

GAMBLING ON EMPIRE:  
COLONIAL INDIA AND THE RHETORIC OF “SPECULATION” IN BRITISH  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE, C.1769-1830

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
2013

This thesis entitled:  
Gambling on Empire:  
Colonial India and the Rhetoric of “Speculation” in British Literature and Culture, c.1769-1830  
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Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Gambling on Empire: Colonial India and the Rhetoric of “Speculation” in British Literature and Culture, c.1769-1830

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Jillian Heydt-Stevenson

ABSTRACT:

*Gambling on Empire* offers the first extended study of a central trope governing literary representations of British colonial expansion in India: “speculation.” My study proceeds from a fundamental question: why do authors so frequently invoke this term in relation to the burgeoning Indian empire, relying upon it to characterize, in a negative fashion, the East India Company (EIC), its leaders and employees, and the men and women who emigrated to its stations?

Through analyses of a wide range of works both from recognized authors such as Austen, Edgeworth, and Scott, and less well-known writers like Mariana Starke, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Frederick Reynolds, I address this question and situate “speculation” at the heart of British attempts to reconcile new modes of commerce to customary conceptions of value and virtue during an era of unprecedented economic and imperial expansion. Speculation has always held the root meaning of “vision” or “perception,” but expanded during the 1770s to encompass suspect financial activities “of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain” (OED). The material conditions that precipitated this semantic shift were tied to the economic, cultural, and political instabilities generated by Britain’s transition to a global credit economy fueled by the Scylla-and-Charybdis of finance capitalism and imperial domination—specifically, the EIC’s conquest of Bengal and the subsequent opportunities for

employment, investment, and upward class mobility it created. The spectacle of returning Company employees laden with the spoils of imperial conquest—as well as the popular journalism, novels, plays and travel narratives that represented and narrated these successes—dazzled domestic Britons and reinforced the popular (though ultimately chimerical) view that India was a mine of exhaustless riches. Authors employ a rhetoric of speculation to characterize, reprove, and reform what seemed to be excessively dicey schemes employed by those who, inspired by India's glittering prospects, scrambled to share in the spoils—whether by seeking employment with the EIC; trading in its stocks and imports; emigrating to colonial stations to marry Company servants and leaders; or engaging in other high risk activities.

**Indexing terms:** Speculation; Eighteenth-century British Literature; Empire and Colonialism; Early British India; Nabobs; Colonial Marriage Market; Gender; Migration; Leffel, John C.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude to Jill Heydt-Stevenson and Jeffrey N. Cox: exemplary scholars, teachers, mentors, and friends. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Prof. Heydt-Stevenson's scholarly generosity and expert guidance: I am blessed to have had such a fierce and devoted ally to show me the way. I cannot express how lucky I am to have worked with such an incredible group of scholars at the University of Colorado at Boulder. A profusion of thanks go to John Stevenson, Paul Youngquist, Sue Zemka, Terry F. Robinson, Dana Van Kooy, Padma Rangarajan, Kurtis Hessel, Kirstyn Leuner, Kelli Towers, Jeffrey C. Robinson, Nan Goodman, Katherine Eggert, D. A. Miller, Anne Lester, Deepti Misri, Michael Zimmerman, Teresa Toulouse, Chris Braider, Laura Winkiel, Ali Hassan, and everybody else: you know who you are! I would also like to thank the English Department, the Center for Humanities, the Center for British and Irish Studies, and the Graduate School at CU-Boulder for supporting me with various fellowships and grants during crucial stages of my project. Before coming to Colorado, I had the privilege to learn from an astounding group of teachers: among the many, special thanks go to Cindy Sowers and Marjorie Levinson at the University of Michigan, and to Perry Meisel and the late Paul Magnuson at NYU. To Devoney Looser, George Justice, Erin Goss, Jennifer Frangos, Hannah Doherty, Jodi Wyett, Cheryl Wilson, and all of my new friends from the 2012 NEH summer seminar on Jane Austen: thanks for an amazing five weeks! And to Michael Gamer, Dan White, Tilar Mazzeo, Mark Lussier, Greg Kucich, Devoney Looser (again), James Allard, Michael Macovski, Julie Kipp, Fran Botkin, Tara MacDonald, Lindsey Eckert, Christopher Laxer, and my many conference cohorts and chums: thanks for the collegiality and the good times. Finally, I would not have made it this far without the support, good humor, and kindness of my friends: Sarah Schrift, Jeff Maitz, Andrew Morrow, Seth Haber, Kara Kroes, Katie Cohan, Elena and Michael Degnan, and my dear comrade Michele Speitz, now at Furman University.

Portions of Chapter Two were previously published in Monika Class and Terry F. Robinson, ed. *Transnational England: Home and Abroad, 1780-1860* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009). Selections from Chapter Three were previously published in *European Romantic Review* 23.5 (October 2012). I thank the editors and anonymous readers for their advice and helpful commentaries.

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## INTRODUCTION

### “Gambling on Empire”

Speculation is not a theory about making money; it is a practical way of turning a profit. But the ability to make money by speculation remarks on the theoretical status of the money made, its conjectural relation to real productivity or value. In its mingling of theory and practice, the mind and the market, there is something uncanny about speculation [....]

--Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (1993) (158)

“Why did ye quit a kind, indulgent home, / And challenge sad vicissitudes to come? / May your experience make hereafter wise / All who would *speculate* ‘neath Indian skies” (44; emphasis added). So writes John Hobart Caunter in “The Cadet” (1814), a long autobiographical poem detailing his experience as a young East India Company soldier. Disheartened by the failure of his own venture in the burgeoning eastern empire, Caunter writes a cautionary tale of a youthful dream not only deferred, but ultimately dried up by the brilliant though unforgiving Indian sun. His strategic use of the verb “to speculate” in this passage foregrounds imperial excursion as a *gamble*: a risky scheme to abandon the safe confines of “home” in order to reap colossal riches abroad. As he acknowledges in the preface, Caunter offers “severe truths” (viii) to counter the “specious stories which he constantly hears” of the easy fortunes made and the “luxurious pleasures” enjoyed by Britons on the subcontinent (xi). He explicitly sets out, in other words, to “burs[t] the airy bubble” (xi), or demystify one of the most entrenched cultural scripts (or fantasies) of the rapidly expanding Eastern empire: that India was a land of easy and unlimited wealth; an Edenic paradise studded with sparkling gems ripe for the plucking; a magical place where eager young men like himself could speedily amass handsome fortunes to enjoy back in England:

Thine artless ear imbibes the frequent lie,



That Earth's best blessings show'r from India's sky;  
 That Nature sheds profusion o'er the soil,  
 Nor asks the ruder drudgery of toil; [...]   
 Thou hear'st that wealth by little heed is gain'd,  
 And life at no important cost maintain'd;  
 That ev'ry bliss ambitious man can know,  
 Is here secur'd, nor ever dash'd with wo[e].—  
 Accurs'd Deceit! (1-2)

His mind “warm’d” by tales of “Golconda’s treasures” and other siren-songs of Orientalist fantasy and wish-fulfillment, the young man forms “castles in the skies” and sets sail for India as a Cadet in the Company’s service (2). The result: “Chill Disappointment” and “Harsh Discontent” (6), as “Experience [...] / Rends Fancy’s veil, and shows Truth’s awful frown” (2).

Like a number of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers, Caunter employs the rhetoric of “speculation” to undercut the spurious promise of Indian wealth and to caution fellow Britons against the dangers of imperial ambition. By yoking speculation to projection and delusion as well as to gaming and chance, and by incorporating a “bubble” trope to characterize fantasies of spectacular economic profit in the imperium, Caunter draws upon and reflects the changing signification of the word during this era. According to the *OED*, prior to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, “speculation” generally meant (1) “The faculty or power of seeing; sight, vision [...]. Now archaic”; (4a) “The contemplation, consideration, or profound study of some subject”; or (6a) “Contemplation of a profound, far-reaching, or subtle character; abstract or hypothetical reasoning on subjects of a deep, abstruse, or conjectural nature.”<sup>1</sup> By explicitly setting out to counter the specious “prospect” of India encountered in fictional and non-fictional texts as a veritable paradise regained, a luxurious space of unbounded wealth severed from all labor and toil, Caunter certainly calls upon speculation’s etymological ties to vision, perception, and mental or imaginative projection (or fantasy). But he also engages the term’s more recent signification—one that is notably shaded by economic and imperial contexts and which, as I

argue in this dissertation, takes on special significance in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British literature and imperial culture.

As the *OED* notes, by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, “speculation” increasingly described suspect financial practices articulated through a lexicon of gambling and risk: (8a) “The action or practice of buying and selling goods, land, stocks and shares, etc., in order to profit by the rise or fall in the market value, as distinct from regular trading or investment; engagement in any business enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain”; (8b) “on speculation”: “on chance; on the chance of gain or profit”; (9) “An act or instance of speculating; a commercial venture or undertaking of an enterprising nature, esp. one involving considerable financial risk on the chance of unusual profit.” In contradistinction to “regular” trading or investment, speculation bespeaks risk, hazard, chance; it evokes extraordinary, “unusual” gains and precipitate, devastating losses. If, as Tillotama Rajan usefully summarizes, prior to the late eighteenth-century “speculation” generally signified “taking risks with *thought*” (or a general “willingness to entertain ideas that cannot yet be empirically established” [151; emphasis added]), from that period forward its primary meanings shift to a general sense of “taking risks” with *money*.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, it is the *convergence* or crossing of these two strains—evident in the passage from Caunter’s poem cited above, and explored through various guises in the chapters to follow—that makes speculation such a fitting, though controversial and oft contested, emblem of the vast economic, cultural, and imperial changes that transformed Britain and its citizens during the long eighteenth century.

Christopher Anstey’s topical satire “Speculation; or, A Defence of Mankind” (1780) offers a unique opportunity to register “speculation’s” shifting semiotic resonances during this

era while additionally offering suggestive examples of the different kinds of people—or character “types”<sup>3</sup>—who were typically perceived to engage in and benefit from this reputedly “foul” practice. By strategically juxtaposing speculation’s “debased” new significations with its more exalted past usages, Anstey’s opening lines reinforce how, by the final quarter of the century, speculation had become a dirty word; its application infused with negative value judgments:

Of all th’ unfortunate Expressions  
 Abus’d by Wights of all Professions,  
 Hack’d at the Bar, in Pulpit tortur’d,  
 Or Chapel of St. Stephen slaughter’d,  
 Not one was e’er so basely treated,  
 Of spirit, Sense, and Meaning cheated,  
 Or e’er deserv’d Commiseration,  
 Like this poor Word, call’d—SPECULATION. (pp. 4-5)

While speculation traditionally signified an “ocular, or mental View, / Or Thoughts that from the same accrue” (5), Anstey’s satire suggests that it has been basely “cheated” of its “Sense” and “Meaning” and thereby stripped of its dignity:

Whatever wild fantastic Dreams  
 Give Birth to Man’s outrageous Schemes,  
 Pursu’d without the least Pretence  
 To Virtue, Honesty, or Sense,  
 Whate’er the wretched basely dare  
 From Pride, Ambition, or Despair,  
 Fraud, Luxury, or Dissipation,  
 Assumes the Name of—SPECULATION. (6)

As we see here, speculation in its newer sense encompasses ill-judged attempts to pursue and *act upon* “wild fantastic Dreams” and “outrageous,” risky “Schemes.” This form of speculation thus presents an ethical and even an epistemological dilemma insofar as it operates outside the dictates of “Virtue,” “Honesty,” and reason (“Sense”); the speculator, Anstey’s lines imply, neglects the calls of both sense *and* sensibility in his pursuit of quick wealth.

Employing parataxis, Anstey proceeds to identify the specific kinds of individuals and institutions associated with speculative finance:

The swindling Jew, the gambling Peer,  
 The ruin'd Squire turn'd Auctioneer,  
 The Pimp, the Quack, the broken Banker,  
 Unknowing where to cast their Anchor,  
 Their Fortune's shatter'd Fragments rally,  
 And fix their stations in the Alley;  
 There at the Pandemonium meet  
 Of J-hn-th-n's infernal Seat,  
 Where Fortune oft' with specious show  
 Of fair Advantages that flow  
 From Industry, with flattering Hopes  
 Beguiles her Votaries, and opes  
 A fouler and more dangerous Field,  
 Than all her gambling Arts can yield. (6-7)

Conducted within the “pandemonium” of Jonathan’s (in)famous coffee shop on Exchange Alley, speculative economic practices bring together a host of purported social undesirables (Pimps, Quacks, Jews) alongside nominally respectable figures bankrupted by their extravagant, dissipated lifestyles and ill-founded fiduciary gambles (a “Broken Banker,” a “gambling Peer,” and a “ruin’d Squire”). The men, driven by the frantic hope that one more gamble will “rally” or repair their “shatter’d” fortunes, gather to worship at the shrine of “Fortune.” As the gender pronouns indicate, Anstey follows eighteenth-century convention by allegorizing the figure of “Fortune” as an alluring though capricious woman (i.e., *Fortuna*) who “beguiles” her “votaries” with “specious show[s]” and “flattering Hopes.” But Fortuna was also the gamester’s muse—the goddess of gambling. Anstey thus demonizes speculation here by affiliating it with gaming and other forms of risk-based, non-productive, non-“Industrious” accumulation for which it became (and, in large part, had *already become*) synonymous; significantly, however, he also grants it a privileged position as both “fouler and more dangerous” than any of Lady Fortune’s other “gambling Arts.”

Another literary reference to “Jonathan’s” coffee house sheds further light on contemporary attitudes towards financial speculation and its practitioners while demonstrating the centrality of empire in the changing discourses of speculation I have begun to outline here. In the epilogue to Richard Cumberland’s stage comedy *The Brothers* (Covent Garden, 2 December 1769), originally delivered by the actress Mrs. Yates, Cumberland insists that “all shou’d catch good Humour from the Stage.” Theatre, he suggests, functions not only as a “school” in which to satirize the foibles of the age for the audience’s moral edification; it also offers sanctuary for both the “Great” and the small, who gather to engage in communal laughter as a means of escaping, if only temporarily, the pressures and toil of everyday life:

The mobbing Vulgar, and the ruling Great,  
And all who storm, and all who steer the State;  
Here should forget the Labours of the Day,  
And laugh their Cares, and their Complaints away:  
The Wretch of *Jonathan*’s, who crush’d with Shame,  
Crawls lamely out from *India*’s desperate game,  
Safely might speculate within these Walls;  
For here, while you approve, Stock never falls.

The epilogue concludes with an image that, in 1769, would have held considerable topical interest: a “wretch” from “Jonathan’s [...] / Crawl[ing] lamely out from *India*’s desperate game.” Though he is “crush’d” (financially as well as in spirit) and “Shame[d],” the man finds solace in the space of the theatre, which allows him to partake in alternative and purportedly “safe[r]” forms of “speculat[ion].” Like Anstey’s poem, Cumberland’s epilogue playfully juggles speculation’s originary and emergent meanings: that is, Cumberland invokes the word’s root connotations of imagination, visuality, and spectacle to characterize theatrical representation and the experience of watching live theatre—a form of “speculative” engagement far less hazardous than playing at “*India*’s desperate game” on the Exchange. The date of the premiere (December 1769) is crucial to understanding the larger import of the epilogue’s juxtaposition of different

forms of “speculation” for, as I will discuss further in Chapter One, 1769 saw a spectacular stock market crash precipitated by frenzied overspeculation on East India Company stocks.

Cumberland’s epilogue dismisses speculative finance of this sort as little more than gambling on empire (“India’s *game*”): unlike the volatile value of East India Company stocks and securities on the Exchange, the theatre’s “stock” “never falls.”<sup>4</sup> Yet this is true only if audiences “approve” of the night’s entertainment; the evening’s spectacle *does* constitute a speculative gamble in the financial sense given that, should the piece flop, the author’s “stock” *would* “fall.”

Cumberland’s suggestive references to “India,” “gaming,” and the stock market situate his epilogue within a trajectory of literary and dramatic texts that explore the social, economic, and political ramifications of “gaming” and “speculation” in late eighteenth-century British life. What is so revealing about this piece is the way that Cumberland weaves together a complex of related social, economic, and imperial domains that would come to define “speculation” during the tumultuous decades to follow, revealing in the process the term’s considerable tropological reach and elasticity. Indeed, speculation, like “play” in J. Jeffrey Franklin’s recent study of games and probability in Victorian literature, is “notable to the extent that it functioned as a primary trope within multiple,” seemingly “discrete” (4) discursive domains in eighteenth-century British culture. My study, however, does not attempt to cover all of the various spheres in which this evocative term is active (for instance, the philosophical tradition emerging out of [post]Kantian idealism<sup>5</sup>), nor do I presume to attempt an economist’s analysis of investment theories and fiscal practices. Employing a cultural studies approach bolstered by the tools of literary analysis, *Gambling on Empire* offers the first sustained scholarly attempt to unravel speculation’s special purchase in fictional and non-fictional writing about the British empire (primarily pre-colonial India) during the very period in which this word’s meanings and

connotations shifted and evolved, and it began accruing the various semantic resonances that still surround and cling to it more than two centuries later.

I engage literary scholarship on the literature, history and culture of early colonial India as well as on the intersections of economics, literature and culture during the long eighteenth century. Though “literature and empire” has emerged as a central field of inquiry following foundational studies by Edward Said, Saree Makdisi, Laura Brown, Nigel Leask, Srinivas Aravamudan and many others, much ensuing scholarship has focused upon “transatlantic” and Caribbean contexts at the expense of British India and the “East Indies”: the very fact that we lack an equivalent term to describe “trans-Pacific” or Eastern commercial and artistic networks of exchange only underscores this point. Literary scholars are just beginning to construct and theorize a “canon” of Anglo-Indian literature. Yet much of this important work is organized around particular genres or authors (e.g. Daniel O’Quinn’s work on theatre; Nigel Leask’s studies of Romantic poetry and travel narratives; John Barrell’s monograph on De Quincey), while others provide wide-ranging surveys that, while helpful, necessarily preclude the kind of historical and cultural “thick description” I pursue in this project. And while post-colonial critics have made a vital contribution by recovering the works of “subaltern” or disenfranchised native Indian authors, a large bulk of British writing about India still remains unstudied if not unread. Indeed, previous scholarship on the literature and culture of early British India has tended to examine the same selection of novels, poems and plays—generally, works whose titles explicitly announce their imperial subject matter. I consider many of these texts as well, but I depart from prior critics by insisting that many of the most engaging treatments of India are actually found in “domestic” novels (i.e., novels set either entirely or predominantly in Britain) that have no immediately recognizable connection to imperial matters in their titles and paratexts.

My particular focus on the rhetoric of “speculation” also connects my project to scholarship on the intersections among economics, literature and culture during the long eighteenth century. “Speculation” itself has started to gain attention in recent scholarship, yet the specific era in which the term first accrued the negative socio-economic resonances that still adhere to it today is curiously absent from most of these studies: following the historian J.G.A. Pocock, for instance, Colin Nicholson and Catherine Ingrassia analyze the economic, political and cultural aftermath of England’s “financial revolution” and the nation’s transition to a credit-based economy, focusing primarily upon the first half of the century. Alex Dick, Angela Esterhammer and Tamara Wagner have begun to examine the rhetoric of speculation in British literature, yet they situate (and commence) their studies beginning in the late-Regency and high-Victorian eras. None of these critics, moreover, investigates the *imperial* contexts and practices that inform speculation’s changing meanings and infuse the word with a special charge in colonial fiction and poetry.<sup>6</sup>

In this light, I proceed from a fundamental question: why do authors so frequently invoke this term in relation to the burgeoning Indian empire, relying upon it to characterize, in a negative fashion, the East India Company (EIC), its leaders and employees, and the men and women who emigrated to its stations or traded in its stocks, bonds, and commodities? Through analyses of a wide range of literary and cultural texts from both recognized and less well-known writers, I seek to answer this question and situate the discourse and rhetoric of “speculation” at the heart of British attempts to reconcile new modes of commerce to customary conceptions of value and virtue during an era of unprecedented economic and imperial expansion and change. These changes—the material conditions that precipitated speculation’s evolving meanings and solidified its centrality within cultural discourses of empire—were tied to the economic, cultural,



and political instabilities generated by Britain's transition to a global credit economy fueled by the Scylla-and-Charybdis of finance capitalism and imperial domination. Although this transition began earlier in the eighteenth century, during the heady years of the Financial Revolution and the South Sea Bubble, it accelerated rapidly following the Seven Years War and the EIC's conquest of Bengal. The EIC's ascendancy in particular offered Britons a plethora of new opportunities for employment, investment, and upward class mobility. The spectacle of early Company leaders and employees returning to England laden with the spoils of imperial conquest, as well as the popular journalism, novels, plays and travel narratives that represented and narrated these successes, dazzled domestic Britons and popularized the view that India was a mine of exhaustless riches. Indian wealth was a kind of "gift from heaven," in Prime Minister Pitt the Elder's terms, in that it appeared to offer a heaven-sent solution to the nation's financial troubles—namely, a spiraling national (or *public*) debt. Yet, as we find in "The India Game," a satirical ballad circulating in 1790, this scenario also applied to individual Britons, many of whom embraced imperial service and emigration as a prime opportunity to pull themselves out of *private* debt, bankruptcy, or simply bleak economic prospects<sup>7</sup>: "When fortunes at home have been squander'd away, / The wild and the wanton trip over the sea; / And did they not run to uncommon degrees, / Pray how would they come to their lacks of RUPEES?"

But the initial euphoria subsided; rather than paving the way for economic prosperity and stability (both collective and individual), the EIC's conquest of Bengal instead ushered in a period of extreme economic instability and crisis. In response, authors and commentators repeatedly invoked a rhetoric of speculation and gambling to describe this volatile economic climate, but also to identify, reprove, and reform what seemed to be inordinately hazardous schemes employed by those who, dazzled by India's glittering prospects, rushed to share in the

spoils—whether by seeking employment with the EIC; trading in its stocks, bonds, or imports; emigrating to its colonial stations to marry Company servants and leaders; seeking to cozen returning colonials out of their wealth; or engaging in a range of related activities and practices.

“Speculation” thus comes to link perceivably hazardous financial practices associated with gaming, dissipation, and vice; the use and abuse of credit, debt and related financial instruments developed during England’s “financial revolution,” and which became central to the new “credit economy” (Ahmed *Stillbirth* 77) ushered in by the Seven Years’ War (1756-63) and the conquest of Bengal (c.1765); and “outrageous,” extravagant, and potentially self-consuming forms of desire that are both created by and potentially sated through colonial migration and circulation. By drawing upon a wide body of archival sources from a diverse range of genres (including novels, poems, plays, graphic satires, paintings, letters and correspondence, journals, petitions and parliamentary speeches), I seek in this dissertation to bring these strands *together*. I reveal how speculation—with its attendant logic of risk, hazard and loss, and its ties to gambling, stockjobbing, and fantasy or romance—emerges as a potent trope employed by writers of this period to typify the momentous social, political and economic changes wrought by unparalleled imperial expansion in the East, and an increasingly globalized credit economy. I argue that in the specific context of empire, speculation inflects literary and cultural representations of British imperial and economic activity in numerous ways that bridge the term’s originary as well as its emergent (or changing) semantic resonances. I then trace these intersections in the chapters to follow across a range of interpretive sites, building upon several governing assumptions.

First, practically speaking, eighteenth-century “India” is itself a speculation in the originary sense of the term: a “mental view” (Anstey), a projection or fantasy that is variously warped and shaded by curiosity, distance, and desire. Of course, this is not to say that India did

not exist, or that early traders, explorers and functionaries did not accumulate and publish vast bodies of empirical data pertaining to the subcontinent's peoples, cultures, languages, arts, natural resources, flora, fauna, and so on. More simply, by saying that India was itself a speculation for most domestic Britons is to acknowledge that before the age of photography, mechanical reproducibility, and technologies that might allow for a kind of documentary realism, most people pieced together a vision of the empire gleaned second-hand from travel narratives, personal anecdotes, letters, novels, journalism, paintings and other representational mediums—to the extent that “India” itself becomes, in Dan White’s memorable phrasing, a veritable “patch-work” of texts (“Little God” 100). The politics of representation—encompassing issues of accuracy, authenticity, motive, skill and so on—is thus a crucial factor to weigh when engaging these texts and gauging their potential effects on readers. In the face of a rapidly expanding (and often contradictory) body of writing about India and its native as well as its colonial inhabitants, how did contemporary Britons distinguish between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy? Was India really the eastern El Dorado that many claimed? How did one know for sure? Did its colonial inhabitants actually resemble the predatory *nabobs* and materialistic *nabobinas* excoriated in the press and lampooned on the stage? Did the prospects of immense wealth outweigh the serious risks involved in relocating across the globe? With the East Indies (and the Indian subcontinent in particular) assuming an increasingly central role as the focal point of British economic desires and fantasies (both individual and collective), and with growing numbers of British men and women emigrating to EIC stations in search of economic livelihood and opportunities for class mobility, such questions became matters of crucial import. What happens, we might ultimately ask, when an individual (or a collective, as with the British nation) *speculates on a speculation*? Is such a venture always already slated for disappointment,

disillusion and failure (as Caunter suggests in “The Cadet”)? Or is speculation, finally, only a “problem” for the *losers*?

Second, by the early 1770s, “speculation” functions as an umbrella term under which contemporaries grouped a wide range of financial practices and activities. As any economist will acknowledge, some of these practices were, strictly speaking, more “speculative” than others, but I suggest that all of them were floated in some degree by the convergence of imperial expansion and domination, on the one hand, and what we would now term monopoly finance capitalism, on the other. “Stockjobbing”; trading in “futures” or commodity markets; partaking in insurance schemes or various “lotteries”; attempts to “corner” global markets (such as the world supply of alum or hemp) or to artificially boost or bust such markets; military-backed plunder, looting, and dispossession; the manipulation and/or forging of bonds and other financial instruments; imperial emigration; “mercenary” marriages: all emerge in varying contexts and in varying degrees of specificity as “speculative” activities and practices (or ones that contributed to and enabled speculation) during this period. The literary and popular discourses that *mediate* (identify, define, expose, critique) speculative practices and figures to the British public ultimately reside at the heart of British attempts to reconcile new modes of commerce to customary conceptions of value, virtue, and identity.

Third, speculation and gambling propel and shape fictional plots through the rhythms, tensions and trajectories of romance and fantasy. The “romance” of speculation, like the “romance of gambling” (to borrow Jessica Richard’s term) or the fictional genre of romance, depends upon the thrilling interplay of chance, risk-taking, unforeseen or random developments and encounters, surprise twists and turns, unexpected gains, devastating losses, and so on (Richard *Romance* 5). For instance, the frequency with which financially distressed or displaced

fictional protagonists are suddenly forced out into a brave though hostile new world in which their true “value” or “worth” (as opposed to their capital liquidity) will be tried and tested, only to find themselves rescued from penury and toil by the last-minute announcement of an unexpected inheritance from the East- or West-Indies, becomes almost a cliché in eighteenth-century novels and plays. To say that imperial wealth literally underwrites many narrative plots of this era is thus already to acknowledge a literary economy intricately tied to (and often correlative of) imperial expansion, global finance capitalism, and speculation (both failed and successful, private and public). At stake therefore is not just a questioning of plot contrivance or generic protocol—“realism” versus “romance”—but of the role that literary representation plays in (to quote the subtitle to Mary Poovey’s recent book)<sup>8</sup> “mediating value”: that is to say, the ways that fictional and non-fictional texts shape how readers envision themselves in a rapidly changing economic, imperial, and cultural milieu.

Fourth, speculation drives the *literary* “market.” During this period, such authors as Elizabeth Inchbald, Sydney Owenson, Edward Topham, Robert Southey and many others staked a claim to authorial renown and economic profit by gambling—often quite self-consciously—on the reading public’s growing interest in “Orientalist” themes, characters and settings. Byron was certainly not the only writer to concede that the literary and artistic “plunder” of India and other Eastern locales was correlative of (and perhaps even helped to facilitate) a far more insidious form of plunder. Other writers, such as Keats, tried but failed to achieve such a triumph: when the poet, who was in perpetually dire financial straits and desperate for a critical success, set down to pen a long poem that would “make” his career, he drafted his most “Orientalizing” poem, *Endymion* (1818). In other cases, as in the frame narrative to Walter Scott’s *The*

*Surgeon's Daughter* (discussed in my coda), we find a far more self-conscious meditation on what it means to speculate in the literary market by “send[ing] [one’s fictional muse] to India.”

Finally, one of the primary functions of speculative tropes and figures in late Georgian literature and popular culture is to foreground the dynamic, constitutive interrelations among empire, commerce and “character,” with the latter connoting moral and/or civic “virtue” as well as literary character. Previous eighteenth-century scholarship, notably in the groundbreaking work of J.G.A. Pocock, has paid a fair amount of attention to the anxieties attending England’s “financial revolution” of the 1690s, which ushered in an economy in which land and other “stable” forms of wealth were superseded by immaterial and even spectral ones (notably “paper credit”), thus leading to the rise of “an ideology and a perception of history *which depicted political society and social personality as founded upon commerce*” (emphasis added). The emergence of “classes whose property consisted not of land or goods or even bullion, but of paper promises to repay in an undefined future,” Pocock argued, “was seen as entailing the emergence of new types of personality, unprecedentedly dangerous and unstable” (*Virtue* 235). I will discuss England’s financial revolution and its economic, cultural and political afterlives later in this introductory chapter; here, I would like to point out that most of the scholars who have explored the ramifications of Pocock’s argument (e.g., Ingrassia, Nicholson, Sherman) have focused primarily on the first few decades of the eighteenth century and on literary engagements with the “character of credit” and the “South Sea Bubble” (c.1720) in particular.<sup>9</sup> But what has not been fully acknowledged or studied is how this debate regarding the constitutive link between new forms of commerce and exchange (notably “credit”) and new conceptions of character and identity, persisted into, and found new life during, the *second* half of the century—the very period when speculation first accrued the negative socioeconomic resonances that still

envelop the word today. Ultimately, I'd like to suggest that many of the tensions and concerns that critics conventionally locate within the decades immediately following England's financial revolution found new import in the context of the EIC's ascendancy in Bengal (c.1765); new expression in the emergent discourses of "speculation"; and new targets in a range of late eighteenth-century economic "personality types" such as the nabob, the gamester, the Jew, and the West-Indian planter.

Indeed, speculative tropes and rhetoric forge new networks of inquiry *between* these character types, most of whom have conventionally been studied in isolation from one another or as abstracted, generic representatives of "new" wealth and what Leigh Hunt would later deem the "spirit of money-getting." Thus, in Chapter One I explore how fictional nabobs such as Samuel Foote's Sir Matthew Mite (*The Nabob* [1772]) are frequently depicted working in tandem with Jewish brokers and investors in London, while a real-life "stockjobber" like Sir George Colebrooke (who, as we shall see, never went to India, but presided as Chairman of the East India Company in Leadenhall street), was characterized in print as a *speculator par excellence* no less than a *nabob malgré lui*. The fact that nabobs, stockjobbers and brokers, Jews, West Indians, and related figures were often traduced via a shared lexicon of speculation, gaming and risk reinforces how apprehensions regarding financial speculation, imperial adventuring, and gambling became interwoven during this era, triangulating and thereby exacerbating their *shared* capacity to undermine industry, labor, and legitimate forms of commerce and "investment"—which is to say, to potentially undercut financial, moral and political stability within and without Britain.<sup>10</sup> Given this context, the men and women who engaged in and profited from perceptibly speculative methods of commerce were subjected to intensive scrutiny and even, as both fictional and nonfictional works of this era attest, stigmatization and moral censure.

## I. Commerce, Credit, and Character

The commutability between such ubiquitous (and frequently vilified) commercial figures on the eighteenth-century stage and page as the nabob, the stockjobber, the Jew, and the West Indian planter (in addition to various contractors, commissaries, brokers, and so on) arises from a fundamental link between commerce, credit, and character. The associative chain that links them is forged by their perceptibly “speculative” means of amassing (or pursuing) capital, and in the reputed effects such speculations have on their own—as well as the larger nation’s—moral and civic fabric. This is because, as J. Jeffrey Franklin suggests in another context, questions of financial value or worth inevitably “become inextricably intertwined with questions of personal worthiness” (56). And it is at this “particularly troubling boundary between financial worth and worthiness” that “gambling” (for Franklin) or “speculation” (as I suggest) emerges as a critical marker of *character*:

The channel through which one receives or pursues money is taken as an indicator of one’s character. This points to a problem that is endemic to the nature of money: one of its defining characteristics is its anonymity, and that in turn raises the familiar problem of origins. This problem has two aspects: ‘origin’ can refer to the distinction between ‘old money’ and *nouveau riche* or ‘city’ money, with the attendant class bias, or it can refer to the moral/legal distinction between ill-gotten and honestly acquired money [....] (Franklin 56)

Though Franklin is describing *Victorian*-era texts and contexts, his observations nevertheless drive at the heart of what, during the previous century or so, had emerged as a central, perhaps even defining feature of English fictional writing: the attempt to square different conceptions of “value.” As Mary Poovey argues, “one of the functions performed by imaginative writing in general” during the eighteenth century “was to mediate value—that is, to help people understand the new credit economy and the market model of value that it promoted” (*Genres* 1-2). Deidre Lynch suggests that this process often proceeded according to a “pragmatic” interpretation of



literary characters: eighteenth-century readers, she writes, “*used* the characters in their books” to “renegotiate social relations in their changed, commercialized world,” thus demonstrating the crucial affinities “linking concerns over characterization with concerns over commerce” (5; 24; emphasis in original). Indeed, “most talk about character” during this era, Lynch concludes, “was not talk about individualities or inner lives” (as modern scholarship has routinely claimed), but rather about “the systems of semiotic and fiduciary exchange—the machinery of interconnectedness—that made a commercial society go” (6). Reinforcing (and nicely summarizing) the larger point, Patrick Brantlinger notes how money and fiction are both representational systems that depend upon a credit system; as such, they are both sites of speculative activity that depend upon a careful reading and assessment of “character” in any given encounter or “transaction” (*Fictions of State* intro. and passim).

In a rapidly expanding credit economy in which value was increasingly understood to be free-floating, representational, and relative,<sup>11</sup> and in which the primary instruments of financial exchange were often no more than (as commentators oft complained) a few marks upon a piece of paper, opportunities for fraud, abuse, and chicanery were manifold. Everything depended upon successfully reading and assessing another’s reputation or character, and basing one’s trust on that assessment. As Andrew and McGowan note,

A great deal of the commercial activity of eighteenth-century England was based on paper instruments. There was too little specie to meet demand, and much of it was defective. Although banking had developed rapidly since mid-century, the majority of paper in circulation still consisted of personal notes of hand. The system was well developed, with established rules for the creation and negotiation of such instruments. Shopkeepers and customers alike presented notes that were little more than individual promises to pay. Their worth depended entirely upon the reputation of the person presenting them and the value attached to the signatures that appeared on them. [...] Reputation counted above every other consideration. (Andrew and McGowan 138-9)

In such transactions, however, what if one's initial reading or assessment proved to be mistaken or fallacious? What if pleasing surfaces mask suspect interiors? What if reputation, like paper credit, is just a fiction? Indeed, "gambling, irresponsibility, extortion, usury, avarice and excessive ambition," as Julian Hoppit notes, "were all seen as intimately and inevitably connected to the extensive and intensive use of credit" ("Credit" 306; cited in Richard 29). Time and again, stockjobbers, brokers, nabobs and other speculating figures are accused of achieving their fortunes clandestinely if not unlawfully: through manipulation, misrepresentation, speculation, plunder, fraud, and other tactics. Rather than being rooted in their own industry, application, or merit, critics insisted that these men's profits arose from the purposeful exploitation and hoodwinking of other people: the speculator's "whole faculties," according to a contributor to the *Scot's Magazine* (1772), "are bent upon contriving schemes to get money into his hands from every quarter, from rich and poor, from friends and strangers" alike (550; qtd. in Andrew and McGowan 164). To engage in "speculation," Andrew and McGowan observe, was to open oneself to implications of "moral failure," with "financial failure solidify[ing] and deepen[ing] the moral fault":

One who played in the Alley had no patience for building up a hard-earned competence. He followed no regular occupation or profession. Instead, he pursued illusions and phantoms, trying to take advantage of every rumor that might send stocks up or down. Or worse, such men might instigate rumors in order to benefit from the ensuing panic. (143)

Yet, as I have already shown, the link between speculative commerce and suspect morality extended beyond the immediate purview of the stock exchange, and took on special import in the context of imperial adventurers such as the nabob or the West-Indian planter. Thus, Edmund Burke indicts East India Company employees and leaders (specifically, Warren Hastings) for committing "extravagant speculations of plunder" on the subcontinent (Speech on the Nawab of Arcot's debts n.p.),<sup>12</sup> while Maria Edgeworth singles out West Indian planters for being

“extravagantly disposed to speculation” (395) in her *Practical Education*. Moreover, when Edgeworth came to write one of her most admired novels, *Belinda* (1800), she would embody this speculating, “extravagan[t] dispos[ition]” in the character of Mr. Vincent, a West-Indian Creole who courts the titular heroine until his addiction to gambling—which seriously impairs his inheritance—is exposed as a constitutional flaw tied directly to his childhood upbringing on a West-Indian plantation. Mr. Vincent’s gambling, in other words, takes on an implicit and, by the end of the novel, explicit relation to the speculative nature of West-Indian commerce, which Edgeworth defines negatively as a “kind of lottery.”

As these examples suggest, there are underlying temporal considerations at play here: speculators simply amassed (and lost) their fortunes far too quickly for their means to be reliable or reputable. Reinforcing the OED’s emphasis upon “irregularity” and risk in its definition of speculation, Adam Smith influentially characterized the “speculative merchant” in his *Wealth of Nations* as one who “exercises no one regular, established, or well-known branch of business”:

He is a corn merchant this year, and a wine merchant the next, and a sugar, tobacco, or tea merchant the year after. He enters into every trade when he foresees that it is likely to be more than commonly profitable, and he quits it when he foresees that its profits are likely to return to the level of other trades. His profits and losses, therefore, can bear no regular proportion to those of any one established and well-known branch of business. A bold adventurer may sometimes acquire a considerable fortune by two or three successful speculations; but is just as likely to lose one by two or three unsuccessful ones. (111-12; from Ch. 10, “Of Wages and Profit in the different Employments of Labour and Stock”)

Besides their “irregularity,” what distinguishes speculative financial practices for Smith and other commentators of the era—and makes them simultaneously so alluring and so dangerous—is the speed by which they confer either vast windfalls or crippling debts and bankruptcy. As a consequence, the speculator (like the gambler) proved difficult to gauge and impossible to rely upon: like Mr. Vincent in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, he could be wealthy in the evening, and ruined the next afternoon. According to economic historian David Hancock, “contemporaries attempted

to distinguish speculation from regular trading or investment, placing all on a continuum”:

“investing in lands or depositing money in banks, for instance, were generally regarded as less speculative practices than buying stocks or shares.” “Explicit in the meaning of such terms,”

Hancock continues,

was (1) *the speed with which the value of the commodity could rise or fall* and (2) the fact that investors acted on their beliefs that a rise or fall would occur. Implicit here were observers’ beliefs that (1) speculators behaved irregularly, buying in large quantities or in frequent bursts, and (2) they had privileged access to information about the probability of market fluctuations. (687 n.24; emphasis added).

Stockjobbers, brokers, nabobs, and related “speculating” figures often appeared capable of amassing (or losing) astounding fortunes overnight; of veritably conjuring vast riches out of thin air. This apparent trick inspired negative comparisons to alchemy, witchcraft, and quackery:

“profit and profit are the only speculations—‘double—double, toil and trouble’” (Wollstonecraft *Letters* 128).<sup>13</sup>

Whatever one’s official occupation, then, to speculate was to engage in a range of risk-based ventures that offered the chance for abrupt, extraordinary, but reputedly *unearned* payoffs; labor, industry, and merit are conspicuously elided. This is crucial since, as many published commentaries of the time attest, wealth obtained too quickly and without steady application and industry was believed to have “fatal effects” (*Town and Country Magazine*, February 1771: 70) on both individuals and the nation at large by fomenting a spirit of dissipation, extravagance, and vice. For instance, in his English translation of Isaac de Pinto’s controversial *An Essay on Circulation and Credit* (London 1774)—probably the most notable published attempt to defend “stock-jobbing” and speculative finance during this era—Philip Francis (member of Bengal’s Supreme council writing under the pseudonym “Philip Baggins”) inserted a commentary warning readers that “great sums, easily gained, are squandered in an extravagance which not

only brings distress along with it, but disables the mind from returning to habits of economy and active industry” (cited in Andrew and McGowen 142). As Francis’ comment suggests, even when a speculator’s ventures *do* succeed, his methods nonetheless render him compromised, “disabled” from “active industry, and therefore *suspect*.”

## **II. From “Projectors” to “Speculators”**

But to fully comprehend and analyze the clamor raised against speculators in later eighteenth-century literature and culture, we need to employ a historical wide-angle lens in order to track how their path to notoriety was paved by two long-term, interrelated developments in eighteenth-century society: on the one hand, the “bursting into full bloom” (Wahrman 209) of financial practices and instruments based upon artificial forms of wealth that emerged during the “financial revolution” of the 1690s (which saw the establishment of the national debt, the Bank of England, and a slew of joint-stock corporations); and, on the other, mercantile expansion and imperial conquest. The half century or so leading up to the Seven Years’ War witnessed an extraordinary flurry of new monetary experiments and financial instruments whose impact upon England’s economy and on the culture at large was significant enough to constitute a “revolution” in P.G. M. Dickson’s foundational account (12). At the heart of this “financial revolution” was a system of public borrowing and credit that enabled England to spend on war “out of all proportion of its tax revenue” (Dickson 9). Prior to 1688, Britain’s domestic revenues had already proved insufficient to fund its military needs: as Siraj Ahmed notes, during the Third Anglo-Dutch war (1672-74), “the British state created its first modern debt and, turning to the East India Company, its first modern credit mechanisms” (*Stillbirth* 84). Two decades later, the national debt was made permanent, and thereafter the British government increasingly pursued long-term borrowing from the private sector upon the security of future taxation as a means of

raising the capital needed to fund its seemingly perpetual war efforts.<sup>14</sup> The nation's principal creditors at this time were incorporated "global capitalists": the East India Company; the Bank of England (est. 1694), which received the bulk of its capital from traders and imperial merchants; and, notoriously, the South Sea Company (est. 1711) (Ahmed *Stillbirth* 84). The rise of public borrowing during the first half of the eighteenth century as well as the related flourishing of the new "monied interests" listed above, as Dickson argues, in fact "created a whole range of securities in which mercantile and financial houses could safely invest, and from which they could easily disinvest. The new partnership banks, the new insurance offices, the trading companies, the busy merchants, brokers, and jobbers of the City of London, unexpectedly found at their disposal facilities for investment far more flexible than land alone [...] could ever have provided" (Dickson 11). In this burgeoning credit economy, immaterial or spectral forms of "paper" wealth (banknotes, bills of exchange, debt, stocks, bonds, shares, lottery tickets, annuities, securities, and so on) proliferated and evolved with remarkable and often perplexing swiftness, eventually overtaking land as the primary instrument of financial exchange and, as critics since Pocock have explored, controversially altering the ways that contemporaries measured "value" and "worth."<sup>15</sup> As Virginia Cope summarizes, "proprietorship shaped identity in premodern Britain": land ownership determining "rights, duties, wealth, and status," and thereby signifying "who one was or could be" (1). Following the financial revolution and the expansion of public and private credit, however, property and identity began to lose their grounding, both literally and figuratively:

Along with the eclipse of land ownership as the main arbiter of status, political transformations and commercialization expanded the opportunities for wealth creation and upward mobility, thereby broadening the range of identities a person could conceivably inhabit and bringing into existence such impalpable possessions as copyright, patents, stocks, debt shares, and commercial agreements. The consumer revolution contributed by supplying markers of status to those not to the manor born,

even as the enormously expanded but unstable system of debt and credit put such achievements at constant risk [...]. (Cope 1)

The new finances both contributed to and joined the rise of a consumer culture in Britain in providing novel opportunities for those not born into hereditary wealth and privilege—a precondition for the development of novelistic character in fictions by Defoe and others. Indeed, as numerous scholars have explored, the domains of fiction and finance are fundamentally and irreducibly entwined in eighteenth century literature and culture, with the emergence of early finance capitalism, credit, and “speculative” investment integrally tied to the development of new narrative forms (such as the novel) as well as to new conceptions of property, the state and the self.<sup>16</sup> Fictional and non-fictional discourses of this era blur and blend as authors question both the character of “credit” and the credibility and credulity of “characters” who pursue, profit from, or, more commonly, are ruined by such schemes. While I have already suggested some of the ways in which credit and commerce shape “character,” here I would like to trace these connections from the earlier era of the financial revolution and South Sea Bubble in order to establish notable parallels between the “projectors” populating fiction and commentary of the early eighteenth century, and the speculators encountered in works circulating at the end of the century.<sup>17</sup>

Both the “stockjobber” and “projector” offer two prime candidates by which to contemplate the persistent tethering of “character” to commerce identified by Pocock as a critical commonplace after the financial revolution. In his *London Spy*, published in monthly installments from November 1698 to May 1700, the satirist Ned Ward defines the stockjobber as “a compound of knave, fool, shopkeeper, merchant, and gentleman”:

His whole business is tricking. [...] He most commonly keeps a visible trade going, and with whatsoever he gets in his shop he makes himself a domestic merchant upon [the] ‘Change by turning stock-adventurer, led on by the mighty hopes of advancing himself to

a coach and horses [...]. He's as great a lover of uncertainty as some fools are of the [...] lottery, and would not give a farthing for an estate got without a great deal of hazard. He's a kind of speculum wherein you may behold the passions of mankind and the vanity of human life. Today he laughs, and tomorrow he grins; is the third day mad, and always labours under those twin passions, hope and fear, rising one day, and falling the next, like mercury in a weather-glass [...]. He is never under the prospect of growing rich but at the same time under the danger of being poor [...]. He's a man whose great ambition is to ride over others, in order to which, he resolves to win the horse, or lose the saddle. (qtd. in Mackie 256)

By highlighting vanity and ostentation, Ward characterizes these men as vulgar upstarts driven by a relentless pursuit of luxury (“a coach and horses”; a large “estate”) and status. More revealing, however, is his explicit linkage of the stockjobber’s disreputable means of accumulation and his “passion[ate],” even unhinged nature. In terms of the former, his “whole business is tricking”—manipulating credit, debt, and other paper instruments and arrangements central to the new economy; duping investors with false reports to artificially drive or plunge the markets; and so on. Indeed, Ward’s stockjobber keeps a “visible” trade going only as a front by which to screen his more mysterious, secretive financial doings. By foregrounding the clandestine nature of the stockjobber’s pursuits, Ward both infers his criminality and draws attention to his shifting, “mercur[ial]” nature. “[R]ising one day, and falling the next, like mercury in a weather-glass,” the stockjobber “is never under the prospect of growing rich but at the same time under the danger of being poor” (256): ultimately, he is just as volatile and potentially insubstantial as the “paper” credit that underwrites his scheming in the first place.

The case of the “Projector” is even more telling, for as Defoe famously claimed of his era in *The Essay on Projects* (1697), the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was “The Projecting Age.” According to Defoe, “past Ages have never come up to the degree of Projecting and Inventing, as it refers to Matters of Negoce, and Methods of Civil Polity, which we see this Age arriv’d to” (*Essay* 7). What he refers to as “the Despicable Title of a Projector” (1), then,



characterizes a specific figure emerging out of a specific historical and cultural context: the so-called “economic euphoria” which typified William III’s early reign following the Glorious Revolution of 1688.<sup>18</sup> A mere “Projector,” Defoe wrote, is “a Contemptible thing, driven by his own desperate Fortune to such a Streight, that he must be deliver’d by a Miracle or Starve”:

[...] when he has beat his Brains for some such Miracle in vain, he finds no remedy but to paint up some Bauble or other, *as Players make Puppets talk big*, to show like a strange thing, and then cry it up for a New Invention, gets a Patent for it, divides it into Shares, and *they must be Sold*; ways and means are not wanting to Swell the new Whim to a vast Magnitude; Thousands, and Hundreds of thousands are the least of his discourse, and sometimes Millions; till the Ambition of some honest Coxcomb is wheedl’d to part with his money for it [...] (17-18)

Yet Defoe discriminates between “good” and “bad” Projectors: “tis necessary to distinguish among the Projects of the present times, between the Honest and the Dishonest” (9). While bad projectors “turn their Thoughts to Private Methods of Trick and Cheat [their neighbors]” and pursue “a Modern way of Thieving,” good projectors “turn their thoughts to Honest Invention, founded upon the Platform of Ingenuity and Integrity” (17). The fruits of “Honest Invention,” for Defoe, do not require “Private Methods of Trick and Cheat,” but attract buyers due to their own intrinsic utility and practical function. As the editors of a recent edition of Defoe’s *Essay on Projects* note, “In Defoe’s economic vision, speculation—to be beneficial—must tie into productivity” (Kennedy et al. xxvi). Though their use of the term speculation is, strictly speaking, anachronistic, the editors pinpoint a key perspective that similarly informs later discourses on speculation.

Defoe’s most famous literary character, Robinson Crusoe, would ultimately embody the appropriate balance of “projection” and productivity, and in the novel he enact the kinds of productive projecting (if you will) for which Defoe advocates in his *Essay*. Indeed, Defoe argued that English merchant-adventurers such as the fictional Crusoe were the most valuable projectors

of the age: each “new Voyage the Merchant contrives, is a Project” (8); the “True-bred Merchant” is “the most Intelligent in the World, and consequently the most capable, when urg’d by Necessity, to Contrive New Ways to live” (9). In creating something from nothing in a practical fashion borne by necessity (i.e., in order to survive), Crusoe epitomizes the spirit of the “True-bred” Merchant adventurer. Yet Defoe had almost nothing positive to say about the emergence of colonial “projects” and particularly joint-stock companies like the EIC, for these companies “begot a New Trade, which we call by a new Name, *Stock-Jobbing*”:

A while [ago], several People, under the Patronage of some great Persons, had engag’d in Planting of Foreign Collonies; as *William Pen*, the Lord *Shaftsbury*, Dr. *Cox*, and others, in *Pensilvania*, *Carolina*, *East and West Jersey*, and the like places; which I do not call Projects, because ‘twas only prosecuting what had been formerly begun[.] But here began the forming of publick Joint-Stocks, which, together with the *East-India*, *African*, and *Hudson’s-Bay* Companies, before establish’d, begot a New Trade, which we call by a new Name, *Stock-Jobbing*, which was at first only the simple Occasional Transferring of Interest and Shares from one to another, as Persons alienated their Estates; but by the Industry of the Exchange-Brokers, who got the business into their hands, it became a Trade; and one perhaps manag’d with the greatest Intrigue, Artifice, and Trick, that ever any thing that appear’d with a face of Honesty could be handl’d with; for while the Brokers held the Box, they made the whole *Exchange* the Gamesters, and rais’d and lower’d the Prices of Stocks as they pleas’d; and always had both Buyers and Sellers who stood ready innocently to commit their Money to the mercy of their Mercenary Tongues. (16)

By forging constitutive links between colonial expansion, stock-jobbing, and gambling (“gamesters”), Defoe anticipates the kind of rhetoric that would envelop the EIC at the end of the century, and which would find new expression in the discourse of speculation: “Thus Stock-Jobbing nurs’d Projecting, and Projecting in return has very diligently pimp’d for its Foster-parent till both are arriv’d to be Publick Grievances; and indeed are now almost grown scandalous” (16).

As Ward’s and Defoe’s repeated emphases on “passion,” “artifice,” tricking, and gaming demonstrate, the emergence of projectors, stockjobbers and related figures during the Financial

Revolution typifies the larger conflict between what Colin Nicholson, building on Pocock, terms “traditional forms of civic personality grounded in real property and endowed with classical virtue, and market-oriented perceptions of individuality where passion and fantasy are encouraged to operate in constant flux” (Nicholson xii). Unrestrained by the responsibilities of land ownership and proprietorship; enabled by credit and paper instruments to trade in spectacular sums of money with no apparent material basis; buoyed by “fantasy” and “passion” to risk everything on the promise of future reward: stockjobbers and projectors embodied everything strange and confusing about the nation’s blooming credit system and new financial culture. We see here how economic anxieties regarding the apparent loss of stable “grounds” of value and evaluation in monetary exchange were intimately connected to and often articulated in terms of the blurring of customary conceptions of character in relation to property and land. Money had become “credit,” according to Defoe, but what did that mean? Did having money necessarily equate to having good credit? What made a man creditworthy? Creditable? Of credit to his family, profession, or nation? These, in short, are some of the questions that contemporaries struggled to answer as the shifting sands of finance capitalism, imperial expansion, and speculative investment altered the economic, political and cultural landscape of eighteenth-century Britain from beneath their feet. Such questions would take on a new urgency when the collapse of the South Sea venture seemed to confirm many Britons’ worst fears.

While the eighteenth century’s emergent credit economy both contributed to and complemented the rise of a consumer culture in providing new economic opportunities for Britons not born into hereditary wealth and privilege, the infamous South Sea episode (c.1718-20) infamously jolted public confidence in such prospects, demonstrating just how quickly money obtained via these new circuits could vanish while further calling into question both the

character of credit and the credibility of characters (real-life and fictional) who pursue, profit from, or are ruined by, such schemes. The facility with which bonds of exchange and other documents could be fraudulently manufactured, forged, and manipulated—a key factor contributing to the South Sea collapse—ensured that the episode became prime fodder for satirists such as Alexander Pope (himself a loser in the venture), who denounced the nation’s growing dependence upon “paper credit” and related instruments that “lend Corruption lighter wings to fly” (Pope, *Epistle to Bathurst*). Thomas D’Urfey’s popular song “The Hubble Bubbles” (1720) offers a sense of how contemporaries reacted to the event while cataloguing many of the popular tropes and images that would subsequently inflect literary and cultural representations of similar economic episodes moving forward:

A bubble is blown up with air,  
 In which fine Prospects do Appear,  
 The Bubble breaks the Prospects lost,  
 Yet must some bubble pay the cost,  
     Hubble bubble bubble hubble all is smoke  
     Bubble bubble hubble bubble all is broke  
 Farewell your Woods your Houses Lands your Pastures  
     And all your Flocks.  
 For now you have nought but your Selves in ye Stocks (qtd. in Emmett ix)

Inflated by speculative desire and fueled by little more than hot air, the South Sea bubble allures investors with “fine Prospects” that rapidly disintegrate into smoke and fire, leaving a trail of ruination and despair. The result is bankruptcy and the loss of “real” wealth—wealth that is literally *grounded* in land and its extensions (pastures, woods, flocks and houses). Investors are left with nothing but their “selves” and their worthless stocks. But the conflation between “selves” and “stocks” suggests a more ominous disintegration of identity: because those stocks have proved to be worthless, creatures of air and Fancy, to suggest that investors are left with

“nought but [their] Selves *in* [their] Stocks” implies that they have become just as empty and insubstantial as the bubble they recklessly pursued.

Significantly, both the financial practices associated with the emergence of this “paper” economy and the opportunities for economic profit and advancement that it made possible were described (and often denounced) through a lexicon of gaming, “play,” and chance; so, too, were the individuals who profited by such ventures. This was no coincidence. As Jessica Richard notes, gambling offers “a particularly compelling emblem of identity” in eighteenth-century Britain due to “the foundational role” it played in “the development of public credit and the forms of early finance capitalism that transformed not only the British economy but the culture at large” (Richard *Romance* 4). In particular, the financial instrument of the “lottery” demonstrates “the deep foundations of the Financial Revolution in gambling” (Richard “Putting” 180). While the first state lotteries were created to underwrite the national debt, their popularity—buoyed by the fact that, unlike contemporary lotteries, returns on an individual’s initial investment were at this time guaranteed—necessitated the infamous South Sea Scheme. As Richard explains, “The revenue from taxes was not enough to cover the annual payments to lottery participants, so the annuitants were given the opportunity to trade in their lottery claims for stock in the South Sea company. Thus the South Sea scheme was literally based on the initial speculative ventures of lottery participants” (Richard “Putting” 182). Speculation and gambling were not just metaphors by which to critique or denigrate the new financial culture of eighteenth-century England—they were in fact the very practices that helped create it.

As Srinivas Aravamudan reminds us, although it is often elided in popular contemporary representations of the event such as Hogarth’s *The South Sea Scheme* (1721), Britain’s first “full-blown financial scandal” was also at heart “a grandiose colonial venture” (129). To Defoe’s

chagrin, incorporated, “adventuring” trading bodies like the South Sea Company or the more successful East India Company (originally chartered in 1600, but revamped as a true joint-stock<sup>19</sup> monopoly operation later that century) were among the new institutions which thrived (and occasionally foundered) in the wake of the financial revolution, thus offering an early example of how new forms and mediums of exchange and investment were intricately tied to global mercantile expansion and, eventually, imperial conquest.<sup>20</sup> Although the joint-stock structure of the South-Sea and other Companies was devised as a means of pooling and thereby staving off risk, the spectacular collapse of this venture ironically reinforced the precarious nature of such projects on both an individual and a national basis. While there is no arguing that many investors lost money, Julian Hoppit and others have recently suggested that the economic and financial impact of the South Sea collapse was certainly less severe than contemporary accounts have led us to believe (“Attitudes”). Dror Wahrman has countered by suggesting that what most Britons really lost “was their bearings”: “suddenly all that seemed solid *did* appear to melt into air. The shock led to a feverish bout of collective soul-searching. For the South Sea Bubble was not an isolated event: the decades following the Glorious Revolution had seen an unprecedented flurry of monetary experiments and financial projects [...]. The year preceding the South Sea Bubble alone witnessed the flotation of no fewer than 190 such projects [...]” (*Making* 209). Like Wahrman, I am less concerned with using the benefits of historical hindsight to downplay the debacle’s economic impact, and more concerned with how this calamitous episode was perceived, discussed, and re-presented by contemporaries and especially by later generations of commentators. For there is no denying that the South Sea collapse wounded the collective British psyche, leaving figurative scars that, much like arthritic joints, quavered at signs of impending storms. Indeed, all subsequent financial bubbles would be compared to the South Sea episode—

most notably the collapse of East India Company stocks in 1769-1770 and the related credit crisis of early 1772. Not coincidentally, it was in the years following this later, “East India bubble” that speculation first accrued the layers of negative socio-economic connotation that still hold more than two centuries later. Yet surprisingly, the special purchase of speculation in the context of empire, as well its fundamental role in the cultural inscription of both “imperial character” *and* imperial literary characters, has yet to be fully acknowledged or explored.

Of course, much changed between the South Sea episode in 1720 and the East India bubble and related credit crisis of 1769-1772. Though the 1720 bubble haunted British culture as a cautionary tale alerting enthusiastic Britons against the dangers of “get-rich” schemes, the initial rancor over the fiasco eventually died down, as did the related invective against “paper” credit. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter One, by the second half of the century, the “use of paper instruments as the mainstay of the system of credit was widely believed to have been responsible for the flourishing state of the English economy” (Andrew and McGowen 136). The East India Company in particular thrived, and its “bonds became as central to the movement of wealth in England as government paper” (Sutherland “East India Company” 157). The Seven Years War and its aftermath would, however, significantly cloud this sunny scenario.

Britain emerged after the War in possession of a huge overseas empire spanning the entire globe, from East to West and almost everywhere in-between. Yet the costs of victory were staggering, and Britain emerged in unparalleled debt (the national debt—estimated at more than 130 million pounds—more than doubled during the course of the conflict). Indeed, as Jasanoff notes, the war “opened a new chapter in the history of both the British and French empires,” signifying “a turn toward territorial gain and, with it, direct rule over manifestly foreign subjects. It also, critically, marked a swing to the East as a site of imperial desire” (*Edge of Empire* 22).

This imperial “desire” was in fact propelled by an underlying economic imperative: the need to service the national debt. A series of controversial military interventions and territorial acquisitions on the subcontinent would place the prosperous Indian province of Bengal at the center of such a project. Yet the conquest of Bengal would also unleash a veritable frenzy of over-speculation, plunder, and financial misfeasance that would bring the Company to the verge of bankruptcy and the nation’s economy to the brink of disaster. It is precisely within this cultural and economic context that financial and imperial speculation become securely tied, thereby laying the foundation for a powerful trope that, as I demonstrate in various guises in the chapters to follow, would have singular import in literary engagements with British India more generally, and in the development and representation of Anglo-Indian literary characters in particular.

### **III. Speculation’s “baleful” effect on “moral character”: the case of Wollstonecraft**

In ways that harken back to Defoe’s critique of projectors, a number of later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century authors associate financial speculation with moral irregularities that carry significant social, familial and political repercussions. Of these, Mary Wollstonecraft makes perhaps the strongest and most direct case. In her travel-narrative *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), Wollstonecraft interweaves a spirited critique of “commerce, [...] [as] it is at present carried on,” foregrounding in particular “*the baleful effect of extensive speculations on the moral character*” (*Letters* 80; 127; emphasis added). Much of this critique arises from Wollstonecraft’s personal experience: namely, her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, a former officer during the American War of Independence who embroiled himself in a series of speculative ventures—including extensive land speculation in the new republic, which he promoted by publishing both a pamphlet, *A Topographical*



*Description of the Western Territory of North America* (1792), and a novel, *The Emigrants* (1793). But Imlay was also involved in a risky (and technically illegal) venture to circumvent naval blockades and trade with the French by employing Scandinavian agents. Along with his partner, Imlay licensed a French ship with Norwegian papers and loaded it with a horde of silver (likely amassed from the estates of dispossessed French nobility) to send to Gothenburg, where it was to be used in payment for Scandinavian grain that he hoped to sell to the embattled (and blockaded) French (see Mee Introduction xvi-xv). The ship sailed in August of 1794, but rather mysteriously failed to reach its final destination. Imlay's Norwegian partner used his connections to press an investigation, and the ship's captain, Peder Ellefsen, was arrested and then released to await trial. Because Imlay was busy pursuing his American emigration scheme, Wollstonecraft travelled on his behalf through Sweden, Norway and Denmark in an attempt to find out what happened to the silver cargo and to act as Imlay's representative in the proceedings against Ellefsen.<sup>21</sup>

Scholarship on Wollstonecraft's account of that journey has typically glossed over the text's economic critique and focused instead upon her evocative descriptions of land- and seascapes; her self-conscious adoption of the language of sentiment (which she had critiqued in the *Vindication*); and her reflections on "the failure of the [French] Revolution in both private and public contexts" (Kelly xxiii). In his introduction to the *Letters*, John Mee even goes so far as to assert that "little or nothing" of the "murky commercial background" outlined above "makes it into her book" (*Letters* intro xvii).<sup>22</sup> Yet even a cursory reading of the *Letters* reveals a sustained though conflicted rumination on the forms of "speculative" commerce that necessitated her Scandinavian trip in the first place, and which made her increasingly anxious about Imlay's moral constitution. After several unflattering accounts of various Scandinavian merchants, for

instance, Wollstonecraft elucidates what she deems the “baleful” effects of speculation: “A man,” she argues, “ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth; as one clashes with his interest, the other with his pleasures: to business, as it is termed, every thing must give way; nay, is sacrificed; and all the endearing charities of citizen, husband, father, brother, become empty names” (127-128). The narrow pursuit of profit, in other words, negatively affects morality and manners as the speculator abandons the civic responsibilities of “citizen, husband, father, [and] brother” in the selfish pursuit of ever greater wealth: “to commerce every thing must give way; profit and profit are the only speculations.” What becomes clear is that for Wollstonecraft, the nature of “business” has changed; she targets not “commerce” *tout court*, but a particularly disruptive new form of commerce called “speculation”: “You may think me too severe on commerce, but from the manner it is at present carried on, little can be advanced in favour of a pursuit that wears out the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude. What is speculation, but a species of gambling, I might have said fraud [...]” (80). Commerce as “it is at present carried on” is precisely *speculative commerce*, “a species of gambling.” As such, it threatens “the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude.” What Wollstonecraft realizes, and what her increasingly heated rhetoric reinforces, is that speculation typically thrives not just on chance, but on misrepresentation, “fraud,” and the ruination, suffering, and even death of *others*: “The sword has been merciful, compared with the depredations made on human life by contractors, and by the swarm of locusts who have fattened on the pestilence they spread abroad. These men, like the owners of negro ships, never smell on their money the blood by which it has been gained, but sleep quietly in their beds, terming such occupations *lawful callings*” (130). As Candace Ward notes, Wollstonecraft’s “engagement with the debate over the character and role of eighteenth-century *homo economicus*” is “not limited to

questions of polite and refined behavior, [...] but goes deeper to address questions of labor: who performs it? How is it valued? What are its costs and to whom?” (91). In her allusions to slavery and to depredations committed “abroad,” Wollstonecraft acknowledges that the moral *costs* of modern speculative “commerce” far outweigh the potential profits. In the specific case of sugar, the most lucrative slavery-driven commodity, speculators who gamble on the commodity markets from afar are directly implicated in the abuses and horrors committed at the West-Indian scene of production. They might not smell the blood on their money, but that doesn’t mean it hasn’t seeped into their hands.

“But you will say that I am growing bitter, perhaps, personal,” Wollstonecraft acknowledges, addressing Imlay directly: “Ah! shall I whisper to you—that you—yourself, are strangely altered, since you have entered deeply into commerce—more than you are aware of—never allowing yourself to reflect, and keeping your mind, or rather passions, in a continual state of agitation” (126). Like the inveterate gamester, Imlay is in too “dee[p].” He has become “strangely altered” by his reckless pursuit of profit: agitated, restless, and distant. Since the gamester’s (like the speculator’s) livelihood is subject to the whims of *Fortuna*, such a metamorphosis makes perfect sense; we notice, however, how this “agitation” creeps into Wollstonecraft’s own prose, which becomes increasingly disjointed (note all the dashes) as she anxiously describes the changes she perceives in her lover. Speculation takes its toll not just on the speculator but on his friends, wife, and children—a scenario Wollstonecraft would trace to horrifying conclusions in *The Wrongs of Woman* when Venables, morally and financially bankrupted by his pursuit of “wild speculations” and a life of extravagance and pleasure, comes to view his wife as his only remaining stock in trade, and tries to sell her to the highest bidder.

When this fails, he commits her to a mental institution in an attempt to steal his wife's inherited fortune—which, whether coincidentally or not, originates from colonial India.

#### **IV. A Gambling Nation, “inclined to every sort of speculation”**

If Wollstonecraft offers a powerful account of speculation's capacity to negatively transform the individual speculator, numerous commentaries published during this era target the larger social and economic ramifications of speculative financial practices. Most writers agreed that the consequences to the nation were potentially dire. “[G]aming in Change-alley,” insisted a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, is “a vice more fatal to commerce in such a trading nation, than all the *sharping* at Newmarket, and all the *shuffling* at Arthur's, and which loudly calls for the effectual interposition of the Legislature” (July 1772: 311). For Hester Thrale, speculation debased traditional mercantile practices and undermined investor confidence, thus acting as a “curse” against legitimate “commerce” (Thrale I: 333). Cobbett likewise insisted that “speculation” functioned as a euphemistic screen by which to mask the kinds of suspect (and frequently criminal) financial and investment practices that should more accurately be classified as blatant “commercial gamblings” (*Rural Rides* 319; qtd. in Wagner 9). Indeed, the spread of this noxious “spirit of extravagance and speculation” (*London Chronicle*, 9 July 1772) across the nation was believed to jeopardize not just Britain's economic but also its cultural and political stability. The two factors (extravagance and speculation) in this equation, moreover, were believed to be mutually constitutive: extravagance (or the desire for extravagance) begets speculation, which begets further dissipation and extravagance in what becomes a vicious cycle. For the lucky few, speculating on the Exchange or on an East India Company career might clear the path to speedy riches, luxury, and ease; yet for many, this was the road to ruin.

In the face of ongoing scandals in India; a general climate of economic crisis in Britain; the devastating loss of the American colonies; and, of course, political revolution in France, such rhetoric often took on a newfound urgency by the final years of the century. Thus Edmund Burke—taking a break from his aggressive impeachment of the former Governor-General of British India, Warren Hastings—draws upon the rhetoric of speculation in his *Reflections* (1790) to excoriate French radicals for being “the first who have founded a commonwealth upon gaming, and infused this spirit into it as its vital breath”:

The great object in these politics is to metamorphose France, from a great kingdom into one great play-table; to turn its inhabitants into a nation of gamblers; to make speculation as extensive as life; to mix it with all its concerns; and to divert the whole of the hopes and fears of the people from their usual channels, into the impulses, passions, and superstitions of those who live on chances. (qtd. in Henderson 97)

For Burke, gambling and speculation characterize a new social order in which the regulating strictures of property, custom, lineage and authority are impetuously discarded, replaced by the vagaries of chance, luck, “passion,” and speculative desire. An impetuous and ill-fated roll of the dice has propelled the nation of France into a state of anarchy, and England might be next.

Yet while Burke adopts nationalist rhetoric to paint speculation as a particularly *foreign* or imported vice—and thus one that the British must repel at all costs—the French traveller Louis Grandpré, who visited British Bengal in 1789-90, argued in his published travels that it was “the English” who were in fact “inclined to every sort of *speculation*,” citing their practice of sending “whole cargoes of females” to India in order to “ge[t] husbands” (the subject of my second chapter) as evidence of this peculiarly British propensity (*A Voyage* 179). (The fact that Grandpré makes this assessment after visiting Bengal further underscores the centrality of empire—particularly India—in shaping the emergent discourse of speculation I am outlining here). Indeed, by the end of the century and beginning of the next, a number of commentators

supported the French traveller's perspective by anxiously remarking on Britain's increasingly speculative activities and identity: "Fine subject ours—rare times! when Speculation / Engrosses every subject in the nation," writes Miles Peter Andrews in the epilogue to Frederick Reynolds' timely comedy, *Speculation* (1795; n.p.). In the preface to his *Political Songster; or, a Touch on the Times* (1790), John Freeth prods readers not to assume that "politics alone, / Can in a large free trading town, / At this time fam'd for SPECULATION, Engross the public conversation" (xiv). Byron expressed his opinion that "the English people in general" carry a "passion for every kind of speculation" (Letter to Mr. Bowring, 12 May 1823). And while he doesn't use the specific word, Samuel Paterson paints a vivid portrait of the speculating age in which he lived: a time "rife" with "scandal, and stocks, and scheming, and sweating, and lying, and quackery, and profaneness, and prodigality, and paper-credit, and bulls, and bears, and bankruptcies"—all of which, he argued, contributed to a larger atmosphere of "Licentious Freedom [...] incomparable with the nature of Civil Society" (2: 19, 23; cited in Keen 11). Moreover, the very fact that Hester Thrale spends over a page in her daybook defining speculation "lest it should one Day become an unintelligible Phrase," attests to how contemporaries viewed this "fashionable frenzy" as something *new* in British culture—potentially even a historical- and culture-specific malady (Thrale I: 333).

## V. Speculation and Empire

A sharper in Samuel Foote's *The Bankrupt* (1773)—a fitting successor to his comedic smash *The Nabob*—gleefully concedes that, "the people of this country are always ready to bite at a bubble." Performed, like Colman's *The Man of Business*, on the heels of the EIC stock crash and credit crisis, Foote's satire plainly ties the nation's mania for speculative schemes and bubbles to the overarching theme of "a Bankrupt Age." As in so many of the works published during this

era, we find in Foote's stage comedies a concrete though subtly articulated understanding of the East India Company's centrality to the nation's new credit economy and culture. Even further, though, we find an anxious acknowledgment of the fundamental role that the Company's stocks and bonds played in the gambles of both metropolitan and imperial speculators—gambles that, by 1772, appeared to be precipitating economic disaster and undermining Britain's national "character" if not its "creditability" and creditworthiness.

Given the persistence with which commentators link the nation's prospective bankruptcy (economic and moral) to the mismanagement of the East India Company; the frenzied manipulation of its stocks, bonds and dividend rates; and the resulting incursion of nabobs, stockjobbers, West Indian planters, and other speculating figures into the social and economic fabric of Britain, I simply cannot agree with Andrew and McGowan's argument that "when contemporaries discussed the dangers of speculation they had one particular setting, the stock market, and one figure, the 'stock-jobber,' in mind" (143). As I have already begun to demonstrate, and will explore further in chapters to follow, speculation's rhetorical flexibility and range allowed commentators of this era to interrogate a host of settings, practices, and figures, both domestic *and* imperial.

## **VI. Overview of Chapters**

Chapter One, "'Extravagant speculations of plunder': The East India Company, Nabobs, and Imperial Wealth," historicizes literary representations of the nabob in terms of the East India bubble and its spectacular crash in order to re-script this figure not just as an emblem for the dangers of importing both foreign wealth and cultural difference into the metropole (as conventional readings correctly but rather uniformly emphasize), but instead as an embodiment of imperial and economic "speculation" and the "renascent fantasy" (Ahmed) of colonial wealth

functioning as an antidote to metropolitan bankruptcy and debt. After providing an historical survey of the East India Company and an assessment of the ways in which British authors and critics understood, valued, and depicted the Company and its employees, I examine cultural representations of three specific, real-life individuals—the “King and Father” of the nabobs, Robert Clive; the “stockjobbing baronet,” George Colebrooke; and the “macaroni gambler” and banker, Alexander Fordyce—in order to delineate how these men embody and thus mediate the allure but also the dangers of speculation for both individual Britons and the nation at large. As I reveal, Britons did not necessarily have to abandon English shores to hunt a nabob’s fortune—a fact that complicates the conventional colony/metropole binary by which scholars usually interpret this figure.

If British nabobs were attacked for “speculating” on Indian wealth, British women were targeted for speculating on British nabobs; Chapter Two, “‘To trade in love, and marry for rupees’: Englishwomen and Matrimonial ‘Speculation’ in British India,” offers the first sustained analysis of the controversy over women’s emigration in the colonial “marriage mart.” By tracing competing representations of British matrimonial “speculators” in fictional texts by Elizabeth Griffith, Edward Topham, Mariana Starke, Jane Austen and others, as well as in periodical essays, satirical prints, letters, and a petition to the Directors of the EIC, I identify a notable historical trend: while eighteenth-century commentators employ the rhetoric of speculation and its cognates to stigmatize and rebuke such women, from the turn of the nineteenth century, writers increasingly offer more sympathetic appraisals that emphasize these women’s crucial role in ensuring the success of the nation’s own “speculative” gambit to curtail interracial partnerships between Company men and native Indian women by promoting single women’s migration to the empire.



Chapter Three, “‘The tables turn’d’: Frederick Reynolds’ *Speculation* (1796), Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and Jane Austen’s *Sanditon* (c.1817),” explores how several writers figuratively (and in one case, literally) “tur[n] the tables” by positing speculation as a *domestic* problem displaced onto imperial “adventurers.” In Reynolds’ topical satire, for instance, speculation actually characterizes metropolitan Britons’ attempts to plunder a returning Company servant and assumed nabob of his imagined (if, in this case, *imaginary*) riches, while in Maria Edgeworth’s novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800) a spendthrift heir to his family’s bankrupt Irish estate hastily marries a wealthy, though racially and culturally “Othered,” heiress in a ruthless last-ditch attempt to expropriate her vast fortune, which is emblemized in the notable form of costly Indian diamonds and jewelry. Finally, in her last novel, *Sanditon*, Jane Austen offers a riotous satire of her age’s transition to a speculation-driven economy and culture while subtly unveiling how the success of her main characters’ speculation on a fashionable new bathing spa precariously depends upon the infusion of money amassed in colonial sites like the West Indies—original home to the rich, “half-Mulatto” heiress whose arrival at the spa sparks a flurry of conjecture, maneuvering, and speculation. Rather than simply scapegoating reputed imperial speculators like nabobs and West-Indians (male and female) for their alleged rapacity, decadence, and greed, these three authors offer more nuanced interventions foregrounding the ways in which domestic Britons opportunistically veil their own speculative schemes and avarice behind the mask of anti-nabob, anti-imperial stigma.

Chapter Four, “Siren Songs,” examines how speculation underwrites what I have termed an “imperial seduction trope.” We find this trope—one that bears echoes of Shakespeare’s *Othello*—in poetry written by EIC servants and soldiers; in fictional accounts of imperial emigration such as a periodical essay by James Austen (brother of the novelist); and particularly

in Walter Scott's novel *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827). A typical scenario recurs in these works in which a young man of straitened means or limited prospects is seduced by alluring accounts, either oral or discursive, of improbable successes in the Indian empire. Young men are thus figured as veritable Desdemonas, entranced by stories of exotic travels, adventure, military heroism, and so on. Depicting these men as the dupes of home-based imperial fantasies and delusions—fantasies that are disseminated most powerfully through literary texts and cultural representations—allows writers to combat anti-nabob stigma and elicit sympathy for those who, they insist, are ensnared by empire's own self-sustaining narrative lines and economic fantasies into embarking upon a failed imperial speculation. But if imperial tales often mimic the effects of imperial wealth by inflaming Britons' desires for luxury and adventure, the reverse is also true: fiction could alternatively provide an effective antidote *against* such a seduction.

In the coda, "'Stick to the East': India, Imperial Riches, and Authorial Speculation," I return to Scott's *The Surgeon's Daughter*, this time focusing on Scott's frame narrative and paratexts as an opportunity to look meta-critically at *authorial* speculation. By the early nineteenth century, the prospect of a nabob returning triumphant to Britain with a speedily won and stockpiled fortune was acknowledged to be a chimera of the past; however, in fiction and poetry, authors such as Scott or Southey or Keats could ultimately find an alternative—and certainly a less hazardous—opportunity in the *literary* marketplace by which to speculate on empire and its reputed bounty.

## CHAPTER I

**“Extravagant speculations of plunder”: The East India Company, Nabobs, and Imperial Wealth**

The temptations to and the opportunities which the situation of the Company have afforded of late years for the sudden acquisition of wealth and power, both at home and abroad, have been great and numerous, and such as few men have the virtue to withstand.

--*London Magazine* XLI (1772)

I am one that believe[s] the Indies will leave us stranded as the South Sea did.

--Walpole to Mann, 12 March 1773

What is commerce?

*Gambling.*

What is the most cardinal virtues [sic]?

*Riches.*

What's the Amor Patriae?

*Amor Sui.*

What is fraud?

*Detection [...]*

--Satirical “catechism” published in *Hickey's Bengal Gazette* (1780)

Even the most cursory survey of the newspapers, novels, plays and satires published in Britain during the later eighteenth century demonstrates how the men who traveled to early British India to make their fortunes were perceived to suffer a veritable “sea-change” into something “rich and strange” (*The Tempest* I.ii). If they braved the lengthy and often perilous voyage that could take over six months to complete, weathered the climatological and biological assault upon their bodies experienced after landing in Bombay or Madras or Calcutta, and survived long enough to voyage back to Europe, they reemerged on the domestic front noticeably altered. They appeared wealthy, their bodies, like the reputed corpse of Ferdinand's father in *The Tempest*, often sparkling with diamonds, pearls, and other sought-after luxuries. Their complexion was darker:

sallow, tawny, dusky, even, as sometimes recorded, “black.” They spoke differently, using strange-sounding words like “jaghir,” “banyan,” “nawab,” and “palanquin.” They ate curries and pilafs and chutneys, smoked hookahs, and drank Indian madeira. They were, in short, “Indianized,” straddling the purported border distinguishing “British” from Indian, domestic from imperial, “home” from “abroad.” As such, they were commonly referred to in hybridized terms as “East-Indians” or, later, “Anglo-Indians.” Their detractors, however, used a more suitably foreign-sounding name: *nabobs*.

In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was perhaps no group more satirized, lampooned, or even vilified in British culture. “If [...] readers will take the trouble to search in the dusty recesses of circulating libraries for some novel published sixty years ago,” Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in 1840, “the chance is that the villain or sub-villain of the story will prove to be a savage old Nabob, with an immense fortune, a tawny complexion, a bad liver, and a worse heart” (*Lord Clive* 85). Macaulay aptly characterizes the “tempest of execration and derision” (84) wielded at so-called nabobs during this era. By pinpointing “novels,” furthermore, as the archival ground upon which his account rests, Macaulay highlights the fundamental role of literary representation in helping to forge, disseminate, and ultimately preserve unfavorable attitudes toward this rather outlandish imperial character in particular, and East India Company (EIC) servants more generally. Perhaps he had in mind a novel like Eliza Parsons’ *Woman As She Should Be; or, Memoirs of Mrs Menville* (1793), in which the character of Mrs. Colemore flatly declares that she “hate[s]” nabobs: “accustomed to eastern indulgences, a multiplicity of women, a world of splendor, their whole attention [is] taken up by accumulating riches [...]. By peculation, by distressing the unhappy, they acquire the greatest part of their fortunes; and, with every humane sentiment expunged, they return with callous hearts to their

native country, to dazzle the multitude with their magnificence [...]” (III: 86). Or perhaps he was thinking of the gothic romance *Secresy; or the Ruin on the Rock* (1795), in which Eliza Fenwick pillories Sir Thomas Barlowe as a man who has “risen” in society “by the same depredating practices which the unfortunate natives of India seem destined constantly to suffer from those who perfidiously call themselves the protectors of the country” (65).

Novels, of course, were not the only literary genre to prominently feature nabobs: they are conspicuous in poetry such as the anonymously published *The Nabob: or, Asiatic Plunderers. A Satirical Poem* (1773), the preface to which excoriates these “plunderers” for “stain[ing] the very Name and Annals of our Country with Crimes scarce inferior to the Conquerors of *Mexico* and *Peru*” (iii), or “Timothy Touchstone’s” *Tea and Sugar; or, The Nabob and the Creole; A Poem* (1795), which opens by distinguishing “Indian born” *nawabs* (like “fam’d Tippoo”) from “British Nabobs,” “My Country’s shame, and poor Hindostan’s curse” (1). Periodicals frequently printed anti-nabob accounts, often in the guise of the “occasional letter” popularized by Addison and Steele earlier in the century: the *Town and Country Magazine*, for instance, published the first sustained discussion of nabobs in English print culture in a series of letters entitled “Memoirs of a Nabob” (January-May, 1771), explaining the reasons why “every country gentleman” in England should “condem[n]” these “purse proud” oppressors. The drama of the period, meanwhile, features some of the most prominent examples of anti-nabob sentiment, with Samuel Foote’s Haymarket comedy *The Nabob* (1772) concretizing these men’s reputation as a “horrid crew” who have “imported” both “the wealth of the East” as well as “the worst of its vices” (13).<sup>23</sup>

Writing in 1783, Joseph Price confirms that “the appellation of *Nabob*” was being “indiscriminately bestowed on *all* the gentlemen who [...] served in India,” regardless of their

individual circumstances (10; emphasis added). While, as Price lamented, the appellation “nabob” became a general term of rebuke applied to any man employed by the East India Company, strictly speaking, the cultural *figure* of the nabob emerged out of a particular set of historical and economic contexts relating to the EIC’s controversial metamorphosis from mercantile trading body to *de facto* sovereign in Bengal in the late 1750s and 1760s. Nabobs encode contemporary anxieties regarding the *effects* (real and imagined) of this transition, as well as the larger risks (again, real and imagined) attending the nation’s growing “investment” in an Indian empire of conquest. At the same time, anti-nabob discourse is directly implicated within a related and equally contentious debate regarding the nation’s increasingly speculation-driven, risk-based global credit economy, powered by the twin engines of imperial expansion and domination, on the one hand, and monopoly finance capitalism, on the other. I purposefully italicized the term “investment” above because the relative stability connoted by this term does not accord with the volatile history of Anglo-Indian economic relations at the end of the eighteenth century. Even as Company servants returned from the subcontinent laden with imperial spoils, by the late 1760s and especially the early 1770s, the EIC itself was in perpetual crisis, tottering at the brink of insolvency. And because the Company’s stocks and bonds were so central to the circulation of wealth in Britain’s global credit economy, such volatile prospects foreboded disaster. Much of the anti-nabob anxiety outlined above was thus rooted in the gradual realization that the nation’s “investment” in an Indian empire of conquest was beginning to look more like a high-stakes “gamble” or “speculation”—and a losing one at that.

This chapter aims to shed new light on the eighteenth-century nabob controversy by closely examining and historicizing fictional and non-fictional accounts of EIC employees’ financial practices, and by uncovering the economic and political networks that yoked these oft-

denigrated imperial “marauders” to other cultural figures populating late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British novels, plays, poems and periodical essays. Focusing in particular upon literary representations of and published responses to the bursting of the “East India bubble”—encompassing the EIC stark market crash of 1769, the Bengal famine (c.1770-71), and the credit crisis of 1772-3—I depart from traditional scholarship by examining how anti-nabob discourse intersects with related debates concerning the nation’s transition to a global credit economy driven by perceptibly “gaming” methods and modes of commerce which found new expression in the changing discourse of “speculation.” When commentators like Horace Walpole (in the second epigraph printed above) conjure the infamous South Sea bubble (c.1720) to express their doubts concerning the touted promise of surplus Indian capital solving Britain’s financial problems (particularly its spiraling national debt), we note how the situation in British India revived memories of the South Sea fiasco, which, as Pocock has shown, emblemized for earlier generations the dangers inherent in the nation’s gradual shift to an economy in which land and other “stable” forms of wealth were superseded by immaterial and even spectral ones—notably “paper” credit—and in which the chimera of purportedly unlimited imperial riches prompted a veritable feeding frenzy of financial maneuvering and investment that brought unheard of riches to a lucky few, but ruined many more.

By moving forward historically and eastward contextually, I thus seek to expand and extend a crucial debate in eighteenth-century studies regarding the larger cultural and political effects of England’s “financial revolution” beyond the purview of the South Sea episode alone. From the stock market plummet of 1769 to the credit crisis of early 1772, the bursting of the East India bubble arguably constituted the eighteenth century’s most spectacular and, in terms of actual impact, devastating economic crises.<sup>24</sup> It re-sparked earlier anxieties while presenting a

host of new issues and concerns that authors and commentators mediated to the public by frequently displacing them onto perceptibly “speculative” financial practices and “speculating” individuals and character types. The burgeoning rhetoric of “speculation,” outlined in the introduction, offers the most fruitful avenue by which to identify and explain the *shared* traits and practices that connect such seemingly discrete figures as the nabob, the stockjobber, the gambler, and the Jew, lending them a special *frisson* as exemplars of a new social and economic order founded upon the shifty sands of risk, chance, contingency, imagination, and (speculative) desire.

Before proceeding, however, it is first necessary to address the East India Company’s remarkable institutional transformation in the second half of the eighteenth century, for it was this metamorphosis that provided its employees (and Britons at large) with new though controversial opportunities to accumulate vast wealth much more rapidly—opportunities that ultimately came to be categorized (and denounced) as forms of “speculation.” I trace the ways in which literary and cultural texts of this era attempt to understand, explain, and characterize imperial wealth (the forms it takes; how it was being obtained and spent; its reputed effects on metropolitan life), as well as how these texts represent the men who pursued and speculated on it. In the following sections, I turn to the much-publicized financial and investment practices of three real-life individuals whose names became synonymous with imperial and financial speculation in cultural discourses of the era: Colonel Robert Clive, the reputed “Prince” and “Father” of the nabobs; Sir George Colebrooke, a noted stockjobber, EIC Director and Chairman; and the “Macaroni Banker” Alexander Fordyce, whose fraudulent activities in the stock market caused a series of bank collapses and sparked the 1772 credit crisis. Finally, I conclude by examining two plays staged during and immediately following the East India



Bubble and credit crisis, Samuel Foote's *The Nabob* (1772) and George Colman the Elder's *The Man of Business* (1774), focusing on how these plays situate EIC employees and purported nabobs within complex *networks* of speculative and imperial finance that ultimately suggested an unholy alliance between speculators both "abroad" and "at home."

### **I. The East India Company: From Trade to Conquest**

*Touchit*: "Why, here are a body of merchants that beg to be admitted as friends, and take possession of a small spot in a country, and carry on beneficial commerce with the inoffensive and innocent people, to which they kindly give their consent."

*Mayor*: "Don't you think now that is very civil of them?"

*Touchit*: "Doubtless. Upon which, Mr. Mayor, we cunningly encroach, and fortify by little and by little, till at length, we growing too strong for the natives, we turn them out of their lands, and take possession of their money and jewels."

*Mayor*: And don't you think, Master Touchit, that is a little uncivil in us? (39-40)

--Samuel Foote, *The Nabob* (1772)

Originally founded by royal charter on 31 December 1600 as "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies," the English East India Company (EIC) successfully established a series of small trading enclaves or "factories" in Madras (1639), Bombay (1668) and Calcutta (1690) during the course of the seventeenth century. A joint-stock operation, by the turn of the eighteenth century the EIC also became one of the nation's principal creditors, providing the loans necessary to fund Britain's overseas war efforts. But while similar trading concerns like the South Sea Company (also one of England's principle creditors) famously foundered, from the early to mid eighteenth century the EIC enjoyed "a period of internal peace and steady commercial expansion," garnering a reputation for financial strength and stability that "cemented its position at the heart of the City of London and the nation's public finances" (Bowen *Business* 2). Its trade, Dame Lucy Sutherland observes, was "more prosperous than at any other period of its history," and EIC stock in the rapidly evolving London exchange enjoyed a "gilt-edged reputation" while its bonds became as central to the movement of wealth

in England as government paper (“East India Company” 157). An aggressive turn towards territorial conquest and military domination during the second-half of the eighteenth century, however, would soon inspire feverish bouts of trading, investment, and various forms of economic and political jobbing that would ultimately muddy the Company’s stolid reputation and raise serious questions regarding its employees’ “speculative” methods of acquiring their imperial fortunes.

Faced with the gradual decline and breakdown of the Mughal empire and a growing French threat on the subcontinent, the EIC began to transform itself dramatically during the 1750s and 1760s. In various parts of the subcontinent, the Company pursued military supremacy over both native rulers and its European rivals. In 1757, Colonel Robert Clive led a military expedition from Madras and retook Calcutta (which had been seized the previous year by Siraj-ud-Daula, the *nawab* of Bengal); captured the French settlement at Chandernagore; and defeated the *nawab* and his regrouped forces once and for all at the famous Battle of Plassey, replacing him with Mir Jafar, a British puppet who was in turn deposed three years later in favor of his son-in-law, Mir Kasim. Company forces proceeded to defeat the French again at the Battle of Wandiwash in 1760, and the following year destroyed the French fort at Pondicherry, thereby securing British interests in southern India from their cross-channel rivals. And in 1764 British troops, once again led by Clive, defeated the allied forces of the *nawab* of Bengal, the *wazir* of Awadh (Shuja-ud-Daula) and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II at the Battle of Bhaksar, a victory which led to the 1765 Treaty of Allahabad in which the Mughal Emperor officially granted the Company the *diwani*, or civil authority and the right to collect land revenues in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This was a considerable boon, as Bengal peasants at this time had “up to one-third or even more of the yield of [their] land extracted from [them] in

taxation” in what became known as the “Bengal revenue” (Marshall “Empire and Opportunity” 120). After the transferal of the *diwani*, the EIC officially claimed the right to the surplus of this revenue. Mir Jafar also made Clive a *mansabdar* (high-ranking servant of the Mughal emperor), a distinction that brought with it a controversial *jaghir*, or income derived from land profits, totaling approximately 27,000 pounds annually. Clive and the EIC emerged, in short, as the “undisputed masters of Bengal” (Bowen *Revenue and Reform* 5).

Such a spectacular metamorphosis did not, of course, pass unnoted: as Sudipta Sen points out, “Trade and war overseas, especially during and immediately following Clive’s military triumphs in Bengal and the routing of the French in the Carnatic, had become recurrent national questions for the general reading public” (7). Periodicals like the *Annual Register*, he observes, confirmed “how the smallest details of the East India Company’s activity in India and elsewhere” (including its “charters, possessions, rights, conduct, dispatches, and importance to the nation”) became “matters of eager and public discussion” (7).<sup>25</sup> Beyond sparking an increased public attentiveness to Indian affairs, the EIC’s activities in the late 1750s and 1760s prompted a marked reconceptualization of both the Company and of its servants. For the former, the sudden evolution from trade to conquest and rule raised fundamental questions regarding the Company’s status and identity. “A trading and a fighting Company,” wrote Jonathan Holwell, eyewitness to the infamous “Black Hole” of Calcutta incident so frequently used to justify the Company’s military interventions during this period, “is a two headed monster in nature, that cannot exist for long” (qtd. in Sen xiv). John Nicholls voiced a similar anxiety regarding the Janus-faced nature of the EIC in his *Recollections and Reflections* (1819-20): “This Empire has been acquired by a Company of Merchants; and they retained the character of exclusive trader after they had assumed that of sovereign. [...] Sovereign and trader, are characters incompatible”

(qtd. in Lawson and Phillips 232). And in 1783, Edmund Burke denounced the Company as “a State in Disguise of a Merchant” (1 December 1783; Speech of Fox’s India Bill). Which was it? Merchant company or State? Trader or Sovereign? For those like Nicholls or Burke, the answer appeared to be a monstrous *both/and*.

Just as the Company itself was viewed as being torn between two “incompatible” and potentially irreconcilable identities,<sup>26</sup> so too were its servants. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the vast majority of Englishmen and Europeans who went out to India, with a few notable exceptions, “either died there, or toiled for years in private trading ventures only to earn a modest fortune” (Lawson and Phillips 226).<sup>27</sup> But in the wake of Clive’s military victories of the later 1750s and especially the Company’s assumption of the *diwani* in 1764, these prospects brightened considerably. Empowered as *de facto* sovereign,<sup>28</sup> the Company assumed (deputized) civil responsibility in India’s largest and most lucrative province. This led to the creation of a new “civilian official class” (Spear 31) as EIC employees took over roles that had traditionally been filled by local Indian agents the Mughal emperor had appointed: administering law and order, supervising revenue and tax collection, even presiding over native temples and shrines (Collingham 14). The irony of this, as Elizabeth Collingham points out, is that by “replacing the Mughals without dismantling the Mughal structure of government[,] the British put themselves in the position of men whom they had previously described as degenerate and despotic” (14). While the position certainly didn’t make the man, it didn’t take long for EIC servants to exploit their new stations and profit by the kinds of debased (if not “despotic”) economic practices of which they formerly liked to accuse their Indian predecessors, filling their pockets by selling offices and contracts, manipulating local markets, engaging in predatory lending practices with displaced and/or straitened native rulers, and accepting (or demanding)

lavish “presents” from anyone seeking to curry the Company’s favor, to name just a few of the more profitable activities.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, the time required for many EIC employees to build a fortune comfortable enough to retire on shrunk considerably: as one pamphleteer noted in 1772, “The East Indies were not[,] *till of late years*, considered a quick road to wealth” (“Considerations on a Pamphlet Entitled ‘Thoughts on Our Acquisitions in the East Indies, Particularly Respecting Bengal’”; emphasis added; qtd. in Juneja 184).<sup>30</sup> By the mid-1760s, however, EIC servants began crowing about the ease with which one could become prosperous: Richard Barwell wrote to his father that, “India is a sure path to a competency. A moderate share of attention, and your being not quite an idiot are (in the present situation of things) ample qualities for the attainment of riches” (26 November 1765; qtd. in Holzman 27-28). Barwell was not necessarily exaggerating: as Peter Marshall notes in his authoritative study of East Indian fortunes, the years 1757-1769 constituted a “boom” (or, as I shall refer to it, a “bubble”<sup>31</sup>): “For the Company’s civil servants these twelve years were the only time during the eighteenth century when survival in Bengal virtually guaranteed that a man would return home with a fortune” (*Fortunes* 234). Astonished (and often envious) Britons took note as Company employees reappeared on the home front after relatively brief jaunts abroad wealthy beyond their wildest expectations. Robert Clive himself set the bar in this respect: when he first returned to England in 1760, the *Annual Register* announced that “it is supposed that the General can realize £1,200,000 in cash, bills, and jewels; that his lady has a casket of jewels which are estimated at least £200,000. So that he may with propriety be said to be the richest subject in the three kingdoms” (qtd. in Nechtman *Nabobs* 148). Rumors of egg-size diamonds and chests overflowing with plunder followed him throughout the capital, prompting Horace Walpole to report in a letter to Horace Mann (1 August 1760) that “General

Clive is arrived, all over estates and diamonds. If a beggar asks charity, he says, ‘Friend, I have no small brilliants about me’” (qtd. in Nechtman “Jewel” 78). For Walpole and other commentators, Clive appeared so outrageously wealthy that diamonds were mere pocket change.

His two additional stints in India only strengthened this impression, and in ensuing decades Clive, more than any other individual, perpetuated the negative stereotype of the EIC employee as a “nabob.” As historian Maya Jasanoff notes, by 1772, Clive “was one of Britain’s richest men and a leading landowner. [...] He played a major role in East India Company affairs. He had been ennobled and decorated with the Order of the Bath, and he consorted with some of the wealthiest and most powerful figures in the land. He divided his time between three substantial and fashionable houses, and was in the midst of building himself a veritable palace. He owned valuable paintings appreciated by connoisseurs. He was a household name” (*Edge of Empire* 40). Clive’s remarkable successes bolstered the common assumption that India was a land of “abundant” if not unlimited wealth (Marshall “Problems” 58). Indeed, Clive actively *promoted* this fantasy, attempting to pacify skeptics of his aggressive military and political conquests by repeatedly predicting a huge yearly surplus streaming out of India and loading English coffers. With the national debt at an all-time high following the Seven Years War, leaders and politicians looked to Indian wealth as a potential (if partial) solution to the crisis. The prime minister, Lord Chatham (Pitt the elder), began maneuvering to claim revenues from India—particularly those acquired through new territorial conquests—for the crown, arguing that Indian wealth could become “the redemption of a nation, [...] a kind of gift from heaven” (qtd. in Marshall “Problems” 30-1). Since the EIC appeared to have taken matters into its own hands and “revolutionized its original charter” unchecked by Parliamentary supervision (Nechtman “Nabobs Revisited” 648), Chatham attempted to (re)assert Parliament’s supremacy over the

Company and its directors and to secure its revenues for the debt-ridden state. Though both attempts failed, a compromise of sorts was reached in which the question of the Crown's right to new conquests in India was set aside and the Company agreed to pay £400, 000 a year to the Exchequer. The EIC thereby retained its responsibilities for the "day-to-day administration" (Peers 35) of its Indian territories with increased, though still minimal, parliamentary oversight.

Many observers, however, believed that the relationship between the Company and the state still needed to be clarified if not revised, and in the years to come the extent to which the EIC and its possessions should fall under the dominion of the Crown became the subject of intense debate, particularly during 1769-1772—a period that encompassed the bursting of the "East India Bubble." Specifically, these years saw a spectacular crash in EIC stock, the value of which had been driven to inordinate heights by frenzied speculation, stock-splitting, and other suspect economic practices; a devastating famine in Bengal that took the lives of up to a third of its residents—a loss which many commentators (including Adam Smith) accused EIC employees of exacerbating if not causing by aggressively hoarding staples such as rice, and then enriching themselves through price-gouging and blatant profiteering; and a dramatic credit crisis which seized Britain and spread across Europe, prompting widespread comparisons to the infamous South Sea Bubble of 1720. Amidst the tumult, the EIC declared that it would be unable to pay both its annual contribution to the Treasury and its shareholders' dividends (Marshall "Problems" 32). Whereas Clive had once predicted up to two million pounds worth of Company-derived revenue streaming back into England each year, the Company now found itself tottering on the verge of financial collapse and was only rescued by a series of controversial "bailouts" (to adopt modern phrasing). If, as the economist Thomas Mortimer claimed during that same year, the East India trade was "one of the chief sources of the power and prosperity of Great Britain"

(qtd. in Bowen “India” 533), such “prosperity” increasingly appeared tenuous at best, and downright chimerical at worst. And yet, remarkably, despite the Company’s well-publicized financial troubles, its employees still appeared to be accumulating immense private fortunes. How exactly were they able to do so? And in what ways—and to what ends—did authors and commentators employ fictional and non-fictional narratives to address this question?

## II. “Damned Strange Ways”: Locating the Origins of Nabob Wealth in British Popular Culture

*Stanmore*: “And pray, Mr. Twist, what business do you mean to follow in Bengal?”

*Twist*: “The same business which every one else follows in Bengal; getting money, eh, Captain.”

*Stanmore*: “But in what line?—For there are various ways of carrying on that business.”

*Twist*: “Yes, Sir, and some of them d[amne]d strange ways, they tell us in England.”

--James Cobb, *Love in the East* (1788)

More than perhaps any other issue, the source of nabobs’ wealth perturbed and perplexed many Britons. Where did such vast wealth come from? How was it obtained so quickly? For a start, fortunes made in India were not, like those amassed in the West Indies, practically or conceptually centered in the fertile earth: Lord Chatham encapsulated the popular view when he denounced nabobs as “importers of foreign gold” without “connections” or “any natural interest in the soil” (qtd. in Lawson *East India Company* 120). British India at this time was not—nor was it ever meant to be—a colony of “settlement” (which connotes stability, long-term commitment, establishing “roots,” and so on) as was the case in America, the West Indies, or Australia; rather, it originated as a series of trading stations ruled by a small hierarchy of Company officials and defended by a minimal military presence. Leaders such as Philip Francis, member of Calcutta’s Supreme Council, actually viewed prolonged English residence in India as “dangerous” if not potentially “fatal to the Mother Country” precisely because Europeans could



not temper the dangers of extended exposure to their new environment by engaging in a benign cultivation of the soil (Guha *Rule of Property* 156; qtd. in Colley “Gendering the Globe” 134-5). In the early years, then, Company employees never officially “settled” in India: as Adam Smith noted disapprovingly in his *Wealth of Nations*, the EIC had produced “a very singular government in which every member of the administration wishes to get out of the country as soon as he can, and to whose interest, the day after he has left it and carried his whole fortune with him, it is perfectly indifferent though the whole country was swallowed up by an earthquake” (*Wealth of Nations* 640; cited in Ahmed *Stillbirth* 124). Burke similarly lampooned Company servants as “birds of prey and passage,” quipping that native Indians never encountered grey-haired Englishmen since they had already returned to England (or died) before such a change could take place (“Speech on Mr. Fox’s East India Bill” [1 December 1783]).

By denouncing EIC servants as “birds of prey and passage,” Burke conjures up an image of rootless circulation, piracy and plunder to discredit and condemn them. From the very beginning, the nabob’s means of accumulating capital were largely dissociated from the realm of work and labor and tied to quick windfalls achieved through violence, rapine, dispossession and plunder. In his letters to Mann, for instance, Walpole frequently compares British rapacity and misconduct in India to Spain’s infamous actions in central and south America: “We are Spaniards in our lust for gold, [...]” (12 February 1772; Yale Edition 23: 381); “Oh! my dear Sir, we have outdone the Spaniards in Peru!” (5 March 1772; Yale Edition 23: 387). But the “Spaniards,” Walpole continues in yet another letter, were at least “forced to dig in mines before they [we]re the better for the gold of Petosi”; in India, “we have nothing to do but to break a truce, and plunder a city, and we find the pretty metal *ready* coined and brilliants *ready* cut and mounted [...]” (28 March 1774; Yale Edition 23: 561-2; emphases added). So-called British

adventurers in the East Indies, Walpole insists, are not *making* or *creating* wealth (through industry, manufacturing, labor, trade and so on), but are instead relying upon usurped political sovereignty, military-backed violence, and inequitable trade monopolies to ruthlessly seize it, “ready”-made, from a native population.

Nabobs were consequently viewed as “Asiatic plunderers” (89), piratical men whose methods imperiled the popular Enlightenment ideal of “civil” or *doux* commerce as set forth in political tracts such as Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (1748) and popularized in fictional works like Henry Brooke’s novel *The Fool of Quality* (1765-70), in which one character celebrates the merchant as, “above all, [...] extensive, considerable, and respectable, by his occupation. It is he who furnishes every comfort, convenience, and elegance of life; [...] who ties country to country and clime to clime, and brings the remotest regions to neighbourhood and converse; [...] who furnishes to each the product of all lands, and the labours of all nations; and thus knits into one family, and weaves into one web, the affinity and brotherhood of all mankind” (qtd. in Skinner 119).<sup>32</sup> In a fascinating blend of Christian and Enlightenment discourse, the former slave and noted man of letters, Ignatius Sancho, elaborated further upon this notion: “Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Diety [sic] to diffuse the various good of the earth into every part—to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love, society, and mutual dependence: [...] Commerce attended with strict honesty, and with Religion for its companion, would be a blessing to every shore it touched at” (Letter #68). Ostensibly an incorporated body of merchants, there was little to suggest that the EIC and its employees were fostering this kind of community and “brotherly” affinity in India; indeed, given their predatory, circulating reputation, they didn’t appear to foster “ties” or bonds at all, leaving instead a decidedly *uncivil*<sup>33</sup> wake of ruination and despair.

Take, for instance, Henry Mackenzie *The Man of Feeling* (1771). One of the earliest and most influential literary works to yoke sensibility to social and political critiques of empire, Mackenzie's novel includes a memorable episode exploring how the EIC's drive towards imperial conquest and domination has unleashed a Pandora's box of greed, violence and exploitation upon the subcontinent, thereby "stain[ing]" Britain's civic virtue. The titular "man of feeling," Harley, encounters "Old Edwards," a father who volunteered himself for Indian service after his son (himself a father with young children) was press-ganged. Old and indigent now, Edwards relates to Harley his experiences in India, confessing that he could easily have "picked up some money if [his] heart had been as hard as some others were," but his "nature was never of that kind that could think of getting rich at the expence of [one's] conscience" (69). We gain a disturbing image of imperial commerce devoid of the regulating strictures of "conscience" and sensibility when Edwards proceeds to relate how a group of fellow officers abducted an "old Indian, who [they] supposed to have a treasure hidden somewhere" (70). When he denies having anything of value for them to plunder, the soldiers bind and torture the man, who "suffer[ed] in silence, while the big drops trickled down his shriveled cheeks, and wet his grey beard, which some of the inhuman soldiers plucked in scorn!" (70). Spurred to action by the untenable spectacle of conduct both "inhuman" and inhumane, Edwards frees the grateful old man, only to find himself court-martialed, sentenced to "300 lashes," and turned out of his regiment for his act of kindness (70). Penniless and starving, Edwards prepares himself for a solitary death when he is suddenly rescued by the very Indian he set free, who blesses the Englishman's gentle soul and "Indian heart" (70), and pieces together enough money to fund his passage home.

Edwards' tale demonstrates the special purchase of sentimental rhetoric in eighteenth-century critiques of imperial expansion and domination. Indeed, sensibility (the susceptibility of

the mental and physical faculties; the capacity for sympathetic identification) and sentimentality (the literary and rhetorical structures that represent sensibility and sympathy)<sup>34</sup> informed—and at times dominated—cultural discourse exploring Britain’s relationship with its expanding overseas empire. Following Mackenzie’s example, authors increasingly turned to sentimental tropes and images in order to condemn imperial rapacity and to invoke pity for the native peoples brutalized and exploited by its activities, strategically “draw[ing] their suffering,” as Lynn Festa suggests, “into the imaginative purview of metropolitan readers [to] potentially move them to right action” (31). Here, Edward’s story prompts an outraged Harley to launch into a spirited—and remarkably prescient—denunciation of the EIC’s “conquests in India,” which, he underscores, provided the opportunity for such systematically brutal, uncivil acts of dispossession and rapine. “I have a proper regard for the prosperity of my country,” Harley begins:

every native of it appropriates to himself some share of the power, or the fame, which, as a nation, it acquires; but I cannot throw off the man so much, as to rejoice at our conquests in India. You tell me of immense territories subject to the English: I cannot think of their possessions, without being led to enquire, by what right they possess them. They came there as traders, bartering the commodities they brought for others which their purchasers could spare; and however great their profits, they were then equitable. But what title have the subjects of another kingdom to establish an empire in India? to give laws to a country where the inhabitants received them on the terms of friendly commerce? You say they are happier under our regulations than the tyranny of their own petty princes. I must doubt it, from the conduct of those by whom these regulations have been made. [ . . . ] The fame of conquest, barbarous as that motive is, is but a secondary consideration: there are certain stations in wealth to which the warriors of the East aspire. [ . . . ] When shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honourable poverty?—You describe the victories they have gained; they are sullied by the cause in which they fought: you enumerate the spoils of those victories; they are covered with the blood of the vanquished! (76-77)

I quote this passage at length because Harley’s critique identifies precisely the organizational and economic changes that transformed the EIC from an incorporated body of merchants into a veritable “empire,” and turned its employees from “equitable” traders pursuing “friendly” (or *doux*) “commerce” into “warriors of the East.” Though he never uses the specific term “nabob,”

Mackenzie depicts EIC soldiers as conquerors and mercenaries who have been granted *carte blanche* to engage in horrifying acts of violence and domination under the absurd guise of “liberating” the native peoples from “the tyranny of their own petty princes.” For Mackenzie, the “spoils” of such conquests are *tainted*: figuratively if not literally “covered with the blood of the vanquished.” Such commerce “sullies” both the agents who pursue and profit by it as well as the Company—and, by extension, the nation—they serve.

The men denounced in Mackenzie’s tale are *soldiers*, with the source of their wealth firmly located in the opportunities for widespread pillage and plunder that the EIC’s military conquests provided them. But what about the men serving in the Company’s civilian branches—its writers, factors, traders, administrators, and so on? We can now return to the question I posed above: how were their means of amassing wealth understood and represented? The “Memoirs of a Nabob,” a series of articles published in the *Town and Country Magazine* in 1771, offers one useful example. The author, identified only by the pseudonym “Anti-Nabob,” declares his dual intention to expose both the low “pedigree” of a particular nabob, as well as the corrupt “origin” of his vast wealth—executing the latter with a remarkable specificity. He opens the first installment by defining a “Nabob” for his readers as, “according to the modern acceptation of the word, [...] a person who in the East-India company’s service has by art, fraud, cruelty, and imposition, obtained the fortune of an Asiatic prince, and returned to England to display his folly, vanity, and ambition” (28). The specific nabob in question is called “Mr. White,” he notes, “by way of contrast to his real character” (28). After spending much of the first issue detailing White’s humble origins, vanity, ambition, and sensuality, in the second installment “Anti-Nabob” hones in on the specific methods by which his nabob-in-the-making amasses his incredible fortune in India. Having, during his voyage to Bengal, “initiated himself” in the “good

graces” of none other than Robert Clive, White gains official permission (likely a *dastak*) “to trade in salt, one of the most profitable branches in that country”: “His emoluments were [soon] immense, and in proportion as his capital increased, his gains accumulated tenfold; and he soon became a man of so much importance, that he was concerned in every article of advantageous traffic under lord C[live] and his successor [...]” (69). Beyond benefitting from exclusive, customs-free trading privileges in one of the most lucrative, monopoly-protected commodities in India, White characteristically partakes in other kinds of “advantageous traffic,” including bribery and extortion: “Being fruitful in imagination, he invented new modes of taxation upon the black merchants, and frequently received considerable *douceurs* for suppressing others that he hinted were in agitation” (69). Through such unsavory means, White rapidly secures an immense fortune:

In fine, after a residence of about four years in Asia, he returned to England with a fortune of near three hundred thousand pounds, which he had accumulated by no other means than *honest industry*, properly seasoned with a little well timed *extortion*, some ingenious *fraud*, and a few strokes of delegated authority which in Europe might erroneously be stiled *tyrannic rapine*. But to his honour be it said, he was never guilty of murder, either by treachery, force, or poison, *a rare instance in a nabob!*” (69; italics in original)

Here, the author’s opening words, which seem to fall under the traditional generic guise of “history” or “memoir,” quickly simmer over in a revealing moment of outraged satirical excess. A rapid succession of italicized words and phrases culminates in a sarcastic “defense” of the nabob that barely contains the writer’s spleen: “[h]onest industry” is unveiled as “tyrannic rapine,” and White’s methods of capital accumulation are even linked to “murder” by negation. To extend the author’s culinary image (“seasoning”), this recipe for concocting a nabob’s fortune produces a distasteful, and potentially poisonous, dish.

While Mackenzie's account focuses upon men employed in the Company's military arm, denouncing the predatory methods by which they profit from territorial domination, violence and the expropriation of private property, the "Memoirs" focuses on the Company's bureaucrats and civilians, exposing how they exploit their newfound power positions in Bengal and profit from bribery, extortion, fraud, and so on. Yet the two roles—military soldier and civilian trader/administrator—were often difficult to discriminate. As Jasanoff notes, the "central significance" of the Company's victory at Plassey was "to marry territorial conquest and, from 1765, administration, to trade" (*Edge of Empire* 30). If, in the years following Plassey, the EIC's commercial agents had become administrators and rulers without ceasing to be traders, its soldiers, as Spear notes, had become "merchants and contractors without ceasing to be soldiers" (30). A passage from Hannah Cowley's comedy *Who's the Dupe* (1779) specifically highlights this perceived "marrying" and blurring of roles when Granger, whose brother has offered to apply to the aptly named "Sir Jacob Jaghire" to procure him a commission in India, mischievously characterizes the contemporary "East India soldier" as hailing from a decidedly "different genus" than his military forebears:

*Sandford*: But how has the negotiation [sic] with your brother ended? Will he put you in a situation to—

*Granger*: Yes, to take a sweating with the Gentoos. He'll speak to Sir Jacob Jaghire to get me a commission in the East Indies—'and, you know, every body grows rich there—and then, you know, you're a soldier, you can fight' (*In a tone of mimicry*).

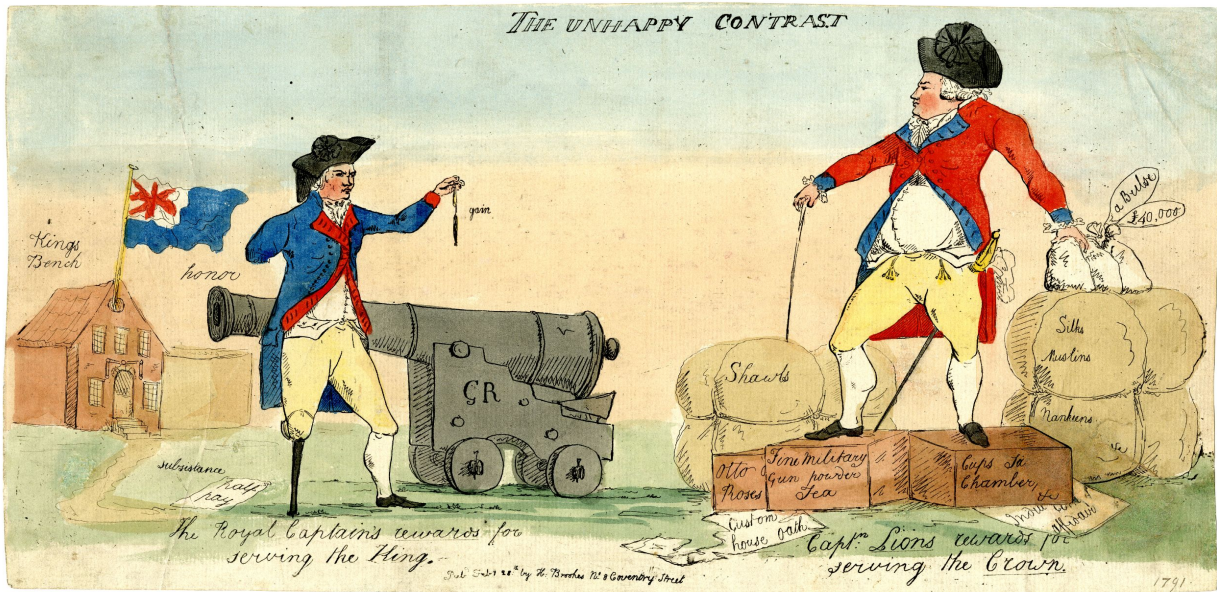
*Sandford*: Well, what answer did you give him?

*Granger*: Yes, Sir Bobby, I can fight. [*Mimicking*.] But I can't grow rich upon the smell of gunpowder. Your true *East India* soldier is of a different genus from those who strewed Minden with Frenchmen, and must have as great a fecundity of character as a Dutch Burgo-master. Whilst his sword is in his hand, his pen must be in his cockade: he must be as expert at fractions as at assaults; to-day mowing down ranks of soft beings, just risen from their embroidery; to-morrow selling pepper and beetle-nut: this hour a son of Mars, striding over heaps of [the] slain; the next an auctioneer, knocking down chintz and calico to the best bidder. (I: 266)

Cowley draws knowing laughs here by suggesting that physical strength, courage, military discipline, and even a relish for the “smell of gunpowder” were no longer adequate skills for a soldier to prosper in this rapidly changing imperial milieu. To “grow rich” in British India, an EIC employee must embody Mercury *and* Mars, wielding a pen as deftly as a sword, “mowing” down “ranks” of clients and customers (including women) as well as military rivals. The very fact that such domains—the mercantile and the military—have become so enmeshed, so entangled in this passage only reinforces the extent to which both the EIC and its employees were perceived to have transgressed their nominal roles and evolved into strange—though formidable—hybrids. But it also suggests that the violence associated with the latter is equally characteristic of the former: the Company’s trade monopolies, taxes and aggressive new methods for extracting native wealth, in other words, could be just as “violent” as—and specifically worked in collusion with—military invasion and domination. This passage suggests that it is ultimately the *permeation* of mercantile, military, and administrative roles and duties that provides EIC servants with such unparalleled opportunities for “getting rich” in India—and becoming “nabobs.”

Because of the various channels for accumulating private wealth available to him, the EIC employee was in a unique and perhaps unprecedented position. Indeed, to compare the situation of Company soldiers and employees with that of soldiers serving in other parts of the globe was, according to the title of a graphic satire published in 1791, to highlight a decidedly “Unhappy Contrast”:





**Figure 1. "The Unhappy Contrast." Anonymous, 1791. Courtesy of the British Museum.**

Published anonymously by H. Brookes, the satire contrasts the poverty of a Captain on half-pay (standing on the left, in front of a cannon muzzle inscribed "honor") with the opulence of an East Indian officer, who stands pompously to the right amidst valuable cargo acquired through plunder and illicit trafficking. The two figures' bodies stand in stark contrast. The half-pay officer is thinner, holding an empty purse labeled "gain." He not only has a wooden leg, but is missing an arm as well, reinforcing the extent of his sacrifice. He stands at the foot of a path leading to the King's Bench (a debtor's prison), signifying the reward for such dedication. The East Indian officer, on the other hand, dominates the scene. He is dressed in the height of military fashion, with a sword at his waist, a thin cane in his hand, a bunch of seals hanging from his belt, and a ruffled shirt which strains to contain his well-fed belly. Yet despite such soldierly

garb, the parcels surrounding him suggest mercantile trade rather than military service. The labels on these packages identify the opulent goods that metonymize his Indian wealth, including a “Bulse” of diamonds; bundles of “Shawls,” “Silks,” “Muslins,” and “Nankeens”; and chests of tea and “Otto o[f] Roses” [sic]. He is actually propped atop several large boxes, taking on the posture of the “auctioneer, knocking down chintz and calico to the best bidder” described by Granger in Cowley’s play. Like Granger’s satirical image of an EIC soldier, the man in this print displays a marked “fecundity” of occupational character. But while he may be profuse in *lakhs* of rupees and “bulse[s]” of diamonds, the print insists that he conspicuously “lacks” honor. Rather than serving the interests of his country or the EIC, the artist suggests that he has pursued only his own self-interest. Enriched through lucrative, monopolistic private trade, mercantile speculation, and military-sanctioned plunder, he has grown inordinately wealthy (represented by his physical corpulence) and, as the torn “Custom House oath” at his feet implies, has illegally smuggled his Eastern spoils back into England.

The East India Company’s transformation into a strange hybrid—part mercantile trader, part territorial ruler and *de facto* sovereign—thus prompted a notable revision in the ways that domestic Britons perceived, imagined, and re-presented its employees. The spectacular successes of Lord Clive and his alleged “progeny” of nabobs at a time of growing economic insecurity and even crisis in both Bengal and London prompted increasing public scrutiny into EIC servants’ methods of acquiring the great wealth being channeled into Britain. Equally problematic, as I examine in the next section, was how nabobs were reputedly *spending* that money back in England.

### III. Torrents of Corruption and “Tide[s] of Luxury”: Imperial Wealth in Domestic Britain

All these absurdities arise from the general tide of luxury, which hath overspread the nation, and swept away all, even the very dregs of the people. Every upstart of fortune, harnessed in the trappings of the mode,

presents himself at Bath, as in the very focus of observation—Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters, from our American plantations[...]; agents, commissaries, and contractors[...]; usurers, brokers, and jobbers of every kind; men of low birth and no breeding, have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence, unknown to former ages; and no wonder that their brains should be intoxicated with pride, vanity, and presumption. Knowing no other criterion of greatness, but the ostentation of wealth, they discharge their affluence without taste or conduct, through every channel of the most absurd extravagance[.]

--Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker* (1771)

Beyond the putative source of nabob fortunes, British popular culture betrays an almost obsessive preoccupation with how nabobs were expending their ill-gotten money back in their native land. Time and again, writers and commentators return to the issue of how the infusion of such large sums of imperial wealth was wreaking havoc upon local and national economies and ultimately destabilizing traditional distributions of wealth, power and influence in Britain. “[L]uxury is on every hand promoted by them,” notes the narrator of “Memoirs of a Nabob,” and “the gentleman of an ancient family, with a thousand a year, who was formerly a respectable character in his country, is now in the neighborhood of a *nabob* sunk beneath an opulent tradesman in the city. These are some of the fatal effects of sudden riches [...]” (70). Writing to a friend, the famous bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu confessed that she “never visit[s] the West Indians in my neighbourhood, because they would teach my servants to drink rum; nor the nabobs, lest they should teach them to want to eat turtle, and such dainties” (*Authentic Letters* 323).<sup>35</sup> And the poet Robert Burns apparently could not stomach the “the luxuriant insolence of *upstart* nabobs” (*Works* 374; emphasis added). Never one to mince words, Walpole insisted that nabobs and their bloated fortunes were in fact turning England into a veritable “sink of Indian wealth”—an image Tobias Smollett would similarly deploy in his comic masterpiece *Humphry Clinker* (1771), quoted in the epigraph to this section. In this novel, imperial-driven luxury and dissipation are figured as an oozy “tide” threatening to pollute the nation. And at the top of

Matthew Bramble's list of "upstart[s] of fortune" are "Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces" (36). They are men of "low birth and no breeding," Bramble claims, who have "found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence, unknown to former ages," and proceed to "discharge their affluence without taste or conduct, through every channel of the most absurd extravagance" (36-7). The presiding metaphors of liquidity and pollution ("sink," "discharge," "tide," "channel[s]") underlying both Walpole's and Smollett's commentaries reveal how the nabob and his vast imperial fortune could function as a figure for of out-and-out *contamination*, both economic and cultural.

Henry Mackenzie would disseminate such concerns for the reading public in a series of occasional essays published in his popular journal *The Lounger*. Expanding upon his earlier critique in *The Man of Feeling* of EIC violence and military-backed plunder, in a 1785 article Mackenzie turns his attention, through the persona of "John Homespun," to "the *effect[s]*" (150) of nabobish wealth on a specific English family and their community. The son of Homespun's neighbors, the aptly-named "Mushrooms," has returned home from India with a reputed fortune of "100, 000 l." (147). He also brings with him a new wife, who, though raised in the neighborhood, had gone out to join him in India soon after his establishment there. The Sunday after the couple's arrival back in England, they appear with their parents and siblings in the local church, presenting a confounding spectacle for Homespun and his neighbors:

[T]heir pew was all carpeted and cushioned over for their reception, so bedizened—there were flowered muslins and gold muslins, white shawls and red shawls, white feathers and red feathers; and every now and then the young Mushroom girls pulled out little bottles that sent such a perfume around them. —Nay, my old friend, their father, like a fool as he was, had such a mixture of black [...] and pink sattin [sic] about him, and was so stiff and awkward in his finery, that he looked for all the world like the *King of Clubs* [...] (148)

Imperial money has transformed even as sanctified a space as a church-pew into an emblem of gaudy splendor and ostentatious display—a metamorphosis that Homespun finds almost as

obnoxious as the potent wafts emanating from the Mushroom girls' perfume bottles. Though the reader may find this funny, for Homespun this is no "joking matter" (149) since the spectacle of the Mushrooms and their "finery" produces noticeable changes in his family's behavior. "I was silly enough to let my wife get hold of a draught on town for the price of my last year's barley," Homespun laments, "and I verily believe she and Mary alone [now] carry the produce of ten acres on their backs. My wife said, a shawl was a decent comfortable wear for a middle-aged woman like her [...]; and so she gave orders to purchase one at a sale in town, which she got [at] a monstrous bargain, though I am ashamed to tell you, that it stood me in two fat oxen and a year-old cow" (149). Homsepun's wife and daughters proceed to make themselves ridiculous in their attempts to emulate their dazzling East Indian neighbors. More disturbing to Homespun is the fact that his family seems to have forgotten the true "value of money" (149). In the company of the nabob and his wife, he complains, they "los[e] all idea of small sums": "Hundreds and thousands of pounds carried a sound of some importance, and could easily be divided into lesser parts; but Madam Mushroom's *Lack*, or half a Lack, sounds like nothing at all; and she has stories which she tells to my poor gaping girls, of a single supper in the East, given by some Nabob with half a dozen hard names, that cost one of two of those Lacks, besides half a Lack in *trifling* presents to the company" (149-50). As Nechtman notes, by punning on the Indian monetary unit, *lakh*, with the English verb "to lack," Homespun suggests that nabob wealth "lacks" a computational or comparative ground. What I would add is how, in a compensatory move, Homespun counters by repeatedly re-grounding "value" not according to pounds and pence (or lakhs and half-lakhs), but in terms of the crops and farm animals that literally embody (rather than *represent*) his wealth: "I verily believe she and Mary alone carry the produce of ten acres on their backs"; "it [the shawl] stood me in two fat oxen and a year-old cow" (149). In

stark contrast to Homespun's fortune, which is literally "grounded" in his harvests, livestock and animals and is therefore easy to tabulate and understand, the nabob's wealth is perplexing, strange, mystifying: difficult to gauge, quantified via a foreign lexicon, and centered in non-local goods and imported luxuries, it makes Homespun "dizzy" to contemplate and turns his "wife and daughters [sic] heads [...] quite topsy-turvy" (150).

The tale suggests that the effects of the vast infusion of new wealth and new commodities made possible by imperial expansion and domination are experienced in the course of everyday life, even in the supposedly protected confines of the rural village, the local church, or the domestic home. The result is discontentment, disillusion and misery:

Every thing that used to be thought comfortable or convenient formerly, is now intolerable. Every thing we now put on, or eat, or drink, is immediately brought into comparison with the dress, provisions, and liquors at *Mushroom-Hall*, for so they have new-christened my neighbour's farm-house. My girls home-made gowns, of which they were lately so proud, have been thrown by with contempt since they saw Mrs. Mushroom's muslins from Bengal; our barn-door fowls, we used to say, were so fat and well-tasted, we now make awkward attempts, by garlic and pepper, to turn into the form of *Curries* and *Peelaws*; and the old October we were wont to brag all our neighbours with, none of the family but myself will condescend to taste, since they drank Mr. Mushroom's India Madeira. (149-50)

Homespun feels robbed of his hard-earned money just as his family is robbed of their happiness. A "new plague is close at our doors," he concludes: "I am really afraid that I must sell my little estate, and leave this part of the country altogether; that I must try to find out some new place of residence, where Nabobs, Rajahs, and Lacks of Rupees, were never heard of, and where people know no more of Bengal than of the Man in the Moon" (151). Mackenzie's published account implies, however, that such a search is *already* a lost cause: "India"—and, more specifically, Indian *wealth*—has thoroughly permeated "British" culture.

While it might prove difficult (if not impossible) for Homespun to find such an idealized, cordoned-off space free the destabilizing influence of nabobs and their imperial wealth, popular

culture might also provide a venue by which to “discipline” returning Anglo-Indians like the Mushrooms into proper conduct. In a subsequent edition of the *Lounger* published later the same year (No. 44; 3 December 1785), Mackenzie introduces a new, allegorized persona (“John Truman”) as a positive counter to the negative characterization of Mushroom. He does so by first clearly establishing Truman’s wealth as ethically obtained and not reaped from military pillage, plunder, or speculation, and second, by detailing how Truman expends his Indian wealth back in England towards productive ends that actually fortify his family and community from the further incursion of corrupting “foreign” luxuries like those bemoaned by Homespun. The oldest son of an impoverished aristocratic family from “one of the northern counties of this kingdom” (70), the young Truman is forced to pursue a profession after his father dies and the family is compelled to sell the paternal estate to pay off his debts. Truman’s mother’s “uncommon industry” allows her to maintain the family in a modest farmhouse, where a benevolent local clergyman tutors her son and teaches him Greek and Latin. Eventually Truman takes up the study of medicine, and at age fifteen, “a near relation” of his mother’s procures him “the commission of a surgeon’s mate on board an Indiaman.” Finally landing in Calcutta, Truman obtains an appointment as surgeon to a small Company settlement. Crucially, by making Truman a surgeon, Mackenzie distances him from the Company’s military and administrative ranks. Then, through his fictional avatar, he addresses the ideological basis motivating this distinction: “Various, Sir, are the methods of acquiring wealth in India,” Truman writes:

Of these the obvious and apparent are so well known, that they need not be mentioned: The more mysterious courses to affluence, as I never was solicitous myself to unravel, so I am not well qualified to explain. It is enough for me to say, that, with a good conscience, and during a twelve years exercise of a profession serviceable to my fellow-creatures, I acquired what to me appeared a competency. In short, Sir, being now possessed of a fortune of 25,000 [pounds], I began to think of returning to my native country. (73)

Rather than pursuing the “more mysterious” (and implicitly corrupt) methods of “acquiring wealth in India,” Truman engages in a profession “serviceable” to his “fellow-creatures,” underscoring his lack of mercenary self-interest and his patriotic duty. He amasses not a bloated nabob fortune but “a competency,” thus raising an important question repeatedly addressed in anti-nabob accounts: how much money is *enough*? Though Mackenzie actually provides an amount (around 25,000 pounds), this question permeates private and public discourse on India. Ignatius Sancho, for instance, made a similar distinction in his correspondence with Jack Wingrave, a young EIC employee: “I hope to live to see you return—the comfort and honor of your good father and family.—But observe—I do not wish you half a million—clogged with the tears and blood of the poor natives:—no—a *decent competence got with honesty*—and that will keep increasing like the widow’s cruse, and descend down to posterity with accumulated blessings” (Letter 61; emphasis added). Sancho explicitly weighs ends (“half a million”) with means (“tears and blood”); then, via negation, he suggests a “competency” as an “honor[able]” alternative to a tainted nabob fortune. It is as if, during an era when *every* man returning from India was prone to suspicions regarding the source of his wealth, the smaller one’s fortune, the easier it was to defend one’s moral character and thus be accepted back into domestic social circles.

In a postscript, Mackenzie (writing in his editorial persona) brings this point home by arguing that “moderation in point of wealth, is productive of the greatest comfort and the purest felicity”: “Had Mr. Truman returned from India with the enormous fortune of some other Asiatic adventurers, he would probably have been much less happy than he is, even without considering the means by which it is possible such a fortune might have been acquired. In the possession of such overgrown wealth, however attained, there is generally more ostentation than pleasure;



more pride than enjoyment: I can but guess at the feelings which accompany it, when reaped from desolated provinces, when covered with the blood of slaughtered myriads” (80). Even when he removes the question of origins (figured once again as “blood[y]”), size matters for Mackenzie. But why? Is it a conviction that some Indian fortunes were simply too large to have been amassed *without* violence or exploitation? Or is there something inherently corrupting in “overgrown” fortunes, irrespective of their sources? I will suggest that both factors are at play here, and, in terms of the latter, the key issue centers once again on the reputed benefits of labor and industry.

Having discriminated Truman from the marauding soldiers and administrators he so scathingly described in *The Man of Feeling*, and restricted his Indian capital to a morally acceptable level (i.e., one that allows for “retirement” but still demands that he engage in productive work), Mackenzie proceeds to elucidate the ways that Truman expends his fortune back in Britain. Rather than erecting a veritable “Oriental” palace, Truman recovers the family’s lost paternal estate (the current owner of which had “embarrassed his fortune” by “a course of extravagance”) and takes “honest pride” in “re-establishing [his] ancient family in the domain of their ancestors” (75). And instead of fishing for a modish new wife, he marries the daughter of his old tutor, with whom he begins to “repair the desolated mansion-house” (76). Specifically not an “improver” of the sort satirized by Jane Austen and other writers of the era, Truman restores the home to its former grandeur (with a few practical alterations), and supervises much of the work himself. Most revealingly, and in explicit contrast to the profuse expenditure attributed to nabobs, he labors to create a self-sufficient estate, covering the surrounding fields with woods and laying out, as he describes, “a large garden, which promises soon to furnish me with a profusion of the most delicate fruits” (78). Truman emphasizes self-reliance and the cultivation

of local, home-grown products: “A fine trouting stream washes [my estate’s] border. My hills pasture my mutton, and supply my game; of which the first is excellent, and the last is plentiful” (78). While typical anti-nabob accounts (as well as his own earlier *Lounger* article) bemoan the negative effects of nabobs’ riotous consumption habits and foreign luxuries on the local community (raising the price of necessities; contaminating neighborhood “taste”; inspiring dissipation and idleness; mystifying “value,” and so on), here Mackenzie offers a vision of how honorably obtained, “moderat[e]” fortunes from India can be re-invested towards stable, productive ends. Truman is explicitly restrained (if not regulated), that is, by the *moderate* size of his fortune: he is forced to commit himself to stable, protracted investment and productive labor rather than to unbounded consumption, dissipation, gambling, and so on. He is *building* a future for himself and for his children. By dispensing an Indian fortune in this manner, it becomes veritably (though, as the very publication of this article attests, not *entirely*) “cleansed” of nabobish taint, and can even act as a barricade against the incoming “tides” and “torrents” of corruption bemoaned by fellow writers such as Walpole and Smollett. Yet the underlying assumption shaping these accounts—that Indian wealth represented a kind of foreign “contagion” *imported* into domestic England from abroad—fails to account for a key fact: such fortunes were often amassed on *British* shores.

#### IV. Clive’s “good news” and the EIC Bubble: Nabobs, Stockjobbers, and Imperial Speculation

What is England now?—A sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs and emptied by Maccaronis! A senate sold and despised! A country overrun by horse-races! A gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation, without principles, genius, character or allies; the overgrown shadow of what it was!—Lord bless me, I run on like a political barber....

--Walpole to Mann, 13 July 1773

To an extent that has gone largely unnoted, nabob fortunes were won (and lost) in the heart of metropolitan London. The initial revelation that the East India Company had taken over

administrative and civil duties in Bengal and would henceforth be responsible for governing millions of native peoples elicited excitement but also apprehension: the former because the British gained direct access to the fabled wealth of Bengal, the latter because the Company, by assuming these responsibilities and privileges, appeared to be flagrantly violating its charter, which explicitly stated that it was to engage in trade and profit, not conquest and colonization. In the short term, however, the arrival of news in London regarding Clive's military successes and the Company's negotiation of the *diwani* inspired frenzied bouts of financial maneuvering and hazardous investment that came to be understood and categorized as forms of speculation. The value of EIC stocks spiked as a result of the changing prospects in Bengal, but also because EIC leaders, stockjobbers, and purported nabobs—particularly Clive himself—were using inside knowledge to advise friends and family members to hoard Company shares. In September 1765, for instance, Clive ordered his London agents to liquefy his own assets, to take out as many loans as they could, and to use those funds to amass Company stocks (*ODNB* 10). As he wrote to John Walsh and his attorneys, "I must request that you will invest all the money that you may have of mine in India stock for I am convinced something very advantageous must proceed from the present flourishing condition of the East India Company" (27 September 1765; qtd. in Bowen "Clive and Speculation" 909). Throughout the process, Clive screened his activities from public or political scrutiny, using nominee holding accounts to accrue stock in other people's names in order to ensure, as he confessed to George Clive, that "the World may not know what sums of money I have in that stock" (9 August 1767; qtd. in *ODNB* 10). Artificially buoyed by such activity, the value of EIC stocks on the Exchange steadily rose to improbable heights, climbing from 164 in April 1766 to a peak of 273 in 1767 (Andrew and McGowan 146).

In a somewhat vicious cycle, Clive's hording of shares furthermore enabled him to help push through an increase in the rate of dividend payable upon the Company's stock. Each owner of £500 nominal stock or more was entitled to one vote in the General Court, or the Company's legislative assembly, whose duty it was to set the rate of the dividend. This meant that an investor holding £3,000 worth of stock or one holding the minimum of £500 would theoretically each be accorded one vote. Following Clive's example, wealthy shareholders began "splitting" up their investments into £500 parcels and then temporarily lending them to friends and political allies in order to garner more votes in the Court. Due to the increased political representation garnered through such stock splitting, Clive and other investors were able to successfully force substantial—and, in hindsight, reckless—increases in the rate of dividend payments. The 6% dividend that had been maintained throughout the early part of the decade was raised to 10% in 1766, and then again to 12½%. The result, as a contributor to *Lloyd's Evening Post* noted early on, was that "More money was made on the buying and selling of India stock following the late good news from Lord Clive than at any time during the late war" (28 April 1766; qtd. in Bowen *Business* 57-8). Subsequent events would demonstrate, however, just how quickly such wealth could be lost.

The first indicator came in May 1769, when reports that the Company was sustaining serious losses in its conflict with Haidar Ali of Mysore (in southern India) prompted a sudden drop in the value of EIC stock. Of course, news of this sort always has the potential to affect stock prices, but in this case misrepresentation (both intentional and unintentional), rumor, and hearsay all contributed to such a degree that Londoners began spuriously reporting the wholesale loss of Madras, sending shock waves throughout London's money markets. Additional stories of the French amassing thousands of troops at Pondicherry also proved to be entirely fabricated, but

contributed nevertheless to the panic. The “alarm was caught at home,” reported the *Annual Register*, “where the distance of the object and the uncertain knowledge of the danger, having full room to operate upon the imagination, multiplied [...] the fears of the people concerned, in a most amazing degree” (qtd. in Bowen “Pests” 43). Unsurprisingly, Clive had already sold the majority of his shares; for others not in the know, however, the resulting plummet in the value of EIC stock proved disastrous, prompting a number of commentators to voice apprehensions regarding the EIC’s powerful sway over London money markets and the nation’s economy at large: a contributor to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, for instance, noted how “The alarming and unparallel[ed] fall of India stock, has afforded matter of serious reflection to every well wisher to his country. The interests of that company [the EIC] are now so interwoven with those of the nation, that whatever materially affects the one, must necessarily make a deep impression on the other” (June 1769 [297]; qtd. in Andrew and McGowan 147). Once viewed as a “sober security comparable to the funds,” India stock was now looked upon as “a gambling venture” (Sutherland “Shelburne” 150-1). In a similar vein, the EIC’s—and, by extension, the nation’s—larger investment in a burgeoning East Indian empire began to take on the appearance of a high-stakes gamble, buoyed by the vagaries of contingency and chance.

In short, the EIC stock crash of 1769-70 reinforced the inherent riskiness of the market while further undermining public confidence in the Company and particularly its directors, investors, and employees—many of whom were subsequently caricatured not just as villainous nabobs, but as inveterate *gamesters*. “The East India Company,” Walpole reported, “is all faction and gaming”: “Such fortunes are made and lost every day as are past belief. Our history will appear a gigantic lie hereafter, when we are shrunk again to our own little island. [...] Riches, abuse, cabals, are so enormously overgrown, that one wants conception and words to

comprehend or describe them. [...] I expect [London] will set itself on fire at last, and light the match with India bonds and bank-bills” (Letter to Mann, 19 July 1769; *Correspondence* 23: 133). Significantly, the inferno that threatens to demolish London in Walpole’s account is sparked by “India bonds and bank-bills,” demonstrating one again the extent to which apprehensions regarding the nascent Indian empire were yoked to concerns about both gambling and England’s new financial culture, which was more and more dependent upon high-risk speculations made possible by the extension of private credit and by the growing reliance upon such “spectral” forms of wealth as banknotes, “paper credit,” bills of exchange, bonds, annuity schemes, stocks, securities, and so on. While the 1720 South Sea episode prompted earlier commentators like Pope to attack “paper-credit” and related instruments for “lend[ing] Corruption lighter wings to fly” (*Epistle to Bathurst*), by mid-century such instruments were the mainstay of the system of credit in England and were often cited as contributing to the nation’s prosperity.<sup>36</sup> Yet the EIC stock crash motivated new scrutiny into these credit arrangements and investment practices and into their larger economic, political and social ramifications. According to William Guthrie’s *A New Geographical, Historical, and Commercial Grammar* (London, 1770), for instance,

The vast fortunes made during the late and the preceding wars, the immense acquisitions of territory by peace, *and above all the amazing encrease [sic] of territorial as well as commercial property in the East Indies*, have introduced a species of people among the English, who have become rich without industry, and by diminishing the value of gold and silver have created *a new system of finances in the nation*. Time alone can shew the event: Hitherto the consequences seem to have been unfavourable, as it has introduced among the commercial ranks a spirit of luxury and gaming that is attended with the most fatal effects, and an emulation among merchants and traders of all kinds, to equal, or surpass the nobility and the courtiers. The plain frugal manners of men of business [...] are now disregarded for tasteless extravagance in the dress and equipage. (119; cited in Raven 229; emphases added)

What is so illuminating about Guthrie's account is the way that he ties the burgeoning Indian empire (the "amazing encrease" of territory; the "vast fortunes" made and imported into Britain) not just to social disarray, but to "a new system of finances"—one that he associates with the pernicious spread of "gaming," dissipation, and "luxury." That is, Guthrie underscores the fundamental link between imperialism, modern finance capitalism, and speculation (figured as various forms of high-risk gaming with funds). As Andrea Henderson notes, in simplest terms, finance capitalism "reli[ed]" upon British imperialism: "stock prices were able to rise as high as they did not only because th[e] ventures were speculative but also because the English believed that foreign lands [...] would provide illimitable wealth" (58). Imperialism, Henderson concludes, thus "allow[ed] the English to transcend ordinary laws of economic growth" (58).

But, as Guthrie points out, the twin engines of imperialism and speculative finance are also implicated in the rise of a "new species of people" that "become rich," but do so "without industry" (i.e., through quick windfalls obtained through plunder, speculation, and so on). Though reminiscent of the complaints waged against "Projectors" and other adventure capitalists during the South Sea episode earlier in the eighteenth century, such concerns were taking on a newfound urgency during the 1770s. For despite the oft-remarked spectacle of wealthy nabobs flaunting their "tasteless extravagance" in the capital, between 1769 and 1772 the EIC flirted with insolvency and was forced to borrow an astounding 5.5 million pounds from the Bank of England. Whereas the EIC had, for much of the century, acted as the state's creditor, the situation had been notably reversed: the debt-ridden state directly and indirectly bailed out its (supposed) golden calf. Far from delivering the "heaven-sent" boost trumpeted by Clive and Pitt the elder, the EIC's ascendancy instead appeared to be wreaking havoc upon Britain's money markets, its "system of finances" (Guthrie), and its general economic stability. Further, the

intensification of and growing reliance upon private credit arrangements during this period—a factor that distinguishes the East-India from earlier speculative bubbles and “tulip manias”—created extensive networks of debt, dependence, and obligation which ensured that this volatile, bubble-and-bust economy affected much larger and broader swathes of British society. A single speculator’s failed gamble could send shockwaves throughout the capital, as the 1772 credit crisis would make painfully clear.

Further contributing to the tide of anti-Company sentiment at this moment was the arrival of news in the summer of 1770 regarding a devastating famine in Bengal in which it was estimated that as many as one in three Bengalis (or upwards of ten million people) may have starved to death.<sup>37</sup> Allegations that the EIC’s monopolies and its employees’ rapacious private trading practices contributed to the famine disgusted metropolitan readers and further stained the already tenuous public image of both the Company and the Englishman in India. An anonymous eyewitness account of the famine, purportedly written by a Company employee and published widely in the British press,<sup>38</sup> directly accused officers and agents of “buying up all [the rice] they could lay hold of” as soon as “the dryness of the season foretold the approaching dearness” of this staple, and then manipulating supply levels and fixing prices to ensure huge windfalls. All the while, thousands of Indians were literally dying in the streets:

By the time the famine had been a fortnight over the land, we were greatly affected at Calcutta; many thousands falling daily in the streets and fields, [their] bodies, mangled by dogs, jackalls, and vultures [...]. We had 100 people employed upon the Cutcherry Lift, on the Company’s account, with doolys, sledges, and bearers, to carry the dead, and throw them into the river Ganges. I have counted from my bedchamber window in the morning when I got up, forty dead bodies lying within twenty yards of the wall, besides many hundreds lying in the agonies of death for want, bending double, with their stomachs quite close contracted to their back bones. (206)

The “groans of India have mounted to heaven,” Walpole reported to Mann (5 March 1772): “We have murdered, deposed, plundered, usurped—nay, what think you of the famine in Bengal, in



which three millions perished, being *caused by a monopoly of the provisions by the servants of the East India Company*? All this is come out, is coming out—unless the gold that inspired these horrors, can quash them” (Lewis Yale Edition [23] 387; emphasis added).<sup>39</sup> What links the Bengal famine to the EIC stock crisis of the previous year? The answer concerns the EIC’s monopolistic trading privileges and the speculative financial practices they underwrote. Through insider trading, price-fixing, blatant profiteering, and various forms of speculation, a band of nabobs, EIC leaders and investors, and so-called stockjobbers were perceived to be profiting from the large-scale devastation and ruin of others, English and Indian alike.

As famine and drought ravaged Bengal, the economic situation in England further deteriorated. Indeed, when viewed in hindsight, Walpole’s catastrophic image of a London set ablaze by “India bonds” and “bank bills” appears eerily prophetic. In the early summer of 1772, the well-known banker Alexander Fordyce (partner in the house of Neale, James, Fordyce and Down), fled to France after his fraudulent investment practices bankrupted the firm and ignited a series of bank closures in Britain—including most notably the firm of Glyn and Halifax as well as the Ayr Bank. The resulting credit crisis paralyzed London money markets and began to spread across Europe. According to a contributor to the *Gentlemen’s Magazine*, it was “beyond the power of words to describe the general consternation of the metropolis”: “No event for 50 years past,” he continues, “has been remembered to have given so fatal a blow both to trade and public credit. An universal bankruptcy was expected, the stoppage of almost every banker’s house in London was looked for. The whole city was in an uproar; many of the first families in tears” (#42 [June 1772]; qtd. in O’Quinn *Staging* 52). The *Scots Magazine* echoed popular sentiment when it declared the crisis the worst “since the famous South-sea bubble in 1720” (qtd. in Andrew and McGowen 136). It is precisely within this cultural and economic context that

speculation emerged as a powerful trope that would carry special import in literary engagements with British India, the East India Company, its employees, directors and investors, and all those who were perceived to “speculate” on imperial wealth.

### **V. Clive, Colebrooke, Fordyce: The Faces of “Speculation as ‘tis called”**

In the wake of the 1769 stock market crash, the Bengal Famine, and the credit crisis of 1772, three specific individuals emerged as the public faces of “speculation”: Robert Clive, George Colebrooke, and Alexander Fordyce. I have already delineated Robert Clive’s crucial role in the EIC’s military conquest of Bengal; his reputation as the “nabob of nabobs”; and the havoc his suspect investment practices wreaked on the stock market. Here, I would like to (briefly) focus upon Colebrooke and Fordyce in order to reveal how these three men were implicated together in collective *networks* of corruption and abuse that ultimately helped secure speculation’s new and conspicuously negative resonances in British culture—particularly in imperial and anti-nabob discourses.

The OED cites Horace Walpole’s 1776 letter to Horace Mann as offering one the first examples documenting speculation’s changing signification during the later eighteenth century. Writing from London, Walpole announces that, “Next to gaming, [...] the predominant folly is pictures [...] Sir George Colbroke [sic], a citizen, and martyr to what is called *speculation*, had his pictures sold by auction last week” (OED). Though he misspells his subject’s last name (perhaps in a purposeful pun on “broke”), Walpole’s association of “gaming,” dissipation, bankruptcy, and “what is called *speculation*” with Sir George Colebrooke (1729-1809) provides a fruitful avenue by which to explore further the cultural, historical and economic contexts that underwrote speculation’s debut in late eighteenth-century economic and imperial discourses. This is because Colebrooke, who never went to India, but served as director of the East India

Company in 1767, deputy chairman in 1768, and chairman in 1769, 1770 and 1772 (the very years of crisis), was lampooned in the British press as a gaming “stockjobber” but also as a “nabob” in close cahoots with Robert Clive:



Figure 2. Anonymous, "The present times, or the nabobs Cl-ve and C-l-ke brought to account" (1773). Courtesy of the British Museum.

We find this partnership at the center of an anonymous satirical print published in 1773, “The present times, or the nabobs Cl-ve and C-l-bke brought to account” (1773). The print depicts a “new Scene for the Proprietors of India Stock”—referring specifically to events that took place in September 1772, during the aftermath of the credit crisis. The EIC, as mentioned, found itself on the verge of bankruptcy and announced that it would be unable to declare a dividend that month. Colebrooke, as the acting Company chairman at the time, was forced to apply to Lord

North to negotiate for a Government loan to bail the Company out (in which he was successful). In the satire, Colebrooke and Clive are kneeling at North's feet, offering bribes for his assistance (Clive proffers his infamous "jaghire"; Colebrooke a piece of paper inscribed "Job in the Alley 30,000£"). "I know the vileness of your deeds!," North replies, "But I must have more hush Money." In the background, a Scottish figure (probably Bute) holds up a shield to protect Clive and Colbrooke from the blindfolded figure of "Justice," who hovers behind the men holding scales in one hand and a sword ready to strike in the other—suggesting that she has made her verdict but is blocked from executing justice. A satirical reflection on "the present times," as its title suggests, how does the piece function as a commentary on *speculation*? The answer, I think, lies in the monstrous figure to which the print's nabobs and stockjobbers are chained. The demon is not identified or named; it could represent Mammon or a number of other candidates. But the print's verbal and visual clues, when considered in their historical and political contexts, point to one likely interpretation: the demon figures as a monstrous embodiment of *speculation* itself. In this reading, the print thereby literalizes the associative chains that tether and link specific individuals (Clive, Colebrooke) and practices (nabobery, stockjobbing) to speculation and its discontents in the British cultural imaginary. Though he never went to India, Colebrooke is nonetheless characterized as a nabob precisely because his powerful position within the East India Company and his close ties to Robert Clive and other wealthy nabobs enabled him and his partners pursue the kinds of risky, speculative financial gambles to which his name would become inextricably attached for posterity (and not just in the pages of the *OED*).

Like the author of the satirical print, other commentators also singled out Clive, Colebrooke, and the banker Fordyce as iconic representatives of the speculative turn that was transforming British finance and culture, seemingly for the worse. When Hester Thrale set out to

define “this modern Spirit of *Speculation* as ‘tis called” in her journal, for instance, she offers the latter two men as primary examples:

By Speculation is meant Trading upon Conjecture, buying large Quantities of any Commodity when cheap, in hopes it may soon become dearer; & so it was that Fordyce by *Speculating* upon the Stocks laid out in them the Money entrusted to him as a Banker, hoping by a sudden & expected Rise to sell out with immense Profit & Advantage; & so Sir George Colebrooke purchased prodigious Quantities of Alum, intending to dispose of it when scarce at his own Price; but the Stocks by some Chance fell instead of rising, and Fordyce ruined himself & hundreds more:—while the People enraged with Sir George Colebrooke’s rapacious and monopolizing Spirit, entered into Combinations to obtain Alum & Hemp some other way, or do without; till the *Speculator* was left to contemplate his unsold Commodity, fretting his Health away in Ignominy & Distress. (Thrale I: 333)

As in Walpole’s letters and the satirical print discussed above, “*Speculation* as ‘tis called” is understood and defined here in relation to specific individuals: Colebrooke and Fordyce. The former, Thrale explains, was a man on whom Fortune initially smiled: he was blessed with a large inheritance from his banker father, amounting to “a hundred & thirty Thousand Pounds”; he amassed “fifty Thousand more by his Marriage with Miss Gavenaham,” a “West Indian”; and besides all this, “his Bankers Shop brought him a good [...] eight Thousand Pounds a Year.”

But, as Thrale stresses,

This Wealth [...] could not content his Imagination, which was ever busy among Schemes of further Profit & further Pleasure. From an elegant House at Southgate he remov’d to a splendid & expensive Seat at Gatton in Surrey: from Broad Street in the City he hastened to Arlington Street St James’s, where he occupied the Duke of Leinster’s magnificent Habitation, with more Magnificence than His noble Predecessor. [H]e bought Estates in the North, Lands in the ceded Islands, had strong Connections in the East Indies, was Director of the Company, Chairman of the Committee & what not! his Wife was covered with Jewels, his Children harassed with variety of Masters, he bought Pictures of great Value, & all was Rapacity, and all was Profusion. [...] After having dazzled the World for about 20 Years I think, he fell a Victim to his Spirit of Speculation; & is now living at Boulogne on his Creditors’ Allowance of 300£ a Year [...] (Thrale I: 334)

Bridging the conventional as well as the emergent meanings of “speculation” she seeks to clarify, Thrale presents Colebrooke as a man whose “Imagination” was perpetually occupied by

“Schemes” for additional “Profit” and “Pleasure.” Though his nabobish consumption habits elicit rebuke (“all was Rapacity, and all was Profusion”), Thrale emphasizes rather Colebrooke’s insatiability: his inability to derive pleasure from what he has, and incessant pursuit of *more*—more elegant houses in the city; more spectacular country estates; more extensive tracts of land. This forward trajectory if not compulsion signals a dissociation from the present: rather than being content with his sizeable fortune or working to secure his capital through stable investments, Colebrooke jeopardizes his family’s security by pursuing risky speculations (e.g., his attempts to corner the world’s supply of alum and hemp so as to manipulate and gamble upon the “futures” [or commodity] markets), loses everything, and winds up an exile, living upon a pittance abroad. This is thus a cautionary tale: for Thrale, Colebrooke fell a “Victim” to *his own* “Spirit of Speculation.”

The banker Alexander Fordyce also succumbed to this “Spirit” and, in doing so, came to embody for Thrale and her contemporaries the allure but also the dangers of speculation. Fordyce, Thrale writes, had “begun the World an Adventurer; & had [...] amassed by this *Gaming* method of Commerce called *Speculation*—more than three Hundred Thousand Pounds. [A]s he amassed it however only to trade with in the Alley, it all went at once; & left him & Lady Margaret Lindsay whom he married, to the mercy of Fortune: They however [...] had a Pension settled upon them on which they now live, and face the World with a Degree of Confidence which no other Country could produce” (Thrale I: 335). Thrale employs the (now familiar) rhetoric of “Gaming” to denounce Fordyce and his disruptive, speculative ventures on the Exchange—a strategy other commentators would build upon through puns on Fordyce’s last name (Four-Dice):



Figure 3. Anonymous, “A Macaroni Gambler” (1772). Courtesy of the British Museum.

Through a visual pun, the four playing dice at the bottom of the print identify the “Macaroni gambler” as Fordyce. He is depicted clutching a “Scotch Bill,” a paper credit instrument that underwrites his high-stakes monetary gaming, and which situates the print within larger critiques of upper-class gaming but also of the abuse of private credit, widely attributed to the credit crisis’s unprecedented scope and reach.<sup>40</sup> Fordyce’s “Macaroni” style in turn connects the banker’s gambling methods and misuse of credit instruments to fashionable display, subterfuge, and the manipulation of surfaces and exteriors. In a speculation-driven, credit-based economy, image, surface and reputation are everything. The strategies necessary for maintaining and bolstering one’s “reputation” in the realms of private credit *and* of elite fashionable society were essentially the same: one needed to look and act the appropriate “part.” But pricey clothes and modish accessories, much like the “Scotch Bill” Fordyce clutches in the print, could prove to be

illusory, nothing more than props which stand for or represent wealth (and value) that is spectral, with no actual basis or grounding. Credit—like wealth, value or power—typically resides where one *believes* it to reside, which is another way of saying, where it *appears* to reside. As O’Quinn nicely summarizes, “private credit was in many ways as dependent on performance as more conventional theatrical representation” (53).<sup>41</sup> As such, it opened up myriad opportunities for dissemblance, subterfuge, masquerade, and corruption (evidenced by the Fordyce-as-macaroni satire, or any number of late-eighteenth-century plays and novels).<sup>42</sup>

“Will you believe [...],” Walpole wrote to Mann of Fordyce, “that one rascally and extravagant banker ha[s] brought Britannia, Queen of the Indies, to the precipice of bankruptcy! It is very true, and Fordyce is the name of the caitiff. He has broke half the bankers [...].” (1 July 1772) (*Correspondence* XXIII: 418-19; 420-21).<sup>43</sup> As in so many of his letters, Walpole once again drives to the heart of the matter—in this case, by paradoxically juxtaposing the nation’s imperial largesse and majesty with its economic vulnerability and potential ruin. How could Britannia, the “Queen of the Indies,” find herself on the “precipice of bankruptcy”? And how (and why) could one “rascally” banker’s actions impinge upon such imperial-driven largesse? The “Memoirs of Mr. Fordyce, a late Banker,” an article published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (July 1772, pp. 310-11), offers some potential answers. Fordyce’s “capital stroke,” the author claims, “is thought to have been made at the time of the great rise of India stock, about seven years since” (311). Crucially, Fordyce’s ascendancy into London’s fashionable and financial realms sprang from his successful speculation on EIC stocks during the bubble. Yet, as in Thrale’s account of Colebrooke, such methods, though initially successful, ultimately cleared the path to ruin:

This success was fatal to Mr. Fordyce; for it induced him not only to speculate for still larger sums in the Alley, but in many other pursuits, particularly in hops. The capricious



goddess still favoured him; and he seemed so infatuated with her kindness, as to think she was intirely [sic] at his command. He purchased a large estate, with a most elegant villa, at Roehampton, where he aimed at surpassing Commissaries and Nabobs in grandeur and magnificence. [...] His ambition was now unbounded; he soared far beyond the line of mere mercantile splendor, and nothing less than nobility seemed equal to his wishes. (311)

We note how Fordyce's speculations are yoked to chance ("the capricious goddess"), unbounded ambition, dissipation, and overt social climbing; they are discursively registered, in other words, through a lexicon of nabobery (a parallel made explicit towards the end of the passage). But while aggressive speculation on India stocks provided the initial capital that allowed Fordyce to enjoy the dissipated lifestyle of a rich nabob, he also fell victim to what Thrall and others deemed a kind of manic, speculative "frenzy": by gambling on ever-larger amounts, he soared, Icarus-like, too close to the sun. Fordyce's own fall, like the credit crash his actions helped to instigate, came swiftly and unsparingly: conjecture (or "speculation" in another of its modern inflections) concerning the ballyhooed likelihood of a war with Spain over the Falkland islands further inflated and then crashed an already jittery market, "g[iving] the most sensible shock to [Fordyce's] finances; and, to make up his speculative differences, he was compelled to employ a very considerable sum of the company's stock" (311). Though Fordyce's banking partners and investors confronted him, he defended himself and "produced Bank-notes to a great amount, which he had borrowed for a few hours to answer his purpose. Equally struck with the plausibility of his discourse, and the sum, they were easily reconciled" (311). These bank-notes—like the "Scotch-bill" he clutches in the satirical print—were nothing but props: Fordyce simply passed them off as his own, trusting that the "plausibility" of his story coupled with his elite social-status and stylish manners and appearance would placate concerned parties and buy him time. Such a ruse could not last long, however, and although Fordyce "employed every method his imagination could suggest to discover some new resource" to save himself and his

partners, it was to no avail. The House was forced to stop payment, and “the whole company [...] [became] bankrupts, the fatal influence of which has affected a great number of other considerable houses involved with them” (311). “Such,” this account concludes, “are the effects of gaming in Change-alley;—a vice more fatal to commerce in such a trading nation, than all the sharpening at Newmarket, and all the shuffling at Arthur’s, and which loudly calls for the effectual interposition of the Legislature” (311). Another periodical, meanwhile, expressed the hope that the credit crisis would finally force Britons to “begin to perceive the difference between actual riches and nominal wealth” (*London Magazine* 41 (1772): 292; cited in Andrew and McGowen 163).

In these accounts, we discern how the East India Company’s transition from commerce to territorial conquest and rule in Bengal—and especially the “spirit of speculation” that it inspired as well as the chancy investment practices that it enabled—played a central role in the financial crises for which Clive, Fordyce, Colebrooke and other speculators were widely deemed culpable. Consequently, all three of these men emerged as public faces of speculation and, in so doing, helped to imbue this word with pejorative new meanings, connotations, and contexts in late Georgian-era fiction and popular culture. In the next and final section to this chapter, I examine two examples: Foote’s *The Nabob* (1772) and George Colman the Elder’s *The Man of Business* (1774). While only the former nominally concerns nabobs, the function of Indian wealth and EIC stocks and bonds in these plays further underscores the commutability between nabobs and other speculating figures (stockjobbers, bankers, gamesters, Jews) that, as I have been arguing, complicates conventional interpretations of nabobs, and suggests the need for a more inclusive critical framework.

## **VI. “the Indies in our pockets”? Men of Business on the British Stage, 1772-1774**

A correspondent recommends to the consideration of Mr. Foote, the late crush amongst the Bankers, as he thinks it a fine subject for his genius to work upon; especially if he takes a certain character, and weaves it into his new piece called the Nabob [...]

--The *Morning Chronicle* (24 June 1772)

*Grub*: "Gad the news-papers have put me into a devilish fright of late. [...] Damn it, man, I never know what to think, they puzzle me so—Why now of a morning at breakfast—in the first column, a friend to the stockholders shall tell me, [...] *that we have got the Indies in our pockets*—then that puts me into spirits, and I'll eat you a muffin extraordinary—When I turn to the next column, there we are all undone again, another devilish clever fellow says we are all bankrupts, and the cream turns upon my stomach [...]"

--John O'Brien, *Cross-Purposes* (1772; emphasis added)

Several plays performed on the London patent stages between 1772 and 1774 evince a complex understanding of the East India Company's centrality to the speculation-driven, boom-and-bust financial culture that was transforming economic, social and political relations in late eighteenth-century Britain. They do so by acknowledging, both at the level of characterization and of plot, the fundamental role that the Company's stocks and bonds played in the gambles of a range of metropolitan and imperial speculators—gambles that, by 1772, appeared to be undermining Britain's national "character" if not its "creditability" and creditworthiness. Here, I will focus upon two of these plays. Both Foote's *The Nabob* and Colman the Elder's *The Man of Business* explore what it meant to be a "man of business" during this tumultuous era. In both cases, the answer is tied (whether explicitly or implicitly) to some form of "gambling" or "speculating" on imperial wealth—a scenario that ensures that spectacular gains are usually lost just as quickly. In this respect, both playwrights tie economic instability and prospective bankruptcy (both economic and moral, individual and collective) to East India Company mismanagement and corruption; the frenzied circulation (and frequent manipulation) of its stocks and bonds; and the machinations of nabobs, stockjobbers, Jewish brokers, and related figures.

By general consensus, Samuel Foote's hit comedy *The Nabob* (1772) contributed more than any other single text to the perpetuation of anti-nabob stigma in late eighteenth-century Britain. The play's titular figure, Sir Matthew Mite, is a wealthy nabob who has recently returned to England and has threatened to foreclose on the Oldhams' family estate unless they immediately repay their considerable debts (the rights of which he has recently acquired), or grant him their eldest daughter's hand in marriage. Depicted as the stereotypically "Orientalized" villain of the anti-nabob literature—manipulative, scheming, ostentatious, arriviste, foppish (yet also sexually dangerous), and so on—Mite encodes anxieties regarding the threat of purported "Eastern" corruption and decadence infiltrating English national identity and disrupting the proper arrangement of social, political, and economic powers in the established English families and their paternal estates (hence Foote's use of the patronymic "*Oldham*"). Lady Oldham voices this threat most clearly when she laments that, "With the wealth of the East, we have too imported the worst of its vices" (13). But the assumption that Mite's "vices" are simply "imported" into England does not account for the full range of the nabob's disruptive potential as represented in the play. Indeed, Foote's satire offers a more complicated portrait of nabobery that emphasizes Mite's collusion with (and reliance upon) a range of *domestic* agents only too willing to advance his speculative schemes.

In Act Two, for instance, we find Mite sporting a "macaroni dress for the hazard-table" as he is instructed by a waiter from Almack's how "to throw the dice with grace"—a scenario that recalls the popular caricature of Fordyce as a "macaroni gambler" witnessed in the print discussed above. Next, Foote connects Mite's gambling proclivities to his aggressive financial speculations when, in an ensuing scene, the nabob is joined by "Moses Mendoza" and "Nathan," two "Jew broker[s]" (25). Mite proceeds to order Nathan to "split" his EIC stocks so he can

obtain more votes on the Company's Board of Directors;<sup>44</sup> to sell off other stocks in order to "sink" EIC share prices "two and a half"; and to burn a large quantity of tea in order to manipulate supply and demand and ensure "that [the] commodity will soon be a drug." Finally, Mite commands the two men to await further instructions as to whether he will fix the market in Company shares to be bullish or bearish (40-41).<sup>45</sup> If the gambling scene recalls popular caricatures of Fordyce, this scene conjures Robert Clive's actions during the EIC bubble whilst also recalling the well-publicized allegations made against Company employees during the Bengal famine. These allusions and intertexts thereby position Foote's comedy within topical debates concerning not just imperial corruption and nabobery, but the causes of the EIC stock crash and credit crisis. But they also encourage spectators to view the two as causally related if not mutually constitutive. Commenting on this scene, Siraj Ahmed notes how EIC "servants' corruption in the colonies became associated with 'stock fixing' in London [...]" (*Stillbirth* 93).<sup>46</sup> I agree, though, as I have shown, these associative links and networks go much deeper, implicating nabobs within a more complicated critique of the increasingly hazardous financial practices that empire both inspired and underwrote—practices that, from this moment forward, were commonly characterized and represented as forms of "speculation."

Foote's rather strange emphasis upon the potentially spectral (or "ideal") nature of Mite's fortune during the final scene takes on a crucial significance in this respect. Oldham's merchant brother, Thomas (whose commitment to honorable trade and sober commerce is set in explicit contrast to Mite's aggressive speculations and nabobery), offers to pay off the nabob and assume Oldham's debts, thereby releasing the family from Mite's clutches. A relieved Lady Oldham then unleashes her pent-up scorn on the insistent nabob: "You will, Sir Matthew, pardon my weakness: but I would much rather see my child with a competence, nay, even reduced to an

indigent state, than voluptuously rioting in pleasures that derive their source from the ruin of others [...]. Besides, I would wish my daughter a more solid establishment: The possessions arising from plunder very rarely are permanent; we every day see what has been treacherously and rapaciously gained, as profusely and full as rapidly squandered” (65). Crucially, Lady Oldham rejects not only the probable source of Mite’s great fortune (derived—at least in part—from “plunder” and “ruin”), but its likely *ephemerality*: it is neither “solid” nor “permanent.” The point is not just that Mite’s unrestrained dissipation and lavish lifestyle jeopardize his fiscal stability, but that his reputedly vast wealth is not liquid: it is tied up in complex private credit arrangements; suspect bonds, unpredictable stocks, and other paper instruments; and various high-risk speculations.<sup>47</sup> Thomas builds upon this comment when he remarks to the nabob, “Your riches (which perhaps too are only *ideal*) by introducing a general spirit of dissipation, have extinguished labour and industry, the *slow*, but *sure* source of national wealth” (66; emphases added). As O’Quinn writes in a trenchant analysis of this scene, the “crucial details in Thomas’s speech are his suggestion that slow accumulation is preferable to rapid speculation, his insinuation that quick gains foment vice, and, most important, his own supposition that Mite’s fortune is “only ideal” (64). These three points, he notes, “are [also] crucial to the critique of the abuse of private credit following the revelation of Fordyce’s fraud. For an audience thoroughly steeped in this crisis, Thomas’s aside signals that Mite’s fortune is based not only on colonial violence but also on paper instruments whose value may be grounded on air” (64). Though focused on this particular scene, O’Quinn’s comments help underscore the fundamental parallel I have been tracing across a range of texts and contexts between wealth acquired through imperial conquest and plunder, on the one hand, and wealth amassed through risky financial speculations, on the other. Both methods are viewed as analogous forms of suspect, even aberrant,

accumulation that carry significant repercussions for those willing to roll the dice. Even further, they are understood as mutually dependent and constitutive: imperialism (abetted by the tools of modern finance capitalism such as the “Scotch Bill” Fordyce clutches in the caricature or the bonds that Matthew Mite surreptitiously acquires and then uses to extort the indebted Oldham family in *The Nabob*) makes such risky though potentially lucrative speculations *possible*.

In literary texts such as *The Nabob*, then, we begin to discern how cultural apprehensions regarding imperialism, finance capitalism, and gaming overlap and triangulate during the later eighteenth century. This point—which is largely suggestive in Foote’s play—finds more concrete expression in George Colman the Elder’s *The Man of Business* (1774). A “dark comedy” which, as Gillian Russell notes, “deal[s] with the financial, moral and social instability that followed the crash of 1772” (125), Colman’s play was immediately recognized and discussed in the papers as a thinly-veiled satire of Alexander Fordyce: according to the *Monthly Review*, “The story, and many of the principal circumstances of this play, have an evident reference to some late and well known events in the mercantile world [...]” (*Monthly Review* 50 [March 1774]). What the reviewer does not address, and I will analyze here, is how the play locates the origins of these mercantile irregularities in the infusion of vast amounts of imperial wealth into Britain, and particularly in the suspect and often reckless methods employed by domestic Britons determined to claim their share. Unlike *The Nabob*, however, *The Man of Business* depicts both successful and failed speculations, thus making the play’s plot resolution as well as its larger stance vis-à-vis imperial wealth and speculation more complicated than they might at first appear.

The plot concerns a young *bon-vivant* named Beverley, who assumes responsibility over his family’s banking house while his step-father and guardian (Mr. Golding) is in India. A

member of “the Macaroni [club]” and the “Scavoir Vivre,” Beverley pursues a life of unrestrained dissipation and pleasure, with his gambling proclivities—as did Matthew Mite’s—doubling for his increasingly hazardous investment and lending practices. In short, Beverley neglects his duties, gambles as recklessly on the Exchange as he does at the clubs, and quickly squanders vast sums by “speculat[ing] in India-stock” (47). After the bank is nearly forced to stop payment during the ensuing credit crunch, Mr. Fable, who works at the bank and anxiously watches over Beverley while his father is abroad, sees an opportunity to show the young man the error of his ways. Unaware of the true extent of Beverley’s difficulties, Fable spreads a rumor that Beverley has been ruined in order to shock his young ward into reforming his conduct. But he is too late: a horrified Fable learns that Beverley really *has* compromised his own fortune, not to mention the Bank’s credit, by his “adventuring in the Alley” and “infamous gambling in India-stock” (48). In so doing, Beverley has also jeopardized his long hoped-for marriage to Lydia, Fable’s ward. Yet the repercussions of Beverley’s actions extend far beyond his own private fortune and prospects, as Fable reminds him in a heated rebuke:

You, who have so grossly abused the mutual confidence between man and man, and betrayed the important trust reposed in you—What! a banker! a banker, Mr. Beverley, not only squandering his own fortune, but playing with the property of others!—the property of unconscious persons silently melting away, as if by forgery, under his hands, without their own prodigality!—And is such a man, because he is at length buried in the ruin he has pulled down on others, an object of compassion? No, sir, nothing is to be lamented but the mildness of his punishment. (49)

An embarrassed Beverley laments the “cruel reverse” he “now [has] to experience,” and offers a tepid defense of his conduct by insisting that he “had been taught to hope and believe that the event would have proved prosperous; and thought to have surprised [Fable], and charmed Lydia, with [his] unexpected good fortune” (49). The language here, particularly words like “hope” and “belie[f],” drive to the heart of the problem: when it comes to speculation, investors like



Beverley willingly suspend reason, judgment, and even common sense, replacing them with passion, desire, and enthusiasm. Hence, while Beverley attributes his unfortunate “revers[al]” of fortune to bad luck and youthful naïveté, Fable is not convinced, noting that it was a “reverse that the daily experience of thousands might have warned you to avoid, rather than to build your hopes on such a sandy foundation” (49).

Crucially, Colman reveals that the “sandy foundation” upon which Beverley built his hopes was one shaped by the “tide of eastern riches flowing in upon us” (49). Such sums of wealth, Fable exclaims, “which might have scattered plenty over our country, such adventurers as you, Mr. Beverley, have rendered the parent of poverty, and the means of almost general bankruptcy. A simple individual to rise today worth half a million—and undone man tomorrow! Are these the principles of commerce?” (49-50). Through Fable, Colman launches what is arguably one of the most spirited critiques of the speculative turn that was transforming Britain’s economy, its culture, and its citizens:

Not content with one species of enormity, but industriously multiplying your ruin, and combining in yourself the double vices of a man of business, and a man of pleasure! Gambling the whole morning in the Alley, and sitting down at night to *quinze* and hazard at St. James’s; by turns, making yourself a prey to the rooks and sharks at one end of the town, and the bulls and bears at the other! Formerly a young spendthrift was contented with one species of prodigality—but it was reserved for you and your precious associates to compound this new medley of folly, this olio of vice and extravagance, at once including the dissoluteness of an abandoned debauchee, the chicanery of a pettyfogger, and the dirty tricking of a fraudulent stock-jobbing broker. (50)

Here, Colman brings together the three foundational pillars of speculative economic activity that I have been tracing throughout this chapter (the pursuit of “eastern riches,” speculating “in the Alley,” and gambling “at *quinze* and hazard at St. James’s”) into a “new medley of folly, [an] olio of vice and extravagance” (50). Colonial capital both inspires and makes possible the kinds of reckless, disruptive speculations pursued by “Men of Business” like Beverley. Yet the

function of “eastern riches” in the play is more complicated than this scene alone might suggest. If imperial wealth is targeted in Fable’s speech for ushering in “an olio” of vice, extravagance, and speculation, it also, perhaps paradoxically, restores order and sets things to right by the end of the play. Fable determines to rescue Beverley and the Banking House from utter ruin (and to save Fable’s marriage to Lydia) by essentially embezzling Lydia’s inheritance—a fortune that was acquired from India and for which Fable acts as trustee. In the final Acts, Beverley’s long-absent stepfather, Mr. Golding, unexpectedly arrives back from India and reveals that Lydia is in fact his daughter from a first marriage (thus explaining her large inheritance). And, contrary to spurious stories of his significant losses in India, Golding informs the group that he has “enough and more than enough to stand the [recent] shock of our affairs, repay [Fable] with interest, and establish our credit; for, thank heaven, I have been employing my time abroad better than my young partner has done at home” (75). In revealing Golding to be a wealthy nabob willing to expend his fortune for the benefit of his friends, family, and employees, it would seem that Colman contradicts the play’s critique of imperial wealth and its negative effects on Britain’s domestic economy and culture. Golding’s remark that he has “employed [his] time abroad better than my young partner has done at home” in effect reverses the conventional script: the plunder, corruption, and speculation attributed to English nabobs pursuing quick fortunes on the subcontinent instead characterizes metropolitan attempts to secure this money. In the end, imperial wealth in this play functions as a kind of Derridean “pharmakon” insofar as it acts as both “poison” and “cure.” That is, while it is identified as the source and implicated in the spread of the “new medley of folly” Fable decries, it also provides the solution to Beverley’s financial difficulties, enables him to marry his beloved, and keeps the family business afloat. Regardless of how one interprets this apparent conundrum, what we are ultimately left with is a revised and

expanded sense of what it meant to “speculate” on the spoils of empire—one that in turn forces us to reconsider how we interpret nabobery and speculation in the literature and culture of this period.

## CHAPTER II

**“To trade in love, and marry for rupees”: Englishwomen and Matrimonial “Speculation” in Early British India**

I am come to Bengal in search of a husband, no uncommon errand,  
I believe.

—James Cobb, *Love in the East* (1788)

From Britain yearly hundreds sail to try  
Their luck in Asia’s kinder lottery.

--John Hobart Caunter, *The Cadet* (1814)

[...] there are few, if any of our readers, whether in this country or in England, who have not heard much and read much on the subject of Female Adventurers, and the Marriage Market, and young ladies going out to India, on what was vulgarly called ‘*a spec*’[*speculation*]. All this is quite swept away.

--*Calcutta Review* (1846)

It was a truth universally acknowledged that single men working for the East India Company must be in want of wives. British men outnumbered women on Indian stations by a huge margin for the duration of Britain’s presence on the subcontinent. While historians have conceded that “official information” about English and European women in India is “extremely patchy” before the mid-nineteenth century, thus making it “difficult to be precise about [their] numbers [...] and their rate of growth,” estimates gleaned from private correspondence, journals, and other sources nonetheless reveal a staggeringly disproportionate gender ratio (Raza xix).<sup>48</sup> Thomas Williamson, who spent much of the 1780s and 1790s in India and published the first edition of his influential travel guide *The East India Vade Mecum* in 1810, asserted that “The number of European women to be found in Bengal, and its dependencies, cannot amount to two hundred and fifty, while the European male inhabitants of respectability, including military officers, may be taken at about four thousand” (453). In 1812, Lady Nugent observed in Calcutta that the proportion at dinner parties was usually one woman to twenty men, while two decades later (1832), Elizabeth Elton Smith noted that “the proportion of females to the other sex may be as

one to fifteen, or as one to twenty” (qtd. in Raza 31). The gender proportion would have been even more lopsided earlier in the eighteenth century, and at all times out in the *mofussil* (i.e., outside of the three main “Presidencies” of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay).

Such disparate male-to-female ratios ensured that marital prospects were consistently favorable for Englishwomen willing to embark upon the lengthy and often dangerous sea voyage east. In November 1775, Francis Fowke rather bluntly assessed the typical scenario prompting such voyages in a letter to his nephew in Bengal: “Your sister [Margaret] goes out now, I suppose, to get a husband, which she has not beauty or fortune enough to get here” (qtd. in S.C. Ghosh 62). Whether women like Margaret lacked the requisite dowries, personal charms or proper connections to secure marriages in England (or simply embraced the opportunity for adventure and travel), migration to Company settlements in India offered them a relatively secure marital gambit: should a woman “possess any pretensions to beauty,” one early-nineteenth-century observer, “she is soon snapped up; for the scarcity of the article prevents people from being very fastidious in their tastes. If of the true European white, she is almost sure to go off tolerably well [...]” (Blakiston 51).<sup>49</sup> Rendered “valuable” due to their scarcity, young single women—even those lacking dowries—could gain the upper hand in an imperial conjugal “market” that reversed the normative distribution of power governing courtship rituals in the metropole.

But if many of the men stationed in India were enthusiastic in their praise for, and hospitable in their reception of, the “young ladies going to India,” not everybody viewed them so positively. As I demonstrate in this chapter, these women were at the center of a controversy that divided late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britons. Frequently derided as “adventuresses” plundering the subcontinent for wealthy husbands in parallel fashion to the

British “nabobs” who scrambled for loot, they were accused of “trad[ing] in love, and marry[ing] for rupees,” or of turning marriage into a mercenary financial transaction and becoming “speculators” in a potentially lucrative, though undeniably risky, imperial sexual economy (Colman “Prologue” to *Sword of Peace* n.p.). During the later eighteenth century, novels, plays, private correspondence, periodical essays, visual satires, and travel narratives ubiquitously joined in depicting East India Company stations as veritable marriage “bazaars” in which Englishwomen are bought, sold and traded like any other commodity. Even more troubling, such works frequently depict the women at the center of such trafficking as complicit in their own commodification and even prostitution: according to a 1783 pamphleteer, women who had “no pretensions to a settlement” in Britain, whether “from a want of beauty, of fortune, [or] of *virtue*,” looked to colonial India “as to a theatre of splendid success, where, with tolerable address, and a promptitude to villainy, they must obtain the summit of their expectations” (John King *Thoughts* 25-6; qtd. in Colley “Gendering” 135-6).<sup>50</sup> As a consequence of such aggressive stereotyping, women returning home from the subcontinent often found themselves ridiculed and even shunned by polite society back in England: none other than Robert Clive, for instance, instructed his wife to spurn “the ladies who have been in India” (referring directly in this case to Jane Austen’s paternal aunt, Philadelphia Hancock) since they “stand in such little esteem in England that their company cannot be of credit” to his wife (qtd. in Le Faye *Family Record* 30).

During the last three decades of the eighteenth century in particular, unmarried women in the “Indian marriage market” became a focal point for some of the British public’s deepest anxieties regarding the effects of an expanding Eastern empire on established gender, class and racial codes in domestic Britain. Yet despite increasing interest in the intersections of gender, sex, and colonialism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and culture, this imperial

trafficking in English brides has gone all but unnoted in recent scholarship.<sup>51</sup> When scholars do address this topic, moreover, they focus almost exclusively upon the later Victorian era despite the fact that, as I demonstrate, this issue exploded into public discourse during the *pre*-Raj era.<sup>52</sup> In this chapter, I attempt to redress this oversight by examining earlier depictions of the Indian marriage market in novels, plays, poems, satirical prints, newspapers, letters, travel narratives and guidebooks. Close attention to the representation of women in these texts reveals a noticeable historical trend: while they are associated with luxury, rampant sexuality, vice, and even criminality during the eighteenth century's latter decades, from the turn of the century we encounter a growing body of works reflecting a more complicated, sympathetic view of these so-called "husband hunters." While single women in India continued to face negative stereotyping for as long as the British remained on the subcontinent, by the early- to mid-nineteenth century we find a growing number of commentators voicing encouragement and support for single women's migration to this radically changing imperial venue. How do we account for this shift?

While there is no simple explanation, I look forward to the *pre*-Raj and Raj eras to suggest that the answer partly lies in the fact that issues of sexuality and marriage emerged at the forefront of imperial strategies of rule as the nature of Britain's presence on the subcontinent shifted from that of a small network of EIC employees and soldiers presiding over a handful of Indian provinces, to a burgeoning, full-fledged empire of settlement. The steadily growing numbers of men serving in India for extended periods of time, as well as the gradual incorporation of British India into the political body of the nation, intensified already simmering apprehensions regarding cultural and racial "miscegenation" in the empire. An Englishwoman's willingness to forgo the comforts of home and migrate to India could thus, for perhaps the first time, be viewed positively as a sacrifice for the benefit of English men who needed companions

and wives—specifically *white*, Christian wives. In other words, by the mid-nineteenth century, a historical moment marked by escalating fears that “miscegenation brought contamination to a nation seeking a purified identity distinctly different from its imperial peoples” (Nussbaum “The theatre” 73-4), oft-maligned husband-hunters came to be viewed as useful prophylactics against the sexual partnerships between English men and native Indian women so common during the earlier eighteenth century—a recalibration that ultimately reflects larger cultural-historical patterns by which the tactical deployment and regulation of bodies and populations in colonial spaces constituted a potent strategy for imperial rule and domination (or “biopower”)<sup>53</sup> as the nineteenth century progressed.

### I. “Speculation”: Nabobinas, the Marriage Market, and Imperial Commerce

From a knowledge of this general predilection in favour of matrimony in India, the English, who are inclined to every sort of *speculation*, send thither annually whole cargoes of females, who are tolerably handsome and are seldom six months in the country without getting husbands.

--Louis Grandpré, *A voyage in the Indian Ocean and to Bengal, undertaken in the years 1789 and 1790* (English translation, 1803) (emphasis added)

The controversy over the Indian marriage market emerged partly as a result of the growing unease many Britons experienced during the 1770s and 1780s as they tracked Britain’s expanding Eastern empire and contemplated its potential to transform the economic, political, and cultural fabric of the home country. Much of this anxiety was channeled into the male figure of the “nabob,” as I discussed in the previous chapter; but to a degree that has gone largely unnoted, such apprehensions were increasingly displaced onto the figure of the English *woman* in India as well, thus complicating the still-common assumption that Britain’s early Eastern empire was a thoroughly masculine realm. Indeed, Elizabeth Griffith’s play *A Wife in the Right* (1772) was one of the first literary works to introduce a female version of the nabob, or



“nabobina,” into British popular culture. Also referred to as the “nabobess,” the nabobina was commonly understood to be the wife of an English nabob. As Nechtman observes, “these women came to be connected to stories of sexual impropriety in the imperial world [...]. From the point of view of their domestic critics, nabobinas were more dangerous than their male counterparts because, in order to profit from Britain's empire in British India, they had to participate in a sexualized commercial system” (“Nabobinas” 24).<sup>54</sup> Griffith’s comedy offers a prime example of how single women relocating to India were viewed with suspicion and commonly imbued with blatantly vicious—if not criminal—motives. The play thereby inaugurates many of the tropes by which the Englishwoman in India would come to be characterized in literary and visual representations published in ensuing decades.

Briefly performed three months before Foote’s play,<sup>55</sup> and published by subscription (with a dazzling list of subscribers including Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds, Isaac Bickerstaff and Samuel Foote) only two weeks before *The Nabob* premiered, Griffith’s play foregrounds this global trafficking in English wives through the character of Mrs. Frankly, an aspirant nabobina. After she is foiled in her attempt to ensnare a recently returned English nabob in London and exposed as a demi-rep, thief, and embezzler, Franky steps forth in the play’s epilogue and details her plot to take “the Indian route” in order to secure a lucrative marriage in Madras:

Blown up and ruin’d here—‘tis a strange notion,  
 You'll say, but I'm resolved to cross the ocean;  
 I'll e'en equip me for the Indian route;  
 Seaton and Ramsay join to fit me out:  
 Bull says he's sure I need not despair,  
 For British features bear a premium there.  
 Even this homely face would charm, they say,  
 Amongst the copper beauties of Bombay;  
 And she who in a crowd would scarcely pass  
 With us, would be a Venus, at Madrass.

Pantheon, Opera, Playhouse, Fantoccini,  
Farewell—I'll go, and be a Nabobini. (90)

“[C]ross[ing] the ocean” is characterized here as an effective scheme by which Frankly can revive and even exceed her “blown” prospects at home by cashing in on the “premium” paid for British “features” (i.e., skin tone) abroad. Though lacking in beauty (“this homely face”), virtue, honesty, and other traits typically valued in a potential spouse, her sex and her complexion are apparently enough to secure Frankly a splendid match. The Indian marriage market, Griffith suggests, allows *undeserving* if not blatantly iniquitous women like Frankly the opportunity to transform into female equivalents of male nabobs or even veritable Eastern princesses.

Thus, in the following lines, Frankly indulges in a fantasy-vision laden with Eastern stereotypes that specifically emphasizes the role of material accumulation and display in her imagined metamorphosis into a nabobina:

Or, if that scheme, perchance, should not succeed,  
E'en wed a Seapoy chief, and mend the breed.  
What if one's husband is a little frightful,  
Where every thing besides is so delightful.  
'Twill be so charming, on a summer's day,  
For forty slaves to fan me as I lay,  
Or on rich carpets free from noise and hurry,  
Sit cross-legg'd with my spouse, and feast on Curry.  
If I've a taste for baubles, my good man,  
Will load me with old China and Japan.  
Diamonds on diamonds heap'd, and pearly rows,  
For hair, ears, neck, and breast, perhaps my nose[.] (90-91)

A vivid fantasy of Eastern dissipation and decadence, Frankly the imperialist consumer is herself consumed by the diamonds and jewels she covets: “hair, ears, neck, [...] breast, [...] nose”—precious stones seemingly cannibalize Frankly's body as this prospective “nabobin[a]” metamorphoses into a bejeweled embodiment of her own fetishized imperial desires. Frankly's proposed journey is thus grounded in her lust for imperial luxuries and a life without labor. To

some readers, this emphasis would have been consistent with popular concerns that imperial wealth—particularly as it is embodied in exotic foreign goods such as “baubles,” “carpets,” or “curr[ies]”—could alter the tastes and even the physical and moral constitutions of English men and women, both abroad and at home. Her drive to acquire vast wealth and luxury goods as quickly as possible, no matter the hazard or risk involved, further connects such marital “schem[ing]” to the kind of ruthless profiteering and aggressive financial “speculation” denounced in other anti-nabob texts (such as Foote’s *The Nabob*) as detrimental to the nation’s economic and cultural stability. Finally, Frankly significantly raises the stakes of her venture by acknowledging her willingness to transgress racial as well as sexual codes of conduct: should she prove unable to snag a wealthy British nabob, Frankly boldly insists, she will “wed a Seapoy chief,” that is, an Indian man serving in the EIC’s regiments.

By yoking the dissolute Mrs. Frankly to various levels of sexual and economic scheming that take on new levels of import when transplanted to India, Griffith presents the favorable marriage prospects in the burgeoning Eastern empire as offering a harbor for the greedy, the immoral, and the depraved; the play veritably displaces the kinds of imperial anxieties typically encoded in the male nabob onto the female husband-hunter and hopeful nabobina. As a cultural figure or type, the nabobina never really achieved the popularity of the male nabob in British popular culture; but in highlighting the complicated braiding of economic and sexual practices governing Anglo-Indian relations as a source of anxiety, and by displacing this apprehension onto the *women* circulating between England and India, the early representations of the nabobina I have examined thus far simultaneously anticipate and shape the more vigorous controversy over female “speculators” in the Indian marriage market that reached its apex during the next decade.

## II. The “Sale of English-Beauties” in the East Indies

The system pursued in disposing of the fair objects is exactly the same as that used at the sales of king's stores in a dock-yard, where the auctioneer begins by putting the highest price on the article, and keeps lowering and lowering, till some bidder assents to the price and bears off the goods. [...] How happy marriages in general prove among Europeans in India may hence be inferred. (49-51)

--John Blakiston, *Twelve Years' Military Adventure in Three Quarters of the Globe* [...] (1829) (49-51)

The final decades of the eighteenth century witness a remarkable number of authors and commentators turning to the husband-hunting Englishwoman in India as a convenient figure by which to lodge critiques of both metropolitan and especially Anglo-Indian society. On 16 May 1786, for instance, James Gillray published a graphic satire entitled “A Sale of English-Beauties, in the East-Indies,” which depicts a bevy of newly-arrived women in an Indian port as they are unceremoniously poked, prodded, examined and publicly auctioned off by a group of Company employees (joined by caricatured Eastern men) amidst stores of the ship's other cargo: boxes of erotic and pornographic literature (Cleland's infamous *Fanny Hill*; a work entitled *Female Flagellants*); cases of birch rods for sexual flogging; and barrels of “Leake's Pills,” a popular remedy for venereal disease marketed by Walter Leake.



Figure 4. James Gillray, *A Sale of English-Beauties, in the East-Indies*, 16 May 1786.  
Courtesy of The British Museum.

Given the various “cargo,” the satirical import of the print is blunt: the East India Company traffics in sex. While the throngs of men populating the docks would seem to suggest no shortage of potential buyers for these “English-Beauties,” we find in the background of the print, off to the right side, a group of women being herded into an open warehouse, the sign for which reads “unsaleable goods from Europe [...] To be returned by the Next Ship.”<sup>56</sup> Though the favorable gender ratio would make an “overstock” of this kind seem unlikely, similar concerns were often voiced during this era: incorporating language which mirrors the representational logic of Gillray’s print, Philip Francis wrote to Lady Clive (21 November 1775), “would you believe that all the Beauty we brought with us has not produced a single Marriage. The Market, I presume, is overstocked, at least there are no Bidders at the public sales. I believe we must prohibit the farther Importation of spinsters, till we have disposed of the Stock on hand” (21 November 1775;

qtd. in S. C. Ghosh *Social Condition* 64). The casual nature by which Francis reduces such women to commodified “Beauties” in an imperial marketplace—in a letter to a female correspondent, no less—suggests the ubiquity of this kind of attitude. Besides associating the women with animals, livestock, and other chattels, Francis’ imagery (“stock,” “bidders”) suggests that the Indian “market” in women is just as erratic and unpredictable as the English stock market. But, as the often scathing representations of “stockjobbers” and “brokers” during this era attests, the immense hazard and risk involved in these various forms of speculation made it difficult for many Britons to sympathize with the individuals on the losing end of such gambles. As Tim Fulford has noted of Gillray’s satire, the “English Beauties” in the print are not “shown as victims,” and “only those who have not found buyers [...] look unhappy” (18). Like Francis, then, Gillray renders the women the *willing*, collusive agents in a network of imperial sexual trafficking both immensely risky and unmistakably corrupt (and corrupting). His double-edged satire critiques the blatant commodification of British women in the colonial marriage bazaar while at the same time assailing British women themselves for voluntarily making a market of their persons in order to achieve quick wealth.

Gillray’s print offers perhaps the most influential visualization of how many Britons perceived the English community in India at this time. Early British India is depicted as a cultural space in which money trumps all other considerations; a place where English character and English virtue are besmirched by morally questionable if not blatantly debased modes of commerce, both economic *and* sexual. The historical purchase of Gillray’s print in influencing subsequent representations of British India and in shaping cultural attitudes towards its male—and particularly its female—denizens is demonstrated by the fact that it was quickly adapted into a two-act Covent Garden farce by the fashionable Edward “Epilogue” Topham.<sup>57</sup> In *Bonds*

*without Judgment; or, The Loves of Bengal* (1787), which received a respectable run of nine performances at Covent Garden during the launching of Hastings' impeachment, Topham satirizes Englishmen in Bengal as a bumbling crew of aging, profligate rakes who, when not "plunder[ing]" the native Indian rulers and princes, spend their time plotting to "wreak havoc" upon the shiploads of "outward bound Venuses" arriving from England (5). When Colonel Fury—his name suggesting the voraciousness of his appetite for both monetary and sexual spoils—makes his stage entrance, he promptly asks if "the English Girls that are exported for matrimony to us at Bengal [are] landed yet? Say they are, for I am in haste, & I will not wait for any Woman upon Earth" (1). After the character Japan temporarily distracts him with business matters, Fury brushes him off and once again voices his impatience for "the sweet dear Angels that are coming over to us," before exclaiming, "O Japan the havock I shall make there!" (3). Apparently, EIC servants have no qualms about putting official "business" on hold when the opportunity to seize so valuable an "export" presents itself in what Topham mischievously deems the "Port of Matrimony" (3) at Calcutta.

But while Colonel Fury and the men waiting on the docks are depicted as greedy (albeit comically inept) economic and sexual marauders, the women in the play appear complicit in the market as well. Sophia voices the pleasure she receives in toying with the men's affections before jokingly confessing that money carries as significant a weight as love in her matrimonial prospects: "But suppose we sho[uld] be made the Queen of Diamonds, w[ould] not that be as well as being the Queen of Hearts? I sh[ould] have no Objection to having some good old Nabob for a Husband who might stile me '*My Jewel*' properly" (13). Sophia would "have no Objection," in other words, to the overt commodification of her person; if she becomes a Nabob's "Jewel," she will in the process acquire her own set of jewels and thus be "made" into a

literal “Queen of Diamonds”—a metamorphosis that recalls Mrs. Frankly’s scheme in the epilogue to *A Wife in the Right*. Though Sophia successfully outwits the nabobs attempting to force her hand (a kind of sexual plunder), and adopts patriotic rhetoric to reject mercenary marriages in British India, nevertheless, in Topham’s farce we find once again that the motivations prompting a young women’s journey to India rooted in greed, self-interest, and the pursuit of “pleasure” and luxury.

The pointedly didactic prologue to Topham’s farce, written by George Monk Berkeley, reinforces the play’s critique of the Indian marriage market by figuring the groups of women who partake in it as threats to “blest Hymen’s laws” (35). In describing these “damsels” as an “unworthy freight” who hypocritically “rail” against “venal” love even as they “blushing[ly]” depart for the “land of husbands,” Berkeley revealingly places the moral onus of this practice on the women themselves—a fact reinforced by the prologue’s repeated addresses (“On you,” “On your support”) to female audience members:

On you, ye fair, who haply scorn the plan,  
To seek so far that faithless creature man;  
Who, spurning Plutus, and his sordid art,  
For love alone exchange the generous heart—  
On your support our anxious bard relies,  
And hopes to take his plaudits from your eyes! (36)

By pleading with the ladies in attendance to “spur[n]” Plutus and his “sordid art” (i.e., reject mercenary considerations) and marry “for love alone,” Berkeley’s prologue underscores the “opposed tropes of integrity and self-interest” that Nandini Bhattacharya (in another context) finds characteristic of “the discourse of female conjugal adventure and conquest in India” (92). In other words, unmarried women voyaging to India are saddled with the burden of clearly establishing their motives and proving their moral integrity in order to avoid conjecture and



probable censure. So pervasive was the cultural stigma against these voyaging women, however, that such an attempt could often seem like a fool's errand.

### III. Imperial Stigma: Marriage, Motive, and Character

I would rather you had no acquaintance with *the ladies who have been in India*, they stand in such little esteem in England that their company cannot be of credit to Lady Clive.

--Robert Clive to Lady Clive (1765) (emphasis added)

Negative depictions of female “adventuresses” and “husband-hunters” like those encountered in Gillray’s print or Topham’s farce had palpable, real-life consequences for single women considering a trip to India, whatever their motives might have been. Indeed, the prejudice against “matrimonial speculators” was simply too great for many women considering an India voyage to ignore. In 1783, the novelist Elizabeth Hamilton wrote a letter to her beloved brother (who was stationed on the subcontinent) in which she revealingly details her reasons for rejecting his offer to join him abroad. Despite the “temptation” of reuniting with her brother, “the objections” to his plan were for Hamilton “so many and so insuperable” that only sheer desperation could possibly induce her to overlook the “thousand delicacies that form a barrier to every woman possessed of true female feelings” from making such a journey. “Nor,” she continues,

would even the certainty of *getting a husband* weigh so very deeply with me, as you gentlemen may perhaps imagine; nor am I sure I should be quite so *saleable* as you might partially suppose: I believe the pert adventuress would have the advantage of me: some antiquated notions of refinement might stand in my way, such as that there were some other requisites besides fortune essential to happiness, —a similarity of disposition, an union of heart and sentiment, and all those little delicacies, which one, whose only ambition is to possess wealth, and whose most ardent wish is the parade of grandeur, may overlook, but which one of a different education, and another manner of thinking, could not dispense with. (qtd. in Benger 92-3)

As Hamilton argues, her motives for voyaging to India—however merited or disinterested—would automatically be chalked down to the mercenary pursuit of a husband. Though desperately lonely without her brother’s companionship, Hamilton simply refused to render herself

vulnerable to the conjecture and slander she would face as an unmarried woman in British India. Her letter vividly demonstrates how the negative scripting of such women as “pert adventuress[es]” whose “only ambition is to possess wealth” acted as a very real “barrier” to women driven by less venal considerations. Even so, Hamilton makes no attempt to challenge or dispel customary stereotypes; indeed, she actually *reinforces* negative labels by relying upon them as the basis for a satirical vindication of her moral virtue and as a justification for her own fears.<sup>58</sup>

Hamilton’s letter demonstrates the precarious position of women travelling to Britain’s holdings during the early phase of empire. Betty Joseph has perceptively noted how English men making the voyage East during this period would have had “various subject positions” available to them “since the seventeenth century—as soldiers, civil servants, adventurers, and so on,” but women making the same voyage were forced to embark upon “a scrupulous clearing of space”: “single women,” she continues, “were always viewed with suspicion because they had nothing to exchange but themselves” (80). But as we have begun to see, successfully “clearing” such a space could be a task akin to the fabled cleansing of the Augean stables. When Maria Graham published her *Journal of a Residence in India* in 1812, for instance, the *Quarterly Review* (#8 [December 1812]) opened its (otherwise entirely favorable) review by meanly conjecturing that the author was “a young lady who, probably, went thither, like most young ladies, to procure a husband instead of information[.]” Faced with such unrelenting stigmatization, we find a veritable anxiety of authorship on the part of women writers who dared to even *address* Anglo-Indian matters or employ Indian settings in their published works. Thus, in the print edition of her 1788 Haymarket comedy *The Sword of Peace; or, A Voyage of Love*,<sup>59</sup> Mariana Starke prefaces the play with a curious interlude in which several characters conjecture about the

identity and background of the work's author (Starke published the comedy anonymously, though acknowledged her sex in the prefatory remarks). Colonel Prattle insists she must be "a mere adventuress," "a grocer's daughter" who has returned to England "an unsuccessful candidate from India for gold mores, and lacks [of] rupees." Mrs. Languish responds, "Nay, Colonel, hardly so! for she bears rather severely upon that point," to which a Colonel Seafar smartly replies, "By no means a necessary consequence she should not be so, Madam, upon that account" (131). The slippery means by which Starke heads off prospective comparisons between authoress and her fictional protagonists in this interlude—even as such an attempt necessarily reinscribes such parallels—demonstrates the need for a closer analysis of the play's ideologically conflicted representation of female "adventuress[es]" in India. Perhaps surprisingly, though she vindicates her two heroines and rewards their disinterested motives for voyaging to the subcontinent, Starke, who was herself born in India, ultimately perpetuates the very stigma her heroines fight to stave off by aggressively caricaturing the settlement's other female denizens as ghoulish, vulgar upstarts who literally embody imperial corruption in its many facets.

Starke's comedy playfully manipulates and enjoins gender politics, the conventions of comedy and romance, and social and political critique in order to create a nuanced intervention into imperial affairs—particularly as regards the notoriously lax morals and mercenary motives (both economic and sexual) attributed to Anglo-Indian (or "East Indian") men and women at this time. As the title indicates, the two protagonists, Eliza and Louisa Moreton, have embarked upon a "voyage of love" to British India; Starke's use of this phrase is pointedly ironic, however, for the Moretons have journeyed there not to "make" their fortunes in the marriage market, as popular prejudice dictated, but to "receive" them, as Eliza proudly makes clear in the opening act (139). Due to a "strange clause" in Eliza's father's will, the two young women are obliged to

travel to India in order to procure a sword for Sir Thomas Clairville once owned by his nephew, who had given the blade to his dearest friend, Lieutenant Dormer, shortly before the latter's untimely death. While Louisa must "disar[m]" Dormer and bring the sword back home to England as a keepsake for the grieving family, Eliza must accompany her in order to claim her inheritance (though she is also seeking out her young love, George Edwards, who was sent to India after his parents forbade the couple's marriage back in England). Starke's plot thus explicitly contrasts the Moretons' motives for riding "a trade wind [...] towards a lover" (140) in British India with the presumably base designs of women seeking "mercenary" (139) marriages there with the Englishmen eagerly awaiting their arrival. Like Elizabeth Hamilton, Eliza bluntly voices the difficulty single women faced in trying to "preserve [them]selves" and their reputations against "the stream of prejudice, and custom" (138). To this effect, once she arrives onshore, Eliza playfully hails India as "thou land of mercenary interest, where love of gold destroys its thousands; where woman, lovely woman, for wealth and grandeur comes from far to sacrifice beauty, health, happiness!" (139). The presiding emphasis is on *risk*. Eliza's use of the word "sacrifice" here might imply that the colonial marriage market exploits and victimizes women in a way that parallels the practice (or at least English perceptions of the practice) of *suttee*—a crucial subject in Starke's next play, *The Widow of Malabar* (1791). Though, as was often the case with the Indian *suttee*, we note that this appears to be an elective sacrifice: women *willingly* risk their beauty, health and happiness in the search for quick imperial wealth and the "grandeur" it affords, thereby justifying their censure. Regardless, what is clear here is that in order to succeed in their respective "quests" and avoid being "sacrificed" to "custom" (138), Eliza and her sister must convincingly establish the honorable, non-"mercenary" grounds for their India voyage.

Despite their concerted efforts to clarify their intentions and stave off suspicion, however, the Moretons find themselves immediately subject upon arrival to unwelcome scrutiny from the colonial residents, who infer that they can only have one object for their journey. The villainous, “half-cast” (139) procuress, Mrs. Tartar, for instance, “throw[s] herself into agitation” when faced with the girls’ steady refusal to “se[e] company in form,” or display themselves like merchandise to the men of the factory—a “form[al]” introduction laughingly dismissed by Eliza as being “dress’d up in grand gala, stuck on a Sopha, at the upper end of a room, for three nights running, to be view’d at will—as who should say—*what d’ye please to buy, gentlemen?* Monstrous!” (144). Here, the process of matchmaking becomes traumatic as the girls are hounded to participate in a “monstrous” custom that renders their commodity status blatant and transforms romantic courtship into something promiscuous and sordid. Eliza brusquely dismisses this sexualized meet-and-greet as a “dress’d up” display of female bodies on sale. Her protest falls on deaf ears, however, as Mrs. Tartar tries to bully the girls into compliance by rejecting their “ridicu-lous refusal of seeing company in form” and insisting that they “trea[t] the subject with more respect in *this place*, and loo[k] upon it in a proper light,” to which Eliza responds: “I think I *do*, Madam, when I look upon it with the most *sovereign contempt*; and I sincerely hope the traffic will be abolished, as still more disgraceful to our sex than that of the poor slaves to a nation” (142). Starke’s aggressive rhetoric in this speech assaults the cultural attitudes and ideologies by which such a “disgraceful” practice could be rendered normative. Eliza clearly condemns both the specific practice of “sitting up in form” (which *was* “abolished” by the turn of the nineteenth century) and the general “traffic[king]” in English wives in India as antithetical to British “nation[al]” character and honor. Her juxtaposition of these two shameful economies (the

traffic in women and the trade in African slaves), meanwhile, reinforces a parallel made more explicit in Starke's side plot involving the emancipation of the black slave, Caesar.

Throughout *The Sword of Peace*, Starke blurs and interweaves—though ultimately discriminates—sexual, economic and sentimental forms of commerce, intervening in the process in topical debates regarding the purportedly corrupt practices of the Company's directors and employees, as well as of the women who plotted to secure their hands in marriage. The swap of the titular sword, for instance, clearly doubles the play's discourse regarding women in the marriage market. While the villainous Resident openly schemes to plunder both the sword and the Moreton sisters for his own pleasure and profit, the honorable but cash-strapped Dormer initially mistakes Eliza's offer to purchase the blade as a for-profit financial transaction rather than a sentimental "exchang[e]." "You do not see the affair *in its proper light*, Sir," Eliza beseeches him, "it is not selling, it is exchanging it, and for the noblest purpose" (159; emphasis added). Eliza's phrase almost exactly repeats Mrs. Tartar's earlier comments on the marriage market with which she is implicated ("trea[t] that subject with more respect in *this place*, and loo[k] upon it in *a proper light*" [142; second emphasis added]). In both cases, mercenary *sales* are set in contrast to honorable (and explicitly disinterested) *exchanges*. When Eliza discloses to Dormer that the splendid sword is to be procured only as the "relic" of "a noble, generous, and grateful heart" (159), and not as a commodified object, he agrees to relinquish it to her, but only after clearly severing his motives for doing so from "mercenary views" (159)—a phrase that yet again parallels language deployed earlier in the play to characterize the marriage market. Though he is but a "poor Lieutenant," Dormer refuses to enrich himself through predatory methods that "tarnis[h] the honor of a British soldier" (159). In the ensuing lines, where Dormer "kisses with enthusiasm" the sword and addresses it as a "jewel next my heart" (160), Starke conjures

imagery and behaviors associated with courtship and marriage in order to establish Dormer's sensibility, moral worth, and generous nature; it should come as no surprise, then, that his actions inflict upon the dazzled Louisa a "mortal wound" (161) and cause her to fall in love with him. By explicitly *not* seeking out a wealthy swain in India, Louisa is rewarded with a worthy husband who embodies idealized notions of both English national "character" as well as English commerce in India. And by not seeking to plunder the Moretons and selfishly profit from their mission to purchase the costly blade in his possession, Dormer is likewise rewarded, both financially and with a deserving English wife.

By successfully disentangling themselves from the webs of imperial corruption threatening to engulf them as unmarried women in early British India, the Moretons ultimately vindicate themselves and preserve their moral integrity: as Colman's prologue notes, the play's "heroines, tho' seeking regions new, / To English honor both hold firm and true" (136). Daniel O'Quinn has interpreted their success as evidence of Starke's "protofeminist critique of the marriage market" as witnessed in Eliza's "defense of her sexual character" and in the two women's spirited "resistance to both Indianization and overt commodification" (*Staging* 290; 291). But, as O'Quinn himself concedes, any reading of proto-feminist sentiment in the play is compromised by Starke's scathing depiction of the play's other women, all of whom are presented as mean-spirited, vulgar, self-important, ignorant, and materialistic, thus reinforcing the most damaging inscriptions of Anglo-Indian femininity circulating during the pre-Raj era. The allegorical function of women's names in the play is frankly aggressive in this respect: "Tartar," "Garnish," "Gobble," "Bronze," and so on. In order to foreground the Moreton sisters' status as exemplars of proper feminine decorum and true "English honor," Starke rather abrasively discriminates them from the other women of the station, who, like the "blue cast"

Mrs. Tartar, function as veritable emblems for the “horror” of cultural *and* racial hybridity (or Indianization).<sup>60</sup> Thus, in the lengthy stage note preceding Act III, scene two, Starke spends over a page vividly describing these other (and explicitly *Othered*) ladies: “with a Number of Jewels, and her whole Dress as fine, and overloaded with Finery as possible in the Indian Stile,” Mrs. *Garnish* is the epitome of Orientalist-inspired notions of “Eastern” decadence and self-indulgent display—driven by “Pride, Vulgarly, and Self consequence”; Mrs. *Gobble* is described as “A great Fat Woman, very brown, sitting full front to the Audience, as fine as can be, but dressed as ridiculously as possible”—her obesity and “full front[al]” stance signifying her consumptive as well as her sexual excesses; and Miss *Bronze*, her complexion “the Colour of Yarico,” twitters affectedly about the Moretons’ “fear it should be thought they came [to India] to get husbands.” The intricacy of Starke’s set-description and staging here doubles the intricacy and complexity of Mrs. Garnish and company’s own *failed* self-staging. That is, although meant to advertise and enforce their social superiority and precedence, the women’s jewels and copious “finery” in fact re-inscribe their alterity and betray the extent of their Indianization. Further, the fact that these women, seated around a card table, are described as barely able to play their own hands, relying instead upon their slaves to play them for them, suggests physical rather than merely cultural degeneration—indeed, one is specifically described as “pale” and “sick”-looking.<sup>61</sup> Though she *does* provide a brief description of the men in the scene that mirrors her characterization of the Anglo-Indian women (“some [...] elegant and genteel; others brown sickly Skeletons; and the elderly Men very fat” [167]), it is remarkable how Starke dilates upon the English *women* as exemplars of imperial corruption, relying upon their darkened complexions, excessive “finery,” and decaying bodies to betoken their avaricious motives and suspect moral economies, and



generally using them as her primary springboard by which to launch a scathing critique of degraded English character in India.<sup>62</sup>

Starke's comedy, like Berkeley's prologue to *Bonds Without Judgment*, thus offers a complex figuration of the marriage market that can be read as simultaneously denouncing the practice on an abstract moral and political level, while on a more personal level condemning the bulk of the women making the voyage as themselves guilty of sexual and economic cupidity. Though Eliza and Louisa "hold firm" to "English honor," the risks involved in embarking upon this "voyage of love" cast a pall over the heroines' reputations that, as Starke's depiction of Mrs. Garnish and the Anglo-Indian women attests, the play must go to extreme and often distasteful measures to dispel. Ultimately, Starke characterizes early British India as a space of corruption and folly totally unsuitable for a proper English lady and desperately in need of the kinds of moral and economic reforms promised in the play by the late arrival of a new Resident (David Northcote), who offers a clear literary stand-in for Lord Cornwallis, Warren Hastings' historical successor as Governor-General—a crucial figure whose controversial yet, at the time, celebrated social and economic reforms will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

#### IV. Combatting Imperial Stigma

Surely they can only be some poor, unfortunate, and friendless girls, who have neither parents nor protectors at home, that are driven to such desperate methods of obtaining a provision?

--Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800)

The adverse scripting of the Englishwoman in the Indian marriage market certainly did not go unchallenged; indeed, a number of writers offer fictional indictments of this conjugal trafficking that notably shift the terms of critique away from the individual women themselves, and toward the larger social, familial, and economic structures that render such voyages, to quote from Jane Austen, "the only possibility that was offered" to many disenfranchised young women

(*Catharine, or the Bower* 188). Like Austen's *Catharine* (1792), Elizabeth Lefanu's novel *The India Voyage* (1804) offers a refreshingly sympathetic counter-depiction of voyaging women as casualties of inequitable cultural and economic structures at home, and, more troublingly, as pawns in their parents' and guardians' own imperial "speculations." An additional, non-fictional example—the "Petition" drafted by a group of "Spinsters" in Calcutta and printed in the Anglo-Indian newspaper *The India Gazette; or, Calcutta Public Advertiser* (5 September 1785)—extends my analysis to include actual English women in India rather than just their fictional avatars.

Both Austen's *Catharine* and Le Fanu's *The India Voyage* work against the grain by emphasizing the cultural and economic practices and ideologies that drove many dependent women to seek marriage in the empire only as a desperate last resort or under the harsh command of unsympathetic and unscrupulous guardians.<sup>63</sup> In the former, the novel's protagonist, Catharine or "Kitty," pines for the loss of her closest childhood friends, Cecilia and Mary Wynne, who were foisted upon the charity of unfeeling relatives after being left in "a state of absolute dependence" by the early death of their parents (187). Reminiscent of the precarious position faced by economically disenfranchised women at the beginning of later novels such as *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen emphasizes in this early work the humiliating, painful reality faced by unmarried women compelled to rely upon others for their subsistence and livelihood. While the younger sister, Mary Wynne, is unenthusiastically "taken" by one relation to act as "a companion to her daughters" in Scotland, the elder sister, Cecilia, is "obliged to accept the offer of one of her cousins to equip her for the East Indies" (187-88):

[T]ho' infinitely against her inclinations [Cecilia] had been necessitated to embrace the only possibility that was offered to her, of a Maintenance; Yet it was *one*, so opposite to all her ideas of Propriety, so contrary to her Wishes, so repugnant to her feelings, that she would almost have preferred Servitude to it, had Choice been allowed her—. Her

personal attractions had gained her a husband as soon as she had arrived at Bengal, and she had now been married nearly a twelve month. Splendidly, yet unhappily married. United to a Man of double her own age, whose disposition was not amiable, though his Character was respectable. (188)

Austen's descriptive terms of the voyage as well as her narrative tone clearly present Cecilia as the unfortunate victim of a dubious form of imperial sexual trafficking and of a culture in which wealth trumps all other considerations when it comes to assessing a woman's marital prospects, if not her overall "value." Forced "to embrace the only possibility that was offered to her," Cecilia eventually secures what society might deem a "splendid[d]" marriage to a wealthy nabob, but it is one that leaves her, notwithstanding fashionable opinion, desperately "unhapp[y]." Indeed, the vigor with which Austen denounces this practice as a blatant exploitation of Cecilia's dependent situation is striking: words such as "repugnant," "Propriety," and "Servitude," as well as the emphasis upon Cecilia's "personal attractions," reveal a stringent critique of an exploitative economy akin to prostitution or even slavery.<sup>64</sup>

The arrival of Kitty's flippant cousin, Camilla Stanley, prompts a heated discussion of Cecilia's journey to Bengal that sheds further light on Austen's critique of the Anglo-Indian marriage market. When Camilla hyperbolically asserts that the Wynne girls are "the luckiest Creatures in the World," Kitty immediately challenges her assertion: "But do you call it lucky, for a Girl of Genius and Feeling to be sent in quest of a Husband to Bengal, to be married there to a Man of whose Disposition she has no opportunity of judging till her Judgement is of no use to her, who may be a Tyrant, or a Fool or both for what she knows to the Contrary. Do you call *that* fortunate?" (197). While Camilla stubbornly insists that there is no "hardship" in taking "a delightful voyage to Bengal or Barbadoes or wherever it is,"<sup>65</sup> and being "married soon after" to an "immensely rich" man (107), Kitty cannot withhold her indignation, and challenges her cousin's sunny representation of "the Affair" by emphasizing both the economic conditions

which force dependent young women to make a traffic of their persons in the East, as well as the virulent social stigma attached to the participants: “to a Girl of any Delicacy, the voyage in itself, since the object of it is so *universally known*, is a punishment that needs no other to make it very severe” (198; emphasis added). By describing the “quest” (197) for husbands in India as a “voyage” for which the object is “so universally known” that it becomes a “punishment” (198), Austen has her protagonist deploy another pointed allusion to prostitution: the “object” of the colonial marriage market is, like the prostitute’s objectified body, *universally known*. By carefully delineating the circumstances by which Cecilia Wynne is forced against her will to enter what Caunter would deem Asia’s bridal “lottery,” Austen challenges the predominant scripting of such women as adventuresses motivated by acquisitive self-interest while figuring Britain’s burgeoning Eastern empire as a veritable dumping ground for the kinds of dependent women who, during the next century, would rather clinically be deemed “surplus” or “redundant” in Malthusian-inspired economic discourses.

The Irish writer Elizabeth Lefanu’s little-studied epistolary novel *The India Voyage* provides a more sustained example illustrative of this counter-trend. Like Austen, Lefanu redirects social censure away from vulnerable young women to the parents, guardians, and interlocutors who seek to profit by their transportation to India. The protagonist, Julia Rivers, is horrified to learn that her mother plans to “sacrific[e] her child to ambitious motives” by “banis[hing]” Julia to Bengal so that she might marry a wealthy nabob and thereby repair the family’s precarious financial situation (3; 4). This “cruel, [...] sudden proposal” (4) is actually the brainchild of Julia’s Aunt Lawson, who, she explains, wrote “to my parents, proposing to send me to India: she will equip me, she says, like a princess, and consign me to the care of Mrs. Des Roles, her husband’s daughter by his first wife, whose rank and fortune will secure respect

to any young person she takes under her protection” (2-3). Though promised that she will be treated like a “princess” and accorded respect due to her lofty connections, the prospects of “rank and fortune” do little to assuage Julia’s apprehensions regarding the journey—particularly after she overhears her aunt’s confidante, the “artful” Mrs. Nesbitt, proclaim to company that Julia is being sent to India to “dispose of herself to more advantage than she could do here” (48).

“Heavens! What an expression,” another guest replies, “one would think you were speaking of a bale of goods!,” to which Nesbitt responds, smiling, “I do not see much difference, [...] worlds would never have tempted *me* to go there as an unmarried woman” (48). Throughout the novel, the titular “India voyage” looms as the dreaded destiny of both Julia and her friend, Emma. Julia directly states her vexing predicament as being forced “to act so as to incur censure, or else to fail in duty to those [her parents and aunt] I am most bound to reverence and love” (85). So traumatic is the prospect of sacrificing herself to “duty” in this manner that Julia finds herself succumbing to a deep depression, her life a “mere blank”: “It is by employing my time and my thoughts about others,” she writes, “that I feel some interest in an existence, to which I should else, I fear, grow quite indifferent” (101). Such a grim fate, shaded with implications of suicide, is ultimately (as we might expect) avoided: Julia and Emma’s benevolence, charity, and virtue are rewarded when a *deus ex machina* flurry of marriage proposals and the restoration of a lost inheritance keeps them home in England and precludes, in Emma’s closing account, the “painful” alternative of “being obliged to go [on] an *India Voyage*” (298).

Thus far, I have focused on the ways in which single Englishwomen in India—particularly those entering the so-called marriage mart—were characterized and represented in British popular culture. According to the texts I have discussed thus far, marriage-market women appear as either villainous, mercenary schemers imbued with full agency and thus deserving of

vigorous rebuke (like Mrs. Frankly or Mrs. Tartar), or as helpless victims whose total lack of agency dictates a sympathetic, though potentially patronizing if not infantilizing, response (as with Cecilia Wynne or Julia Rivers). But how, I'd like to ask, did actual Englishwomen in India respond to the veritable torrent of opprobrium and abuse wielded at them? How did they go about debunking common stereotypes or legitimating their presence in India? Do they provide an alternative to this rather rigid representational dichotomy? What, in short, do they have to say *for themselves*?

One particularly useful document by which to explore these questions is the “humble petition” of “several British Spinsters, Residents of India,” addressed to the “Right Honourable [...] Commissioners of the Board of Controul for India Affairs” and printed in the 5 September 1785 issue of *The India Gazette; or, Calcutta Public Advertiser*. The women’s practical objective in the petition is to protest “some regulations” which the Board “has, or is expect[ed] to make,” which will “so reduc[e]” the “income and salaries of the Company’s servants” that “they will scarcely be able to gain a livelihood for themselves,” let alone support an English bride in lawful matrimony. But the piece also performs important cultural work—namely, by putting a positive “spin” on female emigration and offering a counter-narrative that avoids the villain/victim binary and re-figures single women in British India as agents of reform in service to their countrymen, their nation, and their religion.

As we might expect, addressing issues of representation and mis-representation is central to the petitioners’ strategy. On the one hand, they defend their male compatriots by entreating the Board to “enquire into the characters, the fortune, the income, and mode of life of your fellow subjects, who reside in India. You will find, that notwithstanding the misrepresentation of

faction, and designing men, the pure and honorable description of Gentlemen, is no where so eminently preserved”;

That they are neither depraved in their morals, nor licentious in their conduct. That they discharge their publick trust to their employers with fidelity and honor, and private duties, of parents, husbands, brothers, friends, and citizens, with affection and benevolence and patriotism. That the sapling oak transplanted in the fertile plains of Hindostan, branches its liberal arms o’er an immense expanse to shield the hoary head of an aged father, and to make the eve of his life comfortable. That whole families take shelter under this sapling, and whether obliged by age, by misfortune, or accident, revive, and flourish. Are these fit branches for the pruning knife?

Here, the petitioners begin by arguing that Englishmen in India have been grossly injured by the “misrepresentation of faction.” They are not the villainous nabobs of popular stage plays and novels, but “parents, husbands, brothers, friends, and citizens” serving their country and thus deserving of both proper respect and proper reward. Compellingly, the petitioners incorporate the image of a “sapling oak” (a conventional symbol—later popularized in Burke’s writing on the French Revolution—for English national character, tradition, stability, and so on) to figuratively reinforce these men’s centrality in rooted networks (families, communities) of responsibility and care. Though “transplanted” to India, EIC employees’ “branches” nevertheless extend across the ocean, providing crucial shade and shelter for “aged father[s]” and growing families. The “pruning knife” of proposed regulations on private trade would thus enact a kind of violence upon the familial networks dependent upon these “liberal arms” of imperial service.

Furthering this line of argument, the petitioners work against the common assumption that all of the Company’s servants were wealthy nabobs by emphasizing the scantiness of entry-level salaries and by outlining the immense cost of living in India. Such factors, they insist, must be taken into account when considering restricting private trade (one of the most lucrative methods of amassing a “competence”). Many of the Company’s servants, they stress, face perilous financial circumstances if they are not already in debt; proposed regulations would

further straiten them and render marriage out of the question, thus “condemn[ing] the Company's Servants to perpetual celibacy.” The petitioners’ moral and religious appeal now becomes explicit: “you will allow a competence to all those, who serve their country in this sultry clime, at the risk of the loss of health, and of th[eir] constitution. That your religion will not permit you to abrogate the express command of providence to mankind ‘*to encrease and multiply, and replenish the earth*’: And that you will not let your zeal for economy abolish the first blessing of civil society, *Matrimony*.” By framing their entreaty in terms of shared Christian values and dictates (“encrease and multiply”), the women complicate the issue as more than just a matter of strict “economy”; it becomes a matter of moral and religious obligation or duty. A “competency” (money enough to support a wife and family), they argue, is the building block not only of a stable, and expressly Christian, imperial culture, but also of civil society itself. Explicitly countering Foote’s arguments in *The Nabob*, the women’s willingness to depart for a strange, far-away land now reads as patriotic service to the nation insofar as they “rend[er] the situation of their countrymen [...] more comfortable and happy,” and enable them to fulfill their biblical mandate to increase the flock.

On the other hand, the petitioners make a concerted effort to legitimate their own role in the burgeoning Indian empire by countering the “misrepresent[ation]” to which they as a group—like the Company’s male employees—have been subjected. Hence, they provide a catalog of their personal backgrounds, accomplishments, and motivations: they “left their native country to embark for India, at a very great expence to themselves and their friends”; they “are endowed with the usual mental and personal accomplishments of their sex”; they “left their native homes, some with a desire to visit their parents, brothers, and acquaintance, others with a wish to see the world, and almost all not averse to spend the remainder of their days in



matrimonial comfort and ease.” The petitioners emphasize their typicality as proud Englishwomen endowed with the expected feminine accomplishments, and who are supported in their venture by loving families and friends. They are neither victims nor schemers; their motivations for traveling to the subcontinent are various and multi-faceted rather than singular and obvious (i.e., to find a rich nabob). More compelling, however, is their provocative claim that they as a group have been hoodwinked by a fantasy vision of British India which has little to do with the on-site reality:

That your Petitioners had, before their arrival here, been taught to believe, that India was an earthly paradise—that it was a land flowing with milk and honey—that the English residents in it lived in peace, affluence, and plenty, and that nothing was wanting but the society of their fair countrywomen, to encourage them to suffer the sultry climate of Hindostan, till a hard earn’d competency should enable them to return to the more congenial climate of Great Britain. That these considerations, weighed so much with your Petitioners, that they quitted their native habitations, with resolution, though not without regret, and have exposed their complexions to the scorching rays of a verticle sun, and their constitutions to an unhealthy climate, with a patriotic view, of rendering the situation of their countrymen, in this part of the world, more comfortable and happy.

The power of (mis)representation comes the fore here, as the petitioners accuse the Company and their fellow citizens back in England of what we might now term false advertising: India has not proved the “earthly paradise” they were “taught to believe.” Indeed, they proceed to insist that if the Board cannot accept the terms of their petition, it will at least, “in compassion to others of their sex, who may intend to follow their example, [...] give immediate and public notice” of its decision while further publicizing the true “state of this country” so as to “prevent the future embarkation of females from Great Britain [...]” A bold demand, this, and one that offers a new perspective on the question of English “husband-hunters” in India: rather than merely defending themselves as the objects of malicious distortion and caricature, the spinsters highlight the pervasive misrepresentation of *both* men’s financial prospects and women’s marital prospects as being responsible for their “embarkation” to the empire in the first place.

By strategically foregrounding the larger moral and nationalistic implications of Company employees' being doomed to a life of "perpetual celibacy" in order to legitimate their own relocation to India, the petitioners gesture towards what would prove to be a growing concern for the burgeoning empire—namely, the importance of regulating sexuality and procreation (both bodies and populations) on Company settlements. The question of "honorable" connections among Company employees would in fact emerge in official and non-official discourses as central to the maintenance and success of the empire as the nineteenth century progressed, significantly altering in the process the public image and purported role of the Englishwoman in India. Though not acknowledged in the petitioner's analysis of conjugal prospects in India, many Company employees in the eighteenth century found a convenient alternative to compulsory celibacy in sexual partnerships with native Indian women. While it is true that this alternative emerged in large part as a result of the general paucity of marriageable Englishwomen on Company stations, availability was not the sole factor. Indeed, as the spinsters' petition demonstrates (and many fictional treatments elide), single women often struggled to secure financially sound partners.<sup>66</sup> The economic ground of the spinsters' argument thus takes on new significance: it was not necessarily a lack of English wives that kept EIC employees from marrying, but rather the high cost of appropriately maintaining them according to the standards of the time.<sup>67</sup> In fact, a number of contemporary commentators acknowledged that it was far cheaper for a Company employee to take in and maintain an Indian mistress—many of whom additionally acted as housekeepers and domestic servants—than to marry and support a European wife. In the next section, I analyze an episode from Elizabeth Hamilton's novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) and, by measuring it alongside relevant historical and cultural paradigms and contexts, unpack the cultural and economic implications of this

scenario as they impacted the representation of the Indian marriage market and mediated the larger question of female emigration to India at the turn of the nineteenth century. As I argue, concerns over class transgression, sexual impropriety, and alleged *cultural* miscegenation, so vocal in earlier attacks on the Englishwoman in India, give way to heightening anxieties regarding *sexual* miscegenation and the attendant “problem” of interracial children, for which these women could act as a potential “remedy.”

#### V. “the burthen of so many dingy brats”

In considering this interesting subject of the social character of the English in India, there are few points of greater importance than [...] the influx of European ladies into the country, and the facilities thus afforded for the formation of honourable connexions.

--The *Calcutta Review* (1844)

While Elizabeth Hamilton’s 1783 letter to her brother Charles provided a representative example of some of the more negative stereotypes concerning female husband-hunters in India, her anti-Jacobin satirical novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, published almost twenty years later, takes a far more nuanced and complicated position concerning the Indian marriage market that furthermore addresses the crucial issue of race in these discourses. Though not principally concerned with imperial matters, Hamilton’s novel includes a surprisingly lengthy digression on the imperial trafficking in wives that is conveyed in the form of an argument or debate among several characters—a polyphonic form that might have had particular novelistic appeal given the controversial aspect of the subject matter and the plurality of dissenting voices addressing this custom in the public sphere. Towards the end of the book, Hamilton introduces an impulsive but generous East India Company officer (Mr. Carradine) to act as a spark to force the young Henry Sydney to propose to his beloved, the virtuous protagonist Harriet Orwell. Carradine arrives in Britain on temporary leave flush with his successes in the East. “Little accustomed to intercourse

with the [female] sex,” he is immediately smitten with Harriet and offers her his hand in marriage after just a fortnight’s acquaintance, to the shock of her father, Dr. Orwell. Harriet’s father questions whether “the character of any person can be sufficiently developed” during such a short time as “to warrant entering with them into a connection that indissoluble,” to which Carradine promptly replies, ““A fortnight! Why I have known many very happy marriages take place in Bengal upon an acquaintance of less than half the time” (336). Dr. Orwell’s response to this claim is telling:

“You astonish me!” cried Dr. Orwell. “I have indeed heard of young women’s going out to India with a view, no doubt, to get established in marriage. But that whole cargoes should go out in that manner, as to a regular market, I really should not, but from good authority, have credited. Surely they can only be some poor, unfortunate, and friendless girls, who have neither parents nor protectors at home, that are driven to such desperate methods of obtaining a provision?” (336)

Orwell’s outraged reply and disbelief center around the distinction between small groups of “desperate” women voyaging to India “to get established in marriage,” and the organized system of trade in women’s bodies suggested by Gillray’s visual caricature: “whole cargoes” that go out “as to a regular market.” We note, however, that in contrast to her earlier treatments, Hamilton establishes through Dr. Orwell a far more sympathetic understanding of these “unfortunate, and friendless girls.” Gone are the sweepingly confident generalizations about these women’s mercenary intentions and suspect values we encountered in Hamilton’s letter to her brother; instead, we find palpable dismay that vulnerable young women “are driven to such desperate methods of obtaining a provision”—a critical perspective that targets inequitable social and economic structures rather than attacking the women themselves.

But his assumption that these women must be “poor, unfortunate, and friendless girls,” like Austen’s depiction of Cecilia Wynne, is countered by Carradine’s insistence that “the greatest number” of women making the journey are in fact “sent by their parents and protectors; and, in

general, the speculation is not a bad one” (336-7). As Elizabeth Lefanu would do four years later in *The India Voyage*, Hamilton shifts the terms of critique here, positioning these women as economic pawns in their *parents’* “speculation”: “Is it possible,” Doctor Orwell cries, “that any parent should be so depraved, as to expose his child to a situation so humiliating! How lost to all that conscious dignity which enhances every female charm; how lost to every sentiment of delicacy must she become, who is thus led to make a barter of herself! My mind revolts at the idea!” (337). Despite Orwell’s “revulsion” at such an example of parental insensibility, Carradine once again attempts to temper the Doctor’s emotional response by analyzing this “barter[ing]” of English women as a simple case of supply and demand. Crucially, however, Carradine also breaks down the binary between home and abroad by pointing out that marital “speculation” is not isolated to the outposts of colonial India, but occurs in the heart of England, “at every place of public resort”:

“Does the distance of the market, then, make such a mighty difference?” said Carradine. [...] The reason is plain—in India, the number of European ladies is still so small, in proportion to the gentlemen, that they are *there* of some consequence. But here they are hawked about in such quantities at every place of public resort, that if the poor things did not lay themselves out to court attention, they would have no chance of being taken notice of.” (337)

Through Carradine, Hamilton exposes the hypocrisy inherent in judgments against women seeking marriage in “the Indian market” by suggesting that it is merely a more exotic (if blatant) form of the kind of marital brokering that occurs “perpetual[ly]” in fashionable sites of English sociability. Carradine expounds upon this analysis in a letter written from Bath to Henry Sydney: “Poor Doctor Orwell was shocked at the idea of girls of character going to the Indian market; but had he come to Bath, he might have beheld a perpetual fair, where every ball-room may be considered as a booth for the display of beauty to be disposed of to the highest matrimonial bidder” (355).<sup>68</sup> The key dilemma, however, concerns changing conceptions of race, which

offers a notable means by which to distinguish customary forms of matrimonial “bidd[ing]” at home from the kind pursued in the “Indian market.”

Indeed, Hamilton offers an addendum to her characters’ debate that clarifies some of the fault lines of the larger controversy while introducing the topic that, perhaps more than any other, contributed to a marked rethinking of Englishwomen’s role and function in the empire as the nineteenth century progressed: the so-called problem of interracial sex and miscegenation. Forced to consider the likelihood that Harriet will refuse him, Carradine vows that if this should happen, he will “never speak to another beauty” in his life and will “[re-]embark for India in the first ship” (338). “[D]o you think,” he asks Doctor Orwell,

that after having contemplated the unaffected loveliness of Miss Orwell, endeared by sweetness, and exalted by the utmost refinement of sentiment and gracefulness of manners, I shall have any taste for the insipid morsels of foil and froth that I am there likely to meet with? No, no; if I return to India without a wife, I shall go back to poor Mirza; tho’ besides the burthen of so many dingy brats, there is plaguy [sic] little comfort in a connexion that affords neither friendship nor society. (338)

Here, Hamilton injects the issue of race into her analysis only to quash it when the characters’ conversation is brusquely interrupted and never resumed. But Carradine’s diatribe against the available Englishwomen in Bengal has vital implications: rather than choose such “froth and foil,” Carradine will instead return to “Mirza,” his Indian mistress with whom he has fathered “so many dingy brats.” Because Englishwomen were generally in such short supply, and many low-level or newer Company employees (as the spinsters’ petition attests) could not yet afford a “proper” marriage, Englishmen often visited native prostitutes or took in Indian mistresses (or *bibis*) who acted as “housekeepers” in addition to sexual companions. Writing of his amorous prospects in 1780s Bengal after the death of his common-law wife Charlotte, for instance, the memoirist William Hickey describes his conjugal prospects with characteristic frankness:

Having from my earliest youth been of an amorous disposition I began to feel the effects of a long continence. I therefore one night sent for a native woman, but the moment I lay myself down upon the bed all desire ceased, being succeeded by disgust. I could think of nothing but her I had for ever lost, and the bitter recollection rendered me so miserable that I sent off my Hindostanee companion untouched. The same circumstance occurred to me three successive times. Nature, however, at last proved too powerful to be surmounted, and I subsequently ceased to feel the horror that at first prevailed at the thoughts of a connection with black women, some of whom are indeed very lovely, nor is it correct to call them black, those that come from the Upper Provinces being very fair. (III: 213-14)

For Hickey, “Nature”—parsed here as biological sexual imperative—trumped racial and cultural prejudices regarding sexual “connection[s]” with so-called “black” women. Having conquered his “horror,” in fact, Hickey eventually took in a native mistress named Jemdane, who “lived with me,” he relates, “respected and admired by all my friends [for] her extraordinary sprightliness and good-humour[,]” till “the day of her death” (327).<sup>69</sup> Hickey was perhaps atypical in the openness with which he conducted and discussed his relationship with Jemdane, but historical evidence confirms that his association with a native companion was an experience shared by many fellow Englishmen in eighteenth-century India.<sup>70</sup> If few men officially sanctified these relationships through marriage, legal documents such as wills and bequests, as well as letters, memoirs and other papers nonetheless confirm the preponderance of these arrangements.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, it has been estimated that during the 1780s, “over one-third of the British men in India were leaving all their possessions either to one or more Indian companions [...] or to their Anglo-Indian children” (Dalrymple 446). But such “freedom of interracial exchange” soon changes; as Dalrymple has shown, the number of *bibis* “begins to decline from the beginning of the nineteenth century: from turning up in one of three wills in the 1780-85 period,” their inclusion in such documents subsequently goes into steep decline: “Between 1805 and 1810, *bibis* appear in only one in every four wills; by 1830, it is one in six; by the middle of the

century, they have all but disappeared” (447). If during the earlier eighteenth century, as Durba Ghosh argues, “keeping a native female companion and living like a native was a sign of cosmopolitanism, or broad-mindedness, of a level of sophistication unavailable to those who were at ‘home,’ it was also a sign of the kind of cultural and racial hybridity that threatened the social whiteness of colonial societies” (36). Valentia epitomized the urgency with which Company leaders broached this subject when he insisted in 1804 that “the most rapidly accumulating evil of Bengal” was not corruption or mismanagement or even threats from European rivals or Indian adversaries, but “the increase of half-caste children” (qtd. in *Calcutta Review* [May-August 1844] 320).

From the late eighteenth century, Company officials began to redress this “accumulating evil” by seeking to minimize British-Indian relations. When Hastings’ successor as Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis, arrived in India in 1786, he began to enact aggressive racist policies in an attempt “to create a wall of regulations to separate the Indian and European worlds” (Bayly 149). In a 5 November 1789 letter to Sir George Yonge at the war office, for instance, Cornwallis justified his intended policies by noting how many Englishmen were fathering children by the “black women who are natives of this country”; despite the fact that many of the male offspring were raised and educated as “gentlemen” intended for military service, “their colour & extraction,” he insisted, are “considered in this country as inferior to Europeans” and thus preclude them from “command[ing] the authority and respect which is necessary in the due discharge of the duty of an officer” (qtd. in Wickwire 88-9). Consequently, Cornwallis recommended that “the King will be pleased to issue such orders and establish such regulations as will in future effectually bar the introduction of any persons but those who can furnish the clearest proofs that both their parents are European born or descended from Europeans without



any mixture of the blood of natives of this country, as officers or even soldiers into any of the British regiments that are now or that may be hereafter employed in India” (qtd. in Wickwire 89). It was not merely a question of commanding military authority, however; in 1789 Cornwallis flatly insisted that “Every native of Hindustan in corrupt” (qtd. in Sramek 39). It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that when his exclusionary policies came to fruition via a standing order of 19 April 1791, sons of “Native Indian[s]” were prohibited from positions of leadership and power not just in the Company’s military service, but in its civil and marine divisions as well.

It is important to emphasize that, as O’Quinn notes, “Cornwallis’s reforms were designed not only to minimize the amount of intermingling between British and Indian subjects in the realms of commerce and civil administration, but also to avert miscegenation” (*Staging* 387 n.11). Englishwomen played an increasingly crucial role in this campaign. As Louis Grandpré, a French visitor to British Bengal at this time, confirms, Englishwomen’s “matrimonial ventures” were being touted as a “means of keeping up the white race, at Bengal, and prevent[ing] the Portuguese [i.e., “mixed”] caste from increasing so fast on the coast” (qtd. in *The Calcutta Review* [September-December 1860]: 179-180).<sup>72</sup> From Cornwallis’s arrival in India, then, we can begin to trace a spirited campaign to denigrate interracial relationships between Company men and native Indian women.<sup>73</sup> James Moffat’s visual satire “Rival Candidates at Calcutta” (c.1800) offers one example:



**Figure 5. James Moffat, “Rival Candidates in Calcutta!” (c.1800)**

A relatively uncomplicated text, the sole aim of Moffat’s satire appears to lie in rendering such “rivalry” over the hand of a grossly caricatured, dark-complexioned, and unattractive Indian woman as absurd. The print conspicuously lacks visual or verbal clues to assist in our interpretation: for instance, the dark brown chest in the center-foreground gives no indication of its contents (gifts?), just as the apparently blank sheet of paper resting against its side lacks the rich layering of textual signs and cultural allusions to be found in similarly placed parchments in, say, a Hogarth etching. What these two seemingly random objects *do* offer the viewer, however, is a stark contrast of dark and light shades—a visual reinforcement of the main figures’ opposing

skin tones. Totally absent from the piece and thus free from caricature is a fourth figure: an English female rival for the hand of these two foppish Englishmen. Yet it is this absent Englishwoman that in fact supplies the key to the “problem” the print raises: interracial unions between Company officers and native Indian women. Thus, while in Gillray’s earlier “A Sale of English-Beauties” the emphasis is on the abundance of husband-hunting Englishwomen—there are so many that several are being led into a warehouse of “unsaleable goods”—Moffat’s print suggests a *lack*: the absented Englishwoman, in other words, might prevent this scenario from playing out in the first place.

By 1835, the Company had explicitly forbidden interracial marriages among its employees—a move saturated with historical irony since in its earliest years (i.e., the first part of the seventeenth century) it had approved of and even encouraged such connections as part of “a deliberate policy” advocating intermarriage as a means of “increasing the knowledge of Indian affairs” (Hyam 115; 116). If this kind of “carnal knowledge,” to echo Ann Stoler’s work on the Dutch East Indies, initially paved the way for forms of power that helped facilitate imperial domination and control, it also had to be eradicated once that power appeared to be comfortably ensconced.<sup>74</sup> By having Carradine in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* confess to fathering biracial (“dingy”) children with a native mistress *specifically* because he had found the Englishwomen available to him in the marriage market unacceptable or unattractive (“froth and foil”), Hamilton contributes to the larger debate I have been tracing by subtly suggesting the need for more “appealing” women (e.g., women like Harriet Orwell) to make the journey to India in order to prevent Company men from consorting with Indian women and fathering mixed-race “orphans.” In this perspective Hamilton was certainly not alone; as historian Rosemary Raza writes of this era,

Economic reality supported the old-established practice of turning to Indian women as mistresses and wives. Not only were they inexpensive to maintain, they were available, often very beautiful, and at home in the conditions in which British men were required to live. However, the resulting numbers of largely illegitimate Eurasian children were beginning to create official concern by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The best way to rectify the problem was to encourage marriage to British women, and officers with experience of India began to call for a greater number of more respectable ladies to make the voyage east. (32-3)<sup>75</sup>

Yet as Dr. Orwell's outraged comments (as well as Hamilton's own 1783 letter to her brother) attest, transportation to British India was considered unacceptable for Englishwomen of "true female delicacy" given the marriage market's oft-remarked semblance to an auction or barnyard sale of animals, in addition to the purportedly mercenary objectives commonly attributed to most of its participants. Hamilton recognizes, in short, that the situation posed a tricky *double-bind*: Company men like Carradine required respectable, truly "delicate" Englishwomen so that they would forgo the temptation to consort with native Indian women and father mixed-race "orphans"; yet "delicate" women like Harriet Orwell were precisely the ones to reject an India voyage as a viable option given its scandalous reputation and the pervasive stigmatization of its partakers.

Hamilton's novel thus contributes to (and problematizes) a burgeoning discourse emphasizing the crucial function of Englishwomen in India to act as preventative barriers against both cultural and, increasingly, sexual "miscegenation." While negative depictions of migrating British women as greedy husband-hunters and "adventuresses" still circulated throughout the nineteenth century (and even into the early-twentieth century), a growing number of commentators nevertheless began voicing support for these women's journeys, emphasizing their potential to effect stable, traditional English families and thereby contribute positively to the larger imperial project. "In regard to young ladies going to India," a contributor to the *Asiatic Journal* writes in 1817, "I am of [the] opinion [that] the more embark[ing] for that country the

better it will be for the service[;] I mean the more marriage is encouraged, among the civil and military servants of the Company, the more their future happiness is likely to be secured, and the more readily will a stop be put to that intercourse with the native females of India [...]" (#III, 103; cited in Raza 62). Fifteen years later, the same periodical published "Advice to young civilians," specifically urging young men in the Company's Service to marry Englishwomen: "I recommend you, therefore, strongly [...] to make yourself and some fair one happy. [. . .] It will be the means of preserving you from dangerous connexions with most dangerous women, prevent your health from being ruined, and your mind stung by remorse. I know no such good guardian for a young man in India as an amiable and virtuous wife" (#VIII [1832], 196; cited in Raza 33).

## VI. Race, Sex, and Female Migration at the Dawn of the Raj (and beyond)

Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematics of blood was sometimes called on to lend its entire historical weight towards revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, 'biologizing,' statist form): it was then that a whole politics of settlement (*peuplement*), family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race.

--Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (149)

There were, of course, other factors that contributed to this shifting view of Englishwomen's place in the emergent Indian empire. As the nineteenth century progressed, technological advancements such as the development of the steamship and, later, the opening of the Suez canal made the journey to India far shorter and, along with improved means of communication, much safer (I. Sen 9-10). The renegotiation of the Company's charter in 1813 eliminated restrictions on missionary activity, and the resulting influx of missionaries in India—a development explored in

novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)—provided opportunities for women to more directly contribute to the “imperial social mission” and engage in various forms of philanthropy and activism that countered the notion that women in colonial spaces had only their bodies to offer.<sup>76</sup> When the Company's charter was revised once again in 1833, it lost the power to regulate entry into its stations, thus providing access to greater numbers of “non-official British” employed in “services, trade, industry, and the rail and road-building programmes of the 1850s,” many of whom brought their families (Raza xxv). Changing gender demographics in Britain and the problem of so-called “surplus” women, meanwhile, furthermore legitimated migration to India and other colonial posts as a viable alternative to spinsterhood at home. In his article “Why are Women Redundant?” (*National Review*, April, 1862, n.p.), for instance, W.R. Greg suggested that female emigration would “afford relief to the whole body corporate—just as bleeding in the foot will relieve the head or the heart from distressing or perilous congestion” (qtd. in Sen 4).<sup>77</sup> Englishwomen could help “heal” a “congested” Britain, in other words, by voluntarily “discharging” themselves and departing for the woman-starved colonies—an act that, as the “spinsters” argued in their petition almost a century earlier, suggests patriotism and self-sacrifice rather than acquisitive self-interest.

By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, the era of the “adventuress” or “husband-hunter” was reputedly over: as the *Calcutta Review* (1844) insisted, young women “are found in our Indian stations, for the same reason that other young ladies may be found in London, or Liverpool, or Exeter—simply because, when in these places, they are in their proper homes. Adventuresses there are none” (“The English in India—Our Social Morality” 331). “Young ladies,” the author continues,

are never ‘transported to India’ ‘to take their chance.’ Apart from all matrimonial intentions, they have a legitimate purpose in visiting India. The taunt that they come

hither 'to get husbands' is no longer applicable to the class. When they turn their faces towards the East, they do so, not leaving but seeking their proper homes. They go not to dwell among strangers; but 'among their own people'; and occupying as respectable a position, in the houses of their parents, their brothers, or their sisters, as though they had never left the narrow precincts of their own island. (331)

In this new era, the unmarried Englishwoman finds in India her "proper home." The factories and pro tem trading stations of the former century have become fully established, long-term colonies of *settlement*, populated not by "strangers" but by established families. The age of the *memsahib*<sup>78</sup> had arrived, with the figure of the Englishwoman in India accruing symbolic layers of nationalistic and patriotic value heretofore unimaginable. This was particularly noticeable in the wake of the infamous Indian Revolt in 1857, which precipitated the official end of Company rule in India and the instantiation of the Raj. The Crown took active control the following year, and India became an official empire fully incorporated into the political body of the British nation shortly thereafter, with Victoria crowned as "empress" of India. As a result, the British government stepped up its policies of racial segregation and exclusion and began officially sponsoring female migration with newfound urgency as part of official colonial policy.<sup>79</sup> The growing stream of Englishwomen making the journey to British India and the dawn of the *memsahib* in the nineteenth century did not, of course, fully dispel notions of an "Indian marriage market": as later novels such as E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) or George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) demonstrate, the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century controversy over British "husband-hunters" continued to inflect representations of the Englishwoman in India for as long as Britain occupied portions of the subcontinent.

Countering the pervasive image of Britain's early colonial empire as a thoroughly masculine arena in which women have only a marginal (if any) role to play, I have argued that the Englishwoman in the Indian marriage market provided a powerful and controversial figure for

the authorial expression of British colonial, economic, gender, and racial anxieties in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. By studying these oft-neglected female players in the unfolding imperial drama of early British India, we can trace how representations of them unevenly though progressively evolve from greedy “speculators” whose willingness to “trade in love, and marry for rupees” (as Starke put it) potentially undermined British claims to moral superiority that helped justify imperialist expansion, to vital agents in a “civilizing” mission imbued with the potential to stabilize Company settlements, effect a model of normative British domesticity, and shore up national virtue by ensuring the “purity” of the East India Company’s (and, later, the imperial state’s) cultural and racial identity. If during the late eighteenth century such women were denigrated for internalizing (and embodying) “market” principles by speculating on their own bodies in a colonial marriage bazaar, by the mid-nineteenth century their crucial role in the government’s own “speculative” gamble to curtail sexual miscegenation shifted the cards—or at least the stakes—in their favor.



## CHAPTER III

**“[T]he tables turn’d”: Frederick Reynolds’ *Speculation* (1796), Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and Jane Austen’s *Sanditon* (c.1817)**

Such Means to prey upon your Fortune  
 These worthy Gentlemen call SPORTING,  
 And give each base Negotiation  
 The well-bred Term of—SPECULATION.

--Christopher Anstey, *Speculation; or, A Defence of Mankind*

Some people, not always very chaste in their ideas as to the mode in which wealth is there [India] accumulated, suppose as a ‘sine qua non’ that a few atrocities must be committed, before a man can retire with real satisfaction to his native country, *although themselves, are by no means unwilling to participate in such ill accumulated wealth.*

--Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Shigram-Po, Cadet in the Service of the Hon’ble East India Company on the Bengal Establishment* (1821; emphasis added)

[...] when speculators and monopolists, from sordid, selfish motives, distress their fellow creatures, and bring odium on their country, may they be caught in their own snare, and [...] have the tables turn’d upon them!

--Reynolds, *Speculation*

The previous chapters examined how British authors and journalists adopted the rhetoric of “speculation” to characterize, reprove, and reform the kinds of dicey financial schemes employed by Britons who, stirred by India’s glittering prospects, scrambled to share in the loot. In the case of both male nabobs and female “husband-hunters” and “nabobinas,” speculative tropes and figures are frequently linked to imperial emigration, with the underlying assumption being that these men and women are driven by allegedly mercenary, self-interested motives to risk everything—their reputations, morals, health, even their lives—for a chance to quickly stockpile in the colonial periphery sums of wealth not typically available to them in Britain, and to which they are not, given their background and/or professional status, presumably entitled. This was a concern because many feared that these newly monied colonial adventurers would “contaminate”

domestic values and virtues upon their return, and likely lure other Britons into ill-advised attempts to emulate their improbable successes in the imperium. As I have argued, however, Britons did not need to traverse the globe to speculate on imperial wealth. This chapter builds upon that insight by examining literary texts that “tur[n] the tables”—figuratively and, in one case, literally—by reframing speculation as a domestic problem conveniently displaced and projected onto so-called imperial “adventurers.” In Frederick Reynolds’ topical stage comedy *Speculation* (1795), “speculation” characterizes metropolitan Britons’ attempts to plunder a returning Company servant and assumed nabob of his imagined (if, in this case, *imaginary*) riches, while in Maria Edgeworth’s novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a spendthrift heir to his family’s bankrupt Irish estate hastily marries a wealthy, though racially and culturally “Othered,” heiress in a ruthless last-ditch attempt to expropriate her vast fortune, which is emblemized in the notable form of costly Indian diamonds and jewelry. Finally, in her last novel, *Sanditon*, Jane Austen offers a riotous satire of her age’s transition to a speculation-driven economy and culture while subtly unveiling how the success of her main characters’ speculation on a fashionable new bathing spa precariously depends upon the infusion of money amassed in colonial sites such as the West Indies, birthplace of the rich, “half-Mulatto” heiress whose arrival at the spa sparks a flurry of speculation and maneuvering. Rather than simply scapegoating reputed imperial speculators, these three authors offer more nuanced interventions foregrounding some of the ways in which Britons aggressively speculated on imperial wealth—or, as we see here, speculated on (purported) imperial speculators. That is to say, in these texts the corruption and violence typically encoded in imperial figures like the nabob instead characterize domestic Britons’ attempts to secure colonial fortunes for their own ends. Reynolds, Edgeworth and Austen thereby draw attention to the hypocrisy by which British men and women stigmatized

and censured colonial returnees for their rapacity, decadence and greed, even as many of them concocted rapacious schemes to cozen and defraud them of their purportedly suspect wealth. What is so revealing is that in all three cases, such attempts backfire or *fail*, whether because the targeted lucre proves to be spectral (or “speculative” in the sense that it exists only in the imagination); because it is vested and remitted in a particular form that makes it easy to conceal or protect; or because the intended target successfully parries and deflects the attempts upon her fortune. Ultimately, all three works offer prime opportunities to rethink the role of imperial wealth and the various forms of speculation—whether financial or personal—it inspired and fueled in late Georgian society and popular culture.

### I. “The age for speculation”: Frederick Reynolds’s *Speculation* (1796) in Context

[T]his is the age for speculation—People love delusion—ay, so much that the more you dupe them, the better they like you.

--Reynolds, *Speculation*

Your Lordships will find it [EIC-controlled Bengal] *a fairy land, in which there is a perpetual masquerade, where no one thing appears as it really is* [...] In that ambiguous government everything favors fraud; everything favours peculation; everything favours violence; everything favours concealment.

--Edmund Burke, “Speech in Reply” (5 June 1794; emphasis added)

Hailed by contemporary reviewers as an entertaining “abstract and brief chronicle of the times” (*The Sun*, 9 November 1795), Reynolds’ *Speculation* opened on 7 November 1795 at Covent Garden and went on to earn the author a respectable £500. Mostly remembered (if at all) for its satirical allusions to King George III’s hobby farms<sup>80</sup>—allusions that lent the play a special charge when it was performed by Royal command on 21 January 1796 in front of the King himself—Reynolds’ comedy offers one of the most sustained attempts to represent and, by means of its plot resolution, characterization, and forceful concluding lines, curtail the various kinds of speculation that were transforming British commerce and society during the late

eighteenth century. But while many commentators of the age scapegoated nabobs, stockjobbers, and related figures for their speculative financial practices, Reynolds bucks convention by “turning the tables” and revealing speculation to be as much a home-grown (i.e., domestically centered) as an imported or imperial vice. He does so, first, by depicting a nabob whose vast fortune exists only in the mind of the speculators who plot to expropriate it upon his return to England, and second, by representing a range of domestically-centered financial schemes and “projects” that prove to be equally delusory—from a picturesque farm that yields no crops to a “piggery” that houses no pigs. Although the play’s villainous speculator, the aptly-named “Mr. Project,” enthuses that “this is the age for speculation—People love delusion,” his own delusional schemes and eventual comeuppance provide the occasion for a more probing, critical exploration of speculation in late Georgian Britain. At the same time, the play offers a notable revision of the conventional nabob figure and dynamic. While imperial wealth underwrites many of the characters’ speculative schemes and desires, speculation itself figures for a more expansive range of dissembling and often predatory financial practices and socioeconomic relations that foster an atmosphere of suspicion, manipulation and deception—or what Reynolds characterizes as an economy of “false appearances.” Ultimately, Reynolds departs from many commentators by strategically juxtaposing and blurring imperial and domestic contexts in order to target financial practices, ideologies, and values rather than merely scapegoating classes of individuals (e.g., nabobs) or professions (“stockjobbing”).

Because the play has remained largely obscure in literary scholarship, let me offer a brief synopsis of its plot that appeared in *The Times* for 9 November 1795:

Emmeline, whose intellects had suffered through disappointed sensibility, was recovering from a state of insanity when her Guardian PROJECT determines still to confine her until the arrival of his relation, a supposed rich Nabob [Tanjore] from the East; imagining him like most Nabobs credulous and careless, and that he would marry her without examining

the fortune which his speculations had long ago embezzled and dissipated.—She, averse of course, and with another lover [Captain Arable] in her head, slips from confinement, elopes with that lover's brother [Jack Arable], and meets with Tanjore, not a rich, but a successful India Adventurer, who, on hearing her misfortunes, is resolved to protect rather than distress her. Her entanglements increase, after the usual dramatic way, till her uncle, a speculating Farmer-Alderman, discovers the villainy of Project, on whom “the tables are literally turned;”—she is given to her favourite, the Alderman's eldest son, and the Speculator left to form new schemes at leisure, in that charming School, or, to speak technically, College—the King's Bench. (Cited in O'Quinn “Insurgent Allegories” 29 n.51)

As this account suggests, the play brings together various forms of speculation in a manner that draws upon conventional tropes, figures, and assumptions only to complicate and upend them. Nowhere is this more evident than in Reynolds' depiction of the nabob Tom Tanjore, whose assumed riches inspire the speculator's (Mr. Project) most insidious scheme. As trustee of his ward Emmeline's inheritance (which derives from India), Project shamefully embezzles and squanders her fortune through a series of failed speculations. Early in Act One, we catch a tantalizing glimpse of what Project has been up to when Lady Project, frustrated that her husband has refused her requests for more spending money, and angry that he blames her “extravagance” for the couple's “undoing,” accosts Project for his recklessness: “Extravagance!—Sir, 'tis your speculations that have undone us—haven't they all fail'd?—didn't the first wise bubble burst into air?” (7). As the ensuing argument reveals, Project's ventures and “bubbles” have been extensive indeed: “two thousand pounds” paid for a “picture gallery” of Rembrants and Lorraines that he intended to exhibit as an “Asiatic Asiphusicon” before discovering the pieces to be worthless fakes; a “speculation on bark” that promised to bring “ample amends” through a “monopoly of that medicine,” but miscarried when “the doctors and apothecaries, finding they could get no profit by it, swore bark was unwholesome physic”; and a housing venture in Paddington that failed when he attempted to “run up so many new houses [...] that many of them were built without stair cases; [so that] by the time one part was finish'd, [the others] f[ell] all to

pieces” (7). Project, however, has two schemes in motion by which to recover Emmeline’s embezzled fortune and to make his own: first, he plots to marry Emmeline to his cousin Tanjore (believed to be a rich nabob), hoping that such a marriage will “prevent an overhawling of accounts” (i.e., will conceal his embezzlement) (6); and second, he conspires to “speculate” a local gentleman farmer (Alderman Arable) “out of all his property” (9).

While the nabob scheme will be my primary focus here, I’d like to discuss briefly Project’s plot against Alderman Arable, who was widely recognized to offer a gentle satire of “Farmer” King George and his much-remarked upon hobby farms. In the only recently published article to discuss Reynolds’ play, Daniel O’Quinn does a fine job of historicizing these allusions to the King in the context of post-French-Revolutionary politics and Burke’s infamous “swinish multitude” commentary from the *Reflections*.<sup>81</sup> I would like to suggest that Arable’s farmstead offers a powerful emblem for the “age of false appearances” (33) ushered in by speculation and related practices at the end of the eighteenth century. We see this particularly in the language used to describe the farm, which consistently sets up a contrast between surface and depth, exterior and interior, appearance and reality. “Here are alterations!” announces Vickery, one of the Alderman’s farmhands: “The vulgar clod who kept this farm before my master, said he built every thing for use; he minded the value not the look of a thing—now I think the Alderman has shewn him the difference” (9). When the Alderman makes his first stage entrance, he immediately invokes and extends these oppositions: “here’s the spot to make a fortune in. Look my dear friend: isn’t everything so tasty? so neat? so clean? you see at once this is none of your rough dirty farms: it belongs to a gentleman, not to a farmer [...] they think of nothing but ploughing, sowing, and reaping: they look to the inside of their barns; I to the out!” (10). Indeed, Arable *only* attends to surfaces and appearances, as we learn in one of the play’s most

memorable comedic passages: pointing to a team of horses, Arable notes that they are carrying “all the ashes and other manure to a neighbouring farmer’s, for you must know I’m too cleanly to have any dust or dirt thrown on my land: a little chalk makes it look light and pretty.—Then the piggery! What do you think of the piggery? there! why there it is.” “Mercy on me,” Project replies, “in high varnish! Why, it is very elegant. But pray, Alderman, haven’t you found that the pigs spoil the paint?” “Yes,” Arable responds, “and that the paint spoils the pigs; so I’ve got an excellent remedy—*I keep none*” (10; emphasis added). As the scene continues, Reynolds repeatedly unveils the emptiness, anti-production, and debt screened behind the Alderman’s various “improvements” and speculations: granaries as empty as the pigsty is devoid of pigs; a “speculation on butter” that cost the farmer “one hundred forty five pounds, twelve shillings and eight pence,” only to yield “one pound, seventeen shillings, and ten pence” in profit; and so on (10-11). Indeed, Arable’s merely cosmetic or surface “improvements” are integrally tied to his anti-productive speculations within Project’s larger scheme: as the latter confesses to Lady Project, “The farm is mine and [the Alderman] thinks I shall give him a long lease; but when I find he has finish’d his improvements, I’ll let it over his head” (9). In other words, Project encourages Arable’s improvement plans only so long as they contribute to and help maintain an *image* or illusion of productivity, order, cleanliness and stability—one that he can subsequently exhibit to prospective buyers in order to dupe them into paying higher leases. Further, Project deviously prods the gullible Arable into pursuing a slew of ill-conceived speculations that repeatedly founder, thus driving the gentleman farmer to undertake even riskier speculations to cover the losses: as Arable enthuses naively after relating the disaster of his butter scheme, “that [cabbage] plantation and my Nova Scotia sheep will make up for all my losses” (11). His son hastily enters, however, and reports that the “Novia Scotia Sheep [...] have broken into the

plantations and [...] eat[en] up the cabbages” (12). One misguided, failed scheme prompts another in a vicious cycle which, rather than tempering Arable’s speculative enthusiasm, seems only to push him deeper into Project’s clutches.<sup>82</sup> For Project and his misled disciple—and, by extension, the increasingly globalized, speculation-driven economy they have embraced and subsequently embody in the play—appearance is everything. As in the realm of private credit, however, this opens up novel opportunities for corruption, dissemblance, and abuse: alluring surfaces harbor potentially vacant or rotten interiors. As a result, the mutual confidence and trust that customarily ground trade, finance, and exchange are undermined and destabilized—a significant problem in a culture in which money (or its spectral supplement, private credit) is emerging as the basis of social connection.

The “false appearances” trope in turn connects the Arable plot to the nabob plot, for even as he conspires to “speculate [Arable] out of all his property,” Project schemes to fleece wealthy nabobs returning from Asia. In Act Two, Scene Three, set in Project’s garden, Jack Arable (one of the Alderman’s sons) inquires about the strange structure “with the foreign name, the pagoda as you call it,” that Project has recently added on to his home. “[P]ray,” Arable asks, what put it into your head to build such an out-of-the-way thing?” “Speculation, sir, speculation,” Project replies: “the house stood on my hands, so by running up a pair of wings after the eastern fashion I thought to catch some thoughtless Nabob, but it wouldn’t do, they were obstinate; however, my rich cousin is coming home—” (23). Having failed to entice any nabob buyers with his pagoda, Project turns his sights to one nabob in particular: his cousin Tanjore, who has written to announce his imminent arrival back in England and accepted Project’s invitation to stay at his home. But the pagoda serves a crucial function in Project’s new scheme as well, for he has imprisoned his ward Emmeline (whom he hopes to marry to the nabob) within its lavish walls.



Like Arable's stagey farm, then, Project's eastern pagoda offers another emblem for the "age" of speculation and "false appearances." Given Project's disappointed hope to profit by its sale to a wealthy nabob, it also figures for the "false promise" of Imperial wealth.<sup>83</sup> And as an "Orientalized" space in which Project can imprison his young ward in a despotic attempt to force her into an unwanted marriage of alliance, the pagoda additionally symbolizes the kinds of despotic sexual and political authority typically encoded in related eastern structures such as the "zenana" or seraglio.<sup>84</sup>

With his plots set in motion, Project has only to await his cousin's long-expected arrival in England. He has good reason to be apprehensive, however, for we learn that Tanjore's initial India voyage was brought about not by choice, but through Project's machinations: briefly, Project and his fellow members of "Bubble's" club, a fashionable gaming house in London, fleeced the young Tanjore of everything he had, thus forcing him to take an additional "gamble" by entering the EIC's service in Madras. "[T]o be sure, Project soliloquizes, "my tricking him and turning my back on him before he went to Madras, was rather unlucky; but his coming to my house, proves he don't think the worse of me—no, no: I have him; and when I've fairly strip'd him, I'll send him to India again, there to make another fortune, for the benefit of me and my Speculations!" (31). As we see yet again, gaming is tied to speculative "bubbles" and to imperial commerce in these scenes; yet Reynolds goes against convention once more by associating this complex of related tropes and figures with *domestic* speculators like Project rather than with colonial adventurers or purported nabobs like Tanjore. While Tanjore *does* speculate on an Indian career, in other words, Reynolds carefully removes any hint of the mercenary motivations and suspect values commonly ascribed to Britons departing for India, attributing them to Project instead. And when Tanjore finally arrives back on the home front, Reynolds bursts the bubble

yet again by revealing him to be penniless. Just as his voyage to India was prompted by gambling losses (though Reynolds makes it clear that, like Mr. Vincent in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1800), Tanjore was unfairly cheated at the Faro table), playing at "India's Game" proves to be an equally risky—and ultimately failed—gamble.

The trope of "false appearances" takes on new life in the play through Tom Tanjore's counter-strategic masquerade as the wealthy nabob Project imagines and desires him to be. He has not forgotten Project's former duplicity, and sees through his current plots. By playing along, he hopes to wrest back some of the money Project and his fellow sharpers had stolen from him, but more importantly, to catch the arch-speculator "in [his] own snare." Tanjore makes his first entrance with a flourish: the stage directions indicate "Blacks with Music, servants in superb liveries," and "other attendants following" (31). Accoutered in all the (faux) trappings of eastern splendor, and joined by his sister Cecilia (Emmeline's confidante), Tanjore hails Project: "here we are you see: hot from Madras: warm as Lucifer—rich as Croesus, my boy!" (31). "'Tis as I thought," Project gleefully exclaims in an aside, before pressing for further details: "Well: but about India, cousin—you made your fortune very rapidly" (32). Tanjore responds with an absurd account replete with burlesqued Indian names:

Yes; the Princess Nundomoree took a fancy to my person and dress—introduced me to the Nabob of Begumboree; he to the Rajah of Seringapatoree; and so amongst them you see—But, Billy, what makes you so civil? before I sailed, you wouldn't pay the fare of a hackney-coach for me; [...] well, well, I take it very kind of you; and so, hark-ye—a few westerly winds will bring round the homeward-bound fleet, and then hire all the strongest waggons [sic] you can get—bullion! pearls! diamonds! —oh, damme, coz, this house will never hold them! (32)

Project is so wrapped up in his visionary schemes that he accepts Tanjore's ridiculous story without further question, and exits the scene praying for a "westerly wind" to hasten the arrival of the nabob's ships. Once left alone with his sister, Tanjore reveals the true state of things:

*Tanjore*: “ [...] here’s a Nabob without a shilling, Cecily!”

*Cecilia*: “Nonsense!—Mr Project says, you have brought over money enough to buy him new houses; new—”

*Tanjore*: “Not enough to buy him a new coat.”

*Cecilia*: “Nay, now you’re joking: I know you must be rich, by the style you kept up in India: you liv’d in a palace, my dear brother.”

*Tanjore*: “I lived in a jail, my dear sister. [...] My furniture was the bare walls, and my dinner bread and water; the fact is, a man may starve in India, as well as in England; and, instead of the finding gold like dirt, or diamonds like pebbles, I found a sort of gentleman that must be attended to in all countries: I mean, a bailiff! [...] I should have been [in prison still] [...] had not the captain of the Packet assisted me in my escape, and landed me generously in old England!” (34)

Upending the conventional script of India as an inexhaustible mine, Tanjore reveals that (English) men “starve in India, as well as in England.” Far from “finding gold like dirt, or diamonds like pebbles,” he discovered only disappointment and poverty; his reputed Eastern palace in actuality a debtor’s prison. From the turn of the nineteenth century, narratives detailing the disappointed hopes of recently enlisted EIC soldiers and writers who were enticed by misleading accounts (oral or discursive) to speculate on an Indian career became a commonplace in Anglo-Indian fiction and poetry, as I discuss in the next chapter. Here, let it suffice to say that through yet another structural motif (a reputed Eastern palace revealed to be a prison—much like Project’s pagoda), Reynolds returns to the “false appearances” theme and sets up the play’s climactic “turning the tables” sequence in which Tanjore tricks Project into confessing his schemes against the Alderman and Emmeline.

In the pivotal table scene, the play’s numerous plot strains converge in order to demonstrate the folly of gambling on visionary schemes for quick profit. Additionally, however, the scene further problematizes customary assumptions, figures, and conventions regarding speculation in relation to nabobs and imperial wealth. With Alderman Arable concealed behind an overturned table, Tanjore tricks Project into confessing his plots. Then, pretending to go along, Tanjore agrees to marry Emmeline and to accept the Alderman’s farm in return for the

inheritance Project squandered. As the speculator gleefully prepares to draw up the documents, Tanjore draws out further details from him:

*Tanjore: (coming down the stage with pen, ink, and paper).* “Here coz, let’s sign—why [Arable] thinks he has a long lease, don’t he?”

*Project:* “Oh the poor clodpole!—he knows as much about a security, as he does about a farm; and as he is wasting hundreds on rotten sheep and blighted cabbages, I’ll kindly give you the means of turning him out at a moment’s warning: here—now for my best Speculation! (*Pulls down the table to write upon it. Alderman leans across the table and stares Project full in the face. Project [...] stands aghast.*)”

*Ald. Arable: (with his arms on the Table).* “Oh you consummate scoundrel!—this is your Speculation is it?”

*Tanjore:* “Why Billy, the tables are turn’d indeed!” (58-59)

Arable finally breaks through Project’s façade and, looking him “full in the face,” sees him for what he is. In a comically epiphanic moment of recognition and demystification, he also sees *himself* (or what his misguided embrace of Project’s teachings and values has turned him into), and vows to change his ways. Finally, the scene once again exposes the vaunted promise of abundant and ready-made imperial wealth to be delusory when the Alderman, still unaware of Tanjore’s real status, implores the nabob not to “give [Project] any of the treasures of the East,” to which Tanjore replies, “No, that I won’t; so far from having the treasures of the East to give, I expect my taylor will send me to the King’s Bench every Moment” (60).

When the Alderman replies that he is “glad you’ve outschem’d [Project],” Tanjore delivers the play’s most forceful lines: “So am I: and when Speculators and monopolists from sordid, selfish motives, distress their fellow creatures, and bring odium on their country, may they be caught in their own snare, and, like Project, have the tables turn’d upon them!” (60). Besides reinforcing my argument that contemporaries viewed speculation and monopoly capitalism as mutually-informed and informing practices propelled by the false promise of exhaustless imperial bounty, these lines, spoken by a nabob, once again posit speculation as a problem that cannot be simply attributed to certain classes of people or professions. Indeed,

Tanjore, Alderman Arable and the rest of the characters all in some manner abandon visionary or speculative schemes and commit to “substantive”<sup>85</sup> accumulation in what constitutes a corrective to the “false and unjust [forms of] Speculation” which, as Miles Peter Andrews reiterates in the play’s epilogue, were “engross[ing] *every* subject in the nation” (76; emphasis added). Through a recommitment to reason and plain dealing, an ethic of integrity and honesty, and a return to substantive, grounded modes of commerce, Reynolds suggests some of the ways that the nation can stave off this proliferating speculative malady. What this essentially entails is a fundamental rethinking of where monetary value is located as well as how it is understood in relation to moral value. In this way, *Speculation* can be read in dialogue with Foote’s earlier the play *The Nabob*—particularly that play’s concluding salvo as spoken by the merchant Thomas Oldham: “however praiseworthy the spirit of adventure may be, whoever keeps his post, and does his duty at home, will be found to render his country best service at last.” “Duty” and “service” to one’s country “*at home*” are offered as counters to the reputedly self-interested motives of colonial profiteers like Matthew Mite or speculators like Mr. Project. But Thomas also connects these values (which constitute an updated version of Roman *civic virtue*) to specific modes and forms of commerce: the “slow, but sure” (66) accrual of riches through “labour” and “industry” (66), as opposed to the quick windfalls gained through imperial plunder, high risk speculations, gambling, and chance.

Yet *Speculation*’s discourse on nabobery and imperial wealth is more complicated than it might seem from my account thus far. This is because Reynolds introduces late in the play *another* nabob named Tanjore (first name Henry), this one as rich as the other is poor. The two men are unrelated, and the coincidence of them sharing the same name explains some of the confusion concerning the vast fortune Project had hoped to steal. However farfetched it might

seem, Henry Tanjore is divulged to be a former lover of Tom Tanjore's sister Cecilia, whom he has now returned to marry. Henry rewards Tom's service to his intended wife, agreeing to hand over a third of his "rupees and pagodas," leading Cecilia to enthuse, "My dear brother, you may now return to India and live in a palace in reality" (76). In terms of my larger argument, the introduction of a nabob who actually has amassed the "pagodas and rupees" that Project and others have falsely imagined all along might seem to contradict Reynolds' emphasis upon the spectral or imaginary status of much imperial wealth—and, thus, the folly of speculating on it. I would suggest that by introducing Henry Tanjore at the end of the play, Reynolds concedes that there is money to be made in India, just not the kind of oversized, ready-made fortunes ripe for the plucking that many persisted in believing were still available long after the bubble had burst (a subject I address in the next chapter).<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, by explicitly rejecting such an offer, Tanjore demonstrates that he has learned his lesson: rather than returning to India in search of a nabob fortune or the chance to "live in a palace in reality," Tanjore announces that he "shall pursue a plan, which had Project follow'd, he had now been happy—that is, not to waste a fortune in dissipation, and try to retrieve it, by false and unjust Speculation" (76). For Reynolds' purposes, an Indian career is presented as a viable career option, but *only* when it is first detached from gaming, speculation, "dissipation," and plunder, and viewed in its proper (if sobering) light: as a long-term career investment, not a guaranteed, immediate financial bonanza. Further, rather than reading speculation or nabobery exclusively in terms of defective character, as many contemporary commentators did, Reynolds refigures them as symptoms of an economy and a culture increasingly driven by "false appearances," false promises, inflated expectations, and a readiness to embrace delusion and risk for a slim chance to obtain vast wealth without labor or merit—even if it means resorting to fraud, violence, corruption, and so on. As the

villainous Project ultimately demonstrates, one did not need to cross the ocean to act the part of a rapacious nabob, or to speculate on imperial riches; as Lady Project remarks, “when a man has money, it don’t signify whether he got it in India or England” (75). Though as much an immoral, duplicitous schemer as her husband is, Lady Project ironically hints at one of Reynold’s key points: while it may not necessarily “signify” *where* a man gets his money (whether in India or England or elsewhere), *how* he gets it is another matter entirely. Indeed, as Reynolds’ play and a slew of literary and cultural texts published during this era attest, in the case of “Speculators” and “monopolists” broadly conceived, it makes a world of difference.

## II. (Speculating about) Diamonds and Speculation in Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800)

[...] rich in the gems of India’s gaudy zone,  
And plunder pil’d from kingdoms not their own.  
--Thomas Campbell, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799)

*Gustava*: “I though you avowed that a spark of the *ton* should have no connection with wedlock.”  
*Captain Peacock*: “There is indeed lately arrived from the East an European Nabobina, with ready cash almost enough to discharge the national debt. If she sets up for matrimony, I may indeed be very glad to alter my condition.”  
--Thomas Horne, *As the World Goes: A Farce of Two Acts* (1777)

[...] her diamond cross was [...] at the bottom of it all.  
--Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*

A key component of Project’s attempt to speculate on imperial wealth in Reynolds’ play entails imprisoning his ward Emmeline, inheritor of a large Anglo-Indian fortune, in an attempt to defraud her of her legacy and force her into an unwanted marriage of alliance. In Maria Edgeworth’s remarkable Anglo-Irish novel *Castle Rackrent*, we likewise encounter a speculator’s failed attempt to defraud a wealthy colonial heiress whom he imprisons (in this case, after marrying her himself). Although these two literary works—in terms of genre, tone, style, and so on—could not be more different, their shared plots of failed speculation reinforce how

marriage plots are fundamentally financial plots, and as such offer prime opportunities to explore analogous social, economic, and political relations. Of course, given the dominant system of primogeniture in the West as well as the historical disenfranchisement of women and their property, marriage plots and financial plots have always been intimately entwined in British and European literature. But as critics have noted, unprecedented imperial expansion and the advent of colonialism during the long eighteenth century infused them with additional levels of signification and significance. For instance, Ina Ferris, Mary Jean Corbett and others have traced the emergence of sub-genres such as the “National Tale,” in which the 1800 political Union of England and its “internal colony” of Ireland is allegorized through the marriage of an English man with an Irish woman.<sup>87</sup> While novels like Sydney Owenson’s imperial romance *The Missionary* (1811) or Phebe Gibbes’ *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789) flirt with these conventions, there is no comparable sub-genre expressive of Anglo-Indian social and political relations. However, Betty Joseph and Sara Suleri have demonstrated how political and economic relations between Britain and India were commonly figured through tropes and figures of victimization and rape, as opposed to marriage and “union.”<sup>88</sup> Taking this as a starting point, I will briefly analyze these tropes as they surfaced during the sensational impeachment trial of Warren Hastings (first governor-general of British India) in order to frame my reading of one of the most well-known—though persistently enigmatic—episodes in Edgeworth’s novel: Sir Kit Rackrent’s imprisonment and abuse of an unnamed heiress in a ruthless (though ultimately failed) attempt to speculate her out of an imperial fortune vested in a particular—and particularly intriguing—form: diamonds.

As Nicholas Dirks has recently argued, the lengthy impeachment trial of Warren Hastings (the EIC’s first Governor-General) for corruption and mismanagement<sup>89</sup> came to represent a



larger, symbolic trial of the “scandal” of empire itself (*Scandal* i-iii). Led by such luminaries of the age as Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the prosecution attempted to scapegoat Hastings for everything rotten in early British India: according to Burke, Hastings was “the head, the chief, the captain-general in iniquity; one in whom all the frauds, all the peculations, all the violence, all the tyranny in India are embodied, disciplined and arrayed” (Burke *Writings* 6: 275–76).<sup>90</sup> In the prosecution’s speeches as well as in the extensive media coverage of the trial, however, the dominant rhetoric, tropes, and imagery evoked a particular *kind* of scandal: namely, a sex scandal. Hastings and the EIC employees he led are characterized as sexual predators and deviants whose goal is to rape a feminized India of her virtue no less than her riches. In his speech on the “Begums”<sup>91</sup> charge (3 June 1788), for instance, Sheridan described in horrific detail how Hastings’ minions (allegedly) humiliated, sexually violated, and tortured native Indian women—even going so far as cutting off several women’s nipples with sharpened bamboo stakes.<sup>92</sup> As this commentary and others attest, the scandal of British India was irreducibly conjoined with the script of sexual scandal. This duo, articulated via the discourse of sensibility, was in turn repeatedly highlighted in satirical prints and other topical media addressing the trial: James Gillray’s etching “Blood on Thunder fording the Red Sea” (1788), for example, represents an “Indianized” Warren Hastings in full Eastern regalia clutching two large bundles of rupees valued at £4,000,000 each as he crosses the Red Sea (part of the land route back to Europe) riding atop the shoulders of Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who presided over the impeachment proceedings in the House of Lords. Floating around the two figures can be seen a slew of dead bodies, including, in direct reference to Sheridan’s speech, the naked body of an Indian woman whose nipples have been visibly removed. Another print, William Dent’s *The Raree Show* (1788), alludes to the same incident. Above the throng of men and woman battling

to crowd into the House to observe the trial hang a series of posters advertising the key “figures” starring in the spectacle being staged within: Hastings is identified as “the Prodigious Monster arrived from the East,” and depicted savagely biting at a naked woman’s breasts; Burke, meanwhile, is depicted in the act of condemning Hastings, delivering a fiery “oratorical tragedy” as his audience of fashionable society ladies literally drowns in their own tears.

It should be noted, however, that Burke in particular was invoking this kind of gendered, sexualized rhetoric well before the impeachment commenced in the House of Commons in 1788. Take, for instance, this fascinating passage from a speech he gave 16 years earlier (18 December 1772), when he was still a staunch defender of the EIC and viewed the kind of parliamentary oversight of the Company he came to champion during the 1780s as an encroachment on the Company’s autonomy as set forth in its original charter:

In the year 1767, [the] administration discovered that the East India Company were guardians to a very handsome and rich lady in Hindostan. Accordingly, they set parliament in motion; and parliament, (whether from love to her person or fortune is, I believe, no problem), [...] directly became a suitor, and took the lady into its tender, fond, grasping arms, pretending all the while that it meant nothing but what was fair and honourable; that no rape or violence was intended.

In this miniaturized, negative spin on the “national tale,” Burke allegorizes imperial occupation as the predatory seduction of a rich Indian woman whose purse (“fortune”) is collapsed into her “person.” Romantic conquest masks even as it enables intended financial conquest—figured here as forms of “rape and violence.” A predatory marriage arrangement thus stands in for a certain kind of imperial “speculation” in Burke’s speech (specifically, Parliamentary wrangling to regulate and derive additional revenues from the EIC), while further perpetuating the unfavorable characterization of Hastings and Company servants as predatory imperial marauders, both financial and sexual.

What I am interested in here is how, just as Reynolds' "turns the tables" on the conventional nabob-as-speculator plot in *Speculation*, Edgeworth recasts this seduction scenario in *Castle Rackrent* by depicting an Anglo-Irish man's attempt to speculate on an Indian fortune by marrying a "rich" and conspicuously Othered heiress whom he meets not in Calcutta or Madras, but in the English spa-town of Bath—a noted center of dissipation, vice, and speculation located in the heart of domestic England. Like other writers of the period—including Fanny Burney in her comic play *A Busy Day* (c.1800), Jane Austen in her novel fragment *Sanditon* (1817; publ. 1871), J.G. Holman in the Covent Garden comedy *The Votary of Wealth* (1799), and, a bit later, W. M. Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*—Edgeworth depicts how returned colonial heiresses found themselves targeted by ruthless speculators back in England. In my discussion of the colonial marriage market in Chapter Two, I noted the ways in which Englishwomen who migrated to colonial India in search of marriage were stigmatized as greedy adventuresses and "matrimonial speculators"—at least until, during the course of the nineteenth century, racial anxieties and burgeoning discourses of "miscegenation" prompted a notable reconsideration and gradual recuperation of these women precisely because of their capacity to act as prophylactics against interracial partnerships and marriages. Edgeworth's tale depicts a different *kind* of marital speculation, but one that similarly reflects cultural apprehensions regarding racial difference and intermarriage.

The section in question has been hailed by Marilyn Butler as "the best-known episode" in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) if not "the best-known episode in Edgeworth" ("Edgeworth's Ireland" 272). Sir Kit Rackrent, the dissipated heir to his family's bankrupt Irish estate, abruptly marries "the grandest heiress in England" (75) in order to repair his finances, brings her back to the absentee Irish estate, and, when she refuses to relinquish her valuable diamonds to him,

imprisons his new wife in her bedchamber for seven long years. Thady, the elderly Irish narrator of the tale, seems to approve of his master's brutal tactics, perhaps because he is "shocked" and confused by his new mistress, whom he describes alternatively as "a Jewish," a "heretic blackamoor," and, in one key instance that has eluded critical commentary, "a nabob" (76; 76; 77). Though I agree with Butler that this strange episode is both memorable and noteworthy, I also believe it poses a challenge given how enigmatic is the figure at its center: a woman whose name we are never given and whose identity—like the source of her glittering diamonds—remains shrouded in mystery. Yet the most tangible narrative detail associated with Sir Kit's bride—her costly diamonds—provides a means by which we can understand and connect these various ascriptions of identity: as Thady suggests at one point, "her diamond cross was [...] at the bottom of it all" (83). Lady Kit's diamonds are not just convenient symbols for (or metonymies of) her "foreign" wealth and differential status, but are dynamic, signifying objects that interpolate specific cultural and historical narratives into the novel and thereby cast new light on the woman who wears them.<sup>93</sup> By contextualizing references to her as a "a Jewish" and a "nabob" in tandem with descriptions of her "blackamoor" complexion and sizeable fortune in diamonds, I will suggest that Edgeworth associates Sir Kit's new wife with Britain's burgeoning Indian empire, nabobery, and "speculative" networks of commerce and exchange.<sup>94</sup> Other references to diamonds in Edgeworth's works concretize their connection to exploitative colonial and sexual economies while at the same time helping to forge an associative link between "nabobs" and English Jews by means of the Indian diamond trade, centered in London because of the East India Company's ascendancy, and dominated at this time by Jewish merchants and speculators. Through her conspicuous focus on Lady Rackrent's diamonds, Edgeworth ultimately sets up a parallel between the extraction of wealth from the colonies and predatory

marriages of alliance in Britain, and, by so doing, joins Reynolds in overturning conventions and assumptions regarding both imperial wealth and imperial speculators.

The unnamed and enigmatic woman at the center of Sir Kit Rackrent's matrimonial speculation is introduced via a comically vexed moment of cross-cultural encounter when the elderly Irish servant and narrator of the tale (Thady McQuirk) describes his master's arrival at the castle and expresses his "shock" at catching a glimpse of his new mistress:

I got the first sight of the bride; for when the carriage door opened, [...] I held the flam[beau] full in her face to light her, at which she shut her eyes, but I had a full view of the rest of her, and greatly shocked I was, for by that light she was little better than a blackamoor, and seemed crippled, but that was only sitting so long in the chariot. [...] I was not sure what to say next to one or t'other, but seeing she was a stranger in a foreign country, I thought it was right to speak cheerful to her [....] (76)

Here, apparently, his new mistresses' skin color makes her a "stranger" in Thady's estimation. But why does he call her a "blackamoor," a general term used to describe North Africans, slaves, and other "very dark-skinned persons" (*OED*) during this period? This question is further complicated by the fact that the terms "black" and "blackamoor" were variously applied to inhabitants of the East Indies and Indian subcontinent, as well as to West-Indians, Creoles, Spaniards, Jews, the Irish, and even the laboring classes in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century discourse (Cox "intro" x).<sup>95</sup> The very "instability of eighteenth-century racial nomenclature," as Sarah Salih observes, "immediately throws into sharp relief some of the problems that a twenty-first-century critic is likely to encounter when attempting to theorize representations of 'mixed women'" ("Silence" 332). While skin color had emerged by the "last quarter" of the century as the principal signifier of racial and cultural alterity, it was by no means "the only—or even primary—register of human difference for much of the eighteenth century" (Wheeler 7). Indeed, religion, commerce, modes of governance, climate and other factors all

joined complexion in molding Britons' understanding of race and ethnicity during this period. As we see in *Castle Rackrent*, Lady Kit's dark, "blackamoor" complexion becomes for Edgeworth's narrator only the *first* indicator of her "Otherness," and as the scene progresses she becomes a site of rapidly multiplying alterities. After she ignores his questions, for instance, Thady (incorrectly) concludes that "she could not speak a word of English" and surmises once again that she "was from foreign parts" (76). "The short and the long of it," he relates,

was I couldn't tell what to make of her; so I left her to herself, and went straight down to the servants' hall to learn something for certain about her. [...] The bride might well be a great fortune—she was a *Jewish* by all accounts, who are famous for their great riches. I had never seen any of that tribe or nation before, and could only gather that she spoke a strange kind of English of her own, that she could not abide pork sausages, and went neither to church or mass. Mercy upon his honour's poor soul, thought I; what will become of him and his, and all of us, with his heretic blackamoor at the head of the Castle Rackrent estate! I never slept a wink all night for thinking of it [...]; and after this, when strange gentlemen's servants came to the house, and would begin to talk about the bride, *I took care to put the best foot foremost, and passed her for a nabob in the kitchen, which accounted for her dark complexion and every thing.* (76-77; second emphasis added)

Fortune, language, dialect, and diet all join complexion in Thady's account in marking the new Lady Rackrent as a disruptive "stranger" whose presence "at the head of the [...] estate" causes considerable anxiety and even sleepless nights. Exactly what *kind* of stranger she is, however, is a more complicated matter. While commentators, with few exceptions,<sup>96</sup> have rather uncritically accepted Sir Kit's wife as "Jewish" *tout court*, the slide from "Jewish" to "blackamoor" to "nabob" in the passage renders this reading problematic. Should we, in fact, accept this most unreliable of narrators as a reliable guide in this matter?

In this respect, I agree with Sheila Spector that "ambiguity about the Jewish Lady Rackrent reflects an overall confusion about questions of race, religion and gender in the novel" (314); yet despite her acknowledgment of Edgeworth's "blur[ring]" of racial and ethnic

difference, Spector's reading ultimately claims Lady Rackrent as "a Jewish wife" without exploring the added valences that terms like "blackamoor" and "nabob" lend to this characterization (315). If we contextualize these signifiers within the literary, economic, and imperial contexts I have laid out in the previous chapters, as well as in relation to Edgeworth's other fiction, we gain a firmer sense of how she constructs a "creolized" figure whose very hybridity incites supposition, distrust, and hostility in her new household. The diamonds she refuses to relinquish (and which were the impetus for Sir Kit's marriage to her in the first place), moreover, provide the narrative glue that connects these seemingly disparate subject positions ("nabob," Jew, "blackamoor"). Diamonds in *Castle Rackrent* thus crystallize anxieties about the circulation and, in this case, the *failed* assimilation, of both "foreign" wealth and "foreign" bodies into the nation during a period of political consolidation and "union" in the British Isles, and remarkable imperial expansion and conquest in the East. And as the intended object of Sir Kit's connubial venture, they furthermore connect matrimonial speculation in Britain to imperial profiteering and plunder on the subcontinent and elsewhere in the empire.

Lady Rackrent's "blackamoor" complexion prompts Thady to characterize his new mistress as "a Jewish" and a "nabob." His indiscriminate blurring of racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural affiliations is not uncharacteristic of this era; as Judith Page notes, Jews in England were notoriously difficult for the English to "categorize" easily: they were "mostly poor but they were also rich, they were foreign-looking but they also simulated British gentility, they spoke English but not always the King's English" (3-4). With her dark skin color and "strange kind of English," Lady Rackrent foregrounds such paradoxes and confounds the Irish steward. But her wealth becomes an equally significant factor in Thady's attempt to classify his new mistress: she "was *a Jewish* by all accounts," he asserts, "who are famous for their great riches" (76; emphasis added).

The stereotype of the greedy, usurious Jew was of course standard fare in English literary representation for centuries, with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and its unforgettable character of the Jewish moneylender Shylock as its "mastertext" (Ragussis *Figures of Conversion* 58).<sup>97</sup> In the novel, Edgeworth employs a key literary allusion associating Lady Rackrent with Shylock's daughter, Jessica: the garrulous servant relates how his master "tried all his arts to get the diamond cross from her," and would "swear at her behind her back, after kneeling to her to her face, and [would] call her in the presence of his gentleman his stiff-necked Israelite, though before he married her, [...] he used to call her [...] 'my pretty Jessica!'" (80). In alluding to Shakespeare's heroine, Sir Kit's ironic attempt at gallantry and wit might seem to confirm his new wife's religious and cultural background—though this is complicated by the fact that Shakespeare's Jessica explicitly disavows her heritage.<sup>98</sup> I'd like to suggest, however, that Edgeworth's allusion also raises questions about the means by which Lady Rackrent acquired her jewels, for Shakespeare's character is equally memorable for absconding with her father's wealth: "two sealed bags of ducats," but also "jewels—two stones, two rich and precious stones," prompting Shylock to yell "Justice! Find the girl! *She hath the stones upon her* [...]" (II.viii.18-22; emphasis added). The striking parallel between Shylock's appeal and Thady's revelation that his new mistress "has thousands of English pounds concealed in diamonds about her" raises the possibility that Edgeworth's allusion to *The Merchant of Venice* gestures towards the potentially illicit source of Lady Rackrent's great fortune. Though he does not mention Edgeworth's novel, historian David Katz has noted how the "continued public perception of a disproportionate Jewish involvement in crime" helped form attitudes toward the Jewish population of London during the last decade of the eighteenth century—precisely when Edgeworth was drafting *Castle Rackrent* (316). And at least one well-publicized instance of



Jewish criminal activity at this time, the 1791 theft of the jewels belonging to Louis XIV's mistress Madame du Barry, involved a "prodigious" amount of diamonds (Katz 316). In fact, even the most cursory glance at her depictions of villainous Jewish merchants and jewelers in other fictional works reveals that Edgeworth tends to associate Jews with criminal behavior: the aptly-named "Mr. Carat" in *The Good Aunt*, for instance, traffics in stolen diamonds and jewels, while in *The Little Merchants*, young Piedro takes a pilfered diamond cross (like that worn by Kit's wife) "to a Jew, who, as it was whispered, was ready to buy everything that was offered to him for sale, without making any *troublesome* inquiries" (*Works* 10.254).<sup>99</sup>

Edgeworth's anti-Semitic characterizations have been the source of critical scrutiny ever since Rachel Mordecai, a Jewish woman in America, wrote to Edgeworth and challenged her vicious representations of Jewish characters in novels like *Belinda* (1800) and *The Absentee* (1812).<sup>100</sup> Mordecai certainly had reason to complain, for in these works and others Edgeworth perpetuates the conventional, shop-worn prejudices of her day by depicting Jews as usurers, manipulators, cheats, and rogues who are consistently thwarted, exposed and punished. Despite the efforts of writers like Richard Cumberland, who tried in 1794 to recuperate this vilified people for the English stage in his appropriately titled Drury Lane comedy *The Jew*, such pervasive negative stereotyping proved difficult to disarm.<sup>101</sup> As James Boaden noted in his account of Cumberland's benevolent Jewish stockbroker, Sheva, the fact that Jews were perceived as wealthy "subject[ed] them to hatred [...] and [...] pillage on every indecent pretext" (*Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq.* [1825]; qtd. in Katz 344). Edgeworth likewise presents an "indecent pretext" to "pillage" potentially "Jewish" wealth in this strange episode, but complicates matters both by suggesting that the "Jewish" Lady Rackrent might also be a "nabob," and by blurring the lines distinguishing the pillager from the pillaged, as we discern

most clearly from the details which surface about the nature of Sir Kit's courtship of his new wife at Bath, as well as her narrative exit from the novel.

If Edgeworth's allusion to *The Merchant of Venice* underscores issues of commerce and character, money and marriage, love and theft, assimilation and conversion, it also can be read as initiating a parodic reversal of Shakespeare's plot: unlike Jessica, who willfully elects to pilfer her father's jewels and money in order to marry the man she loves (and who loves her), Lady Rackrent is associated with the marriage market at Bath, where her jewelry attracts the attention of a man who despises her but covets her diamonds. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding Sir Kit's marriage to "one of the grandest heiresses in England" merit closer scrutiny, for Edgeworth clearly depicts the marriage as a form of mercenary speculation by which the desperate Irish noble hopes to stave off his creditors by hastily marrying a wealthy, though apparently "foreign," wife. We first learn of Sir Kit after the death of Sir Murtagh Rackrent, who, as Thady explains, "had no childer; so the Rackrent estate went to his younger brother, a young dashing officer" (72). Sir Kit arrives with a large retinue of "horses, servants, and dogs" to take possession of the estate, and immediately ingratiates himself with the old family servant, who marvels at his "family likeness" (72; 73). In true absentee style, however, Sir Kit remains on site only long enough to "g[et] down a great architect for the house, and an improver for the grounds," before spiriting away "in a whirlwind to town" without "settling" with his poor tenants (73).<sup>102</sup> Significantly, the location of Sir Kit's extended sojourn is the English spa-town of Bath—a place Diego Saglia neatly characterizes as a "*heterotopia* of pleasure and vice, consumption and speculation," in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century cultural discourse (141). Acknowledging that Sir Kit "was a little too fond of play," Thady confesses that "Bath [...] was no place for a young man of his fortune" (75). But if gambling provided a tempting lure for

dissipated young men, Bath's reputation as a center for the marriage market enticed both men and women to engage in another form of "speculation" by which fortunes could be won or recuperated. The anonymous author of *Bath—A Simile* (1779), for instance, culminates his satirical depiction of the spa-town as a space of unbridled consumption with a shocking image of young women being literally "devour[ed]" by predatory fortune-seekers and desperate gamblers: "Those hungry-looking coxcombs whose / Attentions over-pow'r 'em; / With mouths projected out by bows, / Some ready to devour 'em" (qtd. in Saglia 142). Gaming and mercenary marital alliances proceed hand-in-hand as analogous forms of speculation, but the former also prompts and necessitates the latter.

Edgeworth was certainly not alone in suggesting that the various forms of gaming and speculation undertaken at Bath resulted in potentially "disruptive" marital alliances: Christopher Anstey's famed satirical poem about Bath, "An Election Ball" (1776), offers vivid images of courtship in the spa town that highlight "Contrast[s] of Stature, Complexion, and Age," as when he relates how "Miss CURD [danced] with a Partner as Black as OMIAH" (53).<sup>103</sup> Indeed, from Anstey to Smollett, Bath is often described as a veritable "Little India," attracting colonials from both the East and West "Indies." By selecting Bath as the setting for Sir Kit's abrupt marriage, Edgeworth draws upon the site's notorious reputation for fostering alliances that transgress barriers of class, religion, race and ethnicity in the pursuit of quick wealth—wealth that, as Smollett's Matthew Bramble famously complained in *Humphry Clinker* (1771), was itself usually *foreign*, derived from colonial exploitation, mercantile profiteering, and other forms of speculation.<sup>104</sup> "My heart warmed to my new lady when I read this [letter]," Thady admits after receiving Sir Kit's announcement of his marriage, "and I was almost afraid it was too good news to be true" (75). Of course, Thady is in for a "shock": the news *does* turn out to be "too good

[...] to be true” since not only does the new Lady Rackrent refuse to relinquish the diamonds that curiously emblemize her fortune, but her alterity explodes and undermines Thady’s notions of exactly what constitutes “the family” he so insistently—and perhaps misguidedly—exalts.

If the predatory nature of Sir Kit’s marriage potentially allows for readerly sympathy with his new bride, Edgeworth’s allusion to Shakespeare’s Jessica complicates this by fanning entrenched anti-Jewish stereotypes and by raising questions about the source of Lady Rackrent’s precious jewels. And unlike Jessica, Kit’s wife refuses to relinquish her fortune. As Thady reveals,

There was no balls, no dinners, no doings; the country was all disappointed—Sir Kit’s gentleman said in a whisper to me, it was all my lady’s own fault, because she was so obstinate about the cross. “What cross?” says I; “is it about her being a heretic?” “Oh, no such matter,” says he; “my master does not mind her heresies, but her diamond cross, it’s worth I can’t tell you how much; and she has thousands of English pounds concealed in diamonds about her, which she as good as promised to give up to my master before he married, but now she won’t part with any of them, and she must take the consequences.” (78)

As Joseph Addison famously argued in the *Tatler* #151 (28 March 1710), “The Cluster of Diamonds upon the Breast can add no Beauty to the fair Chest of Ivory which supports it. It may indeed tempt a Man to steal a Woman, but never to love her” (qtd. in Mackie 486). Driven to “steal” a new bride of dubious origins (and a complexion several shades darker than Addison’s “ivory”) in order to filch her wealth and repair his finances, Sir Kit’s mercenary speculation in the marriage market ultimately backfires: “no balls, no dinners, no doings.” And once again, Edgeworth focuses upon Lady Kit’s “concealed” diamonds as a source of narrative disruption that carry significant “consequences” both for their possessor and for those that covet them.

The intrigue surrounding diamonds in the novel is compounded by Edgeworth’s use of the term “nabob,” which associates the new Lady Rackrent with the East India Company’s

dubious conduct in India and its employees' profitable though controversial trafficking in imperial commodities—particularly Indian diamonds. If Edgeworth's allusion to *The Merchant of Venice*, particularly when considered in light of her negative depiction of Jewish merchants and jewelers throughout her fictional corpus, raises the possibility that Sir Kit's wife has inherited a fortune acquired by suspect means (or, like Shakespeare's heroine, has perhaps even stolen her jewels), the novel's suggestive linkage of nabobs, Jews, and diamonds offers a further avenue for inquiry that sheds new light on this enigmatic character and her particular form of wealth. Thady "passes" her off as an Anglo-Indian "nabob" to the staff and visiting servants at the estate because, as he explains, "of her dark complexion *and every thing*" (77; emphasis added). While identifying Lady Rackrent as a nabob might seem to distinguish her from Jews and thereby allow Thady to "put the best foot foremost" (75), perceived similarities in "complexion" *do* establish a link between Jews (Sephardic Jews in particular) and East-Indians in Edgeworth's other fiction, most notably in the novel *Harrington*: here, one character speculates that the Jewish Berenice Montenero is "An East Indian I should guess, by her dark complexion," while, a chapter later, Harrington's mother mistakenly welcomes Berenice's father as the acknowledged "Prince and Father"<sup>105</sup> of the nabobs, "Mr. Clive, from India" [135; 147]). In *Castle Rackrent*, I'd like to suggest, Lady Rackrent's "complexion" is likewise one of the means by which Edgeworth forges an association between Jews and nabobs.

Another is compacted within the simultaneously hypertrophic and vague "every thing" that rounds out Thady's sentence above. The notion here of *everything*—the profusion and yet the imprecision—suggests a collapse of any one specific identity marker into some kind of frightening "mixture." If "dark complexion" is a key component of that mixture, so too is great wealth—particularly as materialized in the specific form of diamonds. As mentioned in previous

chapters, diamonds became the most pervasive and visible sign of imperial rapacity and corruption in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. At the commencement of the Hastings impeachment, Walpole epitomized the general consensus when he wryly noted that “Innocence does not pave its way with diamonds, nor has a quarry of them on its estate” (3 June 1786; qtd. in Raven 248). Large diamonds like those worn by Lady Rackrent were viewed with suspicion and hostility during this politically tumultuous era because they seemed to “pave,” in Walpole’s suggestive phrasing, a direct route between the acknowledged source of these gems (Indian diamond mines fueled by slavery and exploited labor) and the site of their sale, consumption and display in London. Such traffic, Walpole and other commentators insisted, could not augur well for the “innocence” and wellbeing of domestic Britons or their cherished institutions and traditions.<sup>106</sup>

In short, by the end of the eighteenth century, diamonds’ customary function as sparkling emblems of wealth, class, and affiliation—not to mention conjugal love and sexual desire—had become messily entangled in the politics of colonial oppression as Londoners anxiously followed the growing scandals in British India while famous nabobs like Robert Clive and Hastings were being publicly accused and, in the case of Hastings, put on trial for allegedly exploiting native Indians and fostering corrupt and illegal networks of trade in order to obtain immense, princely fortunes. During the latter’s impeachment and sensational public trial for high crimes and misdemeanors in his governing of British India, accusations that Hastings and Indian rulers like the Nawab of Arcot were using jewels and other gifts to sway imperial policy and influence the outcome of the trial inspired a sizeable body of satirical prints from Gillray, Cruikshank, and others in which Indian diamonds play a central role. The Queen’s acceptance of costly diamonds, jewels, and other presents from Hastings’ wife, Marian, meanwhile, was similarly subjected to

intensive scrutiny in the press, while inspiring a number of satires such as Elizabeth Ryves' mock-heroic poem *The Hastiniad* (1785). A full-blown scandal erupted on 14 June 1786 after one of Hastings' agents presented the King with a spectacular brilliant known as the Hastings diamond, a gift from the Nizam Ali Khan, ruler of Hyderabad. The unfortunate timing of this transaction (the former Governor-General's impeachment was being debated in the House of Commons at that very moment) ensured that the public presses were immediately flooded with allegations that the diamond was a bribe, and a slew of prints circulated depicting the transaction as confirmation that nabobish wealth and perceived Indian despotism were infiltrating the highest levels of metropolitan society and actively contaminating the nation's governance and juridical integrity. "Caricatures on the subject," according to Thomas Wright's *Caricature History of the Georges* (1904), "were to be seen in the window of every print-shop" (412).<sup>107</sup> Songs and epigrams on the Hastings diamond, meanwhile, were "passed about in all societies," while others, of "a less refined character, were sung about the streets, or sold to the populace by itinerant ballad-dealers" (Wright 412-13).<sup>108</sup>

This link between royal avarice, political intrigue, and diamonds was only exacerbated by the fact that the scandal broke shortly after France's Marie Antoinette had become embroiled in *l'affaire du collier de la Reine* (the Diamond Necklace Affair)—a scandal often credited with contributing to the fall of the *ancien régime* (Pointon "Intrigue" 207; McCalman 112). The two diamond scandals, as Pointon has demonstrated, became intertwined in the public discourse: like Marie Antoinette, George III and Queen Charlotte were depicted as "insatiable consumers of diamonds," while Charlotte in particular became "popularly identified by two apparently contradictory characteristics: an instinct for household management bordering upon parsimony, and a love of jewellery [sic] and precious stones, particularly diamonds, amounting to an

obsession” (“Intrigue” 209; 203). This was no simple matter of satirical hyperbole, however: when Philip Francis, member of the Bengal Supreme Council, met the Queen in 1781, he was shocked to observe that she was literally “covered” with diamonds, writing to a friend that, “I did not know there had been so many diamonds in the world as her Majesty was covered with” (*Memoirs* II.212).<sup>109</sup>

We know that Edgeworth was well aware of the political controversies surrounding diamonds from references in her other works: the plot of her unpublished play *Whim for Whim* (which was performed twice at Edgeworthstown shortly before the publication of *Castle Rackrent*<sup>110</sup>), for instance, is loosely based upon the Diamond Necklace Affair in France, while in *The Good Aunt*, the titular Mrs. Howard is compelled to sell her jewelry to the viciously caricatured Jewish jeweler, Mr. Carat, who makes a sly allusion to the Royal couples’ passion for diamonds: when Charles (Mrs. Howard’s curious nephew and ward) asks the jeweler “about the experiment of Francis the First [...] *melting* [...] diamonds and rubies,”<sup>111</sup> Carat replies (in stereotyped Jewish dialect), “Dat king wash very grand fool, beg his majesty’s pardon, [...] *but kings know better nowadays. Heaven bless dere majesties*” (*Works* 10.154; emphasis added).<sup>112</sup> Here, Edgeworth cagily alludes both to the scandals surrounding the British monarchs’ acceptance of lavish Indian diamonds as gifts and to the diamond scandal that embroiled the French court (and in which, it bears reminding, the perpetrators attempted to sell their purloined diamonds to Jewish jewelers in London). By so doing, Edgeworth subtly links sumptuous consumption habits, questionable mercantile and colonial trafficking, and royal and aristocratic dissipation and vice with the prosperity of dubious Jewish merchants and jewelers such as Mr. Carat.<sup>113</sup>



Vital to my reading of *Castle Rackrent*, perceivably ill-gotten Indian wealth not only allowed nabobs and their wives to purchase and then flaunt expensive gemstones and jewelry back in the metropole, but EIC fortunes were often remitted back to London in the specific form of diamonds, which were eminently portable and allowed for an easier circumvention of East India Company regulating apparatuses.<sup>114</sup> “The problem of repatriating fortunes made in India by company servants,” as Bruce Lenman and Philip Lawson have demonstrated, in fact led to “the development of a great civil war within the Company by 1763,” pitting Robert Clive against his nemesis, Laurence Sullivan (811; 810). While “various means” of repatriation were available to the former, including East India Company drafts and bills drawn on Dutch merchants in Bengal, “if Clive did specialize in a given remittance technique, it was bulk diamonds” (Lenman and Lawson 812). Warren Hastings also relied upon this method, informing a correspondent in 1774, “My best and speediest remittance will be in diamonds” (qtd. in Yogev 172).<sup>115</sup> And when an extraordinary stroke of luck at the gambling table won Philip Francis an immense fortune in one night (he reputedly raked in £20,000 playing whist with his fellow member on the Supreme Council, Richard Barwell), he dispatched a letter to Francis Fowke in May 1776 requesting him to “procure me a small venture of diamonds on the most favourable terms”: “I have actually won a fortune,” he continues, “and must think of some means of realizing it in England. Keep all this stuff to yourself” (II.67-8). We might wonder exactly which factor prompted Francis’s concluding plea for secrecy: the fact that he amassed such an incredible sum (gambling at whist, no less), or the fact that he was using diamonds to channel and “realize” that fortune in England.

This method of transferring wealth in turn depended upon England’s Jewish population, for as historian Gedalia Yogev has documented, “the increase in the power of the English East India Company at the expense of foreign rivals was put to good use by the Anglo-Jewish

diamond merchants, who established a virtual monopoly of European diamond imports from India and made London the chief centre of the trade” (19-20). “The great majority of the diamond merchants in London at the end of the eighteenth century,” S. Ettinger further notes, “were Jews,” and though the East India Company attempted to control the import of diamonds into England, “Jewish merchants also purchased the quantities smuggled in by numerous seamen” (736). The repatriation of East Indian fortunes via diamonds thus forged a commercial as well as an associative chain linking East-Indian nabobs and London Jews—two groups ostracized for their alleged greed, rapacity, trade in suspect forms of wealth, and speculative financial practices, not to mention their perceived “otherness” as registered by complexion, clothing style, and other visual markers.<sup>116</sup> Nabobs’ and Jews’ mutually beneficial trade in Indian diamonds—the former as procurers and importers, the latter as financiers and investors but also as highly-skilled diamond-cutters and setters—thus epitomized a kind of suspect imperial networking that seemed to be enriching these so-called “foreigners” while destabilizing the traditional distributions of wealth, power and influence in Britain.

Indian diamonds reinforced the more unsavory stereotypes stubbornly attached to both nabobs and Jews for another reason: commentators were explicit in foregrounding the fact that this lapidary form of wealth—what Pope in *The Rape of the Lock* deemed “glitt’ring Spoil” (57)—was the product of slavery and oppressed labor. Indeed, Edgeworth was acutely aware of and specifically highlights this connection in both *Lame Jervas* and *Whim for Whim*: in the former work, key portions of which are set in the Golconda mines, the titular protagonist’s discovery of an immense stone likened to the infamous “Pitt diamond” is used to barter for the emancipation of the “naked” slaves who “were treated scarcely as if they were human beings, by the rapacious adventurers for whom they laboured” (42), while in the latter work, a freed slave

named Quaco, who has been rescued from diamond mines<sup>117</sup> and employed as a servant in the fashionable London household of Mrs. Fangle, foils a scheming Frenchwoman's attempt to abscond with his employer's magnificent diamonds by replacing them with paste imitations (a plot, as I mentioned, loosely based upon the Diamond Necklace Affair in France). Because of his troubling past in the diamond mines, Quaco knows how to tell the difference between real diamonds and fakes, and Edgeworth grants this figure both agency (he foils the plot) and a voice with which to draw an explicit parallel between imperial exploitation and slavery in the colonies and the domestic consumption habits that fuel such abuses. Surveying the diamonds for the first time, Quaco delivers a fascinating free-associative monologue before bursting into song:

“Very fine diamuns!—big!—big! diamuns—Poor Quaco once work naked in de mine—cruel man beat poor Quaco—Quaco hate him—Quaco run away from cruel man—yes—yes—Quaco no run away from Massa Opal who give him his liberty—Good Massa Opal!—Quaco love Massa Opal better dan di'muns great deal—better dan dese big—big di'muns—  
(sings)

Down below—down below—hot hot hot! down below  
   Over de Sea  
   In far countree  
       De ugly, ugly, ugly, white diamuns grow  
           Poor little negro work in de mine  
                   Lash from de whip  
                   Black skin all strip  
           White and rich lady for to make fines  
       Down below—down below, hot hot hot! down below  
   Over de Sea  
   In far countree  
       De ugly, ugly, ugly, white diamuns grow—  
   (Exit Quaco) (352)

Here, Edgeworth employs Quaco's song to articulate forcefully the constitutive relationship between slave labor and the profitable trade in precious stones and other colonial commodities. By juxtaposing an image of “white and rich” ladies complacently adorning themselves with large

diamonds in order, in Quaco's words, to "make fines," with the horrific image of an overseer's whip "strip[ping]" the flesh off a slave's back, Edgeworth forces audiences (and readers) to confront a grim reality: no matter their number of carats or the clarity of their water, these diamonds are stained by human blood, blazing forth an "ugly" *red*.

Diamonds in Edgeworth's fiction are, thus, both literally and figuratively, *tainted* wealth. This might help to explain why Lady Rackrent, though preyed upon and abused by the unscrupulous Sir Kit, is largely denied sympathetic treatment in the novel. As Mary Jean Corbett has pointed out, "Rackrent marriages, seemingly without exception, are made for money, not for love"; yet the "women who make these marriages," she continues, "are no mere victims":

The novel's women make material profit from the colonial project and so are directly implicated in it. Like their husbands, Rackrent women display a decided preference for property and no interest in securing the means of its transmission; they have no commitment to the estate, leaving it behind when their husbands die or when things go bad. That they do not reproduce biologically may be taken as emblematic of the disorder Edgeworth locates in familial and social relations: themselves treated as the site and medium for property exchange between men, the ladies Rackrent fetishize what they accumulate, seeing self-interest as the limit of their interests. (394-5)

But as I have argued, the specific material form of Lady Rackrent's "property" distinguishes her from the other Rackrent women and opens up new networks of inquiry. If her predecessor, Sir Murtagh's wife, enriched herself by exploiting her Irish tenants and selfishly hoarding the native fruits of their labor, Lady Kit's diamonds present a different form of colonial spoil: like their owner, they are decidedly "foreign," alien, imported.<sup>118</sup> While Lady Kit is indeed a "site and medium" for "exchange between men," she is also more directly "implicated" in the "colonial project" than her forbears—indeed, the references to her as a Jew, a blackamoor and a nabob, in addition to the constant focus on her diamonds, all suggest that she is herself simultaneously the product, the beneficiary, and the victim of the global networks of speculation—both financial

and sexual—that the colonial project created and perpetuated. Lady Rackrent is no simple “victim,” in other words, because even as she is the *object* of a particularly dastardly form of imperial speculation, she herself, through the conspicuous emphasis on her diamonds, is connected to profits derived from the speculative diamond trade.

When she is finally freed from her captivity after the sudden death of Sir Kit in a duel, Lady Rackrent evinces the kind of “fetishiz[ation]” Corbett discerns: she immediately “pull[s] her cross from her bosom” and, as Thady relates, “kisse[s] it with as great devotion as ever I witnessed” (82). Lady Kit’s ironic “devotion” to the very object that caused her imprisonment and abuse in the first place suggests her own enslavement to the diamonds’ seductive allure. Yet I would like to emphasize how these gemstones exert a spellbinding pull that (at least momentarily) transcends racial, cultural, religious, and class distinctions. If Lady Rackrent’s diamonds, when considered in light of Edgeworth’s allusions to Anglo-Indian nabobs, Jews, and *The Merchant of Venice*, interpolate specific cultural and historical narratives into the novel (whether of imperial exploitation in India, morally questionable networks of commerce in Europe, and famous literary examples of theft and intrigue centering around jewels, respectively)—*the desire to possess diamonds* implicates everyone in the novel, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or station. As soon as word gets out about Sir Kit’s death, the diamond necklace magnetically attracts “all the gentlemen within twenty miles,” who, Thady relates, “came in a body, as it were, to set my lady at liberty, and to protest against her confinement, which they now *for the first time* understood was against her own consent” (82; emphasis added). “The ladies too,” he continues, “were as attentive as possible, striving who should be foremost with their morning visits; and they that saw the diamonds spoke very handsomely of them, but thought it a pity they were not to be bestowed [...] upon a lady who would have become them

better” (83). Drawn like sharks by the smell of blood, the community circles around the newly independent Lady Rackrent, justifying their fantasies of expropriating her diamonds by casting aspersions on her “[un]becom[ing]” complexion and differential status. Thady implicates himself in this scramble when he confesses, “Had she meant to make any stay in Ireland, I stood a great chance of being a great favourite with her [...] But when I saw she had made up her mind to spend the rest of her days upon her own income and jewels in England, I considered her quite as a foreigner, and not at all any longer as part of the family” (83). Lady Rackrent has of course *already* been stigmatized as an outsider—whether Jew, blackamoor, nabob, or some combination thereof—whose suspect wealth and “strange” habits invoked xenophobic discomfiture in the novel’s other characters. She was never truly accepted into “the family,” by Thady or anyone else. Yet after Sir Kit dies, and Lady Rackrent and her diamonds are perceived to be on the market, we witness a revealing turn, for she is sought after and temporarily stripped of her status as Other—which Thady then reinscribes *only after* she announces her forthcoming departure to England.

This episode of *Castle Rackrent* exposes how the rush for colonial riches blurs the lines dividing “us” from “them” even as the material form of the plunder necessarily recalls them. Whether Lady Rackrent is a Jew, “blackamoor” or “nabob,” “white” or “black,” Irish or English, family member or stranger, the temptation to speculate on her diamonds *temporarily* erodes such distinctions and implicates everyone in the scramble for imperial loot, both “at home” and abroad. Edgeworth ultimately turns her critical lens back on to domestic readers, implicating their consumption habits, dissipation and greed in contributing to and perpetuating cycles of colonial exploitation, speculation, and violence. Thus, while most critics have focused upon Lady Rackrent as “a Jew,” she becomes a much more intriguing, complicated figure when we

highlight her *multiple* alterities—all of which gel, I suggest, when we focus upon her conspicuous jewels. Where her fortune originated, we do not know for certain; but like many nabob fortunes, Lady Rackrent’s wealth is conveyed in the form of diamonds, which subsequently, in the shape of a necklace, adorn her body and advertise its “value” for speculators like the avaricious Sir Kit. The necklace which Thady claims was “at the bottom of it all” thus becomes a potent symbol for the global circulation of alien, alienated *and* alienating forms of wealth—whether amassed by means of imperial exploitation, illegal trafficking, outright theft, seduction, mercenary marriage, or other speculative means.

### III. Austen’s *Sanditon*; or, Speculating on Miss Lambe

And if we could but get a young Heiress to S[anditon]! But  
Heiresses are monstrous scarce!

--Austen, *Sanditon*

[Sanditon] was his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation and his  
Hobby Horse; his Occupation his Hope and his Futurity.

--Austen, *Sanditon*

“Heiresses” may well have been “monstrous scarce” to come by during early nineteenth century, but that didn’t hinder speculators like Edgeworth’s Sir Kit or Austen’s Lady Denham—speaker of the first epigraph above, and co-investor of a fashionable new bathing resort named “Sanditon” (literally, a “to[w]n” built upon “Sand”)—from devising rapacious schemes to profit by them: ““Now,” Denham remarks, “if we could get a young Heiress to be sent here for her health—and if she was ordered to drink asses milk I could supply her)—and as soon as she got well, have her fall in love with Sir Edward [Denham’s nephew]!—That would be very fortunate indeed”” (325). Ever since it was first published posthumously in 1871, the incomplete, fragmentary nature of *Sanditon* has inspired readers to surmise (or “speculate”) about its plot, characters, and themes, as well as the directions the novel might have taken had Austen not died before finishing it.<sup>119</sup> While scholars have found much to discuss in this work (e.g., Austen’s

depictions of invalidism, the body, and consumer culture, or the purported breakdown of “Austen style”)<sup>120</sup> most critics tend to agree that *Sanditon* “reflects anxieties about the shift from one socio-economic structure to another” (Salih “Silence” 330; Cf. Roberts *Jane Austen* 64). In his *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, Peter Knox-Shaw identifies the emergent “socio-economic structure” in question as one based upon forms of *speculation*, though without historicizing and contextualizing this term within the more expansive social, economic, and literary contexts that I have been tracing in this dissertation (Knox-Shaw 43-54). Further, his account does not sufficiently attend to the ways in which speculation takes on added levels of signification in relation to empire and colonialism. In this respect, I agree with Sara Salih that “the majority of the novel’s commentators overlook what Edward Said would call its ‘geographical problematic,’ the fact that the seaside resort is dependent on economic resources from outside—from other areas of England, and [...] from England’s Caribbean colonies” (“Silence” 329-330). Building upon these two readings, I would like to connect the novel’s “geographical problematic” to its satirical critique of speculation. The enigmatic figure of the colonial heiress, Miss Lambe, provides an opportunity to do just this, for she is at the center of a particular form of speculation that recalls both of the texts analyzed earlier in this chapter. Like Reynolds, Austen portrays a social milieu in which the main characters are all interconnected by means of speculative or visionary schemes for quick profit: in this case, primarily (but not exclusively) centering around the endeavor to establish Sanditon as a rival to established spas such as Bath or Brighton. And like Edgeworth, Austen introduces a colonial heiress (the “half-Mulatto” Miss Lambe [341]) into the plot, one whose very name positions her as a sacrificial “lamb” within a domestically centered scheme to speculate on colonial wealth by speculating on wealthy colonials. In ways reminiscent of both *Castle Rackrent* and *Speculation*, then, Austen’s compelling final novel



“turns the tables” on the individual speculators depicted as well as on the conventional scripts of imperial speculation sketched out in the introduction and previous chapters. In the character of Lady Denham, moreover, the novel offers perhaps the most pointed example of Britons screening their own rapacity and greed (and justifying their own speculations) through anti-colonial stigma and rebuke.

Joining Lady Denham in the bathing-resort venture is Mr. Parker, a good-natured though deluded “Enthusiast;—on the subject of Sanditon, a complete Enthusiast”:

Sanditon,—the success of Sanditon as a small, fashionable Bathing Place was the object, for which he seemed to live. A very few years ago, and it had been a quiet Village of no pretensions; but some natural advantages in its position and some accidental circumstances having suggested to himself, and the other principal Land Holder [Lady Denham], the probability of its becoming a profitable Speculation, they had engaged in it, and planned and built, and praised and puffed, and raised it to a Something of young Renown—and Mr. Parker could now think of very little besides. (301)

Parker’s venture offers a compelling emblem for the age of speculation and especially the curious imbrication of fashion and commerce that drives it. For Mr. Parker, Sanditon has become an obsession: “it was his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation and his Hobby Horse; his Occupation his Hope and his Futurity” (302). In this remarkably dense sentence Austen manages, in miniature, to bring together the key tropes and figures that shaped contemporary discourses on speculation and highlighted its potential dangers. By conjoining words like “Mine” and “Lottery,” for instance, Austen conjures fantasies of vast, untapped sources of wealth typically ascribed to sites of colonial activity like India, Peru or the South Seas, only to undercut them by invoking the risk, contingency, and hazard associated with “lotteries,” speculation, and gaming. Further, words like “Hope” and “Futurity” suggest a potentially delusive expectation of deferred recompense and reward—the kind of *“If you build it, they will come”* mentality that drives the credit economy and underlies speculative investment, but at root constitutes a leap of faith. The

religious undertones at play here are obvious and important, for as Pocock and other have noted, the system of deferred borrowing and public credit that initiated England's Financial Revolution at the end of the seventeenth century gave rise to a new, "secular" conception of the future ("Virtue" 98).<sup>121</sup> As Andrea Henderson nicely summarizes, "Living by speculation and credit meant believing in progress and growth, believing in a richer tomorrow. This image of the future often seemed to be founded in nothing more substantial than desire, a deeply felt hope that Fortune's wheel was on the rise. Credit, described in contemporary political and economic tracts as a desirable but unreliable woman, thus became the embodiment of Fortuna" (Henderson 45). Laura Brown makes a similar point: invoking Mary Poovey's recent work, she suggest that the modern legacy of the financial revolution is not "the rationalized system of capitalist exchange, but the flights of fancy and credulity of the free market and stock speculation" (*Fables* 102). Mr. Parker's faith in his "hobbyhorse" is unwavering, but for that very reason, *suspect*. While he has already committed to the jump, however, Lady Denham is a bit more hesitant, as Parker himself complains in ways that recall Pocock's and Henderson's characterization of the speculator's "image of the future": "She cannot look *forward* quite as I would have her," Parker remarks, "and takes alarm at a trifling present expence, without considering what returns it *will* make her in a year or two" (305; first emphasis added).

Is Parker's speculation on Sanditon merely a "flight of fancy," built upon the shifting and potentially treacherous sands of hope, belief, and desire, and thus reflective of misplaced or misdirected faith in this new speculative economy? Of course, given the novel's incompleteness, this question cannot be answered definitively; the narrative details provided by Austen, however, do not bode well for Parker and his co-investor, Lady Denham. Strictly speaking, Sanditon's status as "a Something of young Renown" has yet to be proven outside of the pair's desire that it

will emerge as such. That is, much like its touted health benefits (“our health-breathing Hill” [311]) or the various psychosomatic complaints of its sought-after visitors, the spa’s prosperity and fame have not been empirically established: Sanditon is “renown[ed]” only because its investors believe or imagine that it *must become so*. Parker “anticipated an amazing Season,” for instance, despite the fact that, “[a]t the same time last year, (late July) there had not been a single Lodger in the Village!—nor did [Parker] remember any during the whole Summer [...]” (310-11). Indeed, when Charlotte Heywood, the novel’s ostensible heroine, accepts Parker’s invitation and arrives at Sanditon, she finds a handsome, shimmering, but largely *vacant* spa that resembles more of a ghost town than an up-and-coming watering place: “here and there a solitary Elderly Man might be seen, [...] but in general, it was a thorough pause of Company, it was Emptiness and Tranquility on the Terrace, the Cliffs, and the Sands.—The Shops were deserted [...], and Mrs. Whitby at the Library was sitting in her own room, reading one of her own Novels, for want of Employment” (315). While the local business owners fret away their time “for want of Employment,” the novel’s speculators are prone to fits of “activity run mad.” Yet this activity is neither productive (much of it, like Diana Parker’s hypochondria, proceeds from an overactive but simultaneously paralyzing “Imagination”) nor substantive: as with Arable’s showy farm in Reynolds’ play, construction in the spa town seems to consist solely of surface “improvements” catered toward “fashion” rather than quality or use, as when Parker frets over whether “Trafalgar House” should be refashioned because “Waterloo is more the thing now” (308).

Prospects brighten, however, when the sprightly valetudinarian Diana Parker writes to her brother to confirm that she has “secur[ed] [him] two large Families, one a rich West Indian from Surry, the other, a most respectable Girls Boarding School, or Academy, from Camberwell” (314). The news throws the community into “a flurry of speculation and erroneous

surmise,” as Salih notes, with the ensuing discussions providing “a neat snapshot of contemporary attitudes towards West Indian returnees and their perceived place in gentry English society” (“Silence” 334). “These two large families are just what we wanted,” Parker exclaims excitedly, “no people spend more freely, I beleive [sic], than W. Indians” (318). While I have focused in this dissertation primarily on the role of East Indian wealth (real and imagined) in shaping and floating Britons’ speculative desires and schemes, other sites of colonial activity such as the slave-driven plantations in the West Indies were similarly implicated in these debates. Maria Edgeworth, for instance, claimed that “West Indian planters, whose property is a kind of lottery, are extravagantly disposed to speculation”; echoing Mr. Parker’s emphasis on West Indians’ lavish spending habits as well as Pocock’s argument about the speculator’s (potentially misplaced) confidence in the future, Edgeworth goes on to note that, “in the hopes of a favourable season they live from year to year in unbounded profusion” (*Practical Education* 395). William Holland’s satirical print “West India Luxury!!” (1808) reflects a similar viewpoint, but also characterizes West Indians in terms of nabobery through the inclusion of a “West India Nabob” who is depicted lolling at his ease and surrounded by slaves.

Even more revealing, when Edgeworth penned her ameliorationist (as opposed to abolitionist) short story “The Grateful Negro” (1804), she strategically deployed the rhetoric of speculation in order to distinguish her idealized, beneficent planter from his vilified brethren via negation: “[Mr. Edwards] never exceeded his income; he engaged in no wild speculations; he contracted no debts; and his slaves, therefore, were in no danger of being seized by a sheriff’s officer” (50).<sup>122</sup> Parker’s comments, then, reflect contemporary attitudes towards “W[est] Indians” and their reputedly “extravagant dispos[ition] to[ward] speculation” (Edgeworth). Himself an enthusiastic speculator, Parker hopes that the West Indians from Surrey will live up

to their reputation and infuse some much-needed money into the resort community. His sister, Diana, expresses her own hope that the West Indians' will be "as helpless and indolent, as Wealth and a Hot Climate are apt to make [one]," and thus require her services and attendance (331). And Lady Denham flatly remarks, "That sounds well. That will bring Money" (318).

Yet the prospective bubble bursts before any money can be gleaned: the "two large families" Diana Parker had led them to expect prove to be just one small group of young ladies accompanied by an escort (a mix-up that is attributed to Diana's "spirit of restless activity" [334] and enthusiasm). Instead of a family of wealthy colonials, only one actually arrives (Miss Lambe), thus lending a new sense of urgency to the speculators' plotting. Miss Lambe is almost as enigmatic a presence as Edgeworth's Lady Rackrent: we learn that she was "a young West Indian of large fortune"; that she was "in delicate health"; and that she was "beyond comparison the most important and precious [of Mrs. Griffiths three charges], as she paid in proportion to her fortune" (340). The only other description we are given expands upon these initial details: "She was about seventeen, half Mulatto,<sup>123</sup> chilly and tender, had a maid of her own, was to have the best room in the Lodgings, and was also of the first consequence in every plan of Mrs. G[riffiths]" (341).

Accorded precedence by her chaperone and fellow boarders, Miss Lambe quickly finds that she has been granted "first consequence" in Lady Denham's more rapacious "plan[s]." What I would like to emphasize here is how Denham parrots contemporary stereotypes and prejudices concerning "West-injines" (as she calls them), their wealth, and their purportedly contaminating influence on domestic society and on local economies even as she schemes to cozen them of their wealth. Denham's unflattering remarks about West Indians reflect her own class-derived snobbery and sense of superiority, certainly, but they also recall many of the arguments

commonly leveled against nabobs and other newly-monied colonials: “because they have full Purses,” she tells Mr. Parker, “[they] fancy themselves equal [...] to your old Country Families. But then, they who scatter their Money so freely, never think of whether they may not be doing mischief by raising the price of Things—And I have heard that’s very much the case with your West-injines—and if they come among us to raise the price of our necessities of Life, we shall not much thank them Mr. Parker” (318). Note the similarities between Denham’s harangue and Thomas Babington Macaulay’s later summary of anti-nabob attitudes in his essay on Lord Clive: nabobs “had acquired great wealth, [...] exhibited it insolently, [...] spent it extravagantly, [and] [...] raised the price of everything in their neighbourhoods, from fresh eggs to rotten boroughs, [...] but, in spite of the stud and the crowd of menials, of the plate and the Dresden china, of the venison and Burgundy, [they] were still [viewed as] low men” (82, 83-4). Yet, while Denham frets about rich colonials raising the price of consumables like “Butcher’s meat” (318), she has no qualms when it comes to moving “Things” over which she holds a monopoly: her prized “Milch asses” and their milk (believed to carry healing properties for consumptive patients) as well as her nephew, whom she authoritatively decrees, “*must* marry for Money” (324). When Lady Denham promptly extends an invitation to the girls’ chaperone, Mrs. Griffiths, we are informed that she “had other motives [...] besides attention to the Parkers.—In Miss Lambe, here was the very young Lady, sickly and rich, whom she had been asking for; and she made the acquaintance for Sir Edward’s sake, and the sake of her Milch asses” (342). One of the novel’s funniest passages, it is also one of its more disturbing insofar as the woman’s sickness (if it’s not all in her head, as with most of the spa’s other denizens) actually makes her doubly alluring in Lady Denham’s ruthlessly calculating mind. Seeing an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone (sickly *and* rich!), Denham’s predilections against West Indians conveniently give way

when confronted with an opportunity to speculate Miss Lambe out of some of her vast colonial fortune.

Yet, as with the other speculators I have discussed in this chapter, Denham's speculation is exploded—here, when both Miss Lambe and Edward simply refuse to comply with her obvious scheming: “as to the Animals, [Lady Denham] soon found that all her calculations of Profit would be vain. Mrs. G. would not allow Miss L. to have the smallest symptom of a Decline, or any complain which Asses milk could possible relieve. ‘Miss L. was under the constant care of an experienced Physician;—and his Prescriptions must be their rule’” (342). And just as the novel leaves off, Charlotte inadvertently catches an intriguing glimpse of Edward with another young woman: “Miss Brereton [another relation dependent upon the munificence the wealthy Lady Denham takes joy in withholding] seated apparently very composedly—and Sir E. D. by her side.—They were sitting so near each other and appeared so closely engaged in gentle conversation, that Charlotte instantly felt she had nothing to do but to step back again, and say not a word” (345). Though desperate for money, Edward is apparently not the pawn his step-mother believes him to be, and in this moment Austen suggests his resistance to Lady Denham's schemes and his refusal to engage in the kind of mercenary targeting of returned colonials (male and female) that Reynolds, Edgeworth, and other authors of the period critique in their fiction.

By reading *Sanditon* palimpsestically or alongside contemporary fictional and non-fictional accounts of “speculation” and colonial relations, I have attempted to reveal how the novel's “geographical problematic” (Said) and its satire of speculation converge in the figure of Miss Lambe. In this nascent plot, we find yet another example of marriage (or seduction) plots being deployed in order to interrogate analogous social, political and economic relations—here, the contentious relations between England and its colonies, between Britons and returning

colonials, and particularly between traditional forms and conceptions of commerce and exchange and emergent forms of speculation. By depicting a wealthy West-Indian heiress who finds herself the object of various forms of “jobbing” and maneuvering in England, Austen draws upon only to problematize customary understandings of speculators and speculation in relation to colonial wealth. Given the spa’s apparent dearth of visitors and clients (the empty shops; the disappointing number of signatures in the registry), Denham and her co-investor jump at the prospect of a much-needed infusion of West-Indian capital in what reads as an anxious acknowledgment of the nation’s increasing dependence upon wealth amassed *elsewhere*. But when the expected incursion of colonial-derived wealth proves to be illusory, we are left with another fictional text that questions the larger promise of imperial wealth that was used to justify the era’s unprecedented imperial expansion.

While the novel *is* unfinished, I have pointed to passages that indicate that Austen had already begun “turning the tables” on Lady Denham’s selfish, self-interested speculations concerning Miss Lambe and her nephew. While we will never know for certain what Austen intended, *Sanditon*’s very incompleteness in this respect provides an unexpected source of pleasure for its readers and critics, who can return time and again to the remarkable chapters the ailing author managed to finish, and take joy in speculating on what might have been.



## CHAPTER IV

**Siren Songs**

Already to *Imagination's* eyes  
 The glowing scenes of India's coast arise:  
 Bright gems that glow beneath a warmer sun;  
 And duteous slaves in countless numbers run;  
 Rich palanquins, adorn'd with fragrant flow'rs;  
 And charms of wealth, and gay luxuriant bow'rs.  
 But ah, ye fair! beware the glitt'ring bait;  
 In fairest meads oft dang'rous adders wait;  
*Delusive pleasures fatal arts employ,*  
*And, Siren-like, sing sweetest to destroy.*  
 --Anonymous, *Monody on the Death of Captain Pierce*  
 (1790; emphasis added)

Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,  
 Of moving accidents by flood and field;  
 Of hairbreadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach;  
 Of being taken by the insolent foe  
 And sold to slavery. Of my redemption thence  
 And portance in my traveler's history, [...] *...*  
 It was my hint to speak—such was my process;  
 And of the cannibals that each other eat,  
 The anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
 Do grow beneath their shoulders. *These things to hear*  
*Would Desdemona seriously incline; [...]*  
 --Shakespeare, *Othello* (I.iii.128-146; emphasis added)

This chapter examines how speculation underwrites what I have termed an “imperial seduction trope.” We find this trope—one that carries echoes of Shakespeare’s *Othello*—in poetry written by EIC soldiers and employees; in published accounts of imperial emigration (including a periodical essay by James Austen, brother of the novelist); and in Walter Scott’s remarkable Anglo-Indian novel *The Surgeon’s Daughter* (1827). In these works and others, a typical scenario recurs in which a young man of straitened means or limited prospects is seduced by alluring accounts—either oral or discursive—into speculating on a colonial career in the EIC, only to have his “visionary dreams of sudden grandeur, and easily-acquired opulence” (James Austen “Vexations” n.p.) burst by the realities of imperial service. Young men are figured as

veritable Desdemonas, entranced by stories of exotic travels, unlimited wealth, adventure, heroism, and so on, in what constitutes a revised or adapted version of the third Earl of Shaftesbury's influential argument about Shakespeare's play as originally set forth in his *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (included in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* [1711]). As Felicity Nussbaum notes,

Believing that Shakespeare especially catered to readers' passionate desire for fantastic tales, Shaftesbury tells his readers that Othello is just such a tale weaver, a 'Moorish hero, full-fraught with prodigy, a wondrous story teller!' who seduced his 'fair lady' Desdemona with his invented histories. Superstitious, passionate, and above all womanish, *all eighteenth-century readers of wondrous stories* resemble Desdemona's succumbing to Othello's 'round unvarnish'd tale' [...] (*Limits* 4; emphasis added)

For many eighteenth-century writers and critics, Othello's "seduction" of the European Desdemona offered a cautionary tale that could be cited to warn impressionable young men and women of the dangers of reading travel narratives, exotic tales, and other "fantastical" and "monstrous" stories: "reading travel narratives deforms, pollutes, effeminates, and even blackens the English imagination. These imaginative geographies taint and seduce the population of England which is eager, like Desdemona, to gobble up travel tales" (*Limits* 5). While Nussbaum focuses primarily on "African tales" and anxieties about racial and sexual miscegenation, I reveal how a different "imaginative geography" (early colonial India) inspired outlandish and often spurious tales that were similarly believed to "taint" and "seduce" a population that seemed all too eager to "gobble" them up—and, more disturbingly, to *act upon them*.

In other words, the texts I examine in this chapter depict male readers as the dupes of home-based imperial fantasies and illusions—fantasies that are disseminated most powerfully through literary texts and cultural representations. By reinforcing the delusive prospect of India as a mine of easy and unlimited wealth and grandeur, many of the imperial travel narratives, Oriental tales, and other fictional texts published during the long eighteenth century thus function

in much the same way that imperial wealth itself (or its metonymic substitutes: diamonds, pearls, silks, spices, and so on) was believed to do: namely, corrupting Britons' "taste" and potentially enticing them to embark upon ill-advised attempts to act upon and realize imperial pipedreams. Because many of these works are autobiographical, however, we also find male writers strategically invoking this "seduction scenario" as well as the rhetoric of "speculation" in order to combat persistent (though, by the turn of the century, largely dated) anti-nabob stigma, and to elicit sympathy for those who, like themselves, have been ensnared by empire's own self-sustaining narrative lines and economic fantasies. If imperial tales often mimic the effects of imperial wealth by inflaming Britons' desires for luxury and adventure, the reverse could also be true; fiction and poetry could alternatively function as effective antidotes *against* such seductions.

#### **I. "Alas! the service is not what it was!": The Changing Financial Prospects in British India**

Alas! twice ten revolving years or more,  
Must prudence guide the helm and swell the store,  
Not one rupee in useless frolic spent,  
And steady interest at eight per cent.

--William Majendie, "Calcutta: A Poem" (1811)

Many, it has been said, make large fortunes in India, return to this country, and enjoy them. True it is, indeed, that some do; but they are as the eyes of the head in comparison to the hairs, two only to multitudes. Those few who do return are always heard of; whilst the thousands that fail in the desired acquisition of riches [...] fall into the gulf of oblivion silently, and unheard of, but by the few.

-- John Hobart Caunter, *The Cadet* (1814)

From the later 1780s and 1790s, financial prospects for EIC civil servants and soldiers were far from what they had been decades earlier, during the piquant years of the East India Bubble. As P.J. Marshall has noted, the twelve or so years following the Battle of Plassey "were the only time during the eighteenth century when survival in Bengal virtually guaranteed that a man would return home with a fortune" (*Fortunes* 234).<sup>124</sup> Ironically, by the time that periodical

essays, novels, poetry, travel narratives, and other texts made these shimmering prospects public knowledge, the bubble was already losing steam, and about to collapse: around “1770 or thereabouts,” Marshall continues, “declining profits in the inland trade, diminishing prospects for presents, and closer regulation of the perquisites of office by the Company were beginning to create new elements of uncertainty in the pursuit of a fortune” (234). Before long, “uncertainty” gave way to the disappointed realization that the era of quickly stockpiling nabob fortunes to enjoy back in England was, with the occasional exception, over. As Renu Juneja notes, “The heyday of nabobery [was] between 1760 and 1785, and it end[ed] with the reforms undertaken by Cornwallis in the 1790’s” (184). Cornwallis, as discussed in Chapter Two, took over as Governor-General after Hastings was called back to England and impeached. Buoyed by public outrage over Clive’s and then Hastings’ failure to clean up house (or Company), the new Governor-General embarked upon a series of ambitious reforms aimed at rooting out opportunities for speculation and corruption amongst the Company’s employees—most notably, by banning private, “in country” trading and by prohibiting them from accepting “presents” or “gifts” from native Indian rulers and intermediaries. These two actions alone severely hindered opportunities for accumulating “the kind of private wealth which had led to the creation of the nabobs” (Juneja 184). Historically, EIC employee salaries were miniscule precisely because private trading was so pervasive and so lucrative; Cornwallis therefore raised pay levels in an (insufficient) attempt to make up the difference. These reforms did more than just stymie opportunities for amassing nabob-sized fortunes; as Lawson notes in his history of the Company, “Cornwallis introduced a professional ethos into the Company’s bureaucracy. The motives for this reform have a modern ring. To induce Company servants to relinquish their involvement in and need for private trade, along with the unsavoury behaviour associated with such transactions,

Cornwallis approved appointments based on merit with fixed, attractive salary scales. The injection of pride and incorruptibility as ideals in service to the Company proved a novel and welcome reform” (Lawson 129). The establishment of Haileybury College in 1804 and implementation of a standard course of study for incoming Company servants offers a prime example of the new, “professional ethos” Lawson mentions.

In the short term, however, Cornwallis’ reforms proved far from “welcome” to the hopeful new recruits and arrivals who persisted in clinging to the outdated and delusory fantasies of rapidly-acquired wealth and opulence that were still being promulgated in the media and in popular culture. But as we shall see, fiction and poetry also provided a venue in which these men could voice (and thereby work through) their disillusion and regret; counter pervasive misperceptions and false assumptions regarding imperial service; and prevent others from repeating the same mistakes. I am *not* saying that Britons no longer made their fortunes in India; many did. But these were not the inordinate, oversized fortunes a small but prominent group of nabobs managed to stockpile decades earlier, nor were they speedily amassed: EIC employees typically needed twenty to thirty years or more to save up a competency that would allow them to return to and live comfortably in England. And that was only if they lived as frugally as possible whilst in Bengal, as one of the speakers in William Henry Majendie’s poetic dialogue “Calcutta: A Poem” (1811) makes clear: “Alas! twice ten revolving years or more, / Must prudence guide the helm and swell the store, / Not one rupee in useless frolic spent, / And steady interest at eight per cent” (304). Given the notoriously high and even ruinous cost of living in Calcutta and the other British presidencies, however, that was a big *if*. While Cornwallis is credited for raising the pay scales for junior civil servants to a “living wage” in 1793 (S.C. Ghosh 67), numerous testimonials from the period confirm that it was a “living” wage in name

only.

Further, the swelling of the Company's military ranks ensured that "the vast majority of the forty thousand or so Europeans in India by 1800 were enlisted as *soldiers*" (Jasanoff *Edge* 82; emphasis added). This is significant because, as Suresh Chandra Ghosh notes, "rates of promotion grew slower and slower as the century advanced, with subalterns frequently detained in the same rank for twenty or more years (67). Stuck in low-level, subaltern positions with few opportunities for promotion or advancement, many EIC soldiers found that they had "limited chances of returning to Europe"; indeed, "one in four [of these soldiers] would die in India" (Jasanoff *Edge* 82). Despite all this, EIC appointments (especially in the civilian branches) were still in high demand, and securing the more promising positions usually required the assistance of a powerful patron or a well-placed relation within the Company's leadership. For members of the aspiring middle classes and particularly those hailing from the "internal" colonies of Scotland and Ireland, EIC positions continued to provide a much-sought-after opportunity to achieve the kinds of economic and class mobility that might not otherwise have been available to them.<sup>125</sup>

## II. "[F]ond delusion! Prospects nursed in vain!": Demystification and Disappointment in Anglo-Indian Poetry

He sees, with an indignant frown,  
His *airy* castles tumbling down;  
All his fair claims are soon forgot—  
Mendacity must be his lot:  
He scorns to act an *abject* part,  
And droops beneath a broken heart.

--William Combe, *The Grand Master; or, The Adventures of Qui Hi in Hindostan* (1816)

Given the contexts sketched out above, we are better equipped to consider several poems written and published by EIC civil servants and soldiers around the turn of the nineteenth century. A veritable sub-genre emerged at this time, one in which Company servants related their disappointed hopes and unmet expectations, often as a prelude to more accurate or truthful

account of matters that was explicitly intended to demystify others and prevent them from repeating the same mistakes: as Majendie asserts in the preface to “Calcutta,” for instance, the poem was written in order to “put the world in possession of more correct ideas of Asiatic life than are generally entertained in England.” Of course, one of the primary “ideas” in need of correction was that Indian service was a road to vast and swiftly amassed wealth. On the contrary, Anglo-Indian newspapers were peppered with poems in which Company employees bemoaned the difficulty of supporting themselves on their scanty, intro-level salaries without going into significant debt. One prime example is “Ninety-five,” published in the *Calcutta Gazette* (Thursday, 8 March 1787) and attributed to “Jacob Sorrowful.” The title refers to the salary of 95 Rs (rupees sicca) earned by subalterns in the EIC armies during this time. As the opening stanzas immediately make clear, this salary—which is compared to “servants’ wages”—proved far from sufficient, forcing subalterns to devise “a thousand different ways and means to keep [themselves] from starving”:

I am a younger son of Mars, and spend my time in carving  
A thousand different ways and means to keep myself from starving;  
For how with servants’ wages, Sirs, and clothes can I contrive  
To rent a house, and feed myself on scanty ninety-five.

Six mornings out of seven, I lie in bed to save  
The only coat, my pride can boast, the Service ever gave;  
And as for eating twice a day, as hereto-fore, I strive  
To measure out my frugal meal by scanty ninety-five. (st. 1-2)

The poet sketches a bleak portrait of imperial service characterized by disappointment and, as his pseudonym confirms, *sorrow*:

The chit chat hour spent in grief, I trudge it home again,  
And try by smoking half the night, to smoke away my pain;  
But all my hopes are fruitless, and I must still contrive  
To do the best a hero can on scanty ninety-five.

Alack! that e’er I left my friends, to seek my fortune here,

And gave my solid pudding up, for such uncertain fare;  
 Oh! had I chose the better way, and staid at home to thrive,  
 I had not known what 'tis to live on scanty ninety-five. (st. 5-6)

While it might not have been a total revelation that low-level soldiers and new recruits were far from rolling in rupees, the fact that many apparently struggled just to feed and clothe themselves<sup>126</sup> must have shocked metropolitan Britons who had been regaled with accounts of Eastern splendor and wealth for decades. Further, there is no suggestion of any kind of alternative recompense that might alleviate Sorrowful's sorrows (friendship; the thrill of travel; the joy of immersing oneself in a new culture; and so on). Ultimately, for this subaltern at least, EIC service proved to be a failed gamble—one that left him lonely, hungry and depressed, desperately trying to “smoke away [his] pain.” By writing and publishing this cautionary tale, however, Sorrowful might convince other men to think twice about giving up their “solid pudding” for such “uncertain fare.”

Besides the scanty pay earned by cadets and new recruits, the amount of time required to save up enough money to return to England (typically twenty to twenty-five years at minimum) also surprised and chagrined Britons whose understanding of EIC service had been warped and distorted by the glittering success-stories of Clive, Rumbold, and other “nabobs” from a bygone era. John Leyden's (1775-1811) “Ode to an Indian Gold Coin”<sup>127</sup> is another Anglo-Indian poem filled with expressions of sorrow and regret. In this poem, however, the speaker has secured a decent-sized fortune (emblemized in the titular “Indian Gold Coin”). The key question the poem asks is, *at what cost*: “Slave of the dark and dirty mine! / What vanity has brought thee here? / How can I love to see thee shine / So bright, *whom I have bought so dear*?” (l.1-4; emphasis added). Though he has managed to stockpile a respectable sum, he has done so only *after* spending many, many years painfully exiled from his beloved family and friends. Indeed,



the poem is filled with expressions of longing for the now deceased wife he left in Scotland (l.27-31) and for the home on the Banks of the Teviot to which he desperately longs to return (l. 11-14; 73-96). These passages only make the bitter irony at the poem's heart more painful to process, for just when the speaker can finally afford to return home, he finds himself too old and too sickly to be able to withstand such a journey:

For thee, for thee, vile yellow slave,  
                   I left a heart that loved me true!  
 I cross'd the tedious ocean-wave,  
                   To roam in climes unkind and new. [...] (l. 33-36)

Ha! Comest thou now so late to mock  
                   A wanderer's banish'd heart forlorn,  
 Now that his frame the lightning shock  
                   Of sun-rays tipt with death has borne?  
                   From love, from friendship, country, torn,  
 To memory's fond regrets the prey,  
                   Vile slave, thy yellow dross I scorn!—  
 Go mix thee with thy kindred clay! (l. 41-48)

Leyden's frequent deployment of climate and weather metaphors to figure for his beloved home in Scotland ("my sacred natal clime" [l. 21]) takes on added significance when we consider that the poem's speaker blames the Indian climate ("climes unkind and new"; "sun-rays tipt with death") for rendering him incapable of returning home and for ultimately "hasten[ing]" him to an "untimely grave." The "Indian Gold Coin" he now spurns has cost him "love, [...] friendship, [and] country" (l. 45), but also his own life. In the end, imperial wealth cannot compensate for what has been lost in the lengthy search for it; the speaker's "Indian Gold Coin" has been dearly bought, indeed.

William Majendie's poetic dialogue "Calcutta: A Poem" (1811) features a disappointed new arrival (or "griffin") whose "fond delusion[s]" have similarly been shattered upon arrival in India.<sup>128</sup> Unlike "Ninety-Five" or "Ode to an Indian Gold Coin," however, this poem explicitly

locates the source of these delusions in the “tales” the young man read and the stories he was plied with back in England—thus offering the first example of the “seduction trope” I mentioned at the beginning. The poem’s tone is aggressive and “bitter” rather than “sorrowful,” as the young man opens by “curs[ing]” the ship that brought him to India: “Curse on the ship in evil hour that bore / My jolted frame to India’s burning shore! / An inauspicious hour, from which I date / The bitter torments of a wretched fate” (303). He proceeds to explain how the “visionary image” that “nursed” his ambitions and drove him to “India’s burning shore” was one shaped by fictional narratives and misleading anecdotes:

Deluded, listening to the tales they told,  
Lands rich in mines, and rivers streaming gold;  
Whence twelve short years in Luxury’s lap beguiled,  
Would bear me homeward, Fortune’s favourite child,  
To pass my days in some secure retreat,  
Or grace the mazes of St. James’s Street;  
Even then, in fancy drawn with bays or roans,  
I seized the reins, and rattled o’er the stones;  
[...]  
Oh! fond delusion! prospects nursed in vain  
The rude creation of a thoughtless brain!  
A visionary image, formed to shun  
The melting gaze of India’s fervid sun!  
Now, sad reverse! the rich delusion flies,  
House, park, and carriage vanish from my eyes! (303-4)

The poem takes on a more topical edge when the young man denounces Cornwallis’s reforms (particularly his decision to outlaw the acceptance of “nuzzas,” or presents), arguing that “rules and scruples all our prospects blast”:

Alas! the service is not what it was!  
How much degen’rate from those golden days,  
When money streamed a thousand different ways,  
When hands and pockets wisely understood  
No rule of guidance but their master’s good:  
Ere yet we ventured honesty to sham,  
And drew no profit from the low salaam;  
Thought it not fault, whatever were the drift,

To take a handsome nuzza as a gift!  
 Now rules and scruples all our prospects blast,  
 Touch but the money, and you lose your caste. (306)

The young man's interlocutor, a long-term resident in India, encourages him to buck up and face reality. He urges his impetuous junior to embrace temperance and to live within his means, while reminding him that prosperity and reward must be *earned* through steady application and merit. Though good advice, it seems to fall on deaf ears; the young man appears unable to square the present realities with his past illusions, and his disappointment and bitterness continue largely unabated for the rest of the poem. But while the young griffin apparently finds little solace in such advice, the author, like "Jacob Sorrowful," hopes that readers will heed the message and discard (or at least question) "visionary image[s]" of India and imperial service—an act that involves accepting some inconvenient truths.

This trope of a young man having his illusions of wealth, ease, and luxury burst upon arrival in India is repeated in a slew of additional poems published during this era, from John Hobart Caunter's *The Cadet; A Poem* (1814) to William Combe's *The Grand Master; or, Adventures of Qui Hi in Hindostan; A Hudibrastic Poem in Eight Cantos* (1816) to James Atkinson's "City of Palaces" (1824) to Charles D'Oyly's *Tom Raw, the Griffin: A Burlesque Poem in Twelve Cantos* (1828). Like Majendie in "Calcutta," many of these authors target the role of literary representation and narrative ("listening to the tales they told") in fomenting the "fond delusion[s]" of imperial service that lure eager young men to speculate on an EIC career. John Hobart Caunter's *The Cadet* is particularly notable in this respect. Caunter (1792-1851) travelled to India around 1810 to join the 34<sup>th</sup> regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry. Apparently finding "nothing on the Continent of Asia to interest him," he turned to literary pursuits to pass the time before returning to England to start a new career in the clergy. *The*

*Cadet*, his longest and most autobiographical work, vividly details his regret over his initial career choice. Caunter condemns almost every aspect of life in British India: the weather and climate; the native inhabitants; the local religions and customs; the EIC and its materialistic employees; the questionable moral character of female adventuresses and matrimonial speculators; and so on. “The general picture of India is drawn,” he concedes in the preface, “by no means from a favourable impression; but it was taken just as it appeared [...] to my observation” (xi). We can certainly question whether his own disappointments—including the death of his father just before Caunter arrived in India to join him—clouded his “impression[s]” of Anglo-Indian society and culture. What I would like to examine, however, are the ways in which Caunter invokes the “narrative seduction” trope described at the beginning of this chapter, and explicitly ties it to his decision to “speculate” (44) on a cadetship in the EIC’s army.

From the very first line—nay, the very first word—Caunter targets the “delu[sions]” that prompted him to emigrate and join the Company’s service years earlier:

DELUDED Youth! as Rumour swells the gale,  
 And Fancy spreads her visionary sail,— [...]
 Thine artless ear imbibes the frequent lie,  
 That Earth’s best blessings show’r from India’s sky;  
 That Naure sheds profusion o’er the soil,  
 Nor asks the ruder drudgery of toil; [...]
 Thou hear’st that wealth by little heed is gain’d,  
 And life at no important cost maintain’d;  
 That ev’ry bliss ambitious man can know,  
 Is here secur’d, nor ever dash’d with wo[e]—  
 Accurs’d Deceit! (2)

With “Golconda’s treasures danc[ing] before [his] eyes” and his “warm’d mind form[ing] castles in the skies,” the young man proves unable to resist “Rumour’s luring voice” and casts the “fatal die” (2; 3; 4). Yet when his “feet” finally “impress th’ ungenial shore, / Those air-rear’d structures fall, to rise no more” (4). Throughout, Caunter draws upon air imagery and bubble

figures (“swells the gale,” “castles in the skies,” “air-rear’d structures”) to denounce the false promise (or what he calls the “frequent lie”) of abundant imperial bounty and easeful splendor. This critical lexicon is supplemented by another involving gambling metaphors and tropes (“the rashly fatal die is thrown”), with the two ultimately coming together in the discourse and rhetoric of “speculation”: “Why did ye quit a kind, indulgent home, / And challenge sad vicissitudes to come? / May your experience make hereafter wise / All who would *speculate* ‘neath Indian skies” (44; emphasis added).

What is particularly revealing about Caunter’s deployment of this term is how he attributes the “airy structures” (or imaginative projections and impressions) that drove him to “gamble” on an EIC career to his reading of “treach’rous tales”:

Why did’st thou listen to the treach’rous tales,  
That wealth is blown on Oriental gales;  
That spicy breezes waft perfumes around,  
And Earth’s best produce loads the fruitful ground; [...]  
Did’st thou conceive, as fabulists have told,  
That Eastern rocks are form’d of massy gold?  
That copious wealth descends with vernal show’rs,  
And lolling Lux’ry lightens lagging hours?  
That gems refulgent sparkle o’er the sands [...] (5)

“Well may I mourn the folly of my choice, / And curse the hour I dwelt on Falsehood’s voice,” Caunter concludes, before applying his personal experience to a generalization about young Britons: “Did not Deception lull the youthful mind, / How few would leave their parent homes behind!” (6). Like many of his fellow Anglo-Indian poets, Caunter can be accused here of clinging to an idealized, emotionally-rooted fantasy of “home” that seems just as delusory as the false image of India perpetuated in the “treach’rous tales” he condemns. Regardless, his scripting of imperial emigration and service as a “speculation,” and his causative tethering of speculation to the baneful effects of reading alluring and blatantly “false” (8) narratives, offer prime

examples of how authors could co-opt or turn the rhetoric of speculation to their own ends—in this case, finding a means of explaining and justifying Caunter’s own failed gamble on an EIC career. We also find further evidence of the ways in which speculation’s originary significations continued to inflect its newer semantic resonances: in this poem, taking risks with thought *leads* to taking risks with (or in the pursuit of) *money*.

Turning from poetry to prose, I’d like to examine two additional texts that reflect but also build upon the “seduction” scenario outlined above: James Austen’s fictional essay on the “Vexations attending the pursuit, and possession of wealth” (1789) and Walter Scott’s novel *The Surgeon’s Daughter* (1827). Both James Austen and Scott depict young men who have their “head[s] turned” by “Oriental Grandeur” and the mythic prospect of India as “that Country, where riches were so easily to be acquired” (Austen “Vexations” n.p.). And the latter, by directly citing Othello’s “narrative seduction” of Desdemona with fantastic tales of his travels and adventures, demonstrates most clearly how this famous scene provided an allegory by which to critique the seductive allure not just of India, but of Indian *fictions*, on impressionable young men and women.

### III. Turning Heads: James Austen’s “letter from Indicus”

India, and diamonds! [...] Is your head turned, child?  
--Scott, *The Surgeon’s Daughter* (1827)

the blaze of Oriental Grandeur, completely turned my head [...]  
--James Austen, “Vexations” (1789)

On 31 January 1789, James and Henry Austen, then students at Oxford, published the debut issue of *The Loiterer*, a journal modeled after the popular “essay serials” of Addison and Steele, Johnson’s *The Rambler*, and Mackenzie’s *The Lounger*. The periodical was praised in the *Critical Review* (#70 [1790]) for its “easy and elegant style” and “faithful descriptions of life and manners,” and ran for sixty numbers, with the last installment appearing on 20 March 1790. As

A. Walton Litz noted long ago, the *Loiterer* offers an intriguing “record of the ideas and opinions which prevailed in Jane Austen’s early environment,” and “reflect[s] the tastes of the Austen family at the time of Jane Austen’s first literary experiments” (“Loiterer” 252; 261). More recently, Li-Ping Geng has similarly argued that James and Henry’s journal “may have had a large share in the shaping of their sister’s literary identity” (580). (Indeed, some scholars believe that a satirical letter to the editors of the *Loiterer*, signed by “Sophia Sentiment,” was Austen’s first venture into print). Despite such arguments, however, analysis of specific *Loiterer* articles—either on their own terms or in relation to Austen’s literary corpus and contemporary fiction and popular culture—has proven rare. I’d like to begin to reverse this trend by examining James’ article “Vexations attending the pursuit, and possession of wealth, in a letter from *Indicus*,” published in *Loiterer* #23 (Saturday, July 4, 1789). Appearing shortly after the opening of the impeachment trial against Warren Hastings—an important though still widely unacknowledged friend, business partner, and patron of the Austen family—, James’ article offers a positive, strategic counter-scripting of a purported nabob that, given the family’s close personal and financial ties to the embattled former governor-general, calls for a much closer scrutiny of its ideological commitments and attendant representational strategies than I will necessarily be able to attempt here. What I will focus on is the role played by “Oriental Grandeur”—whether “real” or fictional/imaginary—in seducing the fictional correspondent (identified as “Indicus”) into speculating on an EIC career.

As he explains in the opening paragraphs of his letter, “Indicus” was “the youngest son of a country Gentleman” studying (albeit with little enthusiasm) to enter the clergy at Oxford when his parents’ death provided him with a small pittance that allowed him to choose a new path in life. Initially unable to decide on a career, Indicus relates how his fate was determined when he

accepted an invitation to visit a former childhood friend, “about this time returned from the East-Indies, with one of those sudden fortunes, which never fail to draw upon their possessors the admiration of the Vulgar, the envy of the Weak, and the pity of the Wise” (n.p.). One fortnight, he writes, “spent amidst the luxury of fashionable dissipation, and the blaze of Oriental Grandeur, *completely turned my head*, and determined me to waste no more time in this *dirty Island*, but to go at once to that Country, where riches were so easily to be acquired” (n.p.; first emphasis added). Surrounded by the sumptuous trappings of a nabob’s “magnificent Villa,” and regaled with stories of his friend’s improbable successes, Indicus finds himself spellbound: the idea “had so entirely taken possession of my mind, that it haunted my very Dreams. Sometimes I found myself carried in an elegant Palanquin, attended by a long train of Blacks; and at others inclined at my ease on a rich Sopha, while my careful Slaves drove away the Mosquitoes with their fans. I now settled the accounts with my *Circars*, now counted imaginary Lacks, and admired the lustre of ideal Diamonds” (n.p.). His feverish visions of luxury, ease, and splendor are “speculations” in the original sense of the word: mental “pictures” or images that have little to no grounding in concrete realities. Despite the “fruitless expostulations” of his friends and family, however, Indicus pushes forward, determined to act upon and attempt to realize these “dreams”—another form of speculation.

Before long, Indicus secures a writership with the EIC and finds himself on board an East-Indiaman with “several young men, who were going on the same errand with myself”:

some in the civil, and some in the military line, but all equally sure of making their fortunes: a circumstance which made our voyage extremely pleasant; for as we were alike young, enterprising, and thoughtless, we were soon on terms of the highest intimacy; communicated our schemes and hopes to each other, and parcelled out between us almost all the offices in Bengal. Nor did the eagerness of competition, or the jealousy of rivalry ever derange our plans, or interrupt our harmony; for though we were a numerous party, and each was sanguine in his particular expectations, yet we wisely



considered that India was an extensive country, and that probably there was money enough for us all. (n.p.)

Drawn together by their shared hopes and dreams, the men forge bonds of sociability and “intimacy,” each one’s sanguine expectations validating the others’ with little sense of rivalry or competition (though we catch a hint of anxiety in the “probably” tucked into the last sentence). Yet we soon learn that none of them, Indicus included, have any concrete idea *how* they will amass the “money” they seem so certain of amassing: “For my own part, I had never once considered how the fortune, I expected to make, was to be earned; *that* I thought it was time enough to know when I got there, nor ‘till I arrived in India was I quite certain that Diamonds were not to be found in the Streets of Calcutta; or that the Ganges did not run, like the Pactolus, over Golden Sands” (n.p.). Here, Austen points again to the delusions about Indian wealth so common to his era. When Indicus finally arrives, these “visionary dreams of sudden grandeur, and easily-acquired opulence” give way “to the painful reality of unremitted attention, and uninteresting labour.” “I now found,” he writes,

that the rapid acquisition of wealth, so dazzling to the eyes of youth and inexperience, was, comparatively speaking, the lot of but few; while the far greater part of those who ever returned home with any considerable fortunes, were content to make them after many years severe toil and close application.—It was now, however, too late to go back.

In this by now familiar scenario, Indicus’ “visionary dreams” give way to “severe” and “painful” realities. He recognizes that he set *himself* up for a fall by passively and uncritically accepting fabulous tales and exaggerated stories, using them to build airy visions (or *speculations*) of wealth, ease, and grandeur; and then acting upon these chimaeras by speculating on imperial service and migrating to Bengal. How he handles this disappointment, however, is equally revealing. Rather than bemoaning his lot, blaming others, or sinking into passive despair, he “submit[s] to his fate” and dedicates himself to a job that offers none of the adventure,

excitement, or instant gratification (or compensation) he and his ship-board comrades had so confidently expected. After “*thirty years*, spent amidst the toil of business, the pressure of anxiety, and the pangs of ill health,” he “thought [himself] a lucky man in being able to return to [his] native country at the age of fifty-three, with an emaciated form, a shattered constitution, and an Hundred Thousand Pounds” (emphasis added). In these details, we witness a deliberate attempt by the author to rescript imperial careers by distancing them from nabobery, pillage and plunder, risky speculations and quick windfalls, and associating them instead with labor, application, merit, and the “slow, steady accrual of riches” advocated by Thomas Oldham in Foote’s *The Nabob*. Further, like the speaker in Leyden’s “Ode to a Gold Indian Coin,” Indicus stresses that his wealth has come at a steep price: “an emaciated form” and a “shattered constitution.” In the end, James Austen offers a much more sanitized, sympathetic portrait of an EIC employee than readers might have expected at a historical moment in which Hastings’ sensational impeachment trial (begun less than a year before Austen published his article) was reviving negative impressions of EIC employees as predatory, debauched mercenaries and speculating nabobs. (In this light, we might also think of Jane Austen’s sympathetic characterization of Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*, a novel which, in its initial epistolary form, she began writing sometime during the 1790s).

Further, Indicus finds that his hard-earned fortune brings him little pleasure once back in England. After purchasing a “noble Mansion” in which to retire, furnishing it, and completing his domestic arrangements, Indicus “thr[ows] open [his] doors” to his friends and acquaintance and “resolves to be very happy.” He soon regrets his “open-door” policy when he finds himself continually targeted and dunned by neighbors, friends, and family. His haughty neighbors only show up to “dr[i]nk at [his] expence,” and “harangue with fluency and zeal on the insignificancy

of upstart East Indians,” while a “numerous Troop” of distant relations he barely knows repeatedly make demands upon their “rich relation” from the East-Indies, “tak[ing] it into their heads,” he complains, “that I am nothing more than their Steward, and am accountable to them for every sixpence I lay out.” Indeed, Indicus finds himself “as little my own master as the meanest of my Dependants [sic], [with] all the torment of managing a large Estate, [but] without the pleasure of spending it in the manner I like.” He concludes by comically expressing his determination to “turn [my relatives’] names out of my Will, and their persons out of my House; marry a young Wife, and have a family of Children on purpose to spite them.”

Reminiscent of Mackenzie’s earlier satirical essays on nabobs (discussed in Chapter One), though written from an opposing standpoint, James Austen’s article on imperial wealth offers another—albeit a more comical—version of the seduction narrative frequently encountered in Anglo-Indian poetry and fiction during this period. As with many of the speakers in the poetry discussed earlier, Indicus falls victim to the spurious promises and alluring enticements of imperial siren-songs, which convince him to make a ill-conceived gamble on an EIC career. His ability to recognize his mistakes and embrace labor, steady application, and slowly-but-steadily amassed compensation based on skill and merit rather than risk or chance, however, ultimately allow him to return back to England with a handsome fortune that, in yet another twist, fails to bring much pleasure or enjoyment.

Walter Scott’s novel *The Surgeon’s Daughter*, on the other hand, offers a much more tragic vision of what happens when young men are seduced by misleading tales of imperial bounty and largesse into speculating on empire. In this case, however, the Othello trope that has been largely suggestive in the texts analyzed up to this point becomes explicit (Scott directly

quotes from the play), lending a curious though revealing erotic charge to the narrative seduction at the center of Scott's little-studied Anglo-Indian novel.

#### **IV. *Seriously Inclining*: Imperial Tales and Narrative Seduction in Scott's *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827)**

These things to hear / Would Desdemona seriously incline [...]  
--Shakespeare, *Othello*

To hear all this did Richard seriously incline [...]  
-- Scott, *The Surgeon's Daughter*

Like the two other tales included in Walter Scott's volume *Chronicles of the Canongate*, *The Surgeon's Daughter* follows Scots men and women as they cross national, economic, and cultural borders in search of opportunity. In this section, I will be focusing upon the anti-hero (and eventual villain) of the novel, Richard Middlemas, and particularly the role that narratives play in the formation of the romanticized, delusory conceptions of India and of imperial wealth that inspire him to abandon both his medical studies and the woman he loves in order to become a colonial adventurer on the subcontinent—with ultimately tragic consequences. I argue that a previously unnoted and unanalyzed allusion to Shakespeare's *Othello* in the novel interpolates a complicated critical history in which travel narratives, Oriental tales, and related colonial romances are targeted as agents of a potentially “miscegenous” narrative seduction scenario that recalls the poetry and periodical essays analyzed thus far in this chapter.

The novel opens with the unexpected arrival of a mysterious, dark-complexioned couple (later revealed to be a wealthy Sephardic Jewess named Zilia Moncada and an English nabob and interloper named Richard Tresham) at the home of Gideon Grey, a surgeon in the Scottish highlands. Grey doesn't know what to make of these strangers, but immediately offers his assistance to the suspiciously masked woman, who is going into labor. The couple refuses to divulge any details regarding their identity or situation, and after the surgeon delivers the woman of a boy, they hastily depart, leaving the child in the care of the doctor, with whom they remit a

“considerable sum of money” for his care as well as a “ring set with brilliants, which seemed of considerable value” (173). To make matters even more dubious, before departing the man warns the surgeon not to allow the child to seek them out or “intrude himself” upon them in the future, lest they rescind their “favour and protection” (i.e., halt all financial assistance). Despite the mysterious appeals for secrecy, Grey and his wife agree to take in and raise the young boy as their own. And when the boy, whom they name Richard Middlemas, reaches the appropriate age, Grey takes him on as an apprentice in his medical practice.

Richard, however, proves ill-suited for his intended career, namely because his loquacious childhood nurse, Mrs. Jamieson, has regaled the boy with “lore” concerning “what she called the awful season of his coming into the world”:

the personable appearance of his father, a grand gentleman, who looked as if the whole world lay at his feet—the beauty of his mother, and the terrible blackness of the mask which she wore, her een that glanced like diamonds, and the diamonds she wore on her fingers, that could be compared to nothing but her own een, the fairness of her skin, and the colour of her silk rokelay, with much proper stuff to the same purpose. (180)

Not particularly interested in (or capable of) sticking to the facts, the Nurse “indulge[s] her own talent for amplification,” and adds “so many additional circumstances, and gratuitous commentaries, that the real transaction, mysterious and odd as it certainly was, sunk into tameness, like humble prose contrasted with the boldest flights of poetry” (180). Her stories “excite the most ambitious visions in the [...] [boy’s] mind”: “The incidents of his birth resembled those he found commemorated in the tales which he read or listened to; and there seemed no reason why they should not have a termination corresponding to those of such veracious histories” (181). Connecting Nurse Jamieson’s “flattering” accounts of his birth and parentage to the boy’s reading of fantastic “tales,” romances, and “histories” of adventure and travel, Scott likens the overall effect to that of Othello’s stories on Desdemona, who “seriously

inclin'd" so as to better "devour" up the noble Moor's "discourse" with a "greedy ear": "To hear all this did Richard *seriously incline*" (180; emphasis added). (Rather surprisingly, the editors of the Penguin edition of the novel from which I quote neglect to comment upon or even identify this allusion). What are we to make of this previously unnoted reference? Though she does not discuss Scott's work, Felicity Nussbaum's analysis of Shaftesbury's interpretation of the seduction scene in *Othello* (discussed in the introduction to this chapter) offers a useful starting point. As Nussbaum suggests, Shaftesbury interpreted *Othello*'s successful wooing of Desdemona with "monstrous," exotic accounts of his travels and adventures as an allegory by which to bemoan the narrative seduction of English readers and the attendant adulteration of their imaginations and "taste." In this respect, "*all* eighteenth-century readers of wondrous stories resemble Desdemona's succumbing to *Othello*'s 'round unvarnish'd tale' [...]" ("Limits" 4; emphasis added). Through his allusion to *Othello* in this scene, Scott implies that Middlemas has, Quixote-like, succumbed to the romance narratives and adventure tales his nurse reads him. What is crucial for my purposes is how this allusion sets up—and is directly linked to—*another* moment of "narrative seduction" in the novel, this one involving an EIC servant and his enticing tales of "Oriental wealth and Oriental luxury" (201).

The return of Richard's childhood acquaintance Tom Hillary sets the stage for another scene of narrative seduction—one that is explicitly linked to the earlier description of Nurse Jamieson's narrative effusions and their effect on the impressionable young man. When Richard first encounters Hillary after the latter's return from India, he is surprised to see "a very different sort of personage from that which he [had] seemed at his departure": "He was now called Captain; his dress was regimental, and his language martial. He seemed to have plenty of cash [...]" (201). Here, the narrator interjects with a revealing rejoinder:

It was about the middle of the eighteenth century, and the directors in Leadenhall Street were silently laying the foundation of that immense empire, which afterwards rose like an exhalation, and now astonishes Europe, as well as Asia, with its formidable extent, and stupendous strength. *Britain had now begun to lend a wondering ear* to the account of battles fought and cities won, in the East; and was surprised by the return of individuals who had left their native country as adventurers, but now appeared surrounded by Oriental wealth and Oriental luxury, which dimmed even the splendour of the most wealthy of the British nobility. In this new-found El Dorado, Hillary had, it seems, been a labourer, and, if he told truth, to some purpose, though he was far from having completed the harvest which he meditated. (201; emphasis added)

In the italicized lines, Scott alludes once again to the Othello-Desdemona passage referenced earlier. In this case, however, “Britain” itself is the eager listener (Desdemona), “lend[ing] a wondering ear to the accounts of battles fought and cities won.” This passage is significant because it sets up the eventual meeting between Middlemas and Hillary in which the latter *seems* to offer tangible proof that India was indeed a “new-found El Dorado,” thereby convincing Middlemas once and for all to commence a colonial adventurer. I emphasized the word “seems” in the last sentence because Scott clearly casts doubts as to whether Hillary actually is the man he appears (and states himself) to be: “Hillary had, *it seems*, been a labourer, and, *if he told truth....*” These qualifiers drive to the crux of the matter, for Hillary’s exaggerated and purposefully misleading account (significantly, he is later revealed to be a *recruiting* Captain) dazzles Middlemas and convinces him to voyage to and lay siege upon this reputed new El-Dorado.

When considered in relation to the Othello/Desdemona allusions, Scott’s description of Middlemas and Hillary’s reunion reads unabashedly as a seduction scene, with subtle and not so subtle hints of eroticism. I am not suggesting that Scott indicates homosexual attraction, but, rather, uses these erotic tensions to highlight the seductive allure of the East (real and imagined) by foregrounding the seductiveness of narrative itself, with words evoking palpable sensations and physical responses in Middlemas:

It was indeed impossible for a youth, at once inexperienced in the world, and possessed of a most sanguine disposition, to listen without sympathy to the glowing descriptions of Hillary [...] Palaces rose like mushrooms in his descriptions; groves of lofty trees, and aromatic shrubs unknown to the chilly soils of Europe, were tenanted by every object of the chase, from the royal tiger down to the jackal. The luxuries of a Natch, and the peculiar Oriental beauty of the enchantresses who performed their voluptuous Eastern dances, for the pleasure of the haughty English conquerors, were no less attractive than the battles and sieges on which the Captain at other times expatiated. Not a stream did he mention but flowed over sands of gold [...] His descriptions seemed steeped in odours, and his every phrase perfumed in ottar of roses. The interviews at which these descriptions took place often ended in a bottle of choicer wine than the Swan Inn afforded [...] (203)

The description of “Natch” (or Nautch) girls enticing Englishmen with “their voluptuous Eastern dances” doubles for the “enchantment” performed by Hillary’s “voluptuous” *words* on Richard Middlemas. Indeed, Scott emphasizes how the Captain’s tales prompt powerful sensory responses in Richard: “His descriptions seems steeped in odours, and his every phrase perfumed in ottar of roses.” Hillary’s intoxicating Eastern narratives entice and draw his listener in like costly Eastern perfumes, and Richard becomes as drunk on words as does on the “choic[e]” wines Hillary serves him in what constitutes a potent reminder of the power of narrative generally, and Eastern or “Oriental” tales in particular. Here, I challenge Tara Ghoshal Wallace’s argument that “Richard learns romance from a mother-figure [Nurse Jamieson] at home rather than from exotic tales from abroad” (“Elephant’s Foot” 319). In fact, the narrator specifically notes that, “it was from Hillary’s conversations, that [Richard] had adopted [his] enthusiasm respecting India” (203). Further, I would suggest that it is not a simple matter of either/or, for Scott connects the two sources of Richard’s “enthusiasm” through the Othello/Desdemona allusion and the “narrative seduction” trope I have been tracing: “The Indian Captain’s lavish oratory supplied the themes which had been at first derived from the legends of the nursery; the exploits of a Lawrence and a Clive, as well as the magnificent opportunities of acquiring wealth to which these exploits opened the road, disturbed the slumbers of the young adventurer” (203).



Ultimately, Scott links the two sources of Richard's "enthusiasm," both of which constitute forms of narrative seduction. Taken together, they seal the young man's fate, and Middlemas departs for India despite his foster-father's objections and his secret engagement to the surgeon's daughter, Menie Grey.

In a twist, however, Scott elects to bring not only Richard, but his fellow apprentice (and rival for Menie's love) Adam Hartley, as well as Menie Grey herself to India. All three are thus implicated in the larger targeting of imperial wealth, but Scott makes sure to discriminate Adam's and Menie's intentions and motivations for making the journey. Hartley, for instance, certainly hopes to make his career and fortune there, but entertains no fantasies of colonial freebooting like those that draw his fellow apprentice; he enters the Company's service as a surgeon and diligently performs his duty before eventually succumbing to colonial disease (a "contagious distemper") himself. Menie Grey makes the voyage to join Richard, to whom she is secretly engaged (Richard invites her to join him, but absconds from the British settlements before she arrives after accidentally killing a superior officer whilst dueling another man). Instead of reuniting with Richard, Menie finds herself in the clutches of "Mother Montreville," an "adventuress" turned "Begum" (alternatively described as an "unsexed woman" and a "Zenobia") who schemes to make a "speculation" of the girl in the Indian marriage market—at least until, unbeknownst to Menie, she joins the traitorous Richard in a potentially more profitable speculation: a plot to sell Menie to Tipu Sultan in exchange for a governorship in Bangalore for Richard. This duplicitous scheme reveals the true extent of Middlemas' villainy, though careful reading reveals that Scott foreshadows the dastardly plot early on through diamond references and imagery. Indeed, like Edgeworth and other authors I have discussed in this dissertation, Scott employs diamonds as his favored metonymy for Indian wealth precisely

because their glittering facets embody, and their ritualized exchanges perform, ideals of conjugal love, marriage, sexual desire, and so on, at the same time that these gems interpolate complex histories of theft, intrigue, colonial exploitation, and abuse. For instance, well before he departs for India, Richard describes Menie as a “herself a gem—a diamond” (199). The diamond ring left to him by his mysterious parents (notably, a Portuguese Jewess and an English nabob) enflames his speculations about both his past (via Nurse Jamieson’s stories) as well as his intended future in India: when the kindly surgeon gives him the ring before his voyage, Richard thanks him for “this precious relic,” and promises to repay Grey “if India has [any] diamonds left” (209). “India, and diamonds!,” Grey responds, “Is your head turned, child?” “I mean,” Richard hastily responds, “if London has any Indian diamonds” (209). When we consider these diamond passages in relation to Richard’s plot with Mother Montreville to sell Menie (“herself [...] a diamond”) to Tipu Sultan in exchange for a governorship, we therefore recognize how he intends to trade a figurative “diamond” (Menie) for literal ones.

In the end, Richard’s villainy is exposed when Hartley discovers the scheme and informs Tipu Sultan’s father (Hyder Ali, in Scott’s spelling) of Richard’s sordid past and base intentions. Presenting himself to the Sultan, Richard, who has abandoned the EIC and committed a number of treasonous actions against the British, appears completely Indianized: his dress is “as magnificent in itself as it was remote from all European costume [...] His turban was of rich silk and gold, [...] and placed on one side of his head, its ends hanging down on the shoulder. His mustachoes were turned and curled, and his eyelids stained with antimony. The vest was of gold brocade, with a cummerbund, or sash, around his waist, corresponding to his turban” (280). While Desdemona’s succumbing to Othello’s tales, in Shaftesbury’s text and Nussbaum’s critical reading of it, functions as a cautionary tale by which to articulate fears over African sexuality

and sexual miscegenation, here we find Richard described in terms of *cultural* miscegenation (or what contemporaries termed “Indianization”). But just as he appears ready to realize the summit of his ambitions, Richard is unmasked, and consequently subjected to a spectacular form of “justice”: in an almost campy moment of theatricalized violence, he is trampled to death by an enormous elephant at Hyder Ali’s command, thus “put[ting] an end at once to his life and to his crimes” (284). The novel’s other two protagonists meet less fantastic, but also tragic ends: though Menie never reciprocated Hartley’s lifelong devotion and love, he nonetheless bequeaths to her “a considerable part of the moderate fortune” he has saved as a surgeon before succumbing to “a contagious distemper”; he dies, the narrator notes, “a victim to his professional courage” (285). Menie returns to Britain “unmarried though wealthy” (something, the narrator quips in a joke about the Indian marriage market, that “seldom occurs”), settles in her native village, and commences the life of a lonely spinster, her principal joy coming in indulging “acts of benevolence which seemed to exceed the extent of her fortune [...]” (285). Scott’s three characters in search of an Indian fortune find instead only disappointment, defeat, death, and sorrow. Adam Hartley, the true “hero” of the piece if there is one, does find financial compensation and reward, precisely because he carried no illusions about imperial service and resisted temptations to act the part of a nabob (by indulging in plunder, speculation, high-risk speculations, and so on). For Richard Middlemas, on the other hand, the siren songs of imperial wealth and splendor that fed his ambition and drove him to gamble on empire ultimately crush more than just his ambitions and dreams, reminding readers once again of folly and potentially disastrous consequences of chasing imperial castles made of sand, or speculating on speculations. But the novel’s exploration of various methods and means of imperial speculation is not contained within the narrative proper; as I discuss in the coda, an equally suggestive

meditation on the related issue of what we might call “authorial” speculation proceeds in the novel’s fascinating frame narrative.

## CODA

**“Stick to the East”: India, Imperial Riches, and Authorial Speculation**

India yet holds a Mythologic mine,  
 Her strength may open, and her art refine:  
 Tho’ Asian spoils the realms of Europe fill,  
 Those Eastern riches are unrifled still;  
 --William Hayley, *Essay on Epic Poetry* (Epistle V)  
 (1782)

Send her [the “Muse of Fiction”] to India, to be sure. That is the  
 true place for a Scot to thrive in [...]  
 --Scott, *The Surgeon’s Daughter*

In an oft-quoted 1813 letter to friend and fellow poet Thomas Moore, Byron relayed a prophecy delivered by “the oracle, [Madame de] Staël,” that carries significant implications for my analysis of the rhetoric of speculation in Anglo-Indian economic and literary discourses:

Stick to the East; – the oracle, Staël told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted; but from the East, we have nothing but [Southey’s] unsaleables – and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions. . . . The little I have done in that way is merely a ‘voice in the wilderness’ for you; and, if it has had any success, that also will prove that the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you.” (*Letters and Journals* 3: 101)

Byron’s (or, rather, de Staël’s) “poetical policy” proved to be sound fiscal policy: Moore secured the “gargantuan” (Leask 13) commission of 3,000 guineas from Longman’s for his “orientaliz[ed]” poem *Lalla Rookh* (1816). Unlike Southey’s “unsaleables” such as *Thalaba the Destroyer*—which Byron found to reflect a rather paranoid obsession with the Orient’s “most outrageous” fictions and mythologies that failed to make them marketable even to “Orientalizing” Western consumers—, Moore’s poem went on to become one of the more successful and popular long poems of the early nineteenth century. While Southey’s gamble in the literary marketplace foundered, Moore’s paid off, revealing one final way in which Britons

“speculated” on India and its reputed bounty during the long eighteenth century. In his trenchant analysis of “anxieties of empire” in British Romantic poetry, Nigel Leask remarks how in this letter, “Byron speaks like a Levantine or East India merchant who has tapped a lucrative source of raw materials in a newly opened up Orient, which he feels will make a splash on the home market” (13). This parallel between the “Orientalizing” British poet and the enterprising “East India merchant” emerges as a frequent motif during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one which reflects the changed realities of imperial service and a newfound understanding of “market” realities in both the imperial and literary realms. In other words, as the prospect of becoming a nabob and returning triumphant to Britain with a speedily won and stockpiled fortune was increasingly acknowledged to be a chimera of the past, authors such as Scott or Southey or Keats could plunder untapped “mines” of imperial bounty by writing “Orientalist” fiction and poetry—a less hazardous form of speculation.

Compare, for instance, Byron’s comments in the letter cited above to the following passage from Epistle V of William Hayley’s *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782):

India yet holds a Mythologic mine,  
Her strength may open, and her art refine:  
Tho’ Asian spoils the realms of Europe fill,  
Those Eastern riches are unrifled still;  
Genius may there his course of honor run,  
And spotless Laurels in that field be won. (109)

Like Byron, Hayley offers a “poetical policy” that targets a valuable trove of “Asian spoils” for the enterprising poet/adventurer—though one that, crucially, remains “unrifled still.” Even as early as 1782, Hayley suggests that the East India Bubble has burst: the “mines” of reputedly unlimited wealth have been tapped; “the realms of Europe” have *already* been “f[illed]” by “Asian spoils.” Writing about “India” or the “Orient” becomes a potentially more lucrative (and less hazardous) avenue by which to speculate on “Eastern riches.” Indeed, Thomas Moore was

not the only poet to heed Byron's and Hayley's advice: it is remarkable to note the number of authors who made their careers (or achieved their first literary triumphs) by publishing Indian-inspired fiction and poetry. (Even more remarkable is the fact that many of these writers seriously contemplated migrating to British stations on the subcontinent).<sup>129</sup> Besides Thomas Moore and Byron himself (although, strictly speaking, the latter's "Eastern Tales" are set largely in Turkey, the Levant, and Arabia), we have Elizabeth Inchbald establishing herself as a promising playwright (rather than just a mediocre actress) with the smashing successes of her farce *The Mogul Tale; or, The Descent of the Balloon* (1784) and her sentimental comedy *Such Things Are* (1786);<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton made her name with her popular first novel, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), while Owenson's *The Missionary* (1811) matched the popularity of her *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and cemented her reputation as a leading novelist<sup>131</sup>; the socialite, prominent newspaper editor, and playwright Edward Topham achieved his greatest theatrical success with the two-act Covent Garden farce *Bonds without Judgment; or, The Loves of Bengal* (1787), timely staged as a benefit for his mistress (the actress Mrs. Wells) to coincide with the opening of the Hastings Impeachment; Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," also published at Byron's urging and with his assistance in 1816 (the same year as Moore's *Lalla Rookh*), became one of the poet's most recognized and popular poems; and Mariana Starke announced herself to be a significant new voice in the theatre by penning two successful, Indian-set plays—one a satire of British colonials (*The Sword of Peace*), the other a nationalist-driven critique of the notorious Indian practice of suttee (*The Widow of Malabar*).

By no means a complete list (we might add William Jones, Henry Mackenzie, Thomas de Quincey, Emma Roberts, Phebe Gibbes, and a number of others), these represent some of the notable successes; as with any speculation, a number of similar gambles failed. The poet Keats,

faced with perpetually dire financial prospects, pondered entering the EIC's service as a surgeon on an East Indiaman; instead, he penned a long work that he hoped would "make" his career as a poet. The result was *Endymion* (1818), arguably his most "Orientalizing" poem. *Endymion* was a commercial and a critical flop, inspiring a slew of malicious reviews that devastated the young poet and, according to his contemporaries at least, hastened him to an untimely grave. In this case, it remains to be seen whether Keats' hazard in an Orientalizing literary market ultimately proved "safer" than his plan to become a Company surgeon.

Robert Southey's failed speculation in this market is particularly revealing because the poet's letters and correspondence reveal that he made a deliberate choice to write *about* India from the security of England, rather than travelling there in search of a vast fortune. While Southey was in Portugal in 1800, he received a letter from his friend and patron Charles Watkin Williams Wynn offering to help him "try [...] [his] fortune in the East-Indian bar," where, Wynn rather (over)confidently asserted, "[...] success [is] certain" (qtd. in Lynda Pratt "East Indiaman" 139). "You have given me something to dream of," Southey wrote back, but "my dreams take a wild course [...]. I would willingly go to India—& make a fortune there & come home to enjoy it, —but I would rather live in a Welsh cottage, & fill the largest room with books—& enjoy the summer of life [...]" (Letter 549; October 1800). In confessing that his dreams "take a wild course," we catch a tantalizing glimpse of Southey's "head being turned" by the prospect of a sizeable imperial fortune. Yet he rejects this temptation, asking rhetorically: "& for what? to make thousands instead of the hundreds which England promises," before concluding, "[O]f India I can talk & think in England—England—the land of intellect & morality" (Letter 549). Here, we return to a question I posed earlier: *how much is enough?* If Southey can earn "hundreds" of pounds in the safety and comfort of his cottage by writing *about*



India, why would he need to migrate to the subcontinent for the chance at earning “thousands” when the risks attending such a voyage were so high? We also note the whiff of cultural superiority and nationalism underlying his comments: if England is the land of “intellect & morality,” then India by opposition is the land of superstition and corruption—and, thus, a place in need of British intervention. Besides, he continues, “One poet has already tried his fortune in India [...]”; “Camoe[n]<sup>132</sup> went to make a fortune—& he brought back—the *Lusiad*. I suspect my fate would be more likely to resemble the Portugals [sic], than that of Sir William Jones” (Letter 549). As Lynda Pratt suggests, “Southey had no inclination to be another William Jones, to risk any kind of physical engagement with the culture about which he wished to write. Like his near contemporary James Mill, as far as he was concerned, India was best observed and discussed from the vantage point of England. The foreign was best contemplated from the safe (and superior) harbor offered by the native and the known” (140). It was not, however, an easy choice for somebody as intellectually curious and ambitious as Southey; in another letter to Wynn from later that month (30 October 1800), he confesses that, “About India my mind fluctuates. my inclination is against it decidedly—& in the opposite scale perhaps curiosity is a heavier weight than prudence. [MS torn] it is certain that a hot climate suits me. perhaps is even necessary. [...] but India is too hot for comfort—& I have an abhorrence of East-Indianised Englishmen” (Letter 556). Southey labors to balance potential profits with potential costs and dangers (such as the likelihood of becoming “East-Indianised” or transculturated). Throughout, he forges a running parallel between the colonial adventurer and the English writer, both of whom rely upon India as a “mine” for different *kinds* of profit that are nonetheless rendered analogous. Lynda Pratt writes perceptively that “Southey’s condemnations of East Indian fortunes were frequently made in the context of talking about his own decision not to become

rich—to make a different kind of living through his chosen career of writing. He separates the man who went to India to gain wealth from the poet sitting in his book-filled cottage. However, such observations are also somewhat disingenuous. *Southey may not have gone to India or entered the service of the Company, but that did not prevent him from making use of it—a use which was arguably as commercial as that made by those he condemned*” (“East Indiaman” 141; emphasis added). Pratt’s commentary drives at the heart of the kind of authorial or literary speculation I am describing in this coda—a deliberate decision made by numerous late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century authors to pursue colonialist fiction and literary Orientalism as an alternative method of “speculating” on imperial bounty.

We find this issue at the center of Scott’s frame narrative to *The Surgeon’s Daughter*. In my discussion of the novel proper, I focused on how Scott constructs an “imperial seduction narrative” by foregrounding the ways in which imperial tales and pervasive economic fantasies inspire Richard Middlemas into a hasty and ill-judged “speculation” on an EIC career. Here, I want to “speculate” about the motivations that might have prompted Scott to speculate in the literary market by publishing an Indian tale in *this particular volume* and *at this particular historical moment*. For the *Chronicles* are equally notable in literary history for being the first published volume in which Scott directly acknowledged his authorship (which had been assumed in the earlier Waverley novels, but never confirmed). Whether coincidentally or not, the *Chronicles* was also the first major volume that Scott published as he desperately attempted to write his way out of enormous debts encumbered by the failure of his publishing venture with Archibald Constable & Co. and the printers James Ballantyne & Co. But why are these contexts significant for our interpretation of the novel? That Scott (like most authors) was financially motivated to write is of course well known, but I will show how author and imaginative work

merge further in Scott's creation of an authorial persona (Chrystal Croftangry) and in his self-conscious attempt in the frame narrative to explain the motivations behind his substitution of late-1770s India for the customary Scottish settings in the overwhelming majority of his other works. As my reading of the paratextual frame will suggest, Scott constructs a meta-narrative that links his own as well as his fictional avatar's decision to embark upon a literary speculation that specifically recalls Richard Middlemas' financial speculation in India.

Scott's authorial stand-in and first-person narrator, Chrystal Croftangry, is introduced in the frame narrative as an aging Scotsman who dissipated and squandered his inheritance as a young man, recouped some of his losses by years spent abroad (exactly where and in what capacity, Scott curiously neglects to specify), and has turned in his latter years to writing fiction. Having completed two Highland tales ("The Highland Widow," "The Two Drovers"), he is laboring to come up with a suitable final entry for his volume, and consults a trusted friend, Mr. Fairscribe, for guidance: "[M]ost happy should I be," Croftangry says, "to light upon any topic to supply the place of the Highlands, Mr. Fairscribe. I have been just reflecting that the theme is becoming a little exhausted [...]" (154). Fairscribe suggests India as a promising new setting, and the language he employs in making this suggestion is telling: "I think you might do with your Muse of Fiction, as you call her, as many an honest man does with his own sons in flesh and blood.' 'And how is that, my dear sir?' 'Send her to India, to be sure'" (155). Significantly, however, Fairscribe recommends not the India of the present day (1827), but the India of "fifty years back"—the India of Clive and nabobs and diamonds:

That is the true place for a Scot to thrive in; and if you carry your story fifty years back, as there is nothing to hinder you, you will find as much shooting and stabbing there as ever was in the wild Highlands. If you want rogues, [...] you have that gallant caste of adventurers, who laid down their consciences at the Cape of Good Hope as they went out to India, and forgot to take them up again when they returned. (155)

As this passage demonstrates, Scott's novel explores the changing cultural/historical prospect of India much as his earlier novels (like *Waverley*) had dramatized such transformations in the Scottish highlands as a battle between a romanticized past and the inescapable pressures and changed realities of the present. Croftangry's decision to follow Fairscribe's advice and set his novel during the India of Clive and Hastings opens up a critical tension, in other words, between "the old history of India," full of "Glorious and unbounded subjects" (155), and the India of 1827, where such "unbounded" access to wealth and adventure was increasingly the relic of a bygone (and potentially chimerical) era. Does this, I'd like to ask, reflect or entail a kind of imperial nostalgia on Scott's (or his fictional avatar's) part for an "unbounded" as opposed to an increasingly "bounded" (regulated, controlled) empire? And does *writing* allow for the kind of "unhinder[ed]" access to vast, untapped troves of colonial wealth that the reformed EIC service no longer provided during Scott's time?

In this respect, it is surely significant that in the frame narrative we find literary prospects once again mapped onto financial prospects; the author writing about India doubling (or standing in for) the would-be colonial adventurer. Croftangry "kindl[es] at the ideas [Fairscribe's] speech inspired" (155), much in the same way that his anti-hero, Richard Middlemas, finds his imagination and his ambitions enflamed by listening to Nurse Jamieson's or Tom Hillary's stories, or by reading about the fantastical exploits of "[Robert] Clive" and other imperial adventurers, and particularly the "the magnificent opportunities of acquiring wealth to which these [men's] exploits opened the road [...]" (203). Indeed, we find that Croftangry, too, has been reading about Clive and his exploits: "I remember," he tells Fairscribe,

in the delightful pages of Orme [author of a popular history of early British India],<sup>133</sup> the interest which mingles in his narratives, from the very small number of English which are engaged. Each officer of a regiment becomes known to you by name [...] They are distinguished among the natives like the Spaniards among the Mexicans. What do I say?

they are like Homer's demigods among the warring mortals. Men, like Clive and Caillaud, influenced great events, like Jove himself. Inferior officers are like Mars or Neptune, and the sergeants and corporals might well pass for demigods. Then the various religious costumes, habits, and manners of the people of Hindustan, [...] Glorious and unbounded subjects! (155)

Like his fictional character, Croftangry "seriously inclines" towards tales and histories detailing "the old history of India, before Europeans were numerous there" (155). As these stories begin to take hold of and spur his imagination, we note how English colonials morph into "Spaniards among the Mexicans," pushing into strange lands to locate the fabled El Dorado. Next, English officers metamorphose into Greek Gods; sergeants and corporals into demigods. Fairscribe's idea has sparked and "kindl[ed]" Croftangry's imagination, prompting him to entertain a glittering trail of visionary speculations that will ultimately convince him to partake in a literary/financial one. There is, however, one "objection": as the novelist confesses to his friend, "I have never been there [India], and know nothing at all about them [its peoples]" (155). Fairscribe scoffs at Croftangry's objections, agreeing to supply him with some much-needed information by having his daughter relate to the novelist the history of her cousin, "poor Menie Grey," whose story supplies the foundation for the India novel Croftangry eventually writes. But Croftangry's qualms about writing a novel concerning a people and a place about which he "knows nothing" raise some important questions. Does India merely provide a suitable "exotic" alternative to the novelist's preferred setting: the romantic, swashbuckling Highlands? Or do Fairscribe and Croftangry select this particular setting to pander, in a more grasping fashion, to the growing market for Orientalist fictions (i.e., just to sell books)? The latter question, of course, connects to another issue I raised earlier in this coda: why 1770's India rather than the India of Scott's time of writing the novel (c.1827)? While there are no definitive answers here, Scott clearly raises a number of possibilities. One final detail before the commencement of the

narrative proper, for instance, explicitly figures Croftangry's literary gambit as a form of financial speculation: Croftangry notes that because Fairscribe "contributed a subject to the work, he has become a most zealous coadjutor; and half-ashamed, I believe, yet half-proud of *the literary stock-company, in which he has got a share*, he never meets me without jogging my elbow, and dropping some mysterious hints, as, '[...] when will you give us any more of yon [story]?'—or, 'Yon's not a bad narrative—I like yon.' 'Pray Heaven,' Croftangry concludes, 'the reader may be of his opinion'" (158; emphasis added). Here, through his authorial stand-in, Scott characterizes *The Surgeon's Daughter* as a venture in the literary market or exchange:

Croftangry as well as Fairscribe hold "shares" in a "literary stock-company" (akin to a joint-stock company like the EIC) whose success is still to be determined. Like Austen's speculators in *Sanditon*, in other words, Croftangry and Fairscribe put their faith in deferred reward and compensation, taking a gamble on the prospect of future bounty that may never come.

The question of whether or not Croftangry's gamble pays off is left unanswered in the final return to the frame narrative. Croftangry reads the completed novel aloud to a literary gathering of Scotswomen at Fairscribe's house. He confesses that his story "here and there flagged a good deal," and notes that his co-investor in the "literary stock-company," Mr. Fairscribe, "only fell asleep twice" (287; 286). Recalling language employed earlier in the frame narrative and in the novel itself, Croftangry adds that things "*kindled* up at last, when we got to the East Indies," and "subsequent mention of shawls, diamonds, turbans, and cummerbunds, had their usual effect in awakening the imaginations of the fair auditors" (287; emphasis added). Scott returns once again to the notion that imperial tales inspire the same kinds of reactions in domestic Britons as imperial wealth itself (or such metonymies of imperial wealth as diamonds, shawls, and turbans): "kindling" and enflaming their "imaginations." Yet in a curious twist, the

mere presence of these sought-after commodities in the novel ultimately monopolizes his auditor's attention and prevents them from giving the novel their due attention: one "merciless old lady carried them all off by a disquisition upon shawls, which she had the impudence to say, arose entirely out of my story. [...] she threw all other topics out of the field, and from the genuine Indian, she made a digression to the imitation shawls now made at Paisley, out of real Thibet wool, not to be known from the actual Country shawl, except by some inimitable cross-stitch in the border" (287). "[W]rapping herself up in a rich Kashmire," the old lady continues: "It is well [...] that there is some way of knowing a thing that cost fifty guineas from an article that is sold for five; but I venture to say there are not one out of ten thousand that would understand the difference" (287). Through this comic interlude, Scott addresses some of the questions I raised above—namely, by foregrounding a tension between authenticity and integrity, on the one hand, and imitation and market-driven adulteration, on the other. A trained eye can easily spot the difference between true Kashmire shawls like the one the old woman drapes around her shoulders, and fakes like the "imitations sold at Paisley." Can the same thing be said with regard to Croftangry's Indian-set novel? "How could you, Mr. Croftangry, collect all these hard words about India?—you were never there." "No, madam, I have not had that advantage," Croftangry replies; "but like the imitative operatives of Paisley, I have composed my shawl by incorporating into the woof a little Thibet wool, which my excellent friend and neighbor, Colonel MacKerris, one of best fellow who ever trod a Highland moor, or dived into an Indian jungle, had the goodness to supply me with" (287). Perhaps the old lady has been paying more attention than her seemingly random "disquisition" on shawls might first suggest; Croftangry's response indicates that he picks up on the critique embedded within her comments, as he confesses that his story indeed resembles more the "Paisley" imitation than a Kashmire

“original.” Is this due to a simple lack of skill or ability, or rather to an intention to profit from the sale of a “fake” in an increasingly commercialized, speculation-driven literary market and financial culture?

One final detail connects this scene and the questions it raises to Scott’s decision to formally acknowledge authorship with the publication of the *Chronicles*—a move Scott likens to the “unmasking of Harlequin” in the introduction he appended to the volume (yet another complicated paratext). I am referring to Croftangry’s concession that his “shawl”/novel is woven from several different source materials, both authentic and manufactured or second hand (Paisley “imitative[s]”). Croftangry’s figuring of his novel as a patch-work text specifically recalls the patch-work (or party-colored) coat worn by the Harlequin figure in traditional commedia dell’arte and in European harlequinades. Because Scott analogizes his decision to “l[ay] aside his incognito” to the unmasking of Harlequin in his introduction to the volume, we find that the questions about authenticity, intention, and commercialism that were raised in relation to book-publishing in Croftangry’s frame narrative, connect to Scott’s statement about revealing his own identity in the introduction. What I am suggesting is that Scott self-consciously plays with the idea that his decision to “unmask” and acknowledge authorship in the *Chronicles* could be interpreted as a deliberate, “staged” strategy to boost readership and sales. Yet the loss of his mask, according to Scott, entails the loss of the Harlequin’s power over his audience, and he insists that he never intended taking “a risk of the same kind” (3). As with his characters’ speculations in India or his authorial stand-in Croftangry’s decision to write an Anglo-Indian historical romance, Scott employs the language of “risk,” hazard, gambling (i.e. the language of speculation) to describe his authorial “coming out.” He insists, however, that it was not a “voluntary experiment,” but happened circumstantially and unintentionally at a public gathering



in Edinburgh; once the cat was out of the bag, he suggests, it was useless to pretend it was still inside. Whether we take Scott at his word or no, the introduction, when considered alongside both the Croftangry frame narrative and the narrative proper, returns to the idea of speculation even as Scott insists that his declaration of authorship was in no way a marketing ploy or a calculated move to boost sales. However, the very fact that Scott was in considerable debt after the collapse of his publishing venture, and the *Chronicles* was the first work he published in a concerted effort to write his way out of the debts incurred, suggests at the very least that his decision to try something new, to take a risk and “send [his muse] to India,” constitutes another *kind* of speculation, one that recalls or correlates with the various other methods of “gambling on empire” analyzed in this dissertation.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Thus Samuel Johnson, for instance, defined “speculation” in his *Dictionary* as a “mental scheme not reduced to practice,” and which is more or less synonymous with “theory” (qtd. in Rajan 150).

<sup>2</sup> As Rajan notes, in philosophical discourse, “speculation” is “the term generally associated with (post)Kantian idealism, from the 1790s (when F.A. Nitsch and A.W. Willich published the first introductions to Kant in English) to Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, in 1817. [...] (Post)Kantian Idealism is distinguished from the empiricism of the British by being ‘speculative,’ not grounded in experience, but by the same token not limited by it. Kant could therefore speculate on perpetual peace, while Godwin could imagine a euthanasia of government and achievement of immortality. Speculation, not bound by the rules of the understanding, is the thought undertaken by Reason, which Kant says, in evoking Plato’s *Republic*, ‘raises itself to cognitions far too elevated to admit ... of an object given by experience corresponding to them’” (Rajan 151).

<sup>3</sup> During the eighteenth century, critics frequently employed the rhetoric of printing and bookmaking to describe literary characters as “types,” or “one-sided templates that can figuratively ‘impress’ an ethical message on the reader’s subjectivity” (O’Brien “Character” 621). See also Deidre Lynch’s *The Economy of Character* (Intro & Chapter one), which elaborates on this conception of character and traces how it changed during the course of long eighteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> As its title suggests, “The India Game,” a ballad published in 1790, also characterizes the pursuit of Indian wealth as a form of “gaming” or gambling: “Whate’er may be said of this fraudulent game, / Could reason take place, its pursuers ‘twould shame; / Minds are oft perverted, but JUSTICE decrees / A recompence different to that of RUPEES. (stanza 8). Like Anstey’s poem and Cumberland’s epilogue, the ballad makes a series of gestures linking imperial commerce to dissipation, gaming, and the “perver[sion]” of justice and principal; speculating on Indian wealth is associated not just with economic but with moral and ethical irregularity.

<sup>5</sup> As Tillotama Rajan notes in her recent study *Romantic Narrative*, “‘Speculation’ is [...] the term generally associated with (post)Kantian idealism, from the 1790s (when F.A. Nitsch and A.W. Willich published the first introductions to Kant in English) to Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, in 1817. [...] (Post)Kantian Idealism is distinguished from the empiricism of the British by being ‘speculative,’ not grounded in experience, but by the same token not limited by it. Kant could therefore speculate on perpetual peace, while Godwin could imagine a euthanasia of government and achievement of immortality. Speculation, not bound by the rules of the understanding, is the thought undertaken by Reason, which Kant says, in evoking Plato’s *Republic*, ‘raises itself to cognitions far too elevated to admit ... of an object given by experience corresponding to them’ (151).

<sup>6</sup> One notable exception here would be Ian Baucom’s analysis in *Specters of the Atlantic* (2006) of “insurance” as a speculative form of finance capital essential to the perpetuation and success of the triangular slave trade.

<sup>7</sup> According to John Brewer, “public indebtedness, as every politician and political pundit of the era complained, grew at a prodigious rate during the course of the eighteenth century” (*Sinews* 114). Yet private finance followed the same course: private indebtedness became so widespread

that, as Brewer notes elsewhere, “even the humblest of men found themselves enmeshed in the web of credit” (Brewer, “Commercialization” 206-7).

<sup>8</sup> Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2007). On this question, see esp. the introduction and chapter one.

<sup>9</sup> “Credit” figures prominently in such studies: Ingrassia argues that Richardson’s fiction reads as a “domestication of paper credit” (138); Nicholson studies the role of finance and representations of the South Sea Bubble in the works of Pope, Swift, and their contemporaries; Sandra Sherman reads credit as constitutive of a “new kind of narrativity” in Defoe’s fiction (5); Laura Brown reads the ubiquitous figure of “Lady Credit” in eighteenth-century literary and financial culture as “the imaginative condensation” of the financial revolution, her body “shap[ing] a cultural understanding of the economy and of womankind, together” (*Fables* 102).

<sup>10</sup> In this sense, I join Daniel O’Quinn in exploring the “economic vicissitudes of British imperialism,” particularly the ways in which novels, plays, and other cultural texts “analyse [sic] the effect of the infusion (or non-infusion) of vast amounts of wealth from India into British society” (“Theatre and Empire” 237). The incursion “newly monied merchants” into “precincts of privilege and power formerly reserved for the gentry,” O’Quinn writes, “threatened not only to undermine the fundamental link in the British constitution between landed property and liberty but also to replace it with potentially less stable forms of property and class relations” (237).

<sup>11</sup> A transition that Marx would describe as the replacement of use value by exchange value; see Franklin 62.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Dirks notes that while “Burke accepted the general premise that trade was both necessary and good, [...] he worried that it would lead to revolutionary change, not least because of the easy slide from trade to credit, from credit to speculation, and then from speculation to speculation. He defended the role of the East India Company, but he read the excesses of its servants as the dangerous underside of trading society” (Dirks 81).

<sup>13</sup> Rajan notes that “Projectors, alchemists, and speculators, in the double sense of gamblers and theorists, are all connected, in a British Common Sense discourse skeptical of radical ideas that are not grounded in experience and associated with ‘enthusiasm’” (150).

<sup>14</sup> As Nicholson explains, “By encouraging large and small investors to lend capital to the state, the state accepted an increasing volume of credit which enabled it to undertake a greater range of activities that could be paid for out of current capital. As the volume of investments grew, the state promised to pay its creditors out of revenues yet to be collected and thus gave birth to the National Debt” (4).

<sup>15</sup> But, as Laura Brown reminds us, “Even the most venerable source of wealth and stability, landed property, came under the influence of modern finance in this period. Through sales, mortgages, enclosures, innovations in agricultural production, and other means, land was tied increasingly to trade, innovation, and speculation” (99). See also John Barrell, who notes that “more and more landed estates were kept whole only by infusions of money from the City [...] the ownership of land was inevitably and increasingly involved in an economy of credit, where values and virtues were unstable, and where a man was estimated not by an ‘objective’ standard, but in terms of an opinion of his credit worthiness which was liable to fluctuate whatever the source of his income” (39-40).

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Ingrassia, for instance, suggests that “activities in the new economic system and pursuits in the literary marketplace were constructed as culturally analogous and can be read as historically contingent symbolic practices that changed individuals’ understanding of their

opportunities for ‘improvement’” (2), while Colin Nicholson argues that “as what we now call the ‘Financial Revolution’ got under way, new instruments of monetary policy—centrally the Bank of England and the National Debt—transformed the relationship of the citizen to the state” (4). And Marc Shell notes that “Credit, or belief, involves the very ground of aesthetic experience, and the same medium that seems to confer belief in fiduciary money [...] also seems to confer it in literature” (Money 7; cited in Brown 102)

<sup>17</sup> As my discussion of Austen’s *Sanditon* in Chapter Four makes clear, however, some authors persisted in using the terms “projector” and “speculator” synonymously.

<sup>18</sup> William III, it bears reminding, was forced to find new ways to finance his war against France; the phrase “Financial Revolution” is used to characterize the ingenious new forms of taxation, state lotteries, financial instruments, and so on which were floated to this particular end.

<sup>19</sup> See Lawson: “In fact, not until 1657 can it actually be said the Company became a genuine joint-stock endeavor—that is continuous, unlimited investment taking place without reference to individual voyages, and stocks being valued and traded accordingly at the Company’s headquarters in Leadenhall Street, London.” (21). The “crucial factor in joint-stock companies,” Nicholson explains further, “was the right and ability to sell shares, thus allowing the company concerned to continue trading without having constantly to repay its capital, thereby retaining capital liquidity, while its shareholders had income in the form of dividends.” (12)

<sup>20</sup> As Nicholson notes, “in the years immediately following the incorporation of the Bank of England, overseas trade developed phenomenally. The expansion of commerce to distant quarters of the globe stimulated a restless spirit of economic innovation in England and particularly in London. There was also a growing interest in insurance to lessen the hazards of shipwreck, fire and premature death, and a rash of joint-stock companies flourished and died, particularly around the South Sea year of 1720” (12).

<sup>21</sup> I have drawn upon Jon Mee’s introduction to his edition of the *Letters* for details regarding Imlay’s venture.

<sup>22</sup> To be fair, Mee does qualify this remark (xvii); but his hesitancy to take the novel’s critique of commerce seriously stands in line with most scholarship on the *Letters*.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, returned EIC servants were so incensed by the play that two of them came to call on Foote after the premier armed with cudgels, only to be charmed by the playwright’s hospitality and wit after he treated his ruffled guests to a hearty dinner, read aloud from the manuscript, and reassured them that he intended only to satirize those individuals who were corrupt. As this anecdote demonstrates, dramatic and literary depictions of nabobs adversely impacted the reputation of actual EIC servants. The fact that two of them were so sensitive to Foote’s negative characterization that they were willing to resort to violence reinforces the power of literary representation and offers a gauge of its potential to effect real-life consequences—in this case, palpable anti-imperial stigma.

<sup>24</sup> According to Daniel O’Quinn, “Both the amount of money lost and the number of bankruptcies dwarf the consequences of the far more-famous South Sea Bubble” (Staging 52). My debt to O’Quinn’s work will be evident throughout this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> See also Lawson: “Indeed, between 1784 and 1813 public knowledge of Company affairs and British activities in India generally increased markedly. Every aspect of the Company’s operation was openly debated in parliament and the press. Maps of India, the Near East and south-east Asia appeared in official and popular literature, revealing territorial possessions on the sub-continent and far-flung factories from Baghdad in the west to Penang in the east. Material

was being gathered then for the splendid histories that are still with us today by authors such as Sir John Malcolm and James Mill” (126-27).

<sup>26</sup> Adam Smith would even deem the combination of Company-state and merchant empire a “strange absurdity” due to fundamental conflicts of interest guiding each (*Wealth of Nations* 2:4, 479; cited in Stern *The Company-State* 3).

<sup>27</sup> In general, EIC servants were salaried employees in either the Company’s civil or (particularly after 1746) military service, going out as “factors” and “writers” and cadets and moving up the respective ranks in due time based upon their abilities or connections (Spear 29). To avoid having to raise its employees’ salaries, the Company permitted them to engage in additional small-scale private trade with native merchants and other European traders—potentially a far more lucrative way to amass capital.

<sup>28</sup> I use the qualifier *de facto* here to indicate the Company’s rather anomalous position. As Douglas Peers notes, the Company “did not enjoy sovereign authority, at least in legal terms, over the territories it administered. Instead, in Bengal it was acting on behalf of the Mughal Emperor who had granted the rights of *diwani*” (*India Under Colonial Rule* 35). What the EIC assumed, in other words, was the delegated authority to act as sovereign.

<sup>29</sup> See Lawson and Phillips (227). In southern India, to give just one example of the extent to which such abuses were pursued during this era, Sir Thomas Rumbold, Governor of Madras from 1778-80, acquired a personal fortune of at least 750,000 pounds in less than two years in office, a third of which came in the form of bribes and pay-offs from the Nawab of Arcot (see Lawson *East India Company* 111).

<sup>30</sup> East Indian fortunes soon began to be described as “mushroom” fortunes: like any fungus, they appeared capable of sprouting up suddenly, proliferating at an alarming rate, and perhaps even overtaking their host.

<sup>31</sup> In basic economic theory, a “bubble” occurs when the price of financial assets rises sharply and continuously, “with the initial rise generating expectations of further rises and attracting new buyers—generally speculators interested in profits from trading rather than its use or earning capacity. The rise is then followed by a reversal of expectations and a sharp decline in price often resulting in severe financial crisis” (Kindleberger 281-2; cited in Emmett *Great Bubbles* I: xi-x).

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Skinner for this particular example.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, “civility” in eighteenth-century discourse demarcates both acceptable norms of “polite” behavior and characterizes Enlightenment theories of “civil society” in which the laws that secure property, as Siraj Ahmed notes, not only place crucial limits on government, but also have the capacity to “almost single-handedly” transform “primitive” into “civilized” man (“Theatre of Civilized” 28). Since, post Locke, the right to property is viewed as a foundational pillar of civil society, the EIC, functioning as *de facto* sovereign in Bengal according to the terms of the *diwani*, appeared to be egregiously violating one the most basic tenets of “civilized” governance. Thus, anti-nabob accounts such as Bennett’s or Mackenzie’s or Samuel Foote’s) insist that “civility” typifies neither British character nor British commerce in India; it *does*, however, mark out key differences between late-century economic activity on the subcontinent—characterized by domination, violence, and the expropriation of property—and that of the previous century or so, which was purportedly based upon mutually beneficial mercantile trade that was believed to be both *civil* and *civilizing* for all parties involved. For more on eighteenth-century literary representations of mercantile commerce as “a pacific, civilising activity” (119), see Skinner 117-153. Albert O. Hirschman has also suggested that the “image of the trader as a

*doux*, peaceful, inoffensive fellow may have drawn some strength from comparing him with the looting armies and murderous pirates of the time” (63; cited in Skinner 129).

<sup>34</sup> I draw here from Lynn Festa’s helpful parsing of these often slippery terms (28).

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Mrs. W. M. Robinson, 13 June 1779 (323).

<sup>36</sup> As Andrew and McGowan explain, “There was too little specie to meet demand, and much of it was defective. Although banking had developed rapidly since mid-century, the majority of paper in circulation still consisted of personal notes of hand. The system was well developed, with established rules for the creation and negotiation of such instruments. Shopkeepers and customers alike presented notes that were little more than individual promises to pay. Their worth depended entirely upon the reputation of the person presenting them and the value attached to the signatures that appeared on them. Indeed, a note gained credibility as it circulated, because each transaction represented a new endorsement of its worth” (138).

<sup>37</sup> Such figures were likely exaggerated for rhetorical effect, but this did little to assuage public indignation: the *Public Advertiser* wrote on 25 December 1783, for instance, that “A Gentleman charging one of our Nabobs at Brook’s with being concerned in the Monopoly of Rice, which destroyed Half a Million of People, was answered by the great Man, that his Calculation was entirely erroneous, as the whole Number, upon fair Enquiry, did not exceed *one Hundred and fifty Thousand men, women, and Children included!*” (cited in Juneja 196 n. 5).

<sup>38</sup> The article appeared in such influential periodicals as the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, and the *Annual Register* (from which I quote).

<sup>39</sup> Adam Smith would lend weight to such an argument in the *Wealth of Nations*: “Drought is [...] scarce ever so universal as necessarily to occasion a famine, if the government would allow free trade. [...] Some improper regulations, some injudicious restraints imposed by the servants of the East India Company upon the rice trade, contributed, perhaps, to turn [the drought] into a famine” (527; cited in Ahmed *Stillbirth* 120).

<sup>40</sup> For further discussions of Fordyce in the context of public anxieties regarding the abuse of private credit, see also Andrew and McGowan and O’Quinn (51-73)

<sup>41</sup> “Surrounded as we seem by riches and plenty,” concludes the author of an article entitled “Of the Great Extent, Shameful Abuse, and Fatal Consequences, of Private Credit,” “we are actual bankrupts and starving. The most effectual step my poor imagination can suggest, is to bring all sorts of people to live and appear as they really are; strip them of all false colourings [...]”

<sup>42</sup> Exemplary in this respect would be Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782). Mr. Harrel, one of the heroine’s guardians, has deeply indebted himself by pursuing a life of unrestrained dissipation in London, and repeatedly duns Cecilia (an heiress) for increasingly large amounts of money to stave off his creditors. Cecilia is shocked and dismayed, however, to observe how Harrel uses the money she gives him: rather than paying his bills, he and his wife throw lavish parties, gamble, and attend public entertainments and routs in a desperate attempt to manipulate their image and thereby maintain their credit. Threatened with an “execution” (the seizure of their home and belongings for auction to pay off their debts) Cecilia remits a huge (and what turns out to be, final) loan to Harrel, but refuses to attend him and his wife to the Pantheon later that same evening. Mrs. Harrel then explains that Cecilia’s presence “at this critical time is important to our credit,” and that “the unfortunate affair of [that] morning is very likely to spread [...] all over the town [...] [unless they] all appea[r] in public before any body knows whether to believe it or not” (273; [Book IV, Chapter V]).

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted, however, that in the postscript to this letter, Walpole acknowledges that Fordyce was not the sole culprit: "It is now thought that Fordyce only advanced the crash, and that it would have happened without his interference, for the Scotch bankers have been pursuing so deep a game by remitting bills and drawing cash from thence, that the Bank of England has been alarmed, and was not sorry to seize this opportunity of putting an end to so pernicious a traffic. In short, it has given a great shock to credit, and it will require some time to reestablish it" (*Correspondence* XXIII: 420-21).

<sup>44</sup> Specifically, Mite declares his scheme to "qualify Peter Pratewell and Counsellor Quibble" so as to ensure that he has "speakers at the next General Court" (40).

<sup>45</sup> Throughout the remainder of Act Two, Foote is depicted engaging in various other forms of "jobbing," ranging from the financial to the political to the sexual. Far from being a solitary threat, Foote emphasizes that Mite is dependent upon a slew of *domestic* agents, partners, and underlings, who prove only too willing to advance his schemes for a chance to share in the spoils.

<sup>46</sup> O'Quinn makes a similar comparison, noting how the "suspect qualities of the Nabob" double for "those of the suspect creditor" (56).

<sup>47</sup> See also O'Quinn (56), whose work has helped me to shape this argument.

<sup>48</sup> See Raza xix. S.C. Ghosh elaborates further on the difficulties of trying to compile accurate historical data regarding the number of single Englishwomen migrating to British India for marriage in the eighteenth century (62-3).

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, competition over these women could be fierce: when a group of fresh arrivals stopped in Madras in 1780 on their way to Bengal, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* expressed concern that these women would excite "great havock" among "the inexperienced youths of Madras," who were "vyying [sic] with each other to render themselves pleasing to these accomplished beauties" (#30 [12<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> August, 1780]). A contributor to the *Asiatic Journal* in 1834 described the "ecstasy" he and his fellow corpsmen experienced upon learning that six young women were attending a Major on his voyage to Cawnpore: "we were in a deplorable state for want of unmarried ladies," he confesses, and "the pleasing anticipations suggested by so large and so seasonable a supply" led to immediate jockeying by men intent on "monopolizing so valuable an article as a marriageable young lady" ("Trumpingtons" 109-10).

<sup>50</sup> See John King, *Thoughts on the Difficulties and Distresses in which the Peace of 1783 Has Involved the People of England* (1783).

<sup>51</sup> In literary studies, a notable exception would be Nandini Bhattacharya, *Reading* 80-126. Bhattacharya's analysis, however, focuses primarily on the "nabob" (male and female), whereas I am more concerned with representations of the marriage-seeking Englishwoman in India. The latter is not always collapsible with the former, though there is considerable slippage between the two in both the literature of this period and in recent scholarship.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance MacMillan, *Women of the Raj*. Anne de Courcy's recent monograph, *The Fishing Fleet: Husband Hunting in the British Raj* (2012), likewise adheres to this timeline.

<sup>53</sup> Though he focuses primarily on "the second half of the nineteenth century," I am thinking in particular here of Foucault's discussion of a "politics of settlement (*peuplement*)" in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (149). On "biopower," see also Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. For more on Foucault's "analysis of the relationship of racialization and the regulation of populations" in the context of early colonial India, see O'Quinn *Staging* 88-89. Also significant here is Ann Laura Stoler's argument in

*Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* that “imperial authority and racial distinctions were fundamentally structured in gendered terms” (42).

<sup>54</sup> Nechtman’s historical scholarship on this figure has contributed to my thinking in innumerable ways, but I would like to make one critical distinction here: many of the women he describes as “nabobinas” were more accurately characterized in popular discourse as “adventuresses” or “speculators” in the Indian marriage market. An unmarried Englishwoman, in other words, generally went out to India as an adventuress or a “husband-hunter,” and, if successful, returned back to England a “nabobina.”

<sup>55</sup> As Griffith describes at length in the preface to the published edition, the production was a disaster, owing primarily to the drunken antics of the popular comic actor Ned Shuter in the lead role as the nabob, Governor Anderson. Though it only received one performance, the debacle ensured the play a certain degree of notoriety, and several positive reviews of the printed edition ultimately helped vindicate Griffith’s reputation. The epilogue, meanwhile, like many of the era, was published on its own in a variety of venues.

<sup>56</sup> Eventually, such “unsaleable” women were rather cruelly deemed the “returned empties” in Anglo-Indian discourse, and popular belief held that they must be particularly unappealing to fail in their venture given the lopsided male-to-female ratio.

<sup>57</sup> The reviewer for the *European Magazine and London Review* (Vol. XI, 1787) notes that the “picture of the sale of British beauties in the East-Indies” seems “to have given the first hint of the piece” (301).

<sup>58</sup> There is a faint hint of critique embedded in Hamilton’s assertion that “the certainty of *getting a husband*” does not “weigh so very deeply with me, as you gentlemen may perhaps imagine.” Could men “imagine” no other reason why an unmarried woman would be attracted to voyaging to India than to pursue a husband?

<sup>59</sup> The play was performed at the Haymarket ten times between 1788 and 1789.

<sup>60</sup> For the phrase “horrors of hybridity,” I am indebted to George Boulukos’ provocative reading of Charlotte Smith’s West Indian-set novella “The Story of Henrietta” (1800) (“Horrors”).

<sup>61</sup> Though she does not discuss Starke’s play, Bhattacharya notes how “the immoral British antiheroine in the Indian marriage subculture was often marked by the signs of decay and disfigurement attendant on self-indulgent colonial living, symbolic perhaps of spiritual decay or ‘impure’ heterogeneity” (115).

<sup>62</sup> On nationalism and female virtue in the play, see also Moskal (introduction n.p.).

<sup>63</sup> I rehearse an earlier version of this argument in my essay “‘Where woman, lovely woman, for wealth and grandeur comes from far’: Representations of the Colonial Marriage Market in Gillray, Topham, Starke, and Austen.”

<sup>64</sup> This analogy between the exploitation of dependent women and the trade in slaves becomes a more vocal concern in later novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*; as Ruth Perry perceptively notes, “Slavery in these novels figures the dependent status of women without money of their own. The ‘slave trade’ is a trope for the marriage market and for the tyranny of marriage, a displacement of the subject status of captive Africans onto women” (243). For critiques of white women authors’ co-opting of abolitionist rhetoric to further their own political agendas, see Ferguson 4; Coleman “Conspicuous” 341.

<sup>65</sup> Camilla betrays her ignorance here both by confusing the East (Bengal) and West (Barbados) Indies, and by dismissing what was a long and arduous sea voyage (that took more than half a year to complete) as “delightful.” For a fascinating account detailing the “horrors” of such a sea-



voyage, see *The India Guide: or, A Journal of a Voyage to the East-Indies in the Year 1780. In a Poetical Epistle to Her Mother. By Miss Emily Brittle* (Printed at Calcutta in 1785), in which the young protagonist describes to her mother in verse couplets the “suffer[ing]” she endured while “plough[ing] distant seas in pursuit of a Swain.”

<sup>66</sup> See the Rev. Mr. Tennant, writing in 1796 on “Female Adventurers” in India: “Formerly female adventurers were few but highly successful. Emboldened by this success and countenanced by their example, such numbers have embarked in this speculation as threaten to defeat its purpose. The irregularities of our Government, which formerly afforded an opportunity to some of rapidly accumulating wealth and enabling them to marry, are now done away. Few in comparison now find themselves in circumstances that invite matrimonial engagements [...]” (qtd. in *Calcutta Review* “The English in India—Our Social Morality” 323).

<sup>67</sup> According to Williamson in his *Vade Mecum*, “[...] we see formidable objections against a lady’s proceeding to India; but one, not less powerful, remains to be stated, namely, the immense expence ever attendant upon wedlock in that quarter. [...] [I]t is utterly beyond the means of full four persons in five to receive an European lady into their houses” (455).

<sup>68</sup> For more on Bath’s reputation as a site for various forms of “speculation,” see my discussion of Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>69</sup> Jemdanee actually died in childbirth, and Hickey’s son was adopted into the family of his business partner.

<sup>70</sup> As William Dalrymple argues, “cohabitation, transculturation, intermarriage, and religious conversion were very common up until the first quarter of the nineteenth century” (“Assimilation” 446). Dalrymple’s argument has not gone unchallenged; commentators have critiqued his use of individual (and presumably exceptional) cases to support larger historical claims; see Mishra 432-44.

<sup>71</sup> See D. Ghosh, esp. pp. 35-68.

<sup>72</sup> Grandpré’s *A voyage in the Indian Ocean and to Bengal, undertaken in the years 1789 and 1790* was translated into English in 1803.

<sup>73</sup> James Moffat’s visual satire “Rival Candidates at Calcutta” (c.1800) provides one notable example.

<sup>74</sup> Englishmen would, however, continue to frequent Indian prostitutes for the extent of Britain’s colonial occupation, to the chagrin of Company officials and commentators both in India and back home; see Ballhatchet.

<sup>75</sup> Raza does not discuss Hamilton or her work.

<sup>76</sup> Midgley demonstrates how “the woman question” and the development of the early feminist movement in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century linked promotion of female emigration to Britain’s colonies with a new conception of the independent English woman.

<sup>77</sup> On “spinsters” and “superfluous” women’s emigration during the Victorian era, see Kranidis.

<sup>78</sup> As Sharpe explains, “memsahib” is a “class-restrictive term of address meaning ‘lady master’ which ‘was used for the wives of high-ranking civil servants and officers’” (91). The advent of the term “memsahib” marks the sustained presence of much larger numbers of Englishwomen on British stations in India from the mid-nineteenth century onward. For more on the memsahib, see also (in addition to Sharpe, Hyam, and Sen) Stanford and Procida.

<sup>79</sup> As Indrani Sen notes, after 1857 “Colonial officers were now encouraged to marry English girls and create a self-contained English-style society moulded on the pattern of ‘home.’ From

around 1860 onwards, with government encouragement, Englishwomen started coming out in greater numbers than ever to be resident wives in India" (*Memsahibs* ' xv).

<sup>80</sup> See O'Quinn, "Insurgent Allegories," 21-22.

<sup>81</sup> As O'Quinn suggests, Reynolds' description of the pigsty lent the production a considerable political charge because it clearly alluded to topical satires such as Gillray's *Affability* (1795), which depicted the King dressed as a gentleman farmer with numerous pigs visible in the background. Gillray's print and others, O'Quinn argues, suggest the "King's utter alienation" from Burke's infamous "swinish multitudes" (21). In other words, the King, allegedly "out of touch with his people, play[s] at farming while the nation starves" ("Insurgent" 21).

<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Arable even replicates some of Project's own schemes—for instance, trying to secure Emmeline for his own son, the dissipated Jack Arable.

<sup>83</sup> I borrow the phrase "false promise" from O'Quinn "Insurgent" 23, who employs it in a related but slightly different context.

<sup>84</sup> "Zenana" signifies a restricted female space in the home, but is often used synonymously with "seraglio" or "harem." Of course, numerous English and European writers of this era feature harems, seraglios, or zenanas to entwine critiques of the sexual and political tyranny that were believed to be endemic to Eastern cultures, and to emphasize by opposition British freedom and liberty. As Felicity Nussbaum notes, "the oriental seraglio is usually depicted as an abhorrent form of domestic tyranny and slavery from which European women are happily exempt, and as a contrast to England's more benevolent masculinity" (*Torrid Zones* 136). Many anti-nabob texts, moreover, raised the possibility that transculturated or "Indianized" nabobs would seek to construct and thereby reduplicate "despotic" eastern sexual practices back in England: Foote's Matthew Mite, for instance, declares his intention to build a zenana in London. Here, we see Reynolds drawing upon these conventions only to revise and overturn them: Project, who has never been to India, takes on the role of the "Oriental" tyrant presiding despotically over women.

<sup>85</sup> On this point, I am indebted to O'Quinn's work; see "Insurgent Allegories" 24.

<sup>86</sup> Writing in 1783, Joseph Price estimated that "not ten in the hundred of the Company's servants, who go out writers, marine and military officers, surgeons, cadets, tradesmen, &c. ever return to their native country with a handsome independency; and not twenty in the hundred of the whole, who go abroad to settle in India, under every denomination, of free merchant, free mariner, &c. &c. included, ever return at all." (23)

<sup>87</sup> See Ferris *National Tale* and Corbett *Allegories*. Notable examples of the "National Tale" include Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1814).

<sup>88</sup> See especially Joseph *Reading* ch. 2; Suleri *Rhetoric* 77. Gibbes' novel *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789), for instance, ends abruptly after detailing an EIC officers' rape of a native Indian woman and murder of her father; the young female protagonist deems early British India a "place where rape and murder are tolerated acts."

<sup>89</sup> Like Siraj Ahmed, I would stress that "to appreciate the trial in historical perspective, we need to recognize that it marked the culmination of two decades of parliamentary controversy surrounding British India" ("Theatre" 30). As I discussed in Chapter One, reports of military violence, pervasive looting and pillage, and rampant peculation in India during the 1770s and early 1780s (some fabricated, some not) had kindled public outrage regarding Company mismanagement and purported abuses while prompting vigorous governmental scrutiny of Company's leaders and servants. The passage of the 1773 Regulating Act proved insufficient,

and parliamentary leaders began pressing for increased government oversight during the 1780s as they “grappled with the corollary responsibilities and meanings of an empire that could no longer be defined, or dismissed, as an equitable network of mercantilist enterprises” (Taylor 67). In a pair of proposed India Bills (1783-4), the government attempted once more to gain a tighter hold over the Company’s fiscal and military affairs. The first, drafted by Charles James Fox with Burke’s assistance, sought to hand this increased supervisory power over to the Parliament; Burke used his speech in support of the Bill, meanwhile, as an opportunity to catalogue Hastings’ reputed crimes to the public for the first time. Fox’s bill was crushed, however, when the King notoriously intervened by declaring that any MP who voted in support of it would be considered as his enemy. The bill’s defeat, and the King’s strategic triumph, toppled the Fox-North coalition leadership and ushered in the reign of Pitt the Younger, whose own East India Act, shifting regulatory controls to the Crown rather than to Parliament, was summarily passed and would remain the “legal basis of relations between the state and the Company until 1858”) (Marshall *Problems* 43). The passage of Pitt’s India Act did little, however, to stymie the growing tide of anti-Company sentiment. Hastings returned to England in mid-February of 1785 and was warmly welcomed by the royal court. One year later, Burke called for a committee of the House of Commons to examine documents relating to Hastings’ misconduct in India, and in April 1786 he presented a lengthy list of twenty-two charges (including among them warmongering, the dispossession of private property, the demolition of native institutions and customs, and, most sensationally, the defilement and sexual violation of native Indian women) to the House. While Burke’s first charge, relating to the Rohilla War, was dismissed, the second, dealing with Hastings’ transactions with the raja of Benares, passed. Seven of the twenty-two articles were eventually approved; one of them, concerning Hastings’ “Misdemeanours in Oude,” was split into thirteen separate charges, thus bringing the final tally to twenty articles.

<sup>90</sup> Burke detailed this strategy in a letter to Philip Francis, confessing that he sought “not only to state the fact, but to assign the criminality; to fix the species of that criminality; to mark its consequences; to anticipate the defence, and to select such circumstances as [will] lead to presumptions of private corrupt views.”

<sup>91</sup> Sheridan accused Hastings of extorting payments from the widow and the mother of the former ruler of Oudh, and of supplying the newly installed leader with troops who were then ordered to invade the *zenana* of the “princesses” (or *begums*) in order to seize treasure Hastings claimed was owed to the British. Hastings knew, Sheridan thundered, “how sacred was the residence of women in India,” thus rendering his “threat” to “force that residence, and violate its purity by sending armed men into it,” as a “species of torture” (qtd. in Clark 84).

<sup>92</sup> “The treatment of females could not be described:--dragged forth from the inmost recesses of their houses, which the religion of the country had made so many sanctuaries, they were exposed naked to public view; the virgins were carried to the Court of Justice, where they might naturally have looked for protection; but now they looked for it in vain; for in the face of the Ministers of Justice, in the face of the spectators, in the face of the sun, those tender and modest virgins were brutally violated. The only difference between their treatment and that of their mothers was, that the former were dishonoured in the face of day, the latter in the gloomy recesses of their dungeons. *Other females had the nipples of their breasts put in a cleft bamboo, and torn off.* What modesty in all nations most carefully conceals, this monster revealed to view, and consumed by slow fires [. . .]” (Anonymous, *History of the Trial of Warren Hastings* I: 7-8; emphasis added).

<sup>93</sup> I would like to acknowledge Jill Heydt-Stevenson's work on diamonds in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (part of her current book project, *The Afterlife of Things: Belongings in 18<sup>th</sup> - and 19<sup>th</sup> - Century French and British Literature*) for contributing to my thinking on this point.

<sup>94</sup> For this point, I am grateful to historian Tillman Nechtman's suggestion that diamonds "connect[ed] nabobs to the ostracized community of British Jews and to channels of speculative economic activity" ("Jewel" 78). Nechtman does not discuss Edgeworth or her novel.

<sup>95</sup> See also Nussbaum 74.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Manly, for instance, notes that "it is never made clear whether Kit Rackrent's wife really is Jewish," although "she behaves with all the avariciousness of anti-Semitic stereotype, clinging to her jewels to the bitter end ..." ("Introduction" 7).

<sup>97</sup> As Frank Felsenstein argues, Jewish characters like Shylock consistently function in English literature as "the ultimate paradigm of the eternal Other," whose "unsettling presence serves to define the bounds that separate the native Englishman from the alien" (247; 3).

<sup>98</sup> "But though I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners" (II. iii. l. 17-18). Graziano even exclaims that Jessica is "a gentile, and no Jew" (II.vi.51).

<sup>99</sup> The perception that Jews were "receivers of stolen goods" was a common one during the later eighteenth century: according to Edmund Burke (1791), "We have in London very respectable persons of the Jewish nation, whom we will keep, but we have of the same tribe others of a very different description, —housebreakers, and receivers of stolen goods, and forgers of paper currency, more than we can conveniently hang" (*Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*; qtd. in Herzog 311).

<sup>100</sup> In her letter, dated 7 August 1815, Rachel Mordecai questioned how an author "who on all other subjects shows such justice and liberality, should on one alone appear biased by prejudice: should even instill that prejudice into the minds of youth! Can my allusion be mistaken? It is to the species of character which wherever a *Jew* is introduced is invariably attached to him. Can it be believed that this race of men are by nature mean, avaricious, and unprincipled?" (qtd. in Manly "Introduction" 7). Edgeworth realized her error, and responded by acknowledging Mordecai's reproof and expressing her hope that "you will sometime see that it has excited me to make all the atonement and reparation in my power for the past ..." (qtd. in Manly "Introduction" 9). Edgeworth's proffered "reparation," of course, took the form of *Harrington*, published in June 1817. For a splendid reading of both the epistolary exchange as well as the resulting novel, see Susan Manly's introduction to the Broadview edition.

<sup>101</sup> For a succinct discussion of how Cumberland "sought new comic energy in characters excluded by religion or nationality," see Cox ("Cowley's Bold Stroke") 367.

<sup>102</sup> His actions prompt a rare moment of critique from the dutiful Thady: "my young master," he notes, "left all to the agent; and though he had the spirit of a prince, and lived away to the honour of his country abroad, which I was proud to hear of, *what were we the better for that at home?*" (73; emphasis added).

<sup>103</sup> The narrator further describes "Bath's beautiful Nymphs" as an "adorable Tribe. / Who like Mexican Queens in the picture you may / Have seen of the Court of the great Montezuma / Set in solemn array, and diversify'd plume / That shed o'er their charms its delectable gloom" (52). Cited in Sussman 617 n.19.

<sup>104</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, Bramble grumbles about the "general tide of luxury, which hath overspread the nation" and resulted in "absurdities": "Every upstart of fortune, harnessed [sic] in the trappings of the mode, presents himself at Bath, as in the very focus of observation—Clerks

and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters, from our American plantations, enriched they know not how; agents, commissaries and contractors, who have fattened on two successive wars, on the blood of the nation; usurers, brokers, and jobbers of every kind; men of low birth, and no breeding, have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence, unknown to former ages" (36-7). As Sussman observes, "Smollett's Bath is most obviously scandalous because of the indiscriminate mixing of social classes that takes place there; yet the novel makes rhetorical links between this scandal and the process of imperial expansion" (606).

<sup>105</sup> Robert Clive was deemed "the *Prince and Father of Nabobs*" in a 1772 article in the influential *Gentleman's Magazine*; see Teltscher 175.

<sup>106</sup> Representations of the female counterpart to the nabob (or the "nabobina") likewise highlighted diamonds and jewels to script these women as insatiable consumers and gaudy upstarts: in *Ennui* (1809), the novel frequently paired with *Castle Rackrent*, Edgeworth reflects contemporary attitudes when Lord Glenthorn, who has agreed to a loveless mercenary marriage, describes his new wife's purchase of "one hundred wedding-dresses," including one which "came to about five hundred pounds, and was thought, by the best judges in these matters, to be wonderfully cheap, as it was of lace such as had never been trailed in English dust, *even by the lady of a nabob*" (151; emphasis added). "Poor young creature," Glenthorn muses, shifting to her taste for precious stones, "I believe her chief idea of happiness in marriage was the possession of the jewels and paraphernalia of a countess" (151).

<sup>107</sup> The anonymously authored print *The Diamond Eaters, Horrid Monsters* (publ. c. May 1788), for instance, addresses the diamond scandal by depicting a turban-clad Warren Hastings emptying a bag full of diamonds labeled "Indian Plunder" into the expectant, gaping mouths of the King, Queen, and an animalized Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who presided over Hastings' trial.

<sup>108</sup> One such ballad, "A full and true account of the wonderful diamond, presented to the King's Majesty, by Warren Hastings, Esq., on Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 1786," set to the tune of "Derry down," commenced: "I'll sing you a song of a diamond so fine, / That soon in the crown of our monarch will shine; / Of its size and its value the whole country rings, / By Hastings bestow'd on the best of all kings. / Derry down, &c." (qtd. in Wright 413). The ballad takes on sharper edge in the concluding stanza, however, when the author suggests blatant hypocrisy given that "the king may grow rich while the Commons impeach" Hastings: "Then let nabobs go plunder, and rob as they will, / And throw in their diamonds as grist to his mill."

<sup>109</sup> Francis' image of Queen Charlotte would, coincidentally, be reduplicated in a caricature published five years later: in "The Queen of Hearts, Cover'd with Diamonds" (1786), precious stones shine forth from every visible part of the Queen's body as she gazes dreamily at a "bulse" of Indian diamonds while contentedly taking a pinch of snuff. The artist's inclusion of the label "bulse" indicates the geographical origin of the diamonds she sports, as does the Queen's ornate, turban-like headdress.

<sup>110</sup> The play was submitted to Sheridan for performance at Drury Lane, but was rejected for reasons not entirely clear.

<sup>111</sup> The "experiment" alluded to was conducted by the Hapsburg Emperor Francis I, who spent a fortune testing the famed durability of diamonds and concluded that rubies did not alter under heat, but that diamonds melted.

<sup>112</sup> Carat's dialect is consistent with that typically adopted by stereotyped Jewish characters in eighteenth-century stage comedies; see Ragussis *Theatrical Nation* (chapter two: "Cutting Off

Tongues”). This particular example would appear to challenge Andrew Elfenbein’s argument that in Romantic-era British fiction, “narrators comment in passing on the perceived strangeness of Jewish talk, but do not represent it graphemically” (81).

<sup>113</sup> As Pointon acknowledges, commentators during this era noted the frequent visits paid to the King and Queen by well-known jewelers—commerce that allegedly contributed to the “flourishing state” of the jewelry business at this time (“Intrigue” 205-6).

<sup>114</sup> See Nechtman “Jewel” 77.

<sup>115</sup> Indeed, novelists and playwrights from this period frequently allude to imported diamonds in their discussions of “nabobish” wealth: in Foote’s *The Nabob*, the titular Sir Mathew Mite reveals that he has imported “some rough diamonds” from India and sent them to Holland to be polished before they are to be remitted to his London procuress, Mrs. Match’em, who is instructed to use the gems to extort fashionable women encumbered by gambling debts (33; 34). In her gothic novel *Secresy* (1795), Eliza Fenwick presents a London nabob wracked with guilt following his “depredating” practices in India: fearful that each day “should bring tidings of the dreaded scrutiny” of his actions abroad, he resorts to opiates to “hush” his “perturbed conscience,” and “covetous[ly]” “hoards his diamonds in their cases” (66; 67; 110).

<sup>116</sup> Nechtman briefly suggests diamonds as a means of connecting London’s Jewish merchants with nabobs, though he doesn’t mention Edgeworth or provide examples (literary or otherwise) that would substantiate the claim: “In addition to connecting nabobs to the ostracized community of British Jews and to channels of speculative economic activity, diamonds were also a way for nabobs to flaunt their wealth” (“Jewel” 78).

<sup>117</sup> It is unclear exactly where these diamond mines are located; Edgeworth might be thinking of Brazilian mines. In general, however, Edgeworth, like most commentators during this era, associates diamonds with India (an argument reinforced by the fact that Lady Fangle’s diamonds are to be the centerpiece of her Eastern “Sultana” masquerade outfit). Of course, wherever the mines are located, the basic connection between diamonds and exploited labor remains the same.

<sup>118</sup> Though her predecessor *is* accorded cultural difference by means of her Scots heritage, the very fact that her nationality is indicated in the text distinguishes her from Sir Kit’s wife.

<sup>119</sup> As William Galperin notes, “One of the preoccupations of the critics who write on *Sanditon*, no less than of Austen’s more uncritical enthusiasts, has been to speculate on the likely trajectory of the twelve-chapter fragment that Austen gave up writing several months before her death in 1817” (*Historical Austen* 238).

<sup>120</sup> See Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*; Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*; and Miller, *Jane Austen; or The Secret of Style*.

<sup>121</sup> Pocock also argues for a countermove by which contemporaries sought to stabilize this “pathological condition” by refocusing attention away from the future and back toward the present (“Virtue” 113). For a nice discussion, see Sherman, *Telling Time* 190.

<sup>122</sup> The latter clause drives to the heart of the matter for, in the case of Mr. Edwards’ dissipated, indebted neighbor Mr. Jefferies, “wild speculations” force him to sell off his slaves to cover his debts, an act that entails heartlessly dividing up families and thereby directly incites a violent slave revolt on the plantation. Ian Baucaum, moreover, has demonstrated the ways in which the triangular slave trade itself was enabled by “insurance” schemes that contemporaries characterized as forms of speculation—schemes which, as we witness in the notorious Zong case, created a morally repugnant climate by which slaves could actually be more valuable to Captains and traders dead than alive; see Baucaum, *Spectres*.

<sup>123</sup> On the term “half Mulatto,” see Salih “Silence” 335-7.

<sup>124</sup> The qualifier here—*if* they “surviv[ed]”—was no insignificant matter: the death rate throughout the course of the long eighteenth century was consistently staggering. A number of hopeful Britons never even made it to India: in 1760, 33 of the 53 officers and men sailing to India on board the *Osterly* died before arrival, while a third of the men on the *Pondicherry* in 1782 died on the stretch between the Cape of Good Hope and Johanna Island (a common stopover on the way to Madras) alone. Nor was it uncommon for entire ships to be lost to rough seas, as was famously the case with the East Indiaman *Halsewell* in 1786, the wreck of which was commemorated in a series of paintings, poems, and tributes (Colley *Captives* 258). Even if they survived the up-to 6 month voyage, Britons were still at risk: 60% of white male civilians who worked for the EIC in Bengal between 1707 and 1775 are known to have died there, many within a year or two after their arrival; even at the end of the century, one in four British soldiers stationed in India perished each year (Colley *Captives* 251).

<sup>125</sup> A fact the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth repeatedly emphasizes in both fictional (“Lame Jervas,” *The Absentee*) and non-fictional (*Practical Education*) texts. Speaking of Scotland, Walter Scott wrote that “Our younger children are as naturally exported to India as our black cattle were sent to England” (Letter to Lord Montagu, June 1822; *Letters*, 7.185).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. William Combe’s *The Grand Master* (1816): “To well the Indian *subs.* can *feel* / The truth of what I here reveal; / How often, with a doleful face, / They pay for breakfast with their *lace*: / They find the *tenure* of a sword, / Can scarcely bread and cheese afford” (l. 41-46).

<sup>127</sup> Originally collected in John Leyden, *Poems and Ballads, with a Memoir of the Author by Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (Kelso, Scotland: J. and J. H. Rutherford, 1858). All citations to Leyden’s poem correspond to the text provided in Gibson, ed., *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*.

<sup>128</sup> The poem is constructed as a dialogue between two speakers: the one a long-term resident of India (“A”), the other (“B”) his “young friend [...] recently arrived from Europe.” Though “Calcutta” was published anonymously in 1811, the poem was widely ascribed by contemporaries to Majendie (1789-1824), who travelled to Bengal in 1807, served as a Captain in the Grenadier Guards, and left the army on half-pay in 1816. I draw here from the biographical description included in ní Fhlathúin, ed., *The Poetry of British India* I: 97-8.

<sup>129</sup> Hamilton’s decision not to join her brother in India is discussed in chapter two. A year before she penned *The Mogul Tale*, Inchbald describes in her pocket-book (1783) how she “thought and talked of going to India” (qtd. in Annibel Jenkins 147). Like Keats, Shelley pondered an EIC career, and had friends and acquaintances (Peacock, Lamb, Williams) in the Company.

<sup>130</sup> *Such Things Are* is nominally set in Sumatra, but frequent references to “India” as well as Inchbald’s depiction of British colonials testify to the play’s topical interest in the EIC and the culture of early British India.

<sup>131</sup> It also became the particular obsession of Percy Shelley, who repeatedly pestered friends and fellow poets to read the novel and claimed in a letter to Hogg that it made him “th[ink] strangely” (c. 19 June 1811; *Letters* 121).

<sup>132</sup> Camoens was the sixteenth-century Portuguese poet and author of *The Lusiad* (1572).

<sup>133</sup> Robert Orme, *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV* (London, 1763; 1778).