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The Good Imperialists: Empire, National Identity, and Gender in British Theater, 1660-1790

Jennifer Ryer

University of Connecticut - Storrs, jenryer@gmail.com

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Jennifer Ryer, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2015

This work deals with one way in which imperialism could be convincingly rationalized to average people who had little to no substantial, direct investment in it and who may have understood it as something that went against their values as Britons. Through media like the theater, Britons who were sympathetic to empire-building could reframe it as a patriotic and humanitarian endeavor, connect it to their audiences' national identity, and could present those audiences with respectable models for imperial citizenship. Public debate about Britain's expanding empire bled heavily into the theaters, where authors could stage their own immediate contributions to the debate in ways to which a general audience could relate. Over the course of the Restoration and eighteenth century, the overlap between national identity and imperialism become more pronounced. While many Restoration plays portray other cultures, including those of distant English settlements, as threats to English purity, and imperialism as the potential vehicle for that threat, plays from c. 1690 to c. 1790 increasingly portray other cultures as part of an imperial family headed by Britain, a nation that nurtures and disciplines its subordinate nations like a husband or father would nurture and discipline immediate family members. By the end of the eighteenth century, the diversity of people who call themselves British have rendered more traditional markers of national identity useless—being British lies in a performance of certain social values and a benevolently patriarchal relationship with members of the cultures against which Britons define themselves at the time.

The Good Imperialists: Empire, National Identity, and Gender in British Theater, 1660-1790

Jennifer Ryer

B.A., Mercer University, 2002

M.A., University of Connecticut, 2006

A Dissertation

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

The Good Imperialists: Empire, National Identity, and Gender in British Theater, 1660-1790

Presented by

Jennifer Ryer, B.A., M.A.

Major Advisor _____
Jean Marsden

Associate Advisor _____
Charles Mahoney

Associate Advisor _____
Dwight Codr

University of Connecticut
2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Empire and the Ideology of Britishness.....	1
The Gender of Britishness.....	3
Imperialism on the Stage.....	5
Significance.....	7
Chapter Summaries.....	9
Chapter 1—Psychobitches: Imperial Anxieties in Restoration Heroic Drama.....	15
Black Legends and Critiques of Imperialism.....	17
The Case for an English Empire.....	20
Preserving an English Identity in Imperial Relationships.....	25
Heroes and Psychobitches in Heroic Drama.....	29
The Line Between Heroism and Tyranny in <i>The Conquest of Granada</i>	32
Alexander and the Enemy Within in <i>The Rival Queens</i>	45
The Limits of Heroic Drama and the Endurance of the Psychobitch.....	54
Chapter 2—Men Behaving Badly: Liberty, Property, and Human Commodification in Late Restoration Drama.....	56
The Commodification of Liberty.....	58
Possessive Individualism in <i>Oroonoko</i>	64
Men Behaving Badly.....	71
The Limits of Power in <i>Ibrahim</i>	76
The Right to Personhood in <i>Almyna</i>	83
The Problem with Saving the Men Behaving Badly.....	92

Chapter 3—The Good Imperialists: Virtue, Commerce, and Custody in Eighteenth-Century Drama.....	95
The Bonds of Credit.....	98
The Blessings of Commerce.....	102
The Evils of the Money Trader.....	104
The Virtues of the Good Imperialist.....	110
The Rewards of Duty in <i>The Conscious Lovers</i>	118
The Consequences of Self-Interest in <i>The London Merchant</i>	127
The Problem of Personal Virtue.....	137
Chapter 4—The Return of the Nabob: British Colonial Figures in Late Eighteenth-Century Comedy.....	139
The Strangeness of the Colonies.....	141
An Empire of Misfits in <i>The Widdow Ranter</i>	145
The Emergence of a British Imperial Heroism.....	151
Decline and Redemption: The Return of the Nabob.....	157
Trials of the Heart in <i>The School for Scandal</i>	160
Men of Feeling in <i>Inkle and Yarico</i>	169
The Meaning of Britishness.....	177
Conclusion.....	178
References.....	182

INTRODUCTION

In this work, I examine the intersection of imperial politics, British national identity, and gender conventions in representations of empire in British theater during the Restoration and eighteenth century. I argue that, during this period, the theater helped to connect empire to British national identity by presenting models of imperial citizenship for audiences to admire and emulate. At a time when many intellectuals and cultural leaders saw imperialism as a corrupt and destructive (albeit highly attractive) enterprise, the theater became a useful venue in which empire could be reframed as an expression of the best of British manhood. The qualities of Britishness were represented as less innate and more chosen or acquired, more an ideology than an ethnicity as we tend to define those terms today. Imperialism became an important facet of this ideology as it was increasingly represented as a service to the world: “responsible” participation in the British empire was frequently portrayed as humanitarian, patriotic, progressive, and benevolently paternal. Such representations helped justify Britain’s national investments in imperial projects and practices to theater-goers who had little direct investment in them and who might have otherwise considered them to be violations of their national values.

Empire and the Ideology of Britishness

At the beginning of the Restoration, critiques of imperialism were widely available and portrayed empire as an alluring enterprise that would inevitably lead to destruction, both economically and morally. English intellectuals, politicians, and artists were not ignorant of imperial criticism, much of which we might recognize in postcolonial theory today; nor were they bereft of critical imperial histories, many of which offered carefully considered autopsies of legendary empires. While the English were familiar with the pitfalls of absolute power, many writers seemed to recognize that imperialism was a different beast, and they warned of the moral

and practical dangers that empire presented to everyone involved. Public debate about Britain's expanding empire bled heavily into the theaters, where authors could stage their own immediate contributions to the debate in ways to which a general audience could relate. However, as the English empire grew into the much larger and robust British empire of the eighteenth century, it became widely accepted as an extension of the British nation, and the overlap between national identity and imperialism become more pronounced.

The difference lies in the increased visibility of international relationships to average people and their heightened sense of dependence on these relationships. These relationships served dual, intertwining purposes in debates and representations of English and later British national identity: they were useful in addressing concerns about the corrupting effects of blurring the lines between "British" and "other"; and these same fuzzy areas could be helpful in redefining and sharpening the distinctions between "British" and "other." Many representations of these relationships on the stage focus on the power and privilege of Britishness and the necessity of remaining faithful to the admirable features of the British character in order to reap the privileges. While many Restoration plays portray other cultures, including those of distant English settlements, as threats to English purity, and imperialism as the potential vehicle for that threat, plays from the eighteenth century increasingly portray other cultures as part of an imperial family headed by Britain, a nation that nurtures and disciplines its subordinate nations like a husband or father would nurture and discipline immediate family members. British identity was represented as a font of strength and virtue but also as a brand that needed to be maintained if it were to continue being so. By the end of the eighteenth century, the diversity of people who call themselves British have rendered more traditional markers of national identity useless—being

British lies in a performance of certain social values and a benevolently patriarchal relationship with members of the cultures against which Britons define themselves at the time.

The Gender of Britishness

These values were heavily coded as masculine ones. To the extent to which there were any consistent themes in representations of national identity on the British stage, the use of gender conventions and relationships to contextualize Britishness was a prevalent trend. The virtues used to characterize Britishness were typically the same as those that characterize masculinity, namely strength, reason, and self-control; at the same time, “others” were frequently feminized as weak, emotional, vain, and self-absorbed. British identity was paradoxically represented as both strong and fragile. A common method in portraying this apparent contradiction on the stage was the use of sexual relationships as metaphors to draw distinctions between proper and improper contacts with “others”: proper relationships between British and non-British should function more like monogamous marriages or father/daughter relationships based in reason and virtue, and they should contain a senior partner who exerts rational, benevolent, protective authority and a junior partner who nurtures and defers to that authority. Over time, dramatists used that theme to conceptualize national identity in the same way for their audiences: being British was about being the strong, reasonable protector for the weak, irrational people who cannot protect themselves; establishing oneself as British was less about who one is than about what one does to and for others.

The overlap between gender conventions and British imperialism can also show how authors and audiences resolved or elided the cognitive dissonance between British ideals of individual freedom and the forceful authority exerted by imperial powers. Despite their handful

of colonies in North America, the English were largely resistant to language and imagery that characterized England as an empire since common understandings of imperialism clashed with common understandings of their national values. Bridget Orr comments on Restoration-era imperialism, “The frequent English disavowal of claims to empire reflected the dawning suspicion that imperial states were bound, inexorably, to a process of expansion followed just as inexorably by decline; that they were despotic and...hostile to commerce.”¹ The eighteenth century brought new issues that forced Britons to reconcile their preferred perception of their nation with the ways in which their empire was conducted—primarily, Britain’s involvement in the African slave trade and the imperial wars waged in North America and India. As Linda Colley notes, these issues often struck Britons as related; regarding the loss of the American colonies, “many of them now sought to explain what appeared an almost inexplicable defeat at the hands of colonists by reference to their own failings in the sight of God.”² These tensions between the idea and the reality of the British empire were easier to erase or ignore in instances where Britain was portrayed as a husband or a father to “inferior” peoples. In such cases, the imperial authority exerted by British colonists—including violent conquest—could be justified on the grounds that it was an act of care for people in need of protection and guidance.

Consequently, mainstream gender conventions served as a handy language in which playwrights could discuss more abstract issues like empire, geopolitics, and capitalism: members of a general audience would be quite with the common expectations of gender performance and the power dynamics between men and women; playwrights frequently used the hierarchy of gendered relationships as metaphors for Britain’s imperial relationships with other cultures, thereby making them more relatable to a general audience. Moreover, the use of gender

¹ Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 360.

conventions cut both ways in representations of empire: defenders of British supremacy could validate the status quo by casting Britain in the mold of father/husband/head of household with all the rights that went with those roles; critics of British imperial and capitalist endeavors could challenge the status quo by focusing on the obligations of power and reminding their audience of the responsibilities that go with being the head of a household of interconnected peoples.

Imperialism on the Stage

I focus my exploration of empire and British identity to the medium of the theater on the working theory that theater acted as a “barometer” of public taste, to use Daniel O’Quinn’s analogy: “the theatre, perhaps more than any other form of cultural production, offers a glimpse of how change swept through a culture in the midst of fundamental social transformation at home and abroad.”³ Theater was a genre that was perhaps most designed for mass appeal: playwrights’ livelihoods depended, after all, on theatergoers’ willingness to pay to see their products, and they had a strong financial incentive to portray their audience’s lives and worlds in forms that these audiences would be willing to accept, if not entirely agree with. Theater is also one of the most topical genres available to us now: playwrights could produce and stage works that reflected the immediate spirit and controversies of the time, and even in works that are set in distant lands, cultures, and time periods and touch on imperial issues more abstractly, authors could contribute to national dialogues on the costs and benefits of empire to which their audience’s could readily relate. Through resources like *The London Stage*, we can gauge playwrights’ success in hitting a chord with theater audiences (though not necessarily what

³ Daniel O’Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 12.

chord) by examining the immediate popularity of individual works and the longevity of their life spans.

Being all about performance, it is perhaps the best medium to see how much British identity became defined as an interactive performance and how representations of imperial figures evolved over the course of the Restoration and eighteenth century. I approach this point on the working theory that through the theater, Britons who were sympathetic to empire-building could reframe it as a patriotic and humanitarian endeavor by presenting audiences with respectable models for imperial citizenship. British imperial ideas and values could be embodied in recurring character types and staged in relation to other cultures to demonstrate how honorable British men conducted themselves in the context of empire. And as O'Quinn points out, these fictionalized versions of British imperial figures became more culturally valuable when they were reinforced in other media: "so much of theatrical practice turned on the recognizability of character. The complexity of this kind of theatre lies in the relationship between the performance of character on stage, the enactment of character in the boxes and the pit, and the ensuing analysis of character in the newspapers."⁴ The character types that audiences saw on stage gave them a common set of heroes and villains to identify with empire and a common set of terms with which to explore imperial relationships.

As is often the case in discussions of identity, particularly collective identities, definitions of British national identity tend to be rooted strongly in the eye of the beholder—the definer asserts the ability to set markers of Britishness with which s/he identifies and the power to decide who is deserving of whatever privilege comes with that identity. This work deals with one narrative for how imperialism could be convincingly rationalized to average people. This is not to dismiss representations of national identity as insincere or empty of conviction, but rather to

⁴ Ibid., 11.

point out why they are relational, diverse, malleable, and often contradictory. In my readings of these representations, I do not look for any broad, consistent consensus regarding the nature of Britishness. Instead, I tend to focus on the purposes for which definitions of national identity are used to address what powers and responsibilities come with Britishness, and the extent to which it involves imperial citizenship.

Significance

Much of the existing scholarship on public treatments of imperialism focuses on the political debates over Britain's imperial ventures and their influence on perceptions of current events within Britain; moreover, little of it addresses the value of the theater as a site for negotiating popular attitudes toward or identifications with imperialism. My work builds on this scholarship by focusing the development of imperialism as an ideology with which average Britons could identify, regardless of their level of investment in their country's empire. I argue that the consequences of imperialism turned British identity into primarily an ideology to be lived or performed, and similar to conventional gender roles and sexual relationships, it is a performance of superiority and power that can be done only in relation to others.

There are several secondary works to which I am indebted for assistance in developing my own readings of the characters and plays that I have included in this project. For my understanding of the cultural and political contexts in which these plays were first performed, I have relied heavily on John Brewer's *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (1990) and Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1994). In *The Sinews of Power*, Brewer provides a detailed history of the expansion of British bureaucracy and military and the government's increased involvement in trade and empire. His account of the

Britain's rise to global power suggests that eighteenth-century citizens had considerable involvement in the workings of the state, creating unprecedented ties between British commercial and political life. We can see this relationship mostly clearly in the attitudes of the merchant classes toward matters of empire through the eighteenth century: their reliance on a global network of trade protected by the British military led to their growing identification with and fidelity to an imperial British state. In *Britons*, Colley discusses the cultural narratives that brought more sentimental dimensions to the practical relationships that Brewer describes. Colley provides a comprehensive analysis of popular representations of eighteenth-century national identity. Her narrative of the evolution of British identity informs my views on the heavily Protestant versions of Britishness that became popular on the stage.

Considering the importance of imperial politics and commerce in the Restoration and eighteenth century, very little scholarly study has been paid to trends in representations of empire in drama. However, Bridget Orr's *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (2001) and Daniel O'Quinn's *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (2005) both offer examinations of theatrical representations of empire that have greatly influenced my interpretations of the theatrical trends that I examine in this work. Orr's theatrical surveys in *Empire on the English Stage* focus particularly on the conflicted attitudes toward imperialism that permeate much of the drama performed in the Restoration and early eighteenth century, and she portrays the theater as a site of debate over imperial ideology and national values at a time when England's empire was relatively new. In *Staging Governance*, O'Quinn explores a much different set of imperial anxieties and performances in a period when Britain's aging first empire was undergoing a painful death and rebirth. His discussions of late eighteenth-century drama

reveal how necessary it was for Britons to reimagine the British imperial hero both on the stage and outside of the theater.

While Orr and O'Quinn limit their works to a relatively brief period in British theatrical history, I present a narrative of British imperial identity that tracks its evolution through the Restoration and eighteenth century, a span of time that covers the majority of Britain's first empire. Furthermore, my narrative is character-based. I focus on the models of British imperial citizenship that emerged from the debates discussed in other scholarship on imperialism and British identity; and I pay particular attention to the influence of gender politics on representations of empire and national identity. The characters that I discuss provided theatrical audiences with a visible performance of British imperial values that they could incorporate into preexisting models of national identity; and normative gender and family conventions in these models established a familiar framework of conduct rules, a proper role for everyone who performs in that framework, and a way for people to see whether the act is going according to script.

Chapter Summaries

I have divided this work into discussions of four character types from overlapping periods in British theater and examine how the conditions of each period affected intertwining definitions of imperialism, national identity, and gender. For each chapter, I include a selection of plays that illustrate the features and significance of each character type, supplemented with analysis of related works for literary context.

Chapter 1: Psychobitches. My selections in this chapter cover the heroic drama of the early Restoration and discuss imperial power relationships in terms of the benefits and dangers of

consortion with “others.” Produced in a time when England’s overseas holdings and connections with unfamiliar cultures were becoming unsettlingly stronger and more permanent, the works of this period tend to portray imperialism as a corrupting and feminizing influence as it brings a nation into contact with “inferior” cultures. I focus on the typical personification of this disease, the character trope that I call the “Psychobitch”—the exotic femme fatale who embodies the worst stereotypes of a foreign culture, is heartlessly focused on her own power, and advances her own interests by deceiving and tempting otherwise admirable male protagonists to betray their own people and ally themselves with her. Like Lyndaraxa in John Dryden’s *The Conquest of Granada* (1672) and Roxana in Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* (1677), the Psychobitch has no redeeming qualities that would recommend her to a position of power: she is cold, vain, sadistic, greedy, loyal only to herself, and dangerously ambitious. However, she is also undeniably smart and sexy, and she is skilled at presenting herself as an exciting romantic partner and a potential asset to the men she targets. She offers glory to men who, in exchange, are willing to reject their true friends and identities, but she never delivers—she uses and devours the men she successfully seduces, and moves on to increasingly powerful targets.

Eventually, she sets her sights on the hero of the play, who must make a choice between the personal power that the Psychobitch offers and his loyalty to the people with whom he truly belongs. At this point, the audience can see the problem that the Psychobitch presents: her defining qualities mirror those of the hero, and in order to reject her, he must also reject the proud and willful aspects of his own personality that motivate him to seek personal glory over public service. We can measure the true character of the hero by the choice he makes—the truly great hero will destroy the Psychobitch before she can destroy him and everything he is supposed to hold dear, while the not-so-great hero will succumb by allowing the Psychobitch to exploit his

weak bond to his rightful people. Since the Psychobitch is typically a feminized but threatening “other” and the Westernized hero carries the markers of English masculinity, she functions both as a warning against associating too closely with alien cultures and also as a scapegoat for the audience’s anxieties toward imperialism.

Chapter 2: Men Behaving Badly. My selections in this chapter cover the drama of the late Stuart period with a particular focus on the she-tragedies that proliferated at this time. They involve more subversive discussions of the morality of empire: they highlight the moral degradation of too much centralized power and too little accountability, and they address the responsibilities of power that must be taken seriously for the sake of the powerful and the weaker parties that the powerful are supposed to protect. While these plays also put sexual relationships at the center of the plot, these relationships illustrate the divide between the power that one can exercise and the power that one should exercise. Though evil female figures make appearances in these plays, the focus tends to be on the character trope of the Man Behaving Badly—the powerful but corrupted male figure who unconscionably abuses his absolute authority to the point where his morally outraged subjects finally push back. Examples of these characters include the sultans in Delariviere Manley’s *The Arabian Vow* (1707) and Mary Pix’s *Ibrahim* (1696). Unlike the male protagonists of the “Psychobitch” plays, the Men Behaving Badly are not simply weak, misguided, or alienated—they are malicious, value power for its own sake, and enjoy bullying their most powerless subjects.

The problem in challenging their abuses of power is that they are technically legitimate. The Men Behaving Badly are exercising powers that they rightfully have by virtue of their position. Their bad behavior lies in their unwillingness to acknowledge the implied addenda to those powers that demand the ruler take his subjects’ welfare and desires into account. Wrapped

in the moral critiques of these rulers' abuses is the assumption that subjects have natural rights and rulers have natural responsibilities to them, and the main conflict in these plays involve defining what those rights and responsibilities are: how far does the power of an absolute ruler actually go, and at what point do his subjects have a right and even a duty to challenge his authority? To what extent must a legitimate ruler earn his authority from the people he rules? The Men Behaving Badly can be reformed if they can be made to recognize the natural limits of their powers and bring their reign into alignment with the expectations of their subjects; those who cannot be reformed must be replaced by someone who has not rightfully inherited the power but has demonstrated that he actually deserves it.

Chapter 3: The Good Imperialists. My selections in this chapter cover the merchant plays of the early eighteenth century. They focus on the economic power of England and the extent to which it is intertwined with the moral authority of Englishness. Produced during a time in which writers like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Daniel Defoe were extolling the virtues of England's merchant class, the plays of this period tend to celebrate those virtues as the engine that keeps Britain's empire running strong. For this purpose, they often focus on the character type of the Good Imperialist—the dual Englishman and “citizen of the world” who embodies benevolence and good character, uses his greatest qualities for the service of his country, and strives to spread goodwill and prosperity wherever he goes. Examples of these characters include Thorowgood in George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) and Mr. Sealand in Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). Even when the Good Imperialist does not show up as an actual character in the play, his specter hovers over the characters as an ideal on which they should model themselves.

“Model” is the key word: as the protagonists in these plays grow into the good imperialist (or fail to do so), they have to learn and cultivate the virtues that will make them productive members of society and credits to their country and class; one does not become a Good Imperialist simply by identifying oneself as English or participating in English systems. On the contrary, the strength of English identity and English systems depends on individuals performing the virtues that give English identity credibility—honesty, frugality, generosity, industry, justice, an appropriate balance between individual liberty and community service—and mastery of these virtues is supposed to bring success to both the Good Imperialists and the empire as a whole. Problems arise when virtue and success collide: what choice does one make when one has to choose between virtue and success? What happens when virtue involves sacrifice with no promise of reward and success involves a pursuit of self interest that is incompatible with communal responsibilities? Generally, the protagonists who grow into Good Imperialists will eventually be rewarded for prioritizing community over personal gain, often in ways they could not foresee; the protagonists who fail will often discover that the choice between virtue and self interest is illusory.

Chapter 4: The Return of the Nabob. My selections in this chapter focus on the colonial comedies of the late eighteenth century as examples of the paternalism in representations of British imperial relationships. They illustrate the extent to which ideas of Britishness had become disentangled from geography, bloodlines, and sex and consisted of a set of admirable character traits and behaviors, and they go the furthest in bringing white colonial figures into the expanding tent of Britishness. To compare the extent to which representations of colonial figures changed in a hundred years, I first look at the colonists in Aphra Behn’s *The Widdow Ranter* (1690). During the seventeenth century, English colonial characters are often portrayed as

culturally fringe, not quite “other” but not quite English either; the non-English qualities in their appearances and mannerisms mark them as uncivilized and often turn them into threatening and/or comical characters, worthy of little more than disdain until they cultivate more refinement.

By the latter half of the eighteenth century, these colonial figures had gained more acceptance and respectability. They tend to appear on the stage in the character of the Nabob—the wealthy, successful, and powerful Good Imperialist who earned his fortune and his manhood in the colonies, carries the same differences in appearance and mannerisms as earlier colonial figures, but in character has become more British than those who have never tested their cultural identities by venturing out of Britain. They demonstrate the importance of upholding the British brand to preserve the moral authority on which the empire’s power is based. Generally, these characters like Sir Christopher Curry in George Colman’s *Inkle and Yarico* (1787) and Sir Oliver Surface in Richard Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal* (1777) have already completed the process of becoming the good imperialist. They can admirably manage their own mini-empires in the colonies, and they frequently act as models and mentors to Britons who have spent most of their lives at home. Though they may be regarded with suspicion and ridicule in the beginning, the true value of their character is revealed to the audience and to other characters over the course of the play. Their status as heroes illustrates the extent to which empire had been normalized and accepted among British theater-goers despite the political strife that it had so often caused. British colonial figures, practically absent on the Restoration stage, eventually rose to a position as arbiters and guardians of British national values in many works by the end of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER 1

PSYCHOBITCHES: IMPERIAL ANXIETIES

IN RESTORATION HEROIC DRAMA

“The conquest of the earth...is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only...and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...” –Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

When Joseph Conrad wrote these words, the idea of England was firmly intertwined with the idea of empire, but it had not always been a given that the English would “bow down before” the idea of empire or incorporate it into their national identity. During the Restoration, England was not an imperial power, and the English people knew imperialism mainly as a policy of other nations that threatened their own. Representations of empire in popular culture suggest that world conquest “is not a pretty thing” but rather an economic and moral drain on an imperial power. In Restoration theater, in particular, works that make use of the drama in imperialism focus on the elements that make it an alluring but doomed enterprise: the power, glory, and wealth that an empire offers is difficult to resist, even more difficult to keep, and nearly impossible to pursue in a moral, dignified manner. Many Restoration-era dramas represent imperialism as an agent of moral decay in the imperialists, one that would-be imperialists can resist only by voluntarily harnessing their own ambitions and restricting their own power. Even arguably pro-empire works contain expression of anti-imperial anxieties, usually projected onto empires that had already fallen prey to the corrupting and self-destructive influences of empire. Far from being a national project that inspired near-unanimous enthusiasm, England’s empire frequently appears on the Restoration stage as a problem that needs to be negotiated through role-play or, at best, a risky project that needs heavy advertising to reassure play-going audiences that England’s empire would be different from all the rest.

In Restoration-era plays, particularly heroic dramas, this imperial role-play takes an oft-repeated pattern. The hero is an emerging or returning king who must face an existential crisis that threatens his people. Though the hero is an accomplished warrior who can defeat external enemies on the battlefield, the true test of his leadership lies in his ability to conquer his people's internal enemies, the foreign infiltrators spreading corruption and decay within his nation's borders. In order to accomplish this feat, he must also conquer his own corrupting and decadent impulses and resist the seductive power offered by the most attractive agent of corruption, a figure I call the Psychobitch. The Psychobitch, like the term implies, is easy to reduce to an object of hatred due to her highly gendered, exoticized, and exaggerated amorality in the pursuit of power. She is the temptress who tries to draw the hero into the kind of self-interested, expedient, tyrannical alliance with dangerous tribes that tears down empires and turns civilized heroes into savages. On the most obvious level, like the culture she represents, she displays the worst stereotypical traits of a wild, false, overly privileged woman who has yet to be tamed by a wise and strong masculine hand: she is irresponsible, vain, deceitful, manipulative, sadistic, and consumed by her abundant selfish desires. On a deeper and more threatening level, the Psychobitch is an external projection of some of the hero's basest qualities: she is independent to the point of being loyal primarily to herself; she values power and glory and sees them as rewards in and of themselves; she is brilliant, charismatic, and talented, possessed of great gifts that she uses with evil, selfish intentions. The Psychobitch functions as the hero's mirror as well as his foil. She illustrates a disturbing truth about imperial ventures that heroic dramas attempt to explore but often try to push aside in the end: in a war of cultures, the line between "civilized" and "savage" is thin, fuzzy, and porous. In the conflict between the heroes and the Psychobitches, imperial Restoration dramas grapple with the task of defining and defending that

line, but generally, they illuminate little besides the frightening limitations of the definitions of “civilization” and “English culture” that were available to them. The instructive quality of the *Psychobitch* is not as an example of what “civilized” people should not be, but rather as an example of what “civilized” people could easily become if they could not firmly define their cultural identity and values beyond “us versus them.”

Black Legends and Critiques of Imperialism

The imperial anxieties on display in the Restoration’s heroic dramas had been brewing for decades. English intellectuals, politicians, and artists were not ignorant of imperial criticism, some of which we might recognize in postcolonial theory today, nor were they bereft of critical imperial histories, many of which offered carefully considered autopsies of legendary empires. While the English were no strangers to absolute power, many writers seemed to recognize that imperialism was a different beast, and they warned of the moral and practical dangers that empire presented to everyone involved. Anthony Pagden describes the patterns of ascent and decline that students of empire throughout Europe had noticed.⁵ First, “expansion, ungovernable once it had begun, was perceived as an obvious threat to the stability and continued prosperity of the metropolis,”⁶ and overextension was seen as a primary cause of death of ancient empires. Second, “empires could provide an outlet for military, glory-seeking activities which might

⁵ Pagden also points out that the term “empire” carries different meanings in different eras. According to his own research, the word was more synonymous with “state” or “commonwealth” until the eighteenth century, when it took on its more modern definition of a “political, and cultural, unity created out of a diversity of different states widely separated in space.” See *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 12-13. My readings of Restoration drama suggest that the modern definition was already being used in the Restoration.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

otherwise lead to internal unrest,”⁷ and this possibility could be positive or negative depending on whether the displaced appetites for glory became big enough to return home. Third and perhaps most frightening, “over-reaching might finally result in the collapse of the metropolis’s own political and moral culture, the dissolution of its ethical values, even...its final absorption by the empire it had itself created”⁸—whoever sets out to rule an empire might end up being ruled by it and eventually disappearing into a mess of imperial associations with no strong moral center or bonds of loyalty.

By far, the anxieties that loomed largest in the English’s imaginations pertained to the insatiable greed that empire inspires and the evil that people will do under greed’s influence. They were aware of the tension between the virtue and civilization they celebrated and the profitable empire many of them desired. From Thomas More’s parable of Nolandia in *Utopia*, through Samuel Daniel’s criticisms of Virginia’s sustainability in his *Epistle to Prince Henry*, to Nicholas Ferrar’s attacks on the conduct of the Virginia Company, the link between greed and self-destruction had been a common theme in critiques of imperialism long before the Restoration. Even pro-imperial voices—such as John Donne in his “Sermon to the Virginia Company,” or William Davenant’s *History of Sir Francis Drake*—cautioned colonists to remember their roles as benevolent settlers and not to grow so obsessed with wealth and power that they fell into the sins of tyranny and violence. In his discussion of Davenant’s work, Richard Frohock notes, “This distancing of the colonial hero from profit motives is an important element of the cleansing of imperial appropriation...The desire for gold corrupts Spanish imperialism, and, according to some critics, the Western Design; Davenant’s Drake makes clear

⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁸ Ibid., 106.

that gold must not be allowed to undermine the honor of future English initiatives in America.”⁹

The English had studied many civilizations, ancient and modern, that lost their empires by fixating on material gain and raw conquest, and they seemed to recognize the importance of investing in perpetual prosperity and moral growth in their settlements. They had watched other modern nations expand their territory, and the models provided by those nations were unpopular in England, if their common portrayals on stage offer an accurate measure of public attitudes.

The English saw the perfect example of everything that they did not want their settlement projects to be in the contemporary “Black Legend” of Spain, a narrative of Spanish conquest that emphasized the Spaniards’ atrocities and provided a useful contrast to England’s supposedly gentler, more humane colonization strategies. The Spanish had already tried establishing colonies in the New World, and while their empire was still strong during the Restoration, its signs of inevitable collapse led scholars throughout Europe to commence the autopsy. Anthony Pagden discusses the long-standing English abhorrence of violent conquest in favor of the idea that one gains ownership of land by putting it to productive use,¹⁰ precisely what the Spaniards did not do. The Spaniards’ inattention to viability, economic or moral, would doom their empire: their focus on razing land for specie led to their failure to create self-sustaining settlements or a symbiotic relationship between Spain and its colonies; their belief that papal concession pre-legitimized their possession of land led to their failure to win the hearts and minds of the people who were already on it. In addition to being a valuable modern how-not-to lesson for academics and statesmen, the Spanish empire made for an effective bogeyman for the English masses. Christopher Hodgkins calls the Black Legend “one of history’s greatest propaganda bonanzas” in

⁹ Richard Frohock, *Heroes of Empire: The British Imperial Protagonist in America, 1596-1764* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 43.

¹⁰ Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 76-77.

an era in which England was just beginning to take steps toward building its own empire. The power and wealth of the Spanish empire provided a national defense rationale for devoting resources to colonizing the Americas; more importantly, the stories of massacres, torture, and slavery in Spanish imperialism could be used to argue for England's moral and religious superiority and to cast the English in the role of America's rescuers.¹¹ As the story went, America "is appealing for deliverance," Hodgkins summarizes, from an imperial power that is "duplicitous, dumbfoundingly cruel, prodigiously greedy, and pervasively loathed."¹² The horrific rumors of Spanish brutality and destruction gave it the reputation of a truly evil empire, and it fed the narrative that England, by contrast, was America's great liberator from the practical and spiritual tyranny of Catholic Spain. The narrative of the usurping "bad" empire was the companion of the English claim to the title of rightful "good" empire, and it lasted well into the eighteenth century as pro-empire Britons sought to justify many of the same systematic atrocities that they had condemned in the Spanish empire.

The Case for an English Empire

By the time Charles II took the English throne in 1660, the English had created several established, interlocking moral narratives in academic scholarship and popular culture into which they could incorporate an imperial mission of their own. As a counterpoint to the Spanish Black Legend, those who supported English imperialism had the opportunity to construct it as benevolent, productive, and godly without being coercive--almost as an act of husbandry to other parts of the world. To support this portrayal, they could draw on national histories that

¹¹ Christopher Hodgkins, *Reforming Empire: Protestant Colonialism and Conscience in British Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 56-57.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

characterized the English as uniquely suited for the task of uniting diverse peoples in a “good” empire free of barbarity and bloat. One of the most important narratives along these lines focused on tracing an inherent English heroism in England’s origins and lineage and defending England’s natural moral authority to rule other people and nations. By establishing a pattern of virtues in English leaders and institutions—virtues like courage, wisdom, generosity, perseverance, and loyalty—the English could convince themselves and others that their heroic qualities were deeply embedded in their culture and were simply a part of being born and raised English.

The collection of stories that comprised the Matter of Britain in the seventeenth century portrayed the English as the heirs of Roman liberty and Christian purity. The *rex quondam*, the idea of a returning king who will restore England to its former glory, dominates the most popular stories in this set of mythologies—the beginnings of the Church of England among the first Christians, the origins of London in Troy, the Roman ancestry of the Britons, the legend of King Arthur—and as Christopher Hodgkins points out, it served multiple purposes in forging a narrative of English/British superiority and a coherent justification for English dominance of the world: “[I]t presents a kind of national memento mori, a reminder of the dangers of hubris and the frailties of greatness; but second, and more immediately it provides a means of enlisting the present in fulfilling the betrayed destiny of the past.”¹³ The English monarch’s mythical inheritance of all manner of ancient titles, realms, and moral authority provided empire-building inspiration to the Elizabethans, and its popularity spiked again in the 1660’s when England saw a literal return of a king, a restoration of long-standing traditions, and a hope that England’s national reputation would be rebuilt by the reunion of the rightful monarch with the rightful throne.

¹³ Ibid., 21.

At this stage of England's imperial identity, it is important to emphasize that lineage mattered much more than ethnicity, which was a barely defined concept in the Restoration. Colin Kidd discusses extensively the seventeenth-century preoccupation with connecting English rulers and institutions to ancient greatness, and he points out that these connections did not functionally establish a national identity so much as a national inheritance. "While ethnic consciousness played a relatively minor role in politics, pedigrees—of families, peoples, nations, institutions, church practices and doctrines—clearly mattered a great deal," he stresses.¹⁴ He also suggests that "in a world structured around concepts of jurisdiction and allegiance, rank and order, gentility and dependence, dynasty and church, the very notion of 'identity' (as opposed to loyalty, station, degree, honour, connection, orthodoxy and conformity) might itself be anachronistic."¹⁵ The Matter of Britain, as it stood in the Restoration, illustrates the importance of connections, orthodoxies, and loyalties to the seventeenth-century English and also what connections to greatness they claimed. In the context of seventeenth-century imperialism, these claims involved an inherited right to rule over other nations that had once been part of a mythical ancient British empire. They offered a way to reimagine England's imperial projects as a restoration of its proper place in the world and a chance for the English to extend the benefits of their virtues to less fortunate peoples.

Uncomfortable with conquest for the sake of conquest, the English tended to rationalize their demonstrations of military force and economic domination by casting it as a method for spreading fortune and virtue to the savages they took under their wing. As John Donne's sermon to the Virginia Company suggests, the English had been invested in ennobling their conquests

¹⁴ Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 287.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

since they had begun establishing settlements and trading posts within the cultural spheres of other peoples. They were not plundering faraway parts of the world; they were civilizing them. In 1622, native inhabitants of Virginia stormed an English settlement and massacred the colonists after a protracted period of economic and political tension between the two groups. When word of the massacre reached London, leaders of the Virginia Company denounced the natives as demons and demanded vengeance, either by brutal conquest or genocide. John Donne was one of the few prominent voices who counseled temperance and nonviolence. In his sermon to the members of the Virginia Company, he reminded his audience of what he considered the responsible role of English colonizers: “Beloved, use godly meanes, and give *God* his leisure. You cannot beget a Sonne, and tell the Mother, I will have this Sonne born within five Moneths; nor, when he is borne, say, you will have him past daunger of *Wardship* within five yeares. You cannot sow your Corne to day, and say it shall bee above ground to morrow, and in my Barne next weeke.”¹⁶

As did many intellectuals of his time, Donne cast the relationship between England and America in the terms of a fertile marriage, a union that is destined to produce exceptional and abundant progeny but whose greatest fruit would not appear for generations. In his analogy, building a civilized colony is like building a great family. The beginning may come with uncertainty and dangers that may demoralize the fathers; but if they retain their faith in the righteousness of their endeavor and patiently nourish their children well enough for them to nourish their own children in turn, the fathers’ project will flourish, and the original fathers will be rewarded in heaven for their efforts even if they are no longer alive to reap the earthly rewards. As long as the prospective fathers conduct themselves in a godly manner, the godliness

¹⁶ John Donne, “Sermon No. 10: Preached before the Honourable Company of the Virginian Plantation, November 13, 1622, on *Acts* 1.8,” in *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 4, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 270.

will grant them more authority than those that any royal charter could have provided: “when the instinct, the influence, the motions of the *Holy Ghost* enables your Conscience to say, that your principall ende is not gaine, nor glory, but to gaine Soules to the glory of GOD, this Seales the great Seale, this justifies Justice it selfe, this authorises Authoritie, and gives power to strength it selfe.”¹⁷

Donne also warned that, as with great families, colonies have enemies who are in the grip of devils and false gods and who can threaten a colony by infecting it with subversive, savage beliefs. He insisted that a colony’s fathers have a responsibility to reach out to these modern “Samaritans” but must take care to protect their family/colony from the evil influence that these enemies carry within them: “they have a *Devill*...but as they mingle truths and falshoods together in Religion...they are *Samaritanes*...Beare witness first in Ierusalem, and in Iudea; give good satisfaction especially to those of the houshold of the faithfull...but yet satisfie even those *Samaritans*, too.”¹⁸ Donne’s instructions presented a difficult task to the managers of the Virginia Colony, who were not immune to feelings of rage over their fellow settlers’ slaughter or greed-driven frustration over the halting growth of their investment. These managers had a spark of the devil inside them, as well, and Donne expected their greatest struggle would be learning to follow their own better angels as they built the Virginia addition to England’s commonwealth. Converting the willing is easy; plundering land for immediate gain is easy. Cultivating a sustainable civilized community in a hostile land filled with enemies whom the colony’s fathers must attempt to integrate without allowing them influence over the community—and doing so in the blind faith that their efforts will produce success they will neither see nor enjoy—requires a degree of patience, devotion, and sacrifice that a set of English businessmen would find nearly

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

impossible to summon. However, Donne's articulation of this goal helped set the blueprint for what imperialism should look like and the mission that the English should pursue in their imperial endeavors. The true significance of projects like the Virginia colony was the opportunity for total cultural hegemony, for English culture to spread across the globe and absorb completely the native cultures in its path. To achieve this hegemony, the representatives of English culture had to "satisfie even those *Samaritans*" of the superiority of the English while they protected and preserved the "houshold of the faithfull"—including themselves—from the corrupting influence of native customs and beliefs.

Preserving an English Identity in Imperial Relationships

It would not be entirely accurate to say that the English learned from the Spanish, but many of them recognized the value in taking a different path. They had to learn to associate with other peoples without resorting to exterminating them. Most important, they had to learn to exert power with responsibility and restraint: they could not become so enamored of their dominance over others that they adopted power itself as their primary goal. Although they were initially preoccupied with finding gold and silver where they landed, their failure to find any forced them to settle, build, plant crops, create trade routes, and establish some kind of truce with their native neighbors. This path granted the English a sense of legitimacy and sustainability that conquest could not achieve, and it reinforced the long-standing English abhorrence of the idea of violent conquest in favor of the idea that one gains ownership of land by putting it to practical use. To the English, the greater permanence of their investments, their cultivation of the land, and their attempts at winning the natives' voluntary submission differentiated their empire from the Spaniards'. The English empire would be a labor of mutual love that would involve the willing

cooperation and subordination of partner tribes. As their settlements blossomed, the English found a coherent purpose for their conquests besides material gain, and in the abstract it neatly echoed the patterns of marriage: for what the English took as a dowry of land and resources, they would give in protection, order, and virtue. As long as the natives willingly and completely submitted to English moral guidance and authority, the English would make the land and its people better than they found it.

As a widely revered relationship with which everyone would be familiar, the marriage model was a highly useful way of defending the principles of patriarchal government and legitimizing imperialism. During the reign of Charles I and the civil wars, royalists heavily promoted the analogy of marriage to define the proper relationship between rulers and subjects. Richard Braverman points out that the metaphor was alluring because of the mixture of submission, consent, and mutual care that it implied: unlike a father-child relationship, “marital union was solemnized by an oath that bound husbands to protect and provide for their wives”; additionally “once it was solemnized it was the husband who ruled, and in no way could the wife alter her condition to free herself from her duties.”¹⁹ During the Restoration, the parallels between marriage and proper governance were often invoked to romanticize both domestic political events (the coronation of Charles II) and imperial progress (English assertions of power in India and the Americas), for once a people joined their ruler in a sacred union and pledged their love and fidelity, the people owed that ruler their complete obedience in exchange for his protection and generosity.

The marriage metaphor for imperialism is a common plot device in Restoration heroic drama as well since it illustrates the hero’s relationship to the people he conquers in a

¹⁹ Braverman, Richard. *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature, 1660-1730*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29-30.

conveniently admirable way: our mighty hero is capable of conquest but in the end wins by capturing the hearts of the people he is “marrying,” often represented by the marriage of the hero to a completely submissive native princess. Braverman notes that the heroic drama relies heavily on the conventions of romance to “translat[e] restoration principles into dramatic spectacles...Hence the emphasis on love as well as honor.”²⁰ The love displayed between the conqueror and the conquered gives a warmth and righteousness to conquest, and as Bridget Orr points out, “the heroic plays’ presentations of monarchs invested with absolute religious and political power were alluring,” at least to those in power.²¹

While the English in England had great dreams of converting heathens to Christianity, freeing them from Spain, and absorbing them into English political institutions, the English abroad did not share the enthusiasm for these projects. Improving the natives’ morals and winning their subservience required interacting with them, which many English colonists were loathed to do. As Anthony Padgen points out, the more religious English colonists in the Americas followed strains of Protestantism that contained heavy Calvinist tendencies, and to the disappointment of Anglican religious leaders at home, they were uninterested in polluting their communities with native influences for the sake of pointless evangelizing: “For most of these colonists their colonies had been founded for no religious purpose other than their own perfection...They were to contain no aliens.”²² Many English colonists appeared to believe that the natives were ignorant and savage, unfit companions for civilized people; at worst, they would waste the land they occupied and woo away the English who came near them. Consequently, many English colonists were distrustful of anyone who wanted to attempt to bridge English and

²⁰ Ibid., 33.

²¹ Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 38.

²² Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 37.

native cultures. “Crossing cultures was a fraught business right the way through the colonial period,” observes Peter Hulme in discussing England’s first few disastrous attempts to create settlements in America. After the “mysterious” loss of several expeditions, any Englishmen who showed great familiarity with native American culture and language were seen as “cultural half-breeds” who were “inherently suspicious and potentially dangerous translators who might quite literally be traducers, crossing cultural boundaries only to double-cross their king and country.”²³

On the other hand, at home the marriage analogy of governance was effective in countering such fears and providing a nonthreatening model for colonist-native interaction. As a wife consents to take her husband’s moral authority, some natives might consent to politically “marry into” the English clan by accepting English moral authority and prized traditions. Hulme points to Pocahontas as an example of a native American who quite literally consented to be baptized with a Protestant, English identity and married into the English family. Some natives could be made more virtuous by being converted to English religion, customs, and beliefs; they deserved the chance for self-improvement, and they could be useful if they proved themselves worthy of that chance. Since massacres, like those attributed to the Spanish, were not an option for a humane and godly people, the English were in the awkward position of having to improve relations with the natives and mark boundaries with them at the same time. They had to learn to absorb other peoples without resorting to exterminating them. Most important, they had to learn to exert power with responsibility and restraint: they could not become so enamored of their dominance over others that they adopted power itself as their primary goal, rather than the means to the end of improving other lands.

²³ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Routledge, 1992), 142.

Heroes and Psychobitches in Heroic Drama

Heroic drama was an ideal genre in which to explore this model of imperialism: a true hero, an exceptional man from an exceptional tribe, wins the admiration and obedience of lesser peoples not simply by brute military conquest but by the moral force of his honor. The heroic drama that became popular in the Restoration was well-designed for applying the concept of inherited rights and obligations—informally codified in long-standing traditions, institutions, and loyalties—to the process of imperialism. Bridget Orr notes that the heroic drama of the Restoration combines and dramatizes the favorite claims regarding England’s lawful and moral right to rule the world: “[M]uch of the heroic plays’ significance in the two decades of the genre’s emergence turns on its role in representing theatrically those processes of imperial expansion and decline, the *translation imperii* and the clash between Christian European and pagan non-European societies.”²⁴ Heroic drama typically offers a lost king returning to lead his true people, a “good” empire that emerges and wins with the virtue and strength its returning king restores to it, a weak and disappointing “bad” empire that collapses from its own badness, and a code of honor based in tribal loyalty and religious faith that gives us a way to measure the growth of the hero. Imperialism is central to this process: this hero should promote his nation’s greatness by extending his nation’s dominion, but not in a way that would offend an English audience’s ethic of freedom.²⁵ If the hero is worthy enough to be victorious, the nation he builds will carry a resilient unity that resembles a sanctified marriage, in which the hero and his native tribe act as the authoritative and benevolent husband and subordinate tribes are the willing and subservient wife.

²⁴ Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 3.

²⁵ Orr suggests that this contradiction accounts for why there were nearly no heroic dramas pertaining directly to English politics or history. See *Empire on the English Stage*, 38.

The marriage metaphor could make imperialism more appealing by portraying it as partnership instead of oppression and the hero as a leader instead of a tyrant. Heroic drama frequently reinforces the marriage metaphor by pairing the hero with an appropriately submissive woman from the conquered tribe. Before such a union can take place, however, the hero must go through trials of virtue in which he must navigate the dark side of imperialism and conquer the demons that exist within himself and the people he seeks to rule. Criticism of imperial conduct is a staple of heroic drama, and much of it addresses the moral dark side of the model of benevolent, providential dominion that the English favored in their own national narrative. Many writers seemed to recognize the moral and practical dangers that empire presented to everyone involved. At the same time, however, they seemed reluctant to oppose imperialism explicitly, and instead chose to recast it as a spiritual test of character and identity. Will the hero be virtuous enough to create the right partnership and be the leader that it needs? Will he be seduced into pursuing power for its own sake, betray the people and virtues he is supposed to represent, and destroy himself in the process? What separates a victorious hero from a conquering villain anyway?

To answer these questions, the main ideological conflict in heroic drama centers on that between the hero of the play—a powerful, hypermasculine, Westernized leader of men, in possession of all the markers of potential greatness—and his counterpart and alter ego of sorts, the Psychobitch. The Psychobitch may exemplify the excesses of her native culture; she represents the allure of power, luxury, and personal glory that has put her culture in severe decline. As Laura Brown discusses, she is part of a history of female figures being used to signify differences that challenged mercantile capitalism and imperialism: “Perhaps the general utility of the female figure in this ideological complex is due to the powerful association of

women with difference...As figures of difference, women are connected with sexual insatiability, class instability, natives, the colonized, and the potentially threatening, unassimilable other.”²⁶ However, the Psychobitch is generally not merely different and disruptive, but rather a rogue agent. She poses an existential threat to her own culture as well as the hero’s. She is characterized as so militant, so violent, so detached from any legitimate community, and—by virtue of her gender—so duplicitous and unreasonable that it is impossible for the hero to enter any kind of moral relationship with her. By definition, she must be consumed by the hero in order to preserve a civilization in which an imperial power can rule peacefully with the more compliant natives.

This task comes with a paradoxical challenge for the hero. In demonstrating the honor and moral superiority of his own people, the hero has a responsibility to attempt to tame the Psychobitch without unnecessary brutality and include her in the mutually beneficial marriage of tribes that the hero is supposed to secure. However, imperial-themed heroic drama leaves little room for the hero to distinguish himself from the Psychobitch, let alone conquer her. If she were not so ostentatiously othered and demonized by her gender and race, the Psychobitch would appear uncomfortably similar in personality to the hero. She is a perversion of the hero’s greatest qualities and therefore a moral threat that he must unequivocally reject, both in her and in himself. In this sense, she fits Laura Brown’s description of female figures as “a scapegoat of male violence”: “The corruption assigned to the female body and the murderousness attributed to the militarized female figure can be understood as a reversal of agent and object characteristic of the process by which capitalist alienation or imperial violence is occluded.”²⁷ The Psychobitch

²⁶ Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

disguises the hero's own impulses toward imperial violence by being the supposed inspiration for them. As an extension of the marriage metaphor that illustrates legitimate imperialism, "bad" imperialism often takes the allegorical form of an illicit sexual relationship: the strong, rational, manly hero is tempted to betray his values and loyalties by the exotic Psychobitch, who represents the joys of absolute power and self-gratification; if he fails to conquer the Psychobitch and his own ambitions and allows himself to be seduced, he will succumb to the same power-hunger that has corrupted her and weakened the Eastern culture to which she belongs. To defeat her power, the hero must learn to see himself as a servant-leader of the right people and to define the higher purpose for which he works to gain power and glory—in other words, he must learn the difference between pride and honor. It is not enough for him to know who he is as an individual or how he personally distinguishes right from wrong; he must also know who he is as part of a group and use his power to defend the conventions of the community to which he belongs. In this way, he can emerge as morally superior to the Psychobitch without having to interrogate the legitimacy of imperial violence too closely. The hero must separate himself from the Psychobitch and still attempt to win her over without being won over by her; or failing that, he must employ the force necessary to conquer her without becoming her moral equivalent.

The Line Between Heroism and Tyranny in *The Conquest of Granada*

John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1672) uses the dance between the hero and the Psychobitch to illustrate the meaning of power with honor in the context of imperialism. The hero, Almanzor, comes to Granada from origins unknown and has a reputation for submitting only to "honor," however he chooses to define it. Critics of the play have recognized that Almanzor is in need of socialization, and many have described his personal development as a

process in which he must choose between his love for the king's mistress and his loyalty to the ruler whom he is obligated to serve.²⁸ However, I would argue that the play does not make such a distinction between love and country, but rather combines the two in a way that portrays imperialism as an act of love.²⁹ Almanzor grows into the hero and benevolent ruler he is destined to be through his love for Almahide, who encourages him to reconceptualize love as a self-sacrificing sentiment that he can extend to Almahide's own master and people. In embracing the idea that love and country are closely related, Almanzor can resist the promise of power offered by Lyndaraxa, who is plotting rebellion against Granada's king.

At the same time, the play fails to fully address the main problem that the Psychobitch represents—the thin line between heroism and tyranny—and instead exposes the inadequacy of using lineage and loyalties as evidence of virtue. The play is both a tragedy about how imperialism fails and an idealization of imperialism done properly, and by extension, its characters function as personifications of the forces at play in the process of war and conquest. King Ferdinand of Spain summarizes this dual narrative at the beginning of Part II:

When Empire in its Childhood first appears,
 A watchful Fate o'ersees its tender years;
 Till, grown more strong, it thrusts and stretches out,
 And Elbows all the Kingdoms round about:
 The place thus made for its first breathing free,
 It moves again for ease and Luxury:
 Till, swelling by degrees, it has possest

²⁸ For examples of excellent readings that identify Almanzor's main task as the suppression of his desire for Almahide, see J. Douglas Canfield, *Heroes and States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 10-20; and Thomas Reinert, "Theater and Civility in Dryden's 'Essay,'" *ELH* 65, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 857-876.

²⁹ Laura Brown discusses this pattern in Dryden's heroic dramas and acknowledges the awkwardness with which love and country are joined in *Conquest*, in which Almanzor honorably wins both his love interest and the throne largely by twist of fate; see *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 3-27. Additionally, Carl R. Kropf recognizes a connection between the health and security of *Conquest*'s families and states; see "Patriarchal Theory in Dryden's Early Drama," *Essays in Theatre* 6, no. 1 (1987), 41-48.

The greater space, and now crowds up the rest.
 When, from behind, there starts some petty State,
 And pushes on its now unwieldy fate:
 Then, down the precipice of time it goes,
 And sinks in Minutes, which in Ages rose.³⁰

Moorish Granada is the quickly sinking empire that occupies center-stage in the play. It used to engage in battle for noble goals, to provide freedom and security for its people; its leaders now fight for power and material gain, usually against each other, and Granada has become so unmanageable that its leaders struggle simply to hold it together. By the beginning of the play, the king, Boabdelin, is facing a rebellion from one of Granada's internal factions and the external threat of Spanish invasion, but his fixation on maintaining his own power and luxury render him ill-equipped to deal with either danger to his kingdom. On the side of legitimate government, the play's hero, Almanzor, is Granada's last hope, the one figure who could save Granada from destruction: he is courageous, rational, and fiercely independent; his trustworthiness and his sense of justice are his strongest loyalties, and his interpretation of natural law is his only authority. "I am as free as Nature first made man / 'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began / When wild in woods the noble Savage ran," he announces in his first appearance onstage.³¹ On the side of rebellion and personal power, the Psychobitch, Lyndaraxa, is beautiful, intelligent, dishonest, and dangerously ambitious; her guiding principle is the acquisition of power, and she excels at drawing brave and talented men into her darkness to do her bidding. "I avowe th' ambition of my Soul, / To be that one to live without controul!" she tells one of her suitors as she

³⁰ John Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards, The Second Part*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 11, ed. John Loftis and David Stuart Rodes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1.1.5-16.

³¹ John Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards, The First Part*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 11, ed. John Loftis and David Stuart Rodes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1.1.17-19.

vows that she will not attach herself to anyone of lower rank than a king.³² Almanzor fights not for his own gain but for causes he considers worthy; Lyndaraxa considers her own gain to be the only worthy cause.

It is easy to be impressed by Almanzor's seemingly selfless heroics and to hate Lyndaraxa's self-serving machinations. However, there is a fine line between honor and pride, independence and isolation, justice and personal gain, and the first task for the audience is deciding where that line should be. Almanzor and Lyndaraxa do not meet until well into the second part of the play, but their stories unfold parallel to each other on opposing sides of the surface conflict between Granada and everyone else. Other than their alliances and the language that Dryden attributes to them, what makes Almanzor and Lyndaraxa different from each other? What makes one the hero and the other the villain? Both consider themselves above obligation or accountability to anyone other than themselves, and both scorn the idea of servitude. Almanzor's assertion that he is "free as Nature first made man" is similar to Lyndaraxa's desire to "live without controul." Both follow only the laws they set for themselves, and while Almanzor may dress his personal laws in more respectable language, he does not offer a compelling reason why anyone should trust his moral compass besides his own declaration that it is trustworthy. Both are strong-willed and courageous fighters, but neither has the inclination to subsume their will to a higher authority or community or to compromise their desires. Both change their allegiances several times to achieve the outcomes they desire for themselves, and we do not hear a clear explanation for why Almanzor's desire to order the world as he chooses is less self-interested than Lyndaraxa's desire for power. Does Dryden expect us to take Almanzor's righteousness and Lyndaraxa's evil based on faith? Based on the sides to which

³² Ibid., 2.1.147-148.

they gravitate most consistently? Based on gender conventions that make ambition and self-confidence appear admirable in a man but repulsive and unnatural in a woman?

An audience would need a little bit of all of those bases to sympathize with Almanzor against Lyndaraxa. However, as their narratives progress, they reveal important differences in their approaches to power and their reasons for using it. Lyndaraxa represents the pleasure of power—collecting it, wielding it over others' heads, using it to increase her sense of her own importance—and we can see how the pursuit of it has twisted her into a heartless, narrow-minded person who has no mutually rewarding relationship with anyone or anything besides her power. Since power is the meaning of her existence, she stockpiles proofs that she possesses it, and since she sees power as a relative and finite resource, she can obtain those proofs only by assuring herself that she wields control over others—she wins what she wants from life only if others lose, which locks her in a perpetually hostile relationship with the rest of her world.

Lyndaraxa's love life offers the clearest evidence that she has turned her life into a series of power struggles that give her some immediate gratification but no spiritual fulfillment or support. She has a talent for attracting men who are willing to devote themselves to her happiness in exchange for her love. Her brothers are unfailingly loyal; her suitor Abdelmelech is willing to fight for her love and respect; and her second suitor Prince Abdalla is willing to betray and depose his own brother to make her dreams come true. Unmoved by the intensity of the emotion she inspires, she regards these feelings as tools for bargaining and manipulation in order to acquire the status she actually desires. We learn at the beginning of the play that she has resolved to aim no lower than queen ever since Almahide's engagement to King Boabdalin has noticeably increased her status. Lyndaraxa explains that her attraction to royalty is her desire to wallow in power and her belief that she could perform the part in a purely theatrical sense: "Why

wou'd I be a Queen? because my Face / Wou'd wear the Title with a better grace. / If I became it not, yet it wou'd be / Part of your duty, then, to Flatter me.”³³ She makes clear that her heart follows her ambition while she ponders how to craft the most profitable marriage for herself, and she expresses frustration at her inability to see the future fortunes of her suitors:

O could I read the dark decrees of fate,
That I might once know whom to love or hate!
For I my self scarce my own thoughts can gness,
So much I find 'em varied by success.
As in some wether-glass my Love I hold;
Which falls or rises with the heat or cold.
I will be constant yet, if Fortune can;
I love the King: let her but name the Man.³⁴

Where her suitors use their power to acquire love, Lyndaraxa loves in order to acquire power. In actuality, she has already fallen in love with a position and will go through the motions of romance with any man who can deliver a crown, the true object of her affection. Her assessment of her marriage prospects is an example of how she values all of her relationships to others—people are disposable, but power is priceless. Her willingness to sell her loyalty and her life to the highest bidder reflects the extent to which the goal of accumulating power for its own sake has consumed her life.

However, she does not notice her ambition distancing her from everyone in her life. Having no loyalty to anyone, she distrusts everyone, and for good reason—she does nothing to earn any loyalty on which she can rely, and she lives in fear that one of her tools might one day strip her of whatever power and privilege she has accumulated. “[M]y ill fate / Has made me

³³ Ibid., 2.1.141-144.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.2.1-8.

lov'd with all th' effects of Hate," she complains to Almanzor,³⁵ and although she makes this observation in the process of manipulating him, she speaks the truth. She has made enemies out of her lovers, and they fear each other as much as they want to own each other. She changes allegiances several times during the play, and while she uses many people, she invests in no relationships. Instead, she resembles the farmer who kills the goose who lays golden eggs: rather than nurture a source of love and loyalty that will pay for itself over time and benefit everyone involved, her greed drives her to plunder her relationships and quickly drain them of their usefulness; she is then surprised to discover that her cold-hearted destruction of these relationships leaves her with nothing to use.

While Lyndaraxa's behavior is void of redeeming qualities, her suitors do not conduct themselves much more admirably in their pursuit of power and conquest—in their case, the conquest of Lyndaraxa. On some level, the men in Lyndaraxa's life know how dangerous and untrustworthy she is and how futile their desire for her is. They acknowledge that she is vain, dishonest, ruthless, and cruel. However, they are willing to sacrifice everything they hold dear to have her heart, knowing that it is unattainable. Though he never stands out as one of the smarter or more honorable men of the play, Abdalla surprises even himself with the vague, flimsy, but irresistible allure that compels him to entertain—and later carry out—a coup against his brother, and he asks Lyndaraxa's brother Zulema to help him do the right thing:

Betwixt my love and vertue I am tost;
 This must be forfeited, or that be lost:
 I could do much to merit thy applause;
 Help me to fortify the better cause.
 My honour is not wholly put to flight;
 But would, if seconded, renew the fight.

 'Tis plain that she who for a Kingdom, now

³⁵ Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part II*, 3.3.76-77.

Would sacrifice her love, and break her vow,
 Not out of Love but int'rest, acts alone,
 And wou'd,
 Even in my arms, lie thinking of a throne.³⁶

Though consistently loyal to the king and more resistant than Abdalla to Lyndaraxa's lies, Abdelmelech also struggles to break his desire for her and falls for her machinations repeatedly in futile attempts to win her nonexistent heart. After he watches her woo Abdalla, discovers that she has taken the side of the rebels, and reclaims the fortress that she has commandeered for herself, Abdelmelech still confesses his lingering love for her, chooses to believe that she committed these crimes for him, and agrees to release her, knowing all the while that he is making a mistake:

You know too well my weakness and your pow'r.
 Why did Heav'n make a fool a Conquerour!
 She was my slave; till she by me was shown
 How weak my force is, and how strong her own.
 Now she has beat my pow'r from every part;
 Made her way open to my naked heart.³⁷

What is Lyndaraxa's power over these men, and what is the weakness she exploits? Her beauty, pride, and ambition are the qualities that her suitors mention most frequently, and while they express disapproval of this combination, they are attracted, almost addicted, to it. Lyndaraxa is the character most closely identified with power and prestige, and it makes sense for such a character to come in the package of an impossibly beautiful woman: as a lovely, elusive, and therefore precious object of desire, she is a valuable trophy in her own right; and as a symbol of power, she inspires her suitors to imagine how power could make them valuable as well. Lyndaraxa makes pride and ambition appear desirable, and she encourages everyone around her

³⁶ Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part I*, 2.1.184-189, 196-200.

³⁷ Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part II*, 2.2.101-105.

to follow those qualities in themselves. However, gaining Lyndaraxa is like gaining personal power for its own sake. The means of reaching either goal leaves one unable to possess the prize. For both suitors, having Lyndaraxa requires them to burn bridges with the loyal Granadines, betray their king and the men whom they have fought alongside, and assume the unforgiveable brand of traitor.

We see the same mistakes replayed on a national level. The whole political state of Granada echoes Lyndaraxa's situation—the king, too, has used his subjects and his position to increase his personal status and wealth rather than to strengthen his kingdom through service and sacrifice, and he has been left presiding over a nation weakened by civil war and subjects who feel no desire to defend their king and country from invasion. Boabdelin comments on how his fear of losing his power actually puts him at the mercy of the hostile subjects on which his power rests: “Kings are the Subjects over whom he Raigns.”³⁸ Like Lyndaraxa and her suitors, the king appears powerless in the face of any threat to his desired conquests. Again, we see that those who crave power and possessions are at the mercy of those who can take it away, and as King Ferdinand points out, those whose possessions become too bulky to stand will eventually lose them to those who are less weighed down and have less to lose in a confrontation. Given the corruption within the political and military leadership, Granada needs a hero who is willing to fight for the survival of the empire but able to avoid being seduced by the personal gains that imperialism offers—in other words, an anti-Lyndaraxa.

When we first see Almanzor, he does not appear to be the hero that Granada needs. He is impressive as the leader of an army: he has a degree of confidence and physical courage that would inspire any soldier to follow him; he is brilliant and strong enough to be successful in his military ventures. However, uniting and leading a nation requires a skill set that Almanzor does

³⁸ Ibid., 1.2.89.

not have at first. Primarily, it requires him to maintain a steadfast loyalty to a group of people—he must dedicate himself to protecting them even when they do not necessarily deserve it, and he must develop the will to sacrifice his own reputation and interests to serve the interest of his people even when that sacrifice is unfair to him. Almanzor must grow into his hero role by learning to accept a higher authority than himself. Through his relationship with the king's mistress Almahide, Almanzor receives his first feeling of a stronger devotion than to himself and his first example of self-sacrifice. Though Almahide loves Almanzor, she remains loyal to her vow to marry the king, and while Almanzor feels that he will never be able to give his heart to anyone else, Almahide points out that he has grown from his encounter with true love and is now free to channel his passion toward a cause nobler than she:

Your Heart's, at worst, but so consum'd by fire
 As Cities are, that by their falls rise high'r.
 Build Love a Nobler Temple in my place;
 You'll find the fire has but enlarg'd your space.³⁹

Almanzor may have pursued the wrong woman for the wrong reasons—he threw his heart into the lost cause of possessing a woman who had pledged herself to someone else. However, in the process he learns to serve someone besides himself in feeling as well as in deed. As distressed as he is by Almahide's rejection, he accepts it and leaves her to her choice even when they both know that he is more deserving of her. And now that he does not actually have her to occupy that space in his heart, he retains the space to adopt a greater cause. Consequently, when Almahide approaches him in Part II and asks that he return to save Granada and her husband's monarchy from the invasion of Spain, he agrees even without the promise of reward or credit.⁴⁰

³⁹ Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part I*, 5.1.437-440.

⁴⁰ Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part II*, 2.3.101-102.

He still possesses the strength and independence he had at the beginning of the play, but he has learned when to subordinate it to a higher cause.

Had Almanzor met Lyndaraxa before this experience, she might have succeeded in convincing him to pursue his own power—he certainly believes that he deserves it and, at first, believes that Boabdelin’s disloyalty to him justifies his opposition. Those hard feelings toward Boabdelin do not go away just because he commits to defending Granada at Almahide’s request, and Lyndaraxa seems to sense that when she finally comes face to face with Almanzor. Believing that she may have found the right man to ride to power, she tries to convince him to grab the throne by appealing to his independence and his ego:

Keep for your self (and you can grant no less)
 What you alone are worthy to possess:
 Enter, brave Sir; for, when you speak the word,
 These Gates will open of their own accord.
 The Genius of the place its Lord will meet:
 And bend its tow’ry forehead to your feet.⁴¹

While the old Almanzor might have found this plea compelling, he has learned to be a loyal soldier rather than just his own general. He no longer feels that his personal honor rests on the world reflecting his high opinion of himself back to him; instead, his honor lies in his loyal membership in a culture that he has devoted himself to defending. When he replies to Lyndaraxa, “I am not that *Almanzor* whom you praise”⁴²—and really means it—he finally becomes worthy of the title of hero in this drama by demonstrating that he can live up to the standards of honesty and constancy that he demands from everyone else.

⁴¹ Ibid., 3.3.90-95.

⁴² Ibid., 3.3.102.

Given the transformation that the hero undergoes and the challenge that the Psychobitch presents to his better angels, the ending of the play opens more questions than it resolves. Though he has no way of foreseeing it, his recently-developed capacity for unshakable loyalty actually delivers all the power and glory that Lyndaraxa falsely offers. However, he is not vindicated in the side he has chosen. In the final scene the Duke of Arcos, the Spanish prisoner of war whom Almanzor treats respectfully and releases, reveals that he is Almanzor's father and proclaims him a credit to the Spanish throne; in the wake of Boabdelin's death, King Ferdinand awards Almanzor the throne of Granada and the hand of Almahide, despite the fact that Almanzor fought against Spain.⁴³ Lyndaraxa, who sided with and aided Spain to victory, is gratuitously killed by one of her lovers. Since the play ends abruptly after we finally discover Almanzor's true heritage, we are left to wonder what relevance it has to the rest of the play. What makes Almanzor such a credit to the Spanish throne—his character or his blood? Would he have been capable of growing morally without his Spanish Christian paternity? Does his identification with the losing side not matter as long as he demonstrates a capacity for loyalty and a newly discovered claim to membership in the Spanish tribe, now that his duties to Boabdelin have been fulfilled? And why does Lyndaraxa have to die? The ending is cartoonishly neat in a way that the rest of the play is not. The superiority of the Christian power is maintained, but we receive no explanation for why the Christian power deserved to win or what distinguishes the Christians from the infidels. The only analysis we receive is Ferdinand's observation that upstart countries have the will to work for success that established empires no longer have; but we receive no indication that Granada does not provide us a glimpse into Spain's future if the Spanish cannot step out of the rise-and-fall cycle of empires. By the time *Conquest* is first performed in 1670, the Spanish empire is already crumbling. Even in the end,

⁴³ Ibid., 5.3.270-277.

the similarities between the winners and the Psychobitch are conspicuous while the difference seems to lie primarily in lineage and alliances.

Dryden leaves the door open to the possibility that empire can be pursued correctly and be made sustainable by the right people. Given the final revelation that Almanzor is actually of Christian European descent, the audience could interpret *Conquest* as a story about the depravities of Eastern nations and the superiority of European kingdoms. In heroic drama, Eastern cultures came under particularly sharp censure. Regardless of past glories, they appear lazy due to their luxuries, divided by warring factions, bloated from their mindless pursuit of power and territory, and tyrannical in fear of losing any power—all characteristics that infect nearly every aspect of the Eastern cultures in these plays. In *Conquest* Dryden suggests that these problems reflect the inherent weaknesses of Eastern traditions, and that honorable men of proper birth will inherently demonstrate the strength of character to win the voluntary submission of foreign nations without violent conquest. Other playwrights portray the decline of Eastern cultures as more complicated than inherent inferiorities in its rulers or people. While plays set in Eastern empires are often sprinkled with expressions of religious and cultural bigotry, they also tie imperial decline to the process of imperialism itself. However smugly an English audience might judge England superior the East, they were also aware that any strong, promising, burgeoning empire is at risk of contracting the same infection that drained the empires of the East. The only protection is the imperial leaders' honor—their fidelity to their people, their concern for their conquered subjects, and their faith in the cause(s) for which their empire exists.

Alexander and the Enemy Within in *The Rival Queens*

The Psychobitch is particularly dangerous for heroes who do not know or have forgotten what values and loyalties they are supposed to uphold. Until he can define his national loyalties, the Psychobitch can easily turn the hero's greatest qualities—his independence, his strength, his intellect, his charisma—against him and his people by tempting him to serve himself first.

Produced just a few years after *The Conquest of Granada*, Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) connects to the cultural flaws of the East to the consequences of imperialism when it is pursued for power and personal gain rather than a higher purpose. For Lee's protagonist, Alexander the Great, honor is not a personal code of conduct as it is for Almanzor; it is a performance designed to bolster his glory and secure the power that comes with being a conquering hero. Despite his less-than-flattering portrayal of the Persian culture that Alexander has adopted, Lee makes clear that Alexander cannot blame Eastern influence for his abandonment of his people or his failure to pursue an empire free of vice and tyranny. Alexander's fall is the result of his infatuation with imperialism, not with Persia, and the fate of his empire stands as an example of how any strong, promising, burgeoning empire is at risk of contracting the same infection that drained the empires of the East—imperial greed.

The Rival Queens depicts the morally corrosive effects of imperialism primarily through the lens of the love triangle between Alexander the Great and his two Persian wives. However, unlike in *The Conquest of Granada*, our hero is not tempered into a stronger leader from his heated encounters with the Psychobitch's power and ambition. On the contrary, he is drained of whatever command of himself he has left when he embraces her as part of the single-minded pursuit of glory to which he has already dedicated himself. For the first half of the play, the wives appear to hold an embarrassing amount of influence over Alexander, and his disgruntled

lieutenants frequently blame them for Alexander's transformation into an emotional, effeminate brat. Roxana bears the brunt of the soldiers' blame and functions as the Psychobitch of this play: cold, proud, and ruthless, she is easy for the other characters to hate and fear; additionally, her strong will and talents of seduction make it easy for Alexander's allies to hold her, rather than Alexander himself, responsible for his loss of self control and estrangement from his Macedonian roots. Certainly, Roxana is accountable for much of the evil activity in the play: she orchestrates most of the disarray and violence in Alexander's household entirely for her own gain, and she eventually murders her more angelic rival, Statira. In part as a result of her machinations, Alexander's preoccupation with his domestic troubles distracts him enough for a handful of his subordinates to successfully assassinate him.

However, to what extent does Roxana's influence cause Alexander's degradation? To what extent is she the wedge that divides Alexander from his responsibilities to his rightful people? Bridget Orr argues that Lee "stigmatiz[es] the kind of cultural hybridity Alexander proclaim[s]" and therefore "actively champion[s] xenophobia."⁴⁴ While I agree that Lee makes use of xenophobia in his critique of Alexander, I would argue that Alexander's cultural hybridity is a sign, rather than a driver, of his avarice and that Roxana's influence is a symptom, rather than a cause, of his degradation. Alexander's primary problem is his self-aggrandizing pursuit of power. Unlike the Psychobitches of other heroic tragedies, Roxana is no demon temptress working to seduce the hero to the false ways of the natives he seeks to conquer; instead, she exposes the negative transformation that the hero has already undergone. Statira may be the nobler queen, but Roxana is the queen whom Alexander actually deserves—she is the truest reflection of the vain, power-mad tyrant that Alexander has become and the perfect partner in the pursuit of his goal to become a god on earth. Though Alexander tries to will himself to choose

⁴⁴ Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 122.

Statira, he cannot quit Roxana, the woman whom he is ashamed to want. By extension, Roxana further illuminates the extent to which Alexander's single-minded pursuit of power has infected his entire high command. Though her role in the play initially appears to be as the instigator of dissension in the ranks, she does little more than highlight and exacerbate dissension that already exists. Most disturbingly, she shows that the split in Alexander's army falls not along the line between civilized and barbarian but rather between those sufficiently corrupted to seek power for themselves and those too weak to do so. Her machinations eventually uncover the extent of the damage that imperial adventurism has done to the whole army and expose nearly every character as a villain and/or fool.

Unlike most Psychobitches, Roxana is a strange mix of victim and villain. As Alexander's first wife, she has a legitimate claim on the privileges of being his queen and on any sympathy the audience might feel toward a scorned wife. Roxana is deeply attached to her husband and spurns the affection of other men; when she chooses to fight for Alexander's attention rather than cede any space in her life for a co-wife, the decision is understandable and to some extent admirable. Why, then, does Statira become the subject of the most pathetic "spurned lover" scenes while Roxana is depicted as the play's Psychobitch? Despite her position as the "legitimate" wife, we are led to believe that she is not the "right" wife for a man in Alexander's position. Roxana idolizes power for its own sake and is attracted to the power she sees in others. She embodies and encourages the arrogance of conquest and desire for dominance that turn leaders into tyrants. She frequently boasts of her ability to be master of her environment and her unwillingness to defer to anyone, including her male guardians; at one point in reminiscing about her past, she describes her "reign" over her female friends in Sogdia as one in which she "[t]aught 'em like Amazons to ride and chase / Wild beasts in deserts, and to master

men.”⁴⁵ By her own account, her attraction to Alexander fits neatly into this set of values. When the traitor Cassander tries to declare his love for her, Roxana accuses him of being beneath her: “What, shall I leave the bosom of a deity / To clasp a clod, a moving piece of earth / Which a mole heaves? So far art thou beneath me.”⁴⁶ She then elaborates on why she clings to Alexander: “’tis my pride that gives me height of pleasure. / To see the man by all the world admired, / Bowed to my bosom, and my captive there.”⁴⁷ Unlike Statira’s slavish love, Roxana’s devotion to Alexander is not one of a dutiful wife to a lord to whom she lovingly submits; she is an unnatural Amazon who sees Alexander as prime territory to conquer. Also unlike Statira, Roxana does not demand that Alexander be a good man, only a powerful one; she values him for his fame and glory, not for any honor he may have once had.

Alexander appears to recognize and disdain Roxana’s true character; he insists that Statira is his true love and, halfway through the play, vows to end all association with Roxana rather than lose Statira. However, he has made this promise to her before—why does he keep returning to a woman he scorns despite his desire to love the “good” woman? What are the “charms” that keep seducing Alexander even as he complains of them? Cassander describes Roxana as “jealous, bloody, and ambitious” and explains his love for her: “Sure ’twas the likeness of her heart to mine / And sympathy of natures caused me to love her.”⁴⁸ It is an excellent explanation for why Alexander is continually drawn to her as well. “Jealous, bloody, and ambitious” summarizes Alexander’s character as succinctly as Roxana’s. From the beginning of the play, Alexander’s lieutenants describe him as a man who revels in violence,

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Lee, *The Rival Queens*, ed. P.F. Vernon (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 3.1.82-83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.1.177-179.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.1.190-192.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.1.62-64.

claims glory that he did not earn, and demands absolute loyalty that he does not return. While Alexander may have enough of a conscience to despise these qualities when he sees them in others—like Roxana—they are the same qualities that drive his own actions. Ironically, they are the qualities by which he has gained his power and reputation, for without his unrelenting ambition and thirst for violent conquest, he might never have become Alexander the Great. These qualities are the foundation for his glory, and while Statira shames him for these qualities, Roxana celebrates them. As much as Alexander may want to be a better man by loving Statira, he finds in Roxana a more supportive partner for his career plans and a more alluring mirror of his own desires.

When Alexander disposes of Roxana again halfway through the play, it becomes clear that removing the mirror does not remove the desires—if anything, his worst traits and compulsions become more pronounced and misdirected when he no longer has Roxana on which to blame them. At some point in the process of building his empire, a point he passes before the play even begins, he has lost any sense of national purpose for the empire's existence and has shed his identification with the people whose resources he has used to build it. For Alexander, his empire is not Macedonia's but his own—he builds it to glorify himself, and much like his relationship with Roxana, he gravitates most strongly to the portions of it that reflect his sense of his own greatness back to him. More damning, when he no longer has Roxana's Amazonian aggression and determination from which to draw his strength, all that is left of him is his vanity, shallowness, and irrational temper. The process of empire-building has infected him with the weak femininity of his conquests. Where Dryden's *Almanzor* gains the substance and purpose that makes him a true man, Alexander trades that substance for the appearance of greatness, and his lieutenants encourage him in hopes that some of Alexander's fame and glory will rub off on

them. At the feast celebrating his return to Babylon and reunion with Statira, Alexander enters in Persian garb, singing his own praises while his lieutenants echo his self-love. Only Clytus has the courage and the loyalty to his native people to confront Alexander with how far he has strayed from his roots and allowed his character to be corrupted by success. He refuses to replace his plain Macedonian uniform with an elaborate Persian robe and accuses Alexander of failing to rise to his father's true greatness and nobility:

Come, shall I speak a man more brave than you,
A better general and more expert soldier?
... ..
Your father Philip. I have seen him march,
And fought beneath his dreadful banner, where
The stoutest at this table would ha' trembled.
Nay, frown not, sir; you cannot look me dead.
... ..
Philip fought men, but Alexander, women.⁴⁹

Incensed, Alexander replies with a list of his greatest moments as a warrior, but Clytus dismisses it as "all bravado" and responds with a list of Alexander's greatest crimes. "Forgive yourself for all your blasphemies, / The riots of a most debauched and blotted life," he instructs Alexander.⁵⁰ Clytus's criticism hits too close to home: Alexander inadvertently proves his point by killing Clytus, the last honorable Macedonian in Alexander's command, in a fit of blind rage and cowardly desire to sweep away the critique rather than defeat it.

Alexander's feminization becomes complete when Roxana grows into the strong fighter that Alexander is supposed to be. For all her harshness, Roxana seems imbued with the manhood that Alexander now lacks after they part ways. While he may have been able to temporarily awe her into limited subservience when they were first married, she is not willing to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.2.131-132, 134-137, 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.2.168, 187-188.

let him dictate her position in their marriage or their kingdom, and she will not accept his dismissal of her without a fight. However, she does not consider her opponent to be Alexander—the enemy she must battle is her rival Statira, and Alexander becomes merely the trophy to be won. Their rivalry turns into a real battle, a contrast with the alleged fraudulence of Alexander’s “bravado.” In the final scene, Roxana storms into Statira’s bedchamber with a brigade of slaves in tow and announces that she will kill Statira unless the chosen queen hands over Alexander’s heart. Unwilling to take the chance that Alexander’s grief would inspire her victim to live, Roxana stabs her rival before Alexander arrives in the bedroom, and as he dissolves into grief at the sight of his dying wife, Roxana practically dares him to retaliate: “Do, strike! Behold, my bosom swells to meet thee; / ’Tis full of thine, of veins that run ambition, / And I can brave whatever fate you bring.”⁵¹ Roxana shares Alexander’s ambition and arrogance, but he no longer has her bravery. At Statira’s request to spare Roxana’s life and Roxana’s announcement that she is pregnant with his child, the bereaved Alexander cannot regain command of the problem of Roxana—he can only push her out of sight as he did with the problem of Clytus. Roxana agrees to leave not in deference to Alexander’s wishes but because she has outgrown him and will no longer be made a fool by her love for him:

I go, I fly forever from thy sight.
 My mortal injuries have turned my mind,
 And I could curse myself for being kind.
 If there be any majesty above
 That has revenge in store for perjured love,
 Send heav’n the swiftest ruin on his head,
 Strike the destroyer, lay the victor dead,
 Kill the triumpher and avenge my wrong
 In height of pomp, while he is warm and young...⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.1.123-125.

⁵² Ibid., 5.1.220-228.

With this curse, Roxana escapes to live another day and build a new power base with her heir on the way. Alexander dies shortly thereafter, assassinated by his own men, with no clear successor and no retribution for his or Statira's deaths.

Given the lack of conventional heroes or justice, *The Rival Queens* looks like a parody of heroic drama. Alexander is a dominant figure in Western history, and even if he does not experience a happy ending, he could still be a tragic hero. However, he turns out not to be a great man with a strength that becomes a poisonous flaw in a certain context. Unlike Almanzor, Alexander does not triumph when he turns away from the Psychobitch, largely because he does so for the wrong reasons. He never really rejects what Roxana stands for—he rejects her only because he wants to keep Statira. He makes a self-interested choice rather than a moral one, and though they may happen to be the same choice in that one instance, he never grows out of the habit of serving himself rather than his people as a responsible leader should. Late in the play, we find out that we have been watching the story of Dryden's Boabdelin and that our "hero" is actually a spoiled, lazy, effeminate man masquerading as a hero he never really was, like any Eastern emperor in other heroic dramas. And to complete the role reversal, our "Psychobitch" becomes the only character capable of standing up to tyranny and living to tell the tale—Roxana has the opportunity to give birth to a new royal line in a new world while the old empire of Alexander descends into infighting and chaos. In *The Conquest of Granada*, Almanzor is never a perfect protagonist, but in him we see a strong, ethical man grow into a hero by overcoming his demons and the beautiful woman who speaks for them. Alexander is no Almanzor: in him we see a weak, corruptible man devolve into such a sad wisp that his wife, the nominal villain, becomes the winner of his story simply by surviving it. Almanzor defeats the Psychobitch; Alexander becomes the Psychobitch and has no one to blame but himself.

While it is easy to see why *The Rival Queens* became a major target of mockery—even for a heroic drama, it is melodramatic and over-the-top—the play was very popular and was performed throughout the Restoration and eighteenth century. Why did it manage to outlast the short-lived popularity of its genre? The short answer would be the rival queens themselves: strong female roles paired with the strong female actors who were performing during the peaks of the play’s popularity made for compelling must-see drama.⁵³ The longer answer might be that the audience can feel the same attraction/repulsion for the Psychobitches that the protagonists do, especially when they are performed by actresses capable of bringing their characters’ powerful presence from the page to the stage. The Psychobitches can take one on an emotional and intellectual roller coaster that mirrors evolution of the heroes: one can identify with them, hate them, judge them, admire them, be ashamed of admiring them, hate them for causing the shame, want them defeated, and still mourn their defeat at least a little bit. In a genre famous for characters that never seem to act human, the Psychobitches come closest to being human. As terrible as they can be, their vices fall under the umbrella of desire, a familiar emotion whose power everyone can understand. It is in their determined pursuit of their desires in the context of imperial politics that they become dangerous. They demonstrate that power is seductive and almost irresistible and that amassing power for its own sake is destructive. Encounters with this kind of native puts empire-builders at the greatest risk of failure because they play on a universal selfishness that can inspire individuals to trade the real empowerment of membership in a community for the illusory power of personal fame and glory. The Psychobitches do not infect the heroes with the desire for personal power, but they do try to infect them with the belief that pursuing personal power would be noble.

⁵³ Felicity Nussbaum makes this case convincingly in “‘Real, Beautiful Women’: Actresses and *The Rival Queens*,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 138-158.

The Limits of Heroic Drama and the Endurance of the Psychobitch

The popularity of the heroic drama did not survive the Restoration to which it was linked. As the hopeful excitement of Charles II's return faded, the "rightful return" and "rebirth of national unity" elements of heroic drama lost their relevance and took a darker turn in the 1670's before giving way to epic dramas more focused on the liberties of subjects than the triumphs of monarchs. Braverman goes as far as to say that heroic drama "became a barometer of eroding confidence in restoration principles, registering that impulse through contradictions within its own discursive framework."⁵⁴ Perhaps the heroic drama does die from its reliance on ancient claims to rule, outdated codes of honor, and vague definitions of "self" and "other" that did not incorporate the increasingly popular idea of "ethnicity." However, many of the "contradictions within its own discursive framework"—contradictions personified by the Psychobitch—are arguably the only aspects of heroic drama that outlast the genre. The Psychobitch continues to represent the ignoble realities and motives behind England's noble intentions at various stages of their empire's development well into the eighteenth century. Whenever she appears, she does not demand just that the hero muster the moral strength to resist her charms and choose virtue, but also that he possess the wisdom to know the difference.

Heroic dramas like *The Conquest of Granada* and *The Rival Queens* present a model of empire that is highly dependent on the character and motives of the imperial leaders, and in some ways this model presents a path out of the rise-and-fall cycle of empires to those who are righteous enough to follow it. If the hero is benevolent enough to inspire willing submission from his would-be subjects and wise enough not to overextend himself or his resources—two qualities that the English valued in their own representatives and believed set them apart from

⁵⁴ Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots*, 47.

the Spanish—he can build and preserve a peaceful, productive empire. Such heroes are rare but not total fantasies. In heroic dramas, the honor of an empire’s heroes—their fidelity to their people, their concern for their subjects, their restraint in the exercise of power and expansion of territory, and their faith in the cause(s) for which their empire exists—offers a faint chance that an empire can be prolonged or redeemed.

However, while this vision helped make imperialism a more palatable idea for the English at home, the reality of what was taking place in the Americas fell far short of this ideal. England was populating its colonies not with its patriotic heroes but with its self-interested outcasts. As Pagden points out, this pattern could work to England’s short-term advantage: “From the beginning all the European powers seem to have regarded their overseas settlements as either simple deposits for the waste products of the metropolitan society or, more far-sightedly (and more humanely), as a place where the disadvantaged, those whom Richard Hakluyt called the ‘superfluous peoples,’ could create lives for themselves which they would be denied in Europe.”⁵⁵ In the long term, it threatened to undermine England’s military and financial security and strain the political bonds among its people. England’s colonists were not interested in forging alliances, converting heathens, liberating oppressed peoples, or otherwise acting out a heroic epic; they were overseas to explore personal opportunities for wealth, power, status, and individual freedom that their home country denied them. These struggles for social status and self-possession became a central theme of drama in the two decades after the Glorious Revolution, and the plays that explored these struggles were more likely to focus on the overreaches of the male imperial victors rather than their vilified female counterparts.

⁵⁵ Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 104.

CHAPTER 2

MEN BEHAVING BADLY: LIBERTY, PROPERTY, AND
HUMAN COMMODIFICATION IN LATE RESTORATION DRAMA

“I don’t say that tyranny *ought*, but we find in *fact*,
that it provokes the oppressed to throw off even
a lawful yoke that fits too heavy.” –Mary Astell,
Some Reflections upon Marriage

The heroic dramas of the Restoration repeatedly framed political power as a relationship of kinship, and by extension, they treated empire as a dominant imperial power’s marriage to a voluntarily submissive, uncultivated territory. After the Glorious Revolution, however, many plays presented political hierarchy as a more fluid but more mercenary owner/commodity relationship, while others challenged the threat that this change posed to the English liberties the Revolution was supposed to preserve. Perhaps not coincidentally, many of these plays are authored by women, who would be sensitive to the overreaches of male privilege, and the primary conflicts assume a personal tone and setting: they take place over the territory of women’s bodies. In particular, the Oriental she-tragedies make strong connections between the abuse of women and the abuse of entire polities, and they explore the contradictions in preserving traditional hierarchies while claiming to honoring individual liberties. This tension occupied a central role in post-Revolution political debate and theater, especially as traditional hierarchies were metastasizing into England’s imperial relationships—masters and slaves, colonizers and colonized—and were being complicated by the growing use of capitalist concepts to justify them.

The most provocative plays of the 1690’s and 1700’s explore this tension through the use of Men Behaving Badly, a character type that challenges the wisdom of defining ownership of one’s subordinates as the keystone of English liberty. Unlike in Restoration heroic drama, where

aggressive and amoral women take most of the blame for political chaos, the Man Behaving Badly has overdosed on his own power, is almost comically certain of his absolute authority, and abuses it until he loses it, often at the hands of morally outraged subjects who push back. He is not simply weak, misguided, or alienated, like the corrupted rulers of Restoration heroic dramas—they are malicious, value power for its own sake, and enjoy bullying their most powerless subjects. In many ways, the Man Behaving Badly is the critical, uncharitable portrayal of the “heroic” qualities that are glossed over or projected onto a Psychobitch in heroic dramas like *The Conquest of Granada*. A character like Almanzor is presented as someone who naturally dwells outside of any social or legal system of obligations but who chooses to submit to one in order to protect his people. In many of the late-Stuart she-tragedies, we see what can result from these characters using their power to abuse rather than protect.

The wrinkle in these abuses of power is that they are technically legitimate. The Men Behaving Badly rightfully occupy their positions and are exercising powers that they have technically been granted—the plays of this era do not seriously challenge that possession of authority. Their bad behavior lies in their unwillingness to acknowledge the implied addenda to those powers that demand the ruler take his subjects’ welfare and desires into account. Continuing the marriage analogy of power used in Restoration heroic dramas, post-revolution dramas emphasized the responsibilities that rulers have over their subjects—responsibilities that should mirror a husband’s loving care to an obedient wife—and they warned against the corrosive effects of absolute power without restraint, the abuse of which could destroy a political family as completely as a domestic one. The Men Behaving Badly can be reformed if they can be made to recognize the natural limits of their powers and bring their reign into alignment with

the expectations of their subjects; those who cannot be reformed must be replaced by someone who has not rightfully inherited the power but has demonstrated that he actually deserves it.

The Commodification of Liberty

The meaning of liberty permeated the battle over the meaning of the Glorious Revolution. Over the course of the 1690's, it increasingly focused on the liberty of free (English)men to dominate what was rightfully theirs. In December of 1688—on the same day that the disgraced, depressed, and heavily medicated King James II left his capital—crowds of orange-brandishing Londoners gathered next to the road to greet William, Prince of Orange, as he rode into town to take control of the kingdom. James II had been a legitimate ruler who had inherited his crown by legitimate right, had produced a legitimate (if disputed) male heir, and had not exerted his power very differently from any legitimate ruler before he had been strongly encouraged/forced to flee his country. However, James had frequently taken his government in directions of which his people did not approve, tolerate, or even understand. According to the Convention Parliament, he had “endeavored to subvert the constitution of the kingdom, by breaking the original contract, between king and people, and by the advice of Jesuits and other wicked persons...violated the fundamental laws, and...withdrawn himself out of this kingdom.”⁵⁶ Like most of England's monarchs, he had probably violated any number of laws, but the “original contract” and “fundamental laws” to which the Convention referred ran deeper than the letter of the law—it had to do with the king's obligation to share power with a parliament drawn from the English people, rule within the limits to which the people would consent, and respect the set of individual rights to person and property that the English people believed were their birthright.

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Edward Vallance, *The Glorious Revolution: 1688—Britain's Fight for Liberty* (New York: Pegasus, 2009), 162.

The authoritarian manner in which James had ruled had caused his people to feel their rights, voices, and autonomy so threatened that they had turned to a short, ugly Dutch princeling to rid them of their troublesome king.

In February of 1689, the Convention finally offered William and Mary a dual monarchy when William threatened to take his army and go home, and officially, little had changed from James II's reign: the king and the parliament would continue to battle over their respective powers as they had when James occupied the throne. Unofficially, however, the Glorious Revolution set the stage for the colliding sets of values that would transform England from a parliamentary monarchy to a global empire. On one hand, the Glorious Revolution reaffirmed the English principles of individual rights and government by popular consent, principles that bound the king and his subjects together by social contract rather than divine right to rule. As Edward Vallance points out, "if the Revolution did not enshrine parliamentary 'democracy' it certainly enshrined parliamentary government."⁵⁷ The Revolution also empowered the parliament to extend these principles to the colonies and bring the colonists more genuinely into the English body politic, which resulted in "a growing feeling among many white, English-speaking colonists that they held the same rights as Crown subjects in Britain."⁵⁸ On the other hand, the Revolution also ushered in an imperial era in which power lay in property and wealth and in which the people themselves were divided into subjects and resources. At home, "[t]he post-Revolutionary penal code grew ever more draconian in its treatment of crimes against property," writes Vallance, and overseas, "[t]he Revolution effectively ended the Royal African Company's monopoly on the transatlantic slave trade," eventually resulting in "a doubling of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 308.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 308-309.

human traffic.”⁵⁹ In an era where England had established colonies but a less established monarchical line, the emphasis on Protestant Englishmen’s rights appointed each of them sovereigns of their own private kingdoms and personal subjects—wives, children, servants, and slaves. In the process of theoretically expanding liberty, the rationales behind the Glorious Revolution also recast the oppression of less powerful populations in the language of liberty.

Though the idea sounds paradoxical, John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* explains the reasoning by which personal liberty equates to possession of others, and it also reflects a focus on property and capital over social customs and relationships that was worming its way into English society more successfully after the Glorious Revolution. In post-Revolution representations of society, the social hierarchy remained the same, but the obligations that each member owed society by virtue of his/her station were slowly replaced by a society of ownership and commodification, in which one had a right to whatever he had duly purchased. Theoretically, this right belonged to everyone, but practically, it relegated some to the category of commodity, where human beings themselves became the property of those who could afford to purchase their bodies or labor. Locke himself slides between discussing people as actors and as property in the *Second Treatise* without acknowledging the inconsistency. When he explains man’s natural right to his own person and the fruits of his own labor, he slips into the pattern of limiting this right to those who have the power to own:

[E]very man has a *Property* in his own *Person*...The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*... And the taking of this or that part [of the commons], does not depend on the express consent of all the Commoners. Thus the Grass my Horse has bit;

⁵⁹ Ibid., 182, 308.

the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my *Property*.⁶⁰

In the middle of defending one's right to the product of his labor, Locke puts the harvesting servant on the same level as the grazing horse and the master's hands. The parallelism reveals that, while some may own the product of their labor, some may also own the labor of others; dependent people, like livestock, are among the tools that a man may own and use to enlarge his estate. Locke's most famous argument—that each man naturally has property in his own person and in anything with which he mixes his own labor—refers only to employers and men with capital, and from there it expands the definition of a man's property to include the labor of others. The argument comes undone further when Locke tries to use this argument to justify slavery, indentured servitude, wage labor, and other institutions that alienate one from his or her natural ownership of body and labor. If Locke's readers exclude everyone who lives and labors in the hierarchy of these institutions—and especially if they throw marriage onto the list—the circle of self-possessed individuals becomes very small.

However, Locke's defenses of such institutions make more sense when we narrow the definition of full personhood to include only people enough wealth and social power to assert their natural rights: Christian Englishmen of property are the subjects with the rational and economic agency to claim sovereignty over themselves and their property, both the property they produced with their own labor and the property they purchased with money. While life itself remains the property of God, above the right of anyone to purchase or take away, other people's bodies and labor were among the property that could be purchased with money, and those with the capital had the right to set the price. C.B. MacPherson calls this theory “possessive

⁶⁰ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 5.27, 28. The bolded text is my emphasis.

individualism,” in which individuals of equal worth exercise their liberty through possession, and he uses this theory to reconcile the apparent contradictions in Locke’s thinking:

[Locke’s] whole theory of property is a justification of the natural right not only to unequal property but to unlimited appropriation. The insistence that a man’s labour is his own property is the root of this justification. For to insist that a man’s labour is his own, is not only to say that it is his to alienate in a wage contract; it is also to say that his labour, and its productivity, is something for which he owes no debt to civil society. If it is labour, a man’s absolute property, which justifies appropriation and creates value, the individual right of appropriation overrides any moral claims of the society. The traditional view that property and labour were social functions, and that ownership of property involved social obligations, is thereby undermined.⁶¹

Viewed in this light, Locke’s contradictions appear less contradictory and more threatening to social order in which he lived, even if it does not sound radical to the modern reader. If every man has property in his labor—which Locke seems to presume is a renewable and perhaps unlimited resource—then he is entitled to as much as he can purchase with his labor, and those with money have as much right to a man’s labor and its fruits as money can buy. Theoretically, every man who can work is a man of means. This principle reduces human relationships to pure commodity exchange, in which no one is burdened by social or personal obligations beyond privately contracted trade but everyone is free to possess and acquire as much as they can earn.

The most troubling part of Locke’s commodification of relationships is his rationalization of economic inequality and hardship. According to Locke, one’s wealth is proportionate to one’s work ethic since one has an unfixed amount of labor to convert to money, and then to land and other property: “[A]s different degrees of Industry were apt to give Men Possessions in different Proportions, so this *Invention of Money* gave them the opportunity to continue and enlarge

⁶¹ C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 221.

them.”⁶² Therefore, in agreeing to recognize money as a legitimate way for people to convert their labor into non-perishable, moveable property, “it is plain, that Men have agreed to disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth, they having by a tacit and voluntary consent found out a way, how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use the product of, by receiving in exchange for the overplus, Gold and Silver, which may be hoarded up without injury to anyone.”⁶³ By this logic, any inequalities that emerge from a free market are the fault of those who do not exert enough labor to keep up or who do not invest their property wisely. In Locke’s view, poverty and socioeconomic inequality are not systemic, but rather a reflection of an individual’s worth, and those who are poor or dependent lack the industry or reasoning ability to partake in the natural rights of reasonable men.

If inequality is the natural manifestation of individuals’ character, it divides the population into two general tiers with different sets of market-determined political and social rights: the rational actors, comprised of Christian Englishmen of property, and everyone else, comprised of anyone dependent on labor alone for their livelihood. MacPherson discusses Locke’s propensity to objectify the laboring classes when he discusses specific natural rights:

Now the question who are to have the right of revolution is a decisive question with Locke: the right of revolution is with him the only effective test of citizenship, as he made no provision for any other method of exercising the right to turn out an unwanted government. Although he insists, in the *Treatise*, on the majority’s right to revolution, it does not seem to cross his mind here that the laboring class might have the right to make a revolution. And indeed there is no reason why it should have crossed his mind, for to him the laboring class was an object of state policy, an object of administration, rather than fully a part of the citizen body. It was incapable of rational political action, while the right to revolution depended essentially on rational decision.⁶⁴

⁶² Locke, *Second Treatise*, 5.48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.50.

⁶⁴ MacPherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 224.

While Locke was certainly not the first to paint such an infantilizing portrait of the laboring class, his generation seems to have been the first to connect rational moral and political action to capitalist activity rather than religion, social status, or birth. The ability to convert labor into property, and property into more property, is the mark of a rational actor, and members of the laboring class are too consumed with day-to-day survival to grow their property or worry about the political policies that would protect property and thus preserve civil society. Conversely, having no property, the laboring class has no right to a voice in public policy, for without property, they have no knowledge of what rational political action is. “The essence of rational conduct therefore is private appropriation of the land and the materials it yields, and investment of one’s energies in improving them for the greatest conveniences of life one may thereby get for oneself,” explains MacPherson⁶⁵—anyone who fails to appropriate property has surrendered their rights to their own person and labor due to their ineptitude at rational action.

Possessive Individualism in *Oroonoko*

This owner/commodity model of social and political relationships could prove handy for the upper classes to rationalize their wealth and power domestically and abroad. At home, it justified inequality and oppression among naturally free and equal English subjects, and it redirected attention from systemic injustice to individual failings: “If men are by nature equally rational, in the sense of equally capable of looking after themselves, those who have fallen permanently behind in the pursuit of property can be assumed to have only themselves to blame.”⁶⁶ It assured those without property that they were capable of acquiring it on their own

⁶⁵ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 245.

and encouraged them to work harder for their social betters rather than demand any noblesse oblige or government assistance.

In the context of the global English community, the owner/commodity model provided a productive place for imperialism in the imagination of average people who were not heavily involved in global trade and colonization. The empire offered a place for those without property to acquire it, as well as a source of new wealth for the metropolis, up for grabs for anyone industrious enough to appropriate it. John Locke was an eloquent salesman for the idea that the American colonies offered to every willing worker the means to become the lord of an estate, and often in the *Second Treatise*, he describes America as a vast wilderness of untapped abundance, waiting for free, industrious Englishmen to cultivate and manage it properly. “An Acre of Land that bears here Twenty Bushels of Wheat, and another in *America*, which, with the same Husbandry, would do the like, are without doubt, of the same natural, intrinsic Value,” he points out. “But yet the Benefit Mankind receives from the one, in a Year, is worth 5 *l.* and from the other possibly not worth a Penny, if all the Profit an *Indian* received from it were to be valued, and sold here.”⁶⁷ As a symbol of English national identity, the idea of the empire as a land of opportunity and liberty set it apart from other contemporary empires that the English considered exploitative and oppressive: the English would have an empire of the free, and any Englishman could belong to the free class.

During the 1690's, this version of imperialism began to gain prominence on the English stage. It offered a departure from Restoration-era representations of empire in heroic drama, which tended to portray empires as breeding grounds of tyranny and decadence, and it recast empires as a gateway to freedom and prosperity. While in heroic drama a character's worth

⁶⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise*, 5.43.

rested on honor, sacrifice, and fidelity to his lineage or nation, in many post-Revolution plays a character could be judged on his or her market value, the price that his/her body and labor could fetch in an economic exchange. Though such an assessment might sound dehumanizing, it was presented as liberating in plays where the characters had little going for them besides their property in their persons and labor: anyone with enough gumption and industry could go to the colonies and avail themselves of the abundant opportunity to convert their bodies and labor into property, and from there into security and status. Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko* (1695), for example, brings this point home by tracking the upward mobility of two penniless single women, who are among the most disempowered people in England but find social and economic success on the colonial marriage market. By adding the comic plot of the Welldon sisters to Aphra Behn's tale of the royal slave Oroonoko, Southerne uses the context of marriage and courtship to make the case that, within the fairness of an open market, even the most subjected English are freer than anyone else in the world. When human relationships are contractual and people can sell themselves for the best price that they can command, even impoverished spinsters could find some measure of equality, justice, and social status.

In the first scene of the play, Charlot and Lucy Welldon discuss the plight that has brought them to Surinam: their lack of success in finding husbands in England and their inability to otherwise make a living for themselves. Their conversation establishes the philosophical framework of the play by identifying the root of their problem as economic rather than social in nature. According to Charlot and Lucy, they have not been wronged by a social system that imposes strict gender conventions on women, stigmatizes spinsterhood, and allows women few social freedoms or viable employment opportunities. Instead, they have been forced to journey to Surinam because they have been priced out of the English marriage market. Noting that

women, like clothes, “are out of fashion a great while before they wear out” (1.1.19-20), Charlot complains,

O, yes, [the men of London] know what they wou’d have. They wou’d have a Woman give the Town a Pattern of her Person and Beauty, and not stay in it so long to have the whole Piece worn out. They wou’d have the Good Face only discover’d, and not the Folly that commonly goes along with it. They say there is a vast Stock of Beauty in the Nation, but a great part of it lies in unprofitable hands; therefore for the good of the Publick, they wou’d have a Draught made once a Quarter, send the decaying Beauties for Breeders into the Countrey, to make room for New Faces to appear, to countenance the Pleasures of the Town.⁶⁸

Charlot describes their problem as a simple matter of supply and demand, and consequently, the obvious solution is to go to a place where the demand for broke and fading beauties outweighs the supply. In Surinam, there is not a “vast Stock of Beauty” that pushes them quickly into the hands of undesirable buyers so as to “make room for New Faces to appear” in the more prestigious markets. Unlike London, Surinam offers a plethora of eligible bachelors who own thriving plantations and growing fortunes, and they must compete for wives amidst a shortage of eligible women. Husbands come “as thick as Oranges” in Surinam, Charlot assures her sister, and “[w]eek after week they drop into some Woman’s mouth.”⁶⁹ And unlike in England, where they would have to sell themselves at bargain basement prices to any scrap of a man they could attract, the Welldon sisters would have plenty of potential buyers and the opportunity to choose the best. That change of circumstance alone frees them to make the most of the property they have in their persons, and in the context of marriage and courtship, it makes them freer than the men of Surinam.

However, Surinam is no utopia. The expanded economic opportunity does not translate to social equality, and the Welldon sisters quickly discover that wealth and property still

⁶⁸ Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko*, in *The Works of Thomas Southerne*, ed. Robert Jordan and Harold Love, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 1.1.30-38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.1.5-6.

command power and determine the social pecking order. The marriage plot that centers on the Welldons unfolds alongside the slavery plot that centers on Oroonoko, and the bargaining and bidding that Charlot does over her sister echoes the bargaining and bidding that the planters do over the black Africans who arrive on the slave ships. Sometimes the two plots combine in the same scene. When Charlot, disguised as a man and passing as Lucy's brother, first offers her sister to the slave trader Captain Driver, it is in the middle of a slave auction. Apparently sensitive to the similarities in the transactions, Charlot tries to draw a line between the sale of free Englishwomen and enslaved Africans. When the Captain assures her that he has the money to make a marriage worth the Welldons' while, Charlot responds, "This is your Market for Slaves; my Sister is a Free Woman, and must not be dispos'd of in publick"; in private, however, "if my Sister likes you, and I like your Offers—" Lucy may be disposed of quickly.⁷⁰

Even in human trafficking, there is a protocol that should be followed to preserve the rights of free and rational actors to dispose of their property in their persons. In the case of Englishwomen, they have the right to acquaint themselves and bond with their buyers, and they have the right to privacy in their marriage dealings. In the case of Africans, they have a right to have their social status in their native communities respected, and they have a right to good faith in their dealings. The courtship between the Captain and Lucy is quickly derailed when the Welldons discover that he conned an African prince into boarding his slave ship and betrayed the friendship he had cultivated with Oroonoko by selling him into slavery. "I wou'd not have him, after doing so base a thing," declares Lucy.⁷¹ Their friend Stanmore confesses that such base things provide the foundation on which this land of opportunity has been built: "Enquire into the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.2.113-116.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.2.258-259.

great Estates, and you will find most of 'em depend upon the same Title of Honesty.”⁷² The slave trade exposes the dark side of a society based on property rights rather than human rights. In a society where status and respectability can be bought, honor matters little. One can lie, cheat, steal, betray, and harm, but may still command ownership of others as long as one can pay the purchase price—any individual rights that are trampled in the process do not truly exist if there is not wealth or property to validate them.

Ultimately, *Oroonoko* does not champion universal individual rights. Instead, it rationalizes the idea that people are property by suggesting that everyone with an able body is a property owner unless or until one's lack of reason relegates him/her to the commodity class. In *Oroonoko*, the primary moral problem is not that a slave trade or a marriage trade exists, but rather that these markets can mistakenly make kings out of brutes and slaves out of kings. Furthermore, the play reinforces Locke's point that some people are too stupid or lazy to grow their property in themselves, are not rational actors, and are therefore destined to become the property of those who are. Content to let the institution of slavery stand for much of the play, Oroonoko is finally inspired to plot a slave rebellion when he has to face the possibility of his unborn son growing up in slavery. He is much less concerned with his fellow countrymen, people who would be his subjects back in Africa; he blames their lack of character for their fear in going through with the rebellion, and he blames himself for “think[ing] I cou'd design to make those free, / Who were by Nature Slaves.”⁷³ As far as he—and presumably the audience—are concerned, the slaves may have a natural right to themselves, but they are not rational actors by nature and thus deserve their slavery.

⁷² Ibid., 1.2.262-263.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.2.60-61.

By contrast, the Welldons demonstrate their merit by securing favorable marriages for themselves: Lucy marries an immature heir whom she can easily dominate, while Charlot manages to charm the prosperous Stanmore into proposing to her. Their strategizing and industry pay off, and once they secure husbands, they are arguably freer than they are when they are drifting spinsters. As Lucy points out, wives and widows do not have to worry as much about maintaining a conventionally feminine, virginal image and have more liberty to behave as they please: “I don’t know what Confinement Marriage may be to the Men, but I’m sure the Women have no liberty without it. I am for any thing that will deliver me from the care of a Reputation.”⁷⁴ In both plots within the play, markets in human commodities become immoral only when someone lands on the wrong side of the owner/commodity divide, as Oroonoko does. His story qualifies as a tragedy only insofar as his royal birth and manner should exempt him from slavery. The failure of the slave market in this case is that it does not give Oroonoko the chance to regain the ownership of his person that was wrongfully stolen from him. Everyone else, however, lands where they should according to their natural abilities.

The main problem with this re-imagining of political power and imperialism was the exclusivity of freedom and personal sovereignty. Sovereignty belonged only to those who were economically independent, and the independent propertied classes were entitled to exercise sovereignty over all their property, material and human. Dependency on a husband, a landlord, an employer, or any patron relegated one to the human commodity class and made one an object of sovereignty. In a society where a man’s home is his castle, everyone connected to that home is a serf, subject to his will just as they would be to a king. Even in the colonies, political freedom and full individual rights were limited to property owners, and if the empire were to fulfill its promise of opportunity, it had to offer property that its settlers could appropriate. It

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.1.66-68.

was probably not a coincidence that the Glorious Revolution, a movement to overthrow a dictatorial monarch in defense of English liberty, ushered in an era in which slavery and indentured servitude exploded in English colonies—slaves, servants, employees, and dependents were merely part of the property that a free Englishman had the right to defend. If anything, the post-Revolution dedication to property rights as the basis of freedom made it even more difficult for those without property to assert any rights to their own bodies or labor. If Christian Englishmen of property were entitled to defend their personal sovereignty against a tyrannical monarch, where did that leave women, laborers, non-Christians, and non-whites, many of whom were expected to voluntarily cede their very personhood to the Christian, male, English guardians under whose sovereignty they lived? Would the legacy of the Glorious Revolution be the creation of an unchecked, unaccountable, absolute ruler in every household?

Men Behaving Badly

By addressing these questions, another cohort of post-Revolution playwrights challenged Southerne's presentation of empire and the owner/commodity relationships it promoted. Also using marriage and courtship as a proxy for social relationships in general, these predominantly female playwrights were highly critical of marginalizing whole classes of people by classifying them as property. Once one accepts the idea that people can be possessions and commodities, it is easy to see those people as subhuman and disposable, and it is much harder to see them as humans with rights that should be protected from the interest of property owners. It was not an accident that so many playwrights, particularly women, focused on marriage and courtship as a market that challenged Lockean portrayal of liberty. Marriage and courtship were an institution whose economics everyone knew and could easily understand; they provided a highly visible and

familiar example of both the problems that come with treating human beings as moveable property and the acceptance that such an institution could win from the liberty-loving—but also profit- and cheap-labor-loving—English people. As with any traditional market, marriage was an institution in which the man/buyer had all the power of choice and the woman/seller could not refuse to participate. The woman bore the burden of making a sale, and since the “product” was her own untouched person, that burden required the woman to maximize the attractiveness of her body, maintain a spotless reputation to ensure the product’s integrity, and secure a buyer while her product’s market value was at its peak. As Paula Backscheider points out, “Courtship was a time of intense scrutiny for women, and men, who often had few unchaperoned opportunities to talk to the woman, ‘read’ and set a value upon the text [the woman’s body] offered them.”⁷⁵

Women’s bodies were often the only alienable property they owned and could trade for a household, a family, and social respectability; the trafficking of women under the umbrella of marriage—also known as courtship—was often a woman’s only opportunity to convert her sole property into a better life for herself. Therefore, a woman possessed a strong interest in keeping her bodily property and her reputation as a reliable seller in pristine condition. However, contrary to Locke’s model of individual rights and natural freedom, a woman’s natural reason and industry could only carry her so far. With no desirable options besides marriage, a woman had to sell her body and labor in marriage to the best man she could attract, and most women could not afford to retain ownership of herself as a lifelong single woman. This construction of a woman’s social value, as a man’s helpmeet and mother of his children, put women in an especially vulnerable position. A woman was destined to be someone’s marital property, at least if she was lucky, and she had little protection from exploitation and abuse after she had turned

⁷⁵ Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 137.

her person over to her husband. Moreover, she had considerable responsibility for maintaining the property value in her person before she was married, but too often had little power to fulfill that responsibility—that power rested with the men who had power over women.

For the playwrights who used women's social position to explore the holes in Locke's vision of human liberty, the disproportionate power that men held over women gives birth to a character type that showcased the most extreme injustices of that imbalance, to whom I refer as Men Behaving Badly. These characters illustrate the need to focus on the responsibilities of the powerful rather than the powerless: if a man is granted ownership over another person and the absolute power that ownership implies, he will inevitably become an abusive tyrant with no respect for his dependents' humanity. These characters shift the discussion of human commodification from the language of economics to the language of humanity, specifically that of intimacy and violation. They tend to represent the conquest and ownership of people not as a fair market exchange but as a violation akin to rape: if one takes seriously the idea that every human being owns his/her person, any violation of another's body is an unnatural and violent crime regardless of the economic circumstances under which someone "acquires" another's body. In using the Men Behaving Badly to juxtapose the languages of conquest and rape, these playwrights remove the rationalizing effect that market ideology had on conquest and ownership of people. Both are destructive exploitation, no better than pillaging, and not productive exercises of power. Paula Backscheider observes, "What Manley and other women preserved was the explicit expression of a range of emotions: outrage at being assessed, bartered, and sold; despair and repugnance when married without love; pride in their virtue and integrity. They also preserved the hope of free love—love freely chosen and given and constant because free. Most

important of all, they insisted upon the possibility of female self-control and self-possession.”⁷⁶

This same outrage at the injustice of human commodification and advocacy of self-possession could be extended to all disempowered populations, including those who suffered under the conquest of imperialism.

For a Protestant people who prided themselves on valuing individual liberties, few examples of absolute power were as condemning, illustrative, and titillating as the Middle Eastern seraglio, and few men could be as easily demonized as the sultan of a harem. For playwrights who wanted draw parallels between rape and absolute power, few settings lent themselves so well to the comparison. English travel literature of the Middle East had long featured stories of imprisoned women kept as sex slaves to fulfill the sultan’s every carnal desire. Aaron Hill’s sensational *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire in all its Branches* (1709) earned its popularity from its absurd tales of European visitors’ sexual escapades in the sultan’s seraglio, including those of an Englishman who supposedly managed to slip into the seraglio undetected and spend over a week having sex with the attention-starved women therein. More serious travelogues, like Richard Knolles’s *The Turkish History* (1687) and Paul Rycault’s influential *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1686), abstained from Hill’s risqué imagery but also used the seraglio as evidence that Eastern sultans were violent, totalitarian, and self-indulgent at their subjects’ expense. Travel writers commonly used the treatment of women’s bodies as a barometer of liberty, civilization, and cultural progress, and the erotic horror of the seraglio could effectively illustrate an author’s imagined contrast between the liberty and enlightenment of Christendom and the dark barbarity of the Islamic world.

Bernadette Andrea discusses the ideological alliance that English feminists made with such travel writers: “Instantiated by the masculinist travel literature of the seventeenth century,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 92.

the image of the ‘oppressed’ Muslim woman became the basis for the uneasy marriage between English women’s protests against gender oppression at the turn of the eighteenth century and their complicity with the orientalist and racist ideologies that supported England’s emerging global empire.”⁷⁷ The alliance was not necessarily wise since “the lot of purportedly enslaved Muslim wives was frequently compared with that of ‘freeborn’ English women, who were celebrated in the patriarchal discourse of the period as living in a ‘paradise’ for gender relations.”⁷⁸ In invoking the image of the seraglio, female playwrights ran the risk of exoticizing Muslim cultures in ways that could actually downplay the extent to which English women suffered gendered oppression; by inviting comparisons of the two cultures, they opened the door to the argument that English women should be grateful for the liberties that English men allowed them. However disempowered English women were in their families and their body politic, English culture had no equivalent to the seraglio.

While the sexual dynamics of the seraglio added a taboo-crossing thrill to the setting, it also portrayed the logical extreme of absolute power in emotionally charged, intensely personal ways—even believers in royal supremacy and divine right would have difficulty justifying extensions of those powers that gave a monarch ownership of any woman’s body and virtue, any father’s daughters, and any family’s integrity. Between 1690 and 1714, playwrights who wanted to show the danger and dishonor of tyranny often set their works in the inner sanctum of the some Eastern sultan’s household, where the audience could see an all-powerful emperor wield total control over his subjects, even their own bodies. While such playwrights usually stop short of endorsing outright rebellion against rightful authority, they emphasize the intolerable wrongs

⁷⁷ Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

of tyranny and portray the subjects' resistance not as defiance but rather as an inevitable and understandable attempt at self-preservation. This assignment of blame is the major difference between the *Men Behaving Badly* and the heroes of other epic tragedies: the ruler is responsible for his own abuses of power, and he is faulted for violating the needs of his subjects. As in a marriage, the partnership between a ruler and his subjects may not be equal, but it is a partnership; and in determining what each partner owes to the other, these authors use a standard of universal justice rather than tribal loyalty or market forces.

The Limits of Power in *Ibrahim*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, women wrote many of the plays that follow this pattern, and they show a keenly felt understanding of the injustice of having one's personhood entirely at the disposal of another. Theirs tend to be the plays with the strongest, most self-possessed heroines and the most eloquent assertions of an individual's right to govern her own body and conscience. First produced in 1696, Mary Pix's *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* contains one of the most forceful denunciations of absolute monarchy and defenses of individual rights and heavily implies that legitimate absolute power does not exist—that all rulers do, in fact, have legal and moral limits on their power. As Andrea describes it, the play “enacts the shift from heroics to sentiment by drawing together the emergent discourses of feminism and orientalism in a distinctly Whig performance.”⁷⁹ *Ibrahim* chronicles the anatomy of a rebellion that is sparked when the oppressive sultan Ibrahim kidnaps and rapes Morena, the virtuous daughter of the much-revered Mufti. Most notably, kidnapping and rape is how everyone in the play (except Ibrahim, his sycophantic Visier, and his mistress/procuress Sheker Para) defines Ibrahim's taking of Morena—it is not conquest, nor confiscation, nor possession, nor anything that would imply

⁷⁹ Ibid., 89.

an assertion of rightful authority, but rather a crime of theft and violation. By extension, if Ibrahim's exercise of power is a crime, then the sultan has reduced himself to a criminal, in the kingdom of God if nowhere else. In the moral universe of this play, once Ibrahim crosses that line, he destroys his kingdom's moral order and grants his subjects the authority and even the duty to reestablish it by putting an end to the sultan's criminality.

From the beginning of the play, Pix makes clear that Ibrahim has always ruled as a tyrant and that his subjects have been unhappy with his governance for a long time. Ibrahim has squandered the treasury to satisfy his own sensual appetites, strained his people's commercial relationships by seizing imported goods, issued harmful decrees on malicious whims, and generally abused his powers for his own gain even at the expense of the empire's health. However, his disgruntled subordinates complain not that Ibrahim is exercising powers he does not have but rather that he is misusing his rightful authority. In the first scene, the Mufti unloads a list of complaints about "this degenerate man"⁸⁰ to Mustapha, aga of the janissaries, and compares the undeserving Ibrahim to Mustapha's worthy son Amurat: "O 'tis Nobler far a Crown to Merit, than a Crown / To wear."⁸¹ Mustapha responds simply with hopeless resignation to the empire's circumstances: "But these complaints / Alas, avail not, our Lord hates us his faithful Servants, / And whatever we shou'd offer wou'd certainly despise."⁸² Neither man suggests that Ibrahim has thrown away his right to his servants' obedience or to choose what advice to take. He is a terrible ruler who has given his subjects just cause to complain, but since he is ruling terribly within his rights, his loyal servants must try to persuade him to take a

⁸⁰ Mary Pix, *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* (London, 1696), 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*

different course, no matter how unresponsive to criticism he is. A degenerate sultan is still the sultan.

When we meet Ibrahim and Amurat, the differences between their perceptions of themselves make clear the Mufti's disappointment with the former and admiration of the latter. Amurat is entirely focused on service to others and does not display a trace of Ibrahim's entitlement. While he is aware of the powers that he has a right to exercise, he also seems to realize that they come with an obligation to use them with restraint and do good with them. All of his virtues are on display in his courtship of Morena and his determination to make himself worthy of her love. He especially distinguishes himself from his fellow Muslims by vowing the same fidelity to her that she vows to him: "[T]hough our Law allows Plurality of Wives / And Mistresses, yet I will never practice it."⁸³ Brimming with gratitude toward Morena for her favor, he also vows to spend his life repaying her for that gift in a speech that reflects his attitude toward his all his privileges:

*Morena's Name shall guide my Sword to Conquest,
And after those Laborious Toils, eager and longing
For my bliss, the Laurels I have gain'd,
At thy feet I'll lay, Crown'd with thy love
And reigning in thy heart...*⁸⁴

Unlike Ibrahim, Amurat does not take his fortune for granted but instead sees them as rewards that he must earn. He is honest, humble, brave, faithful, giving, and virtuous, all qualities that would make him both a desirable husband for Morena and a great ruler for the empire. Their virtue and tender courtship of her show us the happiness and goodness that is possible in a

⁸³ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 10.

master-subject relationship in which both parties give each other the devotion and service that make companionship worthwhile.

By contrast, Ibrahim thinks only about what he wants and what he believes is owed to him, and predictably, the two categories are almost identical. He surrounds himself with sycophants who sing his praises with an eye-rolling degree of exaggeration, and he lives in a bubble of pleasure that he rarely leaves even to attend to his public duties. Despite having all the power and luxury a man could want, it is still not enough for him, and he is constantly in search of new ways to gratify and celebrate himself. He cries like a spoiled child to his mistress Sheker Para that he has become too big for the world:

As Heaven hath given me a Despotick
And unbounded Power: so shall my Pleasures be.
But oh! the Earth's too little; and its Pleasures
Too few! I cannot keep my mind
In a continued Frame of Joy; tho' the Slaves
That serve me, vie with the Stars for number!⁸⁵

Ibrahim's love of pleasure and power, his desire to hoard and devour all that is worth having on earth, is the force that threatens the harmony of Morena's and Amurat's union. When Sheker Para informs him that the Mufti has kept a beautiful daughter hidden from his master, Ibrahim is determined to possess her, not for her intelligence or virtue but because her beauty and seclusion make her a desirable object to own. He goes to the Mufti's house not to earn her esteem but to take her body, which he seems to believe he already owns. "[F]irst with Prayers, and Mildness / We'll proceed," he tells Sheker Para; "but, if the surly Fool denies; / He soon shall find that Prayers are / Needless, when Power is Infinite."⁸⁶ In fact, he concedes that he sees the most potential for "new unknown delight" in the opportunity to "conquer all these struggling."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20.

Until this moment, the sultan's subjects had grudgingly tolerated his greed, malice, and incompetence in the belief that, regardless of their feelings about his personal character, they owed him the loyal service that is due to their ruler. Those dues, however, do not extend to bodies and souls—Ibrahim does not have the right to destroy Morena's sexual purity or take her virginity by force. The Mufti quietly advises Ibrahim that he is veering outside the bounds of earthly and divine law:

Tho' you are Lord of all, and may without controul
Command, yet Emperor, Remember,
My Daughter is no Slave, and our holy Law
Forbids that you should force the free,
Therefore if the unhappy Girl shou'd please,
And then refuse the offered Greatness; our Prophets Curse
Falls heavy, if you proceed to Violation.⁸⁸

With this warning, the Mufti signals that his and his daughter's obedience to the sultan is over. Now that Ibrahim is outside his rights to make demands of his subjects, Morena and the Mufti are within their rights as free subjects to refuse him. The submission of Restoration heroic dramas and even the beginning of this play is gone, and it is replaced with civil disobedience, the strongest of which comes from a woman. When Morena turns down the sultan's proposition, it is one of the few moments where we see a loyal subject tell her ruler "no" with no implications that she is in the wrong. In fact, she shows her great character in her recognition that her virtue does not lie in her submission to an earthly master, be he husband or king: "No Crown I covet,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 19.

but that which honour gives; / And my Ambition terminates in the contented paths / Of virtue.”⁸⁹

She begs Sheker Para to lie to Ibrahim about her desirability.⁹⁰

The one-family civil disobedience that begins in the Mufti’s home becomes violent when Morena is dragged to the seraglio: she continues to beg for mercy, reminds the sultan that he owes his life to her father, and tells him that she has already made a holy vow to give herself to another man.⁹¹ She makes a final effort to save herself by slicing her hands and arms with the sultan’s sword, threatening to kill herself, and most daring, threatening to bring open rebellion to the sultan as punishment for his crimes:

...’tis the last of thy mischiefs
 If thou dost not kill me—
 With dishevell’d hair, torn Robes, and
 These bloody hands, I’ll run thro’ all thy Guards
 And Camp, whilst my just complaints, compel rebellion!

 I’ll rend obdurate Heaven with piercing
 Crys; till I have forced their mercy!⁹²

Ibrahim may have mightier forces, but justice is on Morena’s side. Though the Visier calls her behavior “traitorous,”⁹³ Morena’s free status and her obligations to God and virtue makes her right to defy her emperor, thwart his assertion of power over her, attempt to deceive him, and threaten his throne. The kind of subversive resistance that might normally be condemned in the abstract, especially in a woman, serves as further proof of Morena’s goodness in these circumstances.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

⁹² Ibid., 25.

⁹³ Ibid., 22.

Ibrahim's rape of Morena lights a powder keg of resentment and rage among the long-serving subjects who feel that their sultan has betrayed them and viciously attacked one of their own. The sultan has violated the person and freedom of an innocent subject, a woman whom he should have protected from such abuse; and to make the matter worse, he inflicted this horror on the people who have served him most honorably. In addition to the credit that Morena has made herself to the empire, her father saved Ibrahim's life, and her fiancé has fought valiantly at the head of the sultan's military. As Amurat recognizes, Ibrahim has acted as though their service and loyalty has been worthless. Arrogant and selfish until the end, the sultan is stunned to so quickly find himself with so few allies and a full-blown revolt on his hands, and he vacillates between indignation and fear as he scrambles for any way to save his own power. He is consistent, however, in his belief in his earthly greatness, the supremacy of his limitless power, and himself as the real victim of all this unpleasantness:

Flatterers, that curse of Courts have
 Ruined me!—thro' their false
 Opticks, I view'd my greatness—
 And when I thought my self a God;
 Am more wretched than my meanest Slave;
 Unregarded Now's the Frown, that
 Mark't my foe for Slaughter; or the
 Gracious smile which gave my kneeling
 Suppliant, a Kingdom—
 Disobey'd, forsaken, friendless, and alone!
 Yet the inborn greatness of my Soul remains!
 And I will dye with all my Majesty about me...⁹⁴

This final speech before the rebels breach the seraglio illustrates everything about Ibrahim that his people have grown to despise and that the audience can recognize as the mark of an irredeemably evil ruler: self-absorbed, entitled, delusional, cruel, disloyal, and clueless about the state of his kingdom and the quality of his reign. Amurat's friend Solyman neatly summarizes

⁹⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

Ibrahim's character when he spits at his doomed sultan, "[S]uch a monster / So unaccountable art thou!"⁹⁵ In spite of Ibrahim's crimes, the play does not endorse regicide or violent coup d'état. Morena, the conscience of the play, is upset to learn that Amurat killed the sultan while storming the seraglio and exclaims, "I fear thou hast gone too far."⁹⁶ As if Ibrahim is still oppressing and destroying his subjects after death, Morena kills herself in part as a sacrifice to God to absolve Amurat of the royal murder, and Amurat kills himself rather than live without his love. But while the play makes clear that there is nothing to celebrate in rebellion or regicide, the audience is led to believe that the fault lies with Ibrahim. The rebels may have gone too far in pushing back against the emperor's tyranny, but they should never have had to rebel in the first place. Ibrahim's sadism and egomania are walls that no subject could breach, and within them lie the source of the play's tragedy.

The Right to Personhood in *Almyna*

An adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*, Delariviere Manley's *Almyna: or, The Arabian Vow* (1707) covers similar themes on similar ground: a corrupted sultan has turned criminal, and a woman's body is placed at the epicenter of the struggle over the lawful boundaries and responsibilities of the sultan's power. In this play, however, the sultan Almanzor's greatest crime is not simply his violation of a woman's body but rather his denial of women's full personhood, his arbitrary decision to write a whole class of people out of the bounds of rational humanity. Perhaps fittingly, the primary rebellion Almanzor faces is a philosophical one in which he must listen to the logic of a woman who undermines everything that the sultan believes

⁹⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 38.

and exposes the fraudulence of his own self-image as a wise, just, almost godlike commander of the world. Andrea praises Manley for breaking the orientalist pattern set by her contemporaries and recognizing the feminism in Middle Eastern culture: “Manley here contests the feminist orientalist dynamic of distancing the ‘freeborn’ English woman from the supposedly enslaved Muslim wife...She instead models her title character on Scheherazade, the celebrated Muslim woman narrator who deployed her verbal skills to reform the violent excesses of patriarchy.”⁹⁷ She “challenges this liberal feminist logic by presenting stereotypes such as the despotic sultan and the harem slave precisely to undermine them...by stressing the identification with the ‘other’ woman rather than the displacement of patriarchal abuses onto her.”⁹⁸ Manley invests in the sheltered young heroine, Almyra, all the virtues of the Glorious Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment: reason, independence, courage, a virtuous mind, a belief in individualism and limited authority, and the spirit of public service.

By contrast, the sultan is the opposite of these qualities, mostly because he has grown to believe in his own divinity and has devoted his life to asserting it. Having spent much of his reign punishing his subjects for his humiliation at the hands of one woman, he reveals himself to be irrational, weak, cowardly, selfish, and abusive. He defines morality in terms of his own interests, not because he is deliberately deceitful but because he does not see the difference between them, and he disposes of anyone who does not fit into his interests. In this play, however, the heroine’s task is not simply to stop the sultan’s abuse but to change his entire view of his power, specifically his rubric for determining who counts as a full member of society. Where Pix has Morena’s male kinsmen fight for her rights to her body after she is unsuccessful in eluding her own rape, Manley’s heroine Almyra redeems her sultan and her people and helps

⁹⁷ Andrea, *Women and Islam*, 101.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

redefine the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. And where Pix's heroes must resort to violent revolt, Manley grants rational virtue enormous reforming power by having Almyna conquer the sultan's mind with the power of her superior reason and virtue.

The play begins similarly to *Ibrahim* in that a sultan is using his position as supreme authority of all the land to break his own laws and trample on his subjects' natural rights, and again, the objecting men around him feel either too reluctant or too powerless to stop him. While Almanzor used to be a good, wise, respectable ruler, his disastrous marriage to an unfaithful woman has turned him bitter, vindictive, and inhumane. Under the cover of the belief that women have no souls (a belief that the English commonly associated with Islam in the eighteenth century), Almanzor treats women as disposable and asserts the right to dispose of them as he sees fit, and when he claims a woman for his wife, he executes her the morning after the wedding night before she has the chance to humiliate him as his first wife did. His subjects live in terror that they or a female relative will be the next victim of the sultan's vengeance; his officers cannot desensitize themselves to the task of slaughtering women nor convince themselves that they are simply doing an unpleasant duty. The Vizier, in particular, is well aware that the sultan's invocation of his authority as ruler and husband is a false cover for violent criminality. "I was not form'd to murder helpless Women, / Under the sacred Name and veil of Marriage," he cries in the play's opening scene. "What is it else but Murther? horrid Murther!"⁹⁹ Albador, the Chief of the Dervish, agrees that the sultan is "Despotick," but he does not go as far as the Vizier in calling him a murderer. While the Vizier hears the wives' final anguished screams and concludes that they are human with a natural right to life, Albador argues that the wives' humanity is a religious question and that the sultan has the right to define what his wives'

⁹⁹ Delariviere Manley, *Almyna: or, The Arabian Vow* (London, 1707), 1.

rights are: “the Right is his, / To explain what in our holy *Alcoran*, / Or dark, or deep, or difficult appears, / Hence he expounds, that frailer Womankind, / Have mortal Souls, in common with the Brutes / So they are born to Dye.”¹⁰⁰

Here, Manley’s construction of the argument around women’s right to life departs from Pix’s and splits on the legitimacy of natural rights over social rights. In *Ibrahim* we are left to believe the idea that the sultan does not have the right to defy his or the Quran’s laws without incurring legitimate rebellion from his subjects in defense of those laws: Pix’s characters emphasize that Morena is a freeborn subject with the legal rights thereof; the Mufti, who occupies a similar office to Albador, appears to have the rightful authority to compel the Dervish to charge Ibrahim with religious crimes. In *Almyna* the Chief of the Dervish argues that the sultan decides what his subjects’ legal and religious rights are, and the Vizier—and later Almyna—takes the position that the sultan’s laws are out of line with the more authoritative laws of nature, in which women have souls and therefore rights to life, liberty, and ownership of their persons. In this sense, Manley is staking out a position on individual rights that is arguably more radical than Pix’s: the laws of man, even of monarchs, are subordinate to the laws of nature, and monarchs are bound to enforce both.

Manley also goes somewhat further than Pix in portraying women as full individuals capable of governing themselves and others, in this case more capable than the men who actually govern. The sultan’s views on women read like caricatures of the worst stereotypes of femininity, but they also echo many contemporary Western ideas on the nature of women. With the sultan Manley manages to expose the extent to which the power of Englishmen had come to rest on culturally “othering” populations on which they relied for their own authority and comfort: in an era in which Englishmen would point to the (mythical) treatment of women in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2.

Islamic cultures to highlight the (mythical) freedom of English women by comparison, Manley appears to use the same trick only to highlight the extent to which women in Western cultures are characterized as alien and subhuman. Almanzor makes clear that he considers women animals who can never attain the intellect and virtue of men and who are made more dangerous when they are allowed to try. When his brother and appointed heir Abdalla insists that his would-be fiancée Almyna has been educated to masculine virtue and reason, Almanzor protests,

So much the worse, she's still the greater Ill,
 A Contradiction, to her very Nature.
 Born to obey, to know, they nothing know;
 Wou'd they Usurp our just Prerogative,
 Add to the native pride of Ignorance,
 The double pride of seeming Knowledge,
 Vain of their outward Forms, they well may be.
 But when with Notions of Philosophy,
 The Languages and Eloquence they fight
 Intrench'd; with false Quotations, History,
 And the mistaken Learning of the Schools,
 There's not another, such forbidding Wretch!
 The very Error of Creation! The top
 Of Vanity, and all Impertinence!¹⁰¹

In this debate Almanzor lays out the thesis that must be shattered in order to end the cycle of marriages and executions in his house and to restore peace and justice to his kingdom. Almanzor describes women a direct contrast to men and insists that molding them as men would make them monsters: women do not have the mind or the character for a masculine education, and those who receive one will certainly abuse it to gratify their natural impulses toward vanity, deceit, and viciousness; they can be made useful only by training them to obey and please men in accordance with their limited abilities.

His argument would sound familiar to audiences at the beginning of the eighteenth century, many of whom were of the mind that a woman should learn just enough to be pleasing

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

but not enough to give her the idea of competing with her masters. Given his vow to rid himself of his queens within a day of the wedding, Almanzor seems to doubt that women are much capable of obedience either—every woman is an “error of creation” and should be quickly used and destroyed to preserve the “just prerogative” of men. And though Abdalla defends women in the abstract, he tends to treat women as tools and toys to be used and thrown away, as we see in the way he pretends to court Almyrna’s sister in order to reach the female trophy he really wants. While this opinion might appear horrific in the context of a husband’s treatment of a wife, especially in the thrilling setting of a despotic sultan’s seraglio, it effectively illustrates the reasoning process that turns “othering” into dehumanization and then into cruelty and tyranny, a process applied to slaves, non-Europeans, and laborers as well as women. Almanzor is projecting his own flaws onto the women he takes into his life in order to indulge and rationalize those flaws; in reality, he and Abdalla are the ones who are vindictive, faithless, egotistical, and inclined to use their knowledge and power to attack others.

By contrast, Almyrna is the true representative of reason and virtue in the play and fulfills the role of hero and heroine. As the moral conscience of the play, she is the authoritative judge of the men in the play and assesses them with empathy but also a critical eye toward their disruption of the peace. Regarding the sultan, she generously—much more so than the sultan is toward his subjects—allows that there is good in him despite his crimes and that there is hope for his reformation despite his intractability. More importantly, as the moral agent of the play, she has resolved to assume the dangerous task of reforming him or at least ending the terror of his marriages. She proposes to her father, the Vizier, that he give her to the sultan as his next and final bride, and she will either convince him to renounce his vow or die as the last woman the sultan will take as a wife. With her natural virtues and her lofty education, Almyrna has

cultivated within herself the most admirable traits typically associated with men, and she has set her sights on securing a comparably admirable legacy for herself. She describes her desire for glory in the language of honor and public service normally reserved for a hero:

When by great actions we resign our Breaths,
 'Tis not to dye, but more immortally to Live?
 Our days shou'd not by Length, be numbred o're,
 But by the Heroick Deeds, we have perform'd!
 How shall my Name to After-Ages flourish,
 If I succeed in this exalted purpose?
 How will the noble ardour be recorded,
 That call'd me forth, to save my Country's ruin?
 Or, if I Dye, my Memory shall Live!
 To After-Ages live, and live with Glory!¹⁰²

Almyna does not desire the type of glory that comes with power and adulation in her person but rather in her moral example. She wants her sacrifice to save her country from the sultan's terror or a violent uprising against that terror, and whether or not she is still alive to enjoy her countrymen's gratitude and praise, she wants her service to serve as a model for virtue to which they can draw guidance, inspiration, and hope. Almyna is the character who shows us the virtue and devotion to country that Almanzor should have—whereas his arrogance, irrationality, and barbarity threaten to destroy his country, her reason, compassion, and bravery can potentially save it.

Almyna's virtue throws Almanzor's shortcomings as sultan into even sharper relief when she presents herself as his next bride and attempts to persuade him through reason to renounce his cruel and petulant vow. The key to her argument lies in the impious and unnatural quality of his vow: since it breaks the laws of God and nature, the vow is invalid. "Suppose," she says, "I take an Oath to slay the Innocent, / The Crime were less, much less to break the Vow, / Than by

¹⁰² Ibid., 28.

performing it, to run on Murder.”¹⁰³ Continuing to emphasize that his vow is murder, she also points out that no self-serving interpretations of the Quran will spare him damnation for taking innocent lives, and she begs him to consider that his belief in soulless women is wrong, both factually and morally:

Since then their Beings, and their Birth’s the same,
They dye the same, and the same Way shall rise,
And to Immortal Life adjudged as you be,
Dost thou not tremble; Sultan, but to think:
How fatal to thee, the Mistake may prove?
What will our Prophet say, at thy last day?¹⁰⁴

Almanzor’s disregard for his subjects’ humanity suggests that he has been obsessed with his own power and prestige for too long, and therefore, Almyrna focuses most of her argument on reminding him of his own humanity. First, she attempts to speak to him logically by reminding him of something he should know by observation—that his wives, and all vulnerable innocents, are the same species as he, only without the political and economic power—and concludes that their lives count the same as his in the eyes of God and nature. Second, she points out that, for all his power on earth, he is mortal and will face divine judgment one day.

Toward the end of her speech, Almyrna finally appeals to whatever sense of public duty Almanzor may still feel and bravely report to him “[t]he Groans, the Cries, of thy distressed People”:

Oh! what a Tarnish is it, to thy Glory;
Thou, who before of all the happy Nations,
Wert as a God reverenc’d, and almost pray’d to,
Art now become their dread, no more a Blessing,
And what the mighty motive of this Change?
The Inconstancy of a weak Woman, no more,
Which thou with thy large Soul, shoud’st first despse,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Then punish, and forget, so end Revenge;
 Not hold a trembling innocent World in awe,
 For Crimes that are not theirs.¹⁰⁵

In this part of her argument, Almyrna connects the sultan's ostentatious displays of power to his petty fears, thin skin, and hard heart. Almanzor should have been too strong and too reasonable to let one insignificant woman drive him to destroy his own glory and his nation's welfare—but he was not. He felt so entitled to be obeyed, to be adored, to possess everyone over whom he had dominion, that he easily slid into viewing his subjects not as his responsibility but as his property. Further, he invested so much of his identity into these entitlements that any threat to them made him lash out.

Almanzor remains unpersuaded by Almyrna's arguments until he sees her virtue in action with his own eyes. When he observes the courage with which she faces her execution and the conviction with which she speaks of her sacrifice, he spares her life at the last minute.

"Henceforth be it not once imagin'd / That Women have not Souls, divine as we," Almanzor pronounces.¹⁰⁶ However, the sultan's reformation comes too late to spare his household and country from any more carnage. Determined to save the love of his life and end Almanzor's reign of terror, his heir Abdalla mounts a violent rebellion against the sultan, and Almyrna's sister Zoradia tries to intervene to save her love Abdalla. Both are mortally wounded in the course of the fight. Keenly aware that both lives could have been spared, Almanzor expresses regret for his intransigence and the moral of the play in his final lines:

Thus are we punish'd for our rash Resolves.
 Our cruel Vow, be expiated here.

 Let all by him, be warn'd of Breach of Faith.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 64.

Hi Life, repay'd his falseness to *Zoradia*
 By men, let 'em avoid unlawful Oaths.
 (Nor think that Provocation's an Excuse,
 Robb'd as I am, of my Succession here.
For Heav'n no Hopes, but Penitence allows.
*Either for cruel, rash, or perjur'd Vows.*¹⁰⁷

Almanzor's recognition of his wrongdoing lies in the parallel he draws between his own "unlawful Oaths" and Abdalla's betrayal of his original fiancée, Zoradia, whom he abandons to pursue Almyna. He finally sees that his power to rule is contractual, rather than divinely granted, and that he has broken the least official but most important terms of his position: his obligation to obey his own laws, to respect his people's individual rights, and to earn the faith that his people have placed in him. As a result of this "Breach of Faith," he is as guilty of "falseness" to his people as Abdalla is to Zoradia. Almyna shows him that the subjects he has disdained are actually capable of governing themselves, and as his queen, she offers him a new model of governance in which monarch and people are truly partners, albeit unequal, joined together in a consensual relationship of personal autonomy and public community.

The Problem with Saving the Men Behaving Badly

There is much to admire in Pix's and Manley's treatments of their heroines, particularly their efforts to humanize their heroines and ennoble them as something more than prizes to be won or bartered. Jean Marsden argues that both playwrights should be credited for treating their heroines with dignity even in moments of extreme suffering and adhering to a belief "that heroines are indeed 'sacred things.'"¹⁰⁸ Manley quite explicitly sanctifies Almyna by turning her

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 131.

into “a Christ figure” in which she can “literally embody the thesis she articulates.”¹⁰⁹ And while Pix turns Morena’s battered body into a symbol from which an army of rebels can draw inspiration, she makes clear that her heroine’s value lies in the greatness of her mind and heart, and “in the process she argues for a more exalted vision of female virtue.”¹¹⁰ In many ways Pix and Manley succeed in doing what Southerne fails to do: they demonstrate that their heroines have an inherent human value that is independent of their relative social worth and therefore inviolable even by their social masters.

At the same time, like Southerne, Pix and Manley do not seriously challenge the existence of the hierarchies that threaten their heroines. Instead, they couch the source of their plays’ injustices in individuals rather than social systems or ideologies; consequently, the heroines are charged with the task of reforming individual men through little besides the force of their moral example. Laura Brown writes about the heroines of she-tragedies, “[T]he stasis and the consequent lack of status of the female figure result in an emptying out of significance that coincides with the process by which fetishization empties bodies, beings, and practices of all significance except their exchangeability with objects.”¹¹¹ While I would not go as far as to say that Morena or Almyra are fetishized, commodified, or emptied of significance, they do function as instruments in the salvation or damnation of their rulers. The problem with the treatment of the *Men Behaving Badly* is that it focuses on their moral character rather than their power. The implication is that there would be little problem with the power that these men wield over others if they would only wield it with more consideration—which foreshadows the heroes of the eighteenth century.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Ends of Empire*, 85.

Well into the eighteenth century, a woman-authored travelogue finally became widely available in England. In 1724, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu published her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, and she asked Mary Astell to write a preface. “Although Astell adheres to a Christian standard,” comments Andrea, “she refrains from explicitly establishing Islam as a negative foil. In addition, while in her earlier polemics she equated English women’s oppression under patriarchy with slavery...she here refrains from casting Muslim wives as literal slaves, unlike the patriarchal orientalist travel writers.”¹¹² By that point, however, the commodification of human relationships had seeped into every social unit, including marriages and families, as had the idea that the English were the natural owners of whatever they could buy or take by force, thereby making the English free. The success of *Oroonoko* and the relative obscurity of *Ibrahim* and *Almyna* reflect the extent to which the English had grown comfortable with the conquest and ownership of other peoples, and in the eighteenth century representations of imperialism shifted from the model of a marital partnership to the much more authoritative model of the parent-child relationship, with England acting as the father of its imperial children.

¹¹² Andrea, *Women and Islam*, 83.

CHAPTER 3
 THE GOOD IMPERIALISTS: VIRTUE, COMMERCE,
 AND CUSTODY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA

“There must be some failure in the tradesman... There must be something out of order in the foundation; he must fail in the essential part, or he would not fail in his trade.” –Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*

For the first half of the eighteenth century, many popular plays focused on the economic power of England and its relationship with the moral authority of Englishness. They helped rehabilitate the image of global economic imperialism at a time when this image sorely needed improvement. From the beginning of the Restoration, the English theater had presented imperialism as akin to a marital partnership, in which there was a definite hierarchy to which both partners voluntarily committed themselves to uphold. During the late Stuart period, despite the insurgency of plays promoting the virtues of the hierarchical partnership and the rights of the junior partners, the theater reflected English culture’s increasing rejection of the partnership model of social hierarchy in favor of a more authoritarian ownership model, in which wealth and power enabled one to purchase the bodies and labor of those willing to sell. However, the first twenty years of the eighteenth century revealed the dangers of commodifying social relationships. On one hand, the economic empire that England had built had more than repaid her for her pains: the influx of imperial wealth and goods that flowed home to England opened the English to beneficial ideas and luxuries from around the world, and it provided opportunities for fortune-seeking and social mobility that allowed a modern-day middle class to flourish. On the other hand, the empire had also produced a culture that measured the value of a human being in currency and that allowed the pursuit of wealth to guide every facet of civil society. When George I ascended the British throne in 1714, international corporations like the South Sea Company and the East India Company had already bought near monopolies in Britain’s imperial

trade, a large share of the national debt, tremendous favor among government officials and parliamentary members, and the license to do as they pleased. In the process they had unleashed numerous parasites, vultures, and confidence men to prey on the economic hopes and needs of vulnerable people who were least able to weather the fallout from any ill-advised financial schemes. In particular, the collapse of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 exposed the rotting underbelly of global capitalism, which hid crippling weaknesses underneath the appearance of great strength and was easily punctured when it grew too bloated with fraud and mismanagement.

Despite the very public damage that global capitalism and imperialism had wrought on the English's collective sense of security and pride, few were willing to give up on it entirely, and many were willing to defend it not just as a necessary evil but as inherently good and noble. It was no accident that the period that saw some of capitalism's worst abuses also saw some of its most inspiring celebrations. While some of England's most prominent authors painted the masters of the financial sector as national leeches, another contingent of writers diligently nurtured a competing narrative that portrayed the moneyed and merchant classes as the fatherly protectors of both England and the world. Writers like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Daniel Defoe, and George Lillo extolled the values of England's merchant class—honesty, frugality, generosity, industry, justice, and an appropriate balance between individual liberty and community service—and argued that they thrived not despite but because of the demands of global capitalism. Since a merchant's success necessitates that he command others' trust and admiration, it was in his best interest to cultivate a strong moral character, solid judgment, and a virtuous reputation. In turn, the fruits of the merchants' success fed the whole nation and the world, and their good stewardship of a global economy had generally raised the quality of life of

the English people and limited the devastation of anomalous catastrophes. This narrative of capitalism did not retreat from the propertied classes' entitlement to social authority and ownership of others on display in late-Stuart literature. Instead, it softened that entitlement by replacing the language of human commodification with the language of custody and including the responsibility to protect and nurture that is so often lacking in earlier representations of powerful men. The authority on display in this narrative is moral and spiritual authority exerted by influence, rather than brute power exerted by force, and the authority figures are father figures who have the right and the duty to guide their charges toward virtue, chasten them when they stray, and cultivate a social environment where they could mature and succeed on their own. Most important, this narrative is presented as uniquely English. The backbone of the nation was infused with the virtues of capitalism, and it showed in every aspect of English life, including family, religion, work, and leisure.

English theater promoted this narrative in ways overt and subtle, often slipping advertisements for global capitalism into domestic comedies and sentimental tragedies, and it made the tone of theater much more didactic and religious. The plays of this period tend to illustrate those virtues with the character type of the Good Imperialist—the dual Englishman and “citizen of the world” who embodies benevolence and good character, uses his greatest qualities for the service of his country, and strives to spread goodwill and prosperity wherever he goes. The Good Imperialist represents the manly virtue of England and its version of capitalist imperialism; he validates a worthy man's authority to rule his household and England's national prerogative to rule the inhabitants of its empire. The plays of this period do not ignore the excesses of capitalism; however, by displacing the vices onto an all-consuming feminine figure whose appetites are not tempered by virtue, they separate the “true” production-driven capitalism

of the good imperialist from the “false” consumption-driven capitalism of idle, greedy social leeches. Even when the Good Imperialist does not show up as an actual character in the play, his specter hovers over the characters as an ideal on which they should model themselves and as a reminder that the reputation and welfare of the nation rested on their behavior. The strength of English identity and English institutions depends on individuals performing the virtues that give English identity credibility, and mastery of these virtues is supposed to bring success to both the Good Imperialists and the empire as a whole.

The Bonds of Credit

During the eighteenth century, commerce and imperialism were facts of life for the British people, including large numbers who were not directly involved in either enterprise. According to Linda Colley’s estimates, “one in every five families in eighteenth-century Britain drew its livelihood from trade and distribution: and this was on top of those farmers and manufacturers who relied on domestic and external trading networks for their profits.”¹¹³ Nearly every significant British political and social institution was connected to global commerce and to each other by global commerce: the government, the military, the aristocracy and gentry, banks, farmers, manufacturers, shopkeepers, traders, media, and even humble households all had their respective roles to play in the web of the British empire, and all needed the others to play those roles well. Despite the relatively low social status of the commercial classes, their interests tended to receive deference that exceeded their prestige because of the interconnectivity of a British economy that depended on commerce at every level. Of the British elites that looked down on commerce as a social identity, “[m]ost of them believed also that commerce, especially foreign commerce, was the engine that drove a state’s power and wealth, just as they took it for

¹¹³ Colley, *Britons*, 56.

granted that the world's supply of raw materials and markets was strictly finite, that competition to win access to them was bound to be intense, and that if British traders were to succeed in the struggle, they must be vigorously supported abroad and protected at home."¹¹⁴ This view of commerce places great importance on both trade and imperialism. For a people to utilize the full potential of commerce as an "engine" of "power and wealth," they had to do more than fashion goods and services from what they already had and sell them amongst each other; they had to be aggressive in expanding their territory, increasing their resources, creating more trading partnerships, and establishing themselves in more markets. In turn, the power and wealth that commerce produced would provide the government with more revenue, the military with more resources and *raison d'être*, and the people with more opportunity and a higher standard of living.

Though some aspects of this view are outdated, the importance that British elites placed on commerce and imperialism was not misplaced. On the most basic level, the nation benefited greatly just from the influx of wealth that poured into the British economy. More capital meant more potential creditors and more available money to borrow, which was crucial to powering an economy as dependent on credit as Britain's. John Brewer discusses how Britain's shortage of currency turned its credit networks into the force that connected the British people to each other and kept wealth productively circulating: "Credit and debt...were almost universal. Local credit networks interlocked with those of a particular region, and regional credit, largely as a result of the financial activities of the middleman, merchant and shopkeeper overlapped with that of other regions."¹¹⁵ On a larger scale, "more and more economic activity became linked to long-range,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹¹⁵ John Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 207.

large-scale international markets. This development was particularly associated with the expansion of extra-European trade from the late seventeenth century onward.”¹¹⁶ This extensive, worldwide chain of credit meant that a merchant could buy goods overseas (sugar or tobacco from the American colonies, for example) and sell them to a wholesaler in Britain, who could sell them to a shopkeeper in a moderately-sized town, who could sell them to a farmer who would not have cash until the harvest—all without having to muster and transport large piles of specie. The national government also took advantage of the increase in borrowable capital, and by using borrowed money to finance a larger, better-equipped navy and army, the government managed to fight several wars that increased Britain’s overseas territory and trading power.

These elaborate networks of credit also benefited the British people, especially its elites, by giving everyone a vested interest in preserving the status quo, maintaining social and political stability, and promoting social welfare. Britain’s credit networks could function properly only if everyone involved had confidence that their loans would be repaid, and this confidence required some predictability in domestic and international affairs. Consequently, anyone connected to Britain’s credit networks had an interest in avoiding civil unrest or divisive social agitation. In terms of political stability, credit tied many Britons immediately to their government. As Bruce G. Carruthers points out, the link between private and public credit helped William III, Anne, and the Hanovers accrue their subjects loyalty by making many of them direct investors in their regimes. During the expensive foreign wars that followed the Glorious Revolution, the national government converted its crippling short-term debt into more manageable long-term debt by selling it to joint-stock companies and allowing them, in turn, to sell it to the public in the form of company shares. “With the joint-stock companies acting as intermediaries, large numbers of

¹¹⁶ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 185.

shareholders became, in effect, public creditors,” Carruthers concludes. “The personal finances of shareholders, annuity holders, and lottery loan holders were therefore joined to those of the post-1688 regime and they acquired an interest in the stability of that regime.”¹¹⁷

Despite the competition for power among political parties, social classes, companies, and commercial industries, nearly everyone had a common interest in the survival and growth of Britain and its empire, and this common interest built an impressive degree of national unity from an often fractured population. Linda Colley suggests that Britain’s dependence on credit-fueled trade was a major reason why Britain did not experience a civil war or an armed revolution during the eighteenth century, despite the attempts of James II’s descendants to retake the throne:

All social classes could be affected by anxiety in the face of the Jacobite threat. Both Whig and Tory landowners worried about the security of their estates...Government creditors, and those embroiled in the nets of private credit arrangements, worried about the security of their investments and about recovering what was owed to them in the event of a civil war. And when invasion loomed, the poor, who had no money, no influential friends and no easy means of escape, worried most of all...And this went for intrusion by the state’s enemies, as well as by the state itself.¹¹⁸

Though Colley places these reactions to political upheaval in the context of Jacobite invasions, they apply to any threat to economic and political stability, foreign or domestic. For anyone who was invested in the British state and economy—and by the eighteenth century, there was little separating the two—patriotism was personal. And while Britain was far from perfectly tranquil, it was much more peaceful than it might have been had its people not been so materially tied to political continuity.

¹¹⁷ Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 87.

¹¹⁸ Colley, *Britons*, 77.

The Blessings of Commerce

Commerce and imperialism not only contributed to the preservation of the public peace; they also noticeably raised the comfort level of British life on nearly every rung of the social ladder. Global commerce had provided Britons outside of the upper classes with access to an increasing variety of affordable goods and the money to buy them, and consequently, the median British lifestyle came to encompass more possessions of higher quality and more expectation of luxury. Neil McKendrick calls the eighteenth-century burst of consumption “a consumer revolution” and describes the differences from the much more restrained and sparing consumption of previous eras:

What men and women had once hoped to inherit from their parents, they now expected to buy for themselves. What were once bought at the dictate of need, were now bought at the dictate of fashion. What were once bought for life, might now be bought several times over. What were once available only on high days and holidays...were increasingly made available every day but Sunday through the additional agency of an ever-advancing network of shops and shopkeepers. As a result “luxuries” came to be seen as mere “decencies,” and “decencies came to be seen as “necessities.”¹¹⁹

While previously people purchased what they needed to survive, this “consumer revolution” enabled people to purchase what they needed to shape and perform their own tastes, lifestyles, and identities. Thanks to the global network of trade to which they had access, they could experiment with and adopt habits and styles that involved more than their own communities produced. The eighteenth century ushered in the widespread use of goods from around the world—including coffee, tea, sugar, exotic fabrics, and china—that would never have been available to the masses without safe and well-traveled trade routes and a network of overseas trading partners. In turn, access to foreign markets and a better-funded consumer class at home led to an explosion of craftsmanship, entrepreneurship, and manufacturing. When consumers

¹¹⁹ Neil McKendrick, “Introduction,” in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 1.

had enough money to purchase more non-essential items with much greater frequency, it became possible to make a profitable livelihood in such specialized luxury industries as pottery, clothing, and furniture.

These trends could not have unfolded as widely or quickly as they did without a commercial empire. In the first half of the eighteenth century, imports from the American colonies grew exponentially and were crucial in helping Britain balance trade with Europe; the colonies also offered a handy captive market for British merchants looking to increase their consumer base.¹²⁰ With the probable exception of the poor, the average Briton was economically connected to the rest of the nation and the world in tangible and visible ways. As Colley points out, “colonial consumer goods had by now become sufficiently widespread to bring the spoils of empire to the level of every village shop, and the attractions of empire to the minds of many more Britons than ever before.”¹²¹ By extension, the average Briton was also growing more culturally connected to the rest of the world. The consumption of colonial goods fed a national identity that was taking on an imperial look. Britishness was increasingly being expressed in customs based on goods that were not native to Britain. Aspects of British life like the coffeehouse or the tea table marked the British as an international people, citizens of the world to varying degrees, whose commercial prowess enabled them to enjoy the fruits of every corner of the globe. When even middling households contained luxury goods from faraway lands, and even middling traders kept abreast of foreign news that might impact their investments and inventory, the British people looked sophisticated, forward-thinking, resourceful, and rich. In short, commerce and imperialism gave the British the appearance of success.

¹²⁰ Colley, *Britons*, 69.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

The Evils of the Money Trader

However, appearances can sometimes be deceiving. While eighteenth-century British life encompassed more things and sometimes more wealth, it did not necessarily involve more stability in individuals' economic circumstances. In fact, the elaborate credit networks that encouraged global commerce also carried more risk for those connected with them. During periods of peace and plenty, credit was readily available, but with credit driving so much of the British economy, any disruption in domestic tranquility would cause it to collapse. Brewer explains how bad times led to compounding financial crises that could quickly spiral out of control: "when the bubble burst...a major liquidity crisis ensued. Speculators, bankers, merchants and tradesmen alike, they all tried to realize their assets: to convert from commodities to cash, from bills to specie, and from trade credit to hard currency. Credit became almost impossible to obtain precisely when it was needed most. Cash, silver and gold were at a premium because of the sudden and substantial demand for them."¹²² Though credit crunches hit everyone who relied on credit to conduct business, the most vulnerable members of the economy fell the hardest and had practically no social safety net to catch them. Not only would a credit crisis put a small trader or shopkeeper out of business and wipe out any savings he had, but a default on a debt might land him in debtors' prison, which in turn would cause more creditors to seek repayment before the debtor's assets ran out. Even if one managed to dig himself out of the flood of actions that a default (real or suspected) would trigger, his reputation as a reliable credit risk would probably never recover.¹²³ And since a career-ending credit crunch could start with almost any event anywhere in the world, a businessman's entire life could be destroyed by circumstances that he had no way of controlling or predicting. An eighteenth-century Briton

¹²² Brewer, "Commercialization," 210.

¹²³ Ibid., 211.

with an entrepreneurial spirit might appear to have considerable power to make his own fortune, but in many ways he was frighteningly helpless to the whims of fate.

This vulnerability meant that participants in trade were much less likely to be tolerant or forgiving of those perceived to be unfairly contributing to economic disasters, profiting from them, or shielding themselves from the fallout. All businessmen were not created equal, and those who were more equal than others tended to inspire tremendous resentment and suspicion, often for valid reasons. Perhaps the most visibly dominant economic players, Britain's joint-stock corporations used their special privileges to accumulate unprecedented levels of wealth and power. As the primary holders of the national debt, the joint-stock companies occupied a position in which to exercise influence over both public policy and private finance. Many Britons thought it no coincidence that, as the size and number of joint-stock corporations increased, Britain enlarged its military and fought an almost continuous string of wars. During the reigns of William and Anne, Britain engaged in several bruising wars that were financed by long-term debt held by joint-stock companies, the shareholders of which were predominantly Whigs, and that were encouraged by parliament, the members of which were also predominantly Whigs.

The costs to the general populace were daunting and unpopular. The public literally paid for the debts incurred through custom and excise taxes, the burden of which fell primarily on the middle and working classes, and additional government revenue came from greater enforcement of the land tax, which obviously fell to the disgruntled landed class to pay. More indirectly, they also paid with the human and material resources diverted out of civil society and into war. Brewer notes that the lengthy War of Spanish Succession alone included "[t]he subsidization of allied troops with its enormous foreign remittances; the raising of substantial English armies

which drained native manpower; the quagmire of the inconclusive Iberian campaign, which swallowed men and money; and the extensive damage inflicted on the English merchant marine by privateers.”¹²⁴ These costs came on top of the war-related economic uncertainty and disruption of overseas trade with which the average Briton had to cope.

The joint-stock companies and well-connected financiers, however, made out like bandits. As Brewer points out, holding the national debt put a corporation in a position of great power: the security of state IOU’s “conferred enormous power in the private money market. Backed by the large sums of money which made up public finance, an incorporated creditor could also dominate private borrowing.”¹²⁵ Corporations, along with well-connected London merchants, also took most of the spoils of war. According to Carruthers, landed Tories and smaller independent merchants noticed that the costs and benefits of war were not distributed on an equal-opportunity basis: “it seemed to many British subjects...that the Whigs actually wanted to prolong the [War of Spanish Succession]...War-related expenses, the expansion of the state bureaucracy, and the army and navy, all provided vast opportunities for patronage, profiteering, and corruption.”¹²⁶ When the war finally drew to an uneasy close, the Treaty of Utrecht granted Britain and its largest trading companies new territories that could provide more consumers and shipping bases, and most infamously, the South Sea company scored the *asiento*, the exclusive right to supply slaves to Spain’s American territories. The joint-stock companies provided the state with an enormous source of borrowed money with which to wage war and expand its global territories and influence, while the state provided the joint-stock companies with tradable assets,

¹²⁴ Brewer, *Sinews*, 172.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

greater access to foreign markets, and stronger protection abroad—a classic case of one hand washing the other.

The joint-stock companies were not the only players who generated resentment. Few financial actors were as universally hated as the stockjobbers, the stock traders whom Samuel Johnson defined in his dictionary as “a low wretch who gets money by buying and selling shares in the funds.” Stockjobbers played the stock market daily on behalf of themselves and anyone else who hired their services; for a few pence a day, they could park themselves in a coffeehouse in Exchange Alley, where they would arrange stock trades with the help of standardized contracts that were widely available in the eighteenth century.¹²⁷ Landed Tories despised stockjobbers for threatening their political and economic clout, and merchants and shopkeepers hated them for contributing to bubbles and credit crunches. Since they made their money primarily by speculating on the stock exchange, sometimes with money and shares they did not actually have, the stockjobbers were often the only people to emerge unscathed or wealthier from a financial crisis. “Though a slump might be triggered by a bad harvest, a foreign war or foreign investors, it was thought—and often with good reason—that the speculator exacerbated the situation,” explains Brewer. “His profit might well prove the trader’s downfall, and it was for precisely this reason that the men of Change Alley were denounced with a passion that occasionally swelled to hysteria.”¹²⁸ Though stockjobbers sometimes shouldered more blame for bad times than they may have deserved, the public understandably regarded them with suspicion and distaste. In an age when the stock market was relatively new and its workings little understood by many laypeople, the stockjobbers’ profession appeared to be little more than

¹²⁷ Carruthers, *City*, 168-169.

¹²⁸ Brewer, “Commercialization,” 212.

gambling with other people's money. Even more infuriating, they gambled in a state-sanctioned casino that rewarded them for driving innocent bystanders into bankruptcy.

Though they were all linked together in the same economic network, the joint-stock investors and professional stockjobbers bore common characteristics that distinguished them from the rest of the financial community and made them greater objects of public scorn. Unlike shopkeepers, small merchants, or craftsmen, investors and stockjobbers did not earn their wealth by providing goods or services; they used money to make more money, often with the benefit of insider knowledge and connections. They seemed to produce or contribute nothing tangible but instead shifted wealth, much of which existed merely in theory rather than in specie, among various financial schemes until the wealth inexplicably multiplied. "The relative novelty of financial wealth made investment a questionable and morally suspect activity," Carruthers explains. "Financial assets lacked the tangible and familiar qualities of more traditional kinds of wealth, particularly land."¹²⁹ The intangibility of financial assets probably drew the most suspicion. Investments and speculation could make vast sums of wealth appear seemingly out of nowhere and disappear just as quickly; and when a liquidity crisis made clear how much wealth was "real" and how much was speculative, the ones left holding the short straws were too often the traders and producers who sold tangible goods and services on credit that was not honored. Though their investments did much to grease the wheels of commerce, it was difficult for a financial layperson to see what investors and stockjobbers actually contributed to their community or nation, but it was easy to see what they drained.

Their reputations were further soiled by their association with marginalized populations who were already the targets of bigotry and suspicion: Jews, dissenters, Huguenots, and

¹²⁹ Carruthers, *City*, 85.

miscellaneous foreigners, particularly the Swiss and the Dutch.¹³⁰ Disproportionate numbers of investors and stockjobbers came from ethnic and religious groups widely regarded as “other” by white Protestant Britons, and their heavy presence in the financial sector lent an additional air of shadiness to already shadowy and ill-understood activities. This combination—the perceived parasitic qualities of the financial sector and the marginalized people who worked in it—likely led to the longstanding chorus of writers and social critics blaming finance and commerce for promoting greed over patriotism and weakening the political fabric of Britain. Carruthers points out that from the beginning of the eighteenth century, people like Charles Davenant blamed finance and commerce for the decline of good citizenship and the rise of calculating self-interest and materialism.¹³¹ Colley notes that this argument still held sway well into the middle of the century, along with growing blame on a self-absorbed and Francophilic upper class who spent too much time and energy chasing other cultures’ fashions instead of appreciating and promoting British values and products.¹³²

Though they occupied very different social spheres, the increasingly foreign financial class and the increasingly worldly upper and upper-middle classes represented the same unsettling perception that global commerce was eroding British identity. Both groups faced accusations of using their country for personal gain without giving anything in return, prioritizing their private interests over their public duties, and encouraging others to do the same. In short, they faced censure for putting their identities up for sale—they would adopt the cultural markers that were the most profitable or desirable at any given time. Commerce’s critics believed that the influence of foreign customs, products, money, and people was weakening

¹³⁰ Ibid., 85-86.

¹³¹ Ibid., 86.

¹³² Colley, *Britons*, 88.

Britons' attachment to their own country. It was a persuasive argument that built on seventeenth-century connections between commerce and human commodification: in a commercial world, profit mattered more than patriotism, and interests mattered more than values. While the new commercial era of the eighteenth century had opened the world to Britain, many feared that it had simultaneously opened too much of Britain to the world, to the point that it was erasing the distinction between them.

The Virtues of the Good Imperialist

Fortunately for Britain's commercial classes, they also had eloquent and powerful defenders who painted the merchants and their investors as Britain's true patriots and moral exemplars. Writers, politicians, and merchants themselves cultivated a portrait of commerce to counter that of its critics, and they endeavored to make global commerce synonymous with good citizenship, humanitarianism, and progress, both national and global. Where commerce's critics saw its participants as weak, effeminate, money-grubbing aliens, its defenders saw them as the loyal servants and protectors of British values and the moral leaders of their time. This image of the commercial man—which I call the Good Imperialist—represented a new version of British masculinity that was strong and rational as well as nurturing and feeling. The Good Imperialist embodied all of the virtues and social importance that the commercial classes wanted to see in themselves: he was virtuous because of, not despite, his involvement in trade, and though trade made him prosperous, its true rewards lay in the opportunities for him to train others to virtue and extend British influence to the rest of the world.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele provide us with one of the best illustrations of the Good Imperialist in various issues of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. The first part of constructing

the Good Imperialist involved disassociating him from material gain and tying him closely with public spirit. While not entirely divorcing the ideas of trade and profit, the Good Imperialist does not cater to his personal interests so much as he strives to be useful to his community; he may incidentally profit from his goodness, but so should everyone else. His public utility as a commercial being is two-fold: first, he improves his customers' and trading partners' quality of life by distributing wealth, goods, and economic opportunity around the globe; second, he spreads the goodwill, liberty, and virtue that are the natural results of the interdependency fostered by global commerce. Trade is a public service in which the Good Imperialist provides material comforts and moral instruction for everyone in his trading network. And while his first loyalty is to his country, the Good Imperialist's network—his economic community—actually encompasses the entire world. Steele summarizes the distinction between the Good Imperialist and the mediocre businessman in his case study of two merchants in Issue 25 of the *Tatler*: “This *Paulo*...grows wealthy by being a common Good; *Avaro*, by being a general Evil...When *Paulo* gains, all men he deals with are the better: Whenever *Avaro* profits, another certainly loses. In a Word, *Paulo* is a Citizen, and *Avaro* a Cit.”¹³³ His comparison of the citizen and the “cit” echoes the differences between responsible investors and traders and more reckless speculators and stockjobbers: a businessman becomes truly prosperous by cultivating a commercial environment in which everyone may benefit; those who treat commerce as a zero-sum game endanger the whole system by making it socially harmful and unsavory.

Moreover, the Good Imperialist conducts trade for his community's good more than his own. For him, trade is a humanitarian and diplomatic mission, and prosperity includes not just wealth but also peace, friendship, respect, and the joy he derives from doing good and taking care of others. Addison captures the Good Imperialist's worldview in his famous essay on the

¹³³ Donald F. Bond, ed., *The Tatler*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:197.

Royal Exchange in Issue 69 of the *Spectator*. In describing his visit, he directly tackles some of the features of trade that unfairly damaged its social status, and recasts them as positive attributes that should be celebrated rather than scorned. First, he encourages his readers to embrace the diversity of the commercial world as a source of security and comfort. While many Britons may have instinctively recoiled from rubbing shoulders with strange and low-status peoples, Addison brags about being “justled among a Body of *Armenians*” or “lost in a Crowd of *Jews*.” He explains why he proudly wears the label “Citizen of the World”:

As I am a great Lover of Mankind, my Heart naturally overflows with Pleasure at the sight of a prosperous and happy Multitude, insomuch that at many publick Solemnities I cannot forbear expressing my Joy with Tears that have stolen down my Cheeks. For this reason I am wonderfully delighted to see such a Body of Men thriving in their own private Fortunes, and at the same time promoting the Publick Stock; or in other Words, raising Estates for their own Families, by bringing into their Country whatever is wanting, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous.¹³⁴

To Addison, being a citizen of the world does not mean being less of an Englishman but rather a greater “Lover of Mankind,” who takes pleasure in working with his peers to ensure that all of his fellow men are provided for and that they peacefully help each other.

Addison also believes that Britain is uniquely suited to fill this role, and this argument rebuts the second perception of commerce that Addison addresses—the suspicion of conflicting national loyalties in merchants. Addison sees his love of mankind as something that enriches his love of country, and much of his pleasure in visiting the Royal Exchange comes from his patriotic pride in seeing what Britain has accomplished. He confesses, “It gives me a secret Satisfaction, and, in some measure, gratifies my Vanity, as I am an *Englishman*, to see so rich an Assembly of Country-men and Foreigners consulting together upon the private Business of

¹³⁴ Donald F. Bond, ed., *The Spectator* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:294.

Mankind, and making this Metropolis a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth.”¹³⁵ He spins this thought into a larger narrative of British exceptionalism based on commerce:

If we consider our own Country in its natural Prospect, without any of the Benefits and Advantages of Commerce, what a barren uncomfortable Spot of Earth falls to our Share!...[B]ut Traffick gives us a great Variety of what is Useful, and at the same time supplies us with every thing that is Convenient and Ornamental. Nor is it the least part of this our Happiness, that whilst we enjoy the remotest Products of the North and South, we are free from those Extremities of Weather which give them Birth; That our Eyes are refreshed with the green Fields of *Britain*, at the same time that our Palates are feasted with Fruits that rise between the Tropicks...Trade, without enlarging the *British* Territories, has given us a kind of additional Empire: It has multiplied the Number of the Rich, made our Landed Estates infinitely more Valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an Accession of other Estates as Valuable as the Lands themselves.¹³⁶

In pointing out that Britain’s geography and natural resources propelled Britons into trade, Addison imbues British trading prowess with the aura of Providence. Trade is both Britain’s greatest national resource and its greatest contribution to the world, and as the citizens most heavily invested its commercial empire, merchants are Britain’s greatest patriots.

The second part of constructing the Good Imperialist involved disassociating him from vice and tying him with virtue. Markets often appeared so volatile, corrupt, and unreliable to average Briton that it was easy to transfer those qualities to the participants of commerce, and certainly, some of them were the con artists that many suspected they were. However, narratives like Addison’s visit to the Exchange were based on the idea of commerce as a cooperative endeavor, and cooperation demanded trust, often among total strangers from different corners of the globe. Therefore, men of commerce had a vested interest in conducting themselves according to virtues that would foster trust among potential customers and trading partners: honesty, competence, industry, sobriety, generosity, and kindness. Among retailers especially,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:292-293.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:295-296.

courtesy and gentility forged the social bonds that made business transactions appear more respectable and inviting—courtesy made business relationships seem friendly, and it is harder to cheat or distrust a friend. These virtues comprised a code of conduct that not only facilitated trade among virtuous men but also trained trading men to virtue. Though the merchant’s virtues could be seen uncharitably as a façade that could be performed without conviction and abandoned at will—and many of commerce’s critics did—commerce’s defenders saw little to no distinction between performed and inherent virtue. For an example of this close relationship between act and feeling, Addison and Steele introduce us to Manilius in Issue 467 of the *Spectator*. He sounds like the perfect Good Imperialist, the possessor of every recognized virtue in the most excellent moderation, and though we encounter him in his retirement, we are assured that “he is now intent upon the Practice of every Virtue...Thus in his private domestick Employments he is no less glorious than in his publick.”¹³⁷ The character description that follows reveals no difference between action and being: we know that Manilius is frugal because he practices frugality in his affairs; that he is generous because he gives freely to those in need; that he is genteel because he treats others with gentility; and that, overall, he is good because he does good works without quid pro quo. “[H]is outward Garb is but the Emblem of his mind,” we are told,¹³⁸ and though the line refers literally to his clothing, we can easily apply it to his whole character. Instead of being a costume that one can remove at will, the virtues of commerce were supposed to bind one’s internal and external identities like conjoined muscles in a mutually conditioning relationship—virtuous thought leads to virtuous behavior, and vice versa. As commerce grew to be a global network, the virtues of men like Manilius became the code of ethics that was supposed to discipline the merchant’s character and the system of global

¹³⁷ Ibid., 4:151.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4:152-153.

commerce itself. Brewer points out, “Such attitudes...served as a check or constraint, a means of ordering and regulating the trading community in such a way as to protect its members by reducing the risks involved in credit and debt. In sum, the mannerly conduct necessary to improve business and secure credit was as much a form of social discipline as those values connected with work itself.”¹³⁹

The third part of constructing the Good Imperialist involved creating a foil on which to project the distasteful aspects of commerce and separate the participants from the darker side of their profession. Negative portrayals of commercial types tended to feminize them in unflattering ways—speculators as greedy, thoughtless, and conniving; shopkeepers and traders as dependent, obsequious, and unsophisticated—since men of trade were frequently disempowered relative to the upper-class customers on whom they relied for business and perceived to be reliant on their sneaky wiles to ingratiate themselves with their clients. Even more emasculating, the more powerful buyers and shoppers, especially in retail, were increasingly women, who had taken on much more of a consumer role in household economy. By the eighteenth century, non-essential consumption had been coded as a feminine activity even though both sexes heavily indulged in it. With considerable evidence of the sheer volume of eighteenth-century consumption, Neil McKendrick effectively argues, “It was increasingly accepted that man was a consuming animal...To enjoy the act of purchase was no longer seen as the prerogative of the rich.”¹⁴⁰ However, “accepted” does not mean “condoned,” for the pursuit of luxury and fashion were still seen as morally dubious. Addison voices some common concerns over consumption’s corrupting and insidious influence in Issue 116 of the *Tatler*, in which he tells the tale of a hoop-

¹³⁹ Brewer, “Commercialization,” 215.

¹⁴⁰ Neil McKendrick, “The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England,” in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 25.

skirt on trial for the crime of being ridiculous. Since not even the young lady who owns it will defend it, the hoop-skirts advocates are the manufacturers and traders who make money on such monstrosities. Addison, the “judge,” is sympathetic to number of people who owe their livelihoods to the fashion industry, and he confesses that he is almost seduced by such compelling arguments for the hoop-skirt’s economic benefits. However, he is more troubled by “the great and additional Expence which such Fashions would bring upon Fathers and Husbands...To this I added, that great Temptation it might give to Virgins, of acting in Security like married Women, and by that Means give a Check to Matrimony.”¹⁴¹ With the hoop-skirt, Addison shows the dangerous and gendered power imbalances that non-essential consumption creates: it tempts women to throw away men’s hard-earned money, and it enables women to subvert traditional social conventions. The economic arguments in the hoop-skirt’s favor are actually the third strike against its propriety since it shows the degree to which otherwise admirable men of commerce are forced to serve the shallow, wasteful whims of women.

Tradesmen’s defenders, however, reversed this narrative by reinterpreting selling tactics as masculine and sophisticated and arguing that the tradesman is actually in the position of strength compared to the customer. With the spread of more standardized commercial practices and the proliferation of manuals and instructional materials for merchants, men of commerce were better able to present themselves as real professionals. According to the rules of this presentation, the courteous manner and the apparent deference that one shows a customer is the result of a (sometimes long and difficult) process in which one learns to empower the mind to control the passions. To build the sufficient mental strength required dedication, hard work, and some natural talent for reason, but once it was accomplished, one could approach a customer from a position of commanding reason while still maintaining a genteel and nonthreatening

¹⁴¹ Bond, *The Tatler*, 2:194.

demeanor—a particularly handy persona to deploy when dealing with emotionally volatile but manipulable female customers in a shop. Through knowing how to govern himself, the tradesman will also be able to govern his business, his employees, and his customers. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace discusses Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman* as an example of a commerce manual that teaches the reader this professional persona. Referring more specifically to the retail business, “the ‘masculine’ tradesman constructed in the pages of a work like Defoe’s is supposed to know what to do when confronted by such a presence [the unruly and undisciplined shopper]. The mastery of his passions...functions strategically to masculinize his profession...The seller was most often cast in the dominant, or masculine, role of the seducer and the buyer...became the one to be ‘seduced’ as well as mastered.”¹⁴²

The metaphor of seduction, however, does not accurately describe the scope and strength of the command that true men of commerce were expected to have of their domain, nor does it include the reason, selflessness, and community spirit that were supposed to infuse his character. Though insincere flattery and suggestive selling were part of the interactions between retail clerks and shoppers, the calm control, the obliging service, and the discreet manipulation were part of a more coherent and self-aggrandizing ideology of commerce. The authors of professional manuals imagined a relationship between men of commerce and the commercial world’s outsiders that was marked by more authority, responsibility, and caretaking than mere seduction was. The Good Imperialist—the man of reason and virtue and the true master of commerce—was more of a strict and benevolent father. He provided security, emotional support, and character-building discipline for his customers, his subordinates, and any fellow traders who struggled to find their way. Ultimately, he brought a comforting order to the

¹⁴² Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 86-87.

commercial world, and therefore, fictional representations of the Good Imperialist show a great man of commerce taming feminized personifications of the volatile, unpredictable, and disruptive aspects of his world. Socially ambitious consumers, weak apprentices, and even Public Credit herself—all wreak havoc on the smooth function of commerce not because they are evil but because it is their thoughtless feminine nature. The firm, masculine hand of the Good Imperialist guides these figures back to right and restores order to the commercial world so that its members may be secure, happy, and productive again.

The Rewards of Duty in *The Conscious Lovers*

The loving discipline of the Good Imperialist was a popular narrative in eighteenth-century theater, especially among playgoers of the commercial classes. Though the plots of Good Imperialist plays were often insufferably didactic, humorless, and melodramatic, they offered audiences a chance to see the redeeming power of commercial virtues—to see promising characters broken down, either by life or their own failings, so that the Good Imperialist may build them back up and find them a place under his care, guidance, and protection. In his polite comedy *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), Richard Steele uses this narrative to expand on the virtues of commerce that he first explored in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Sentimental and preachy with an unrealistically tidy resolution, *The Conscious Lovers* was an instant hit with audiences and an instant punch line with critics, who argued that no proper comedy would have the tear-jerking moments or the overly sober characters of *The Conscious Lovers*. Audiences, however, seemed to have disagreed, and they left Steele's comedy in tears of joy for the eighteen consecutive

nights of the play's initial run.¹⁴³ Steele offered his audience a new kind of hero, one who wins his reward not by fighting his society or scheming to undercut it, but instead by devotedly doing his social duty, serving others, and spreading comfort and goodwill to anyone in need. This model of Englishman is protective and nurturing toward his dependents, sometimes stern when it is called for, capable of showing emotion when he is moved, and firmly grounded in the conventional wisdom of his nation and class, otherwise known as reason. Steele also connects this model of hero to the merchant class and the social values that he credits for their growing prosperity and prestige. Despite the heroes' refusal to break with convention to orchestrate the right outcome for their stories, they are rewarded with the right outcome anyway precisely because they take care of others before themselves and fulfill their social obligations before overreaching for their hearts' desires. Steele's code of virtue masculinizes caretaking and obedience by placing them in the context of merchant values: the Good Imperialist commands his world by holding the people in it to a common code of virtue; and when he invests this virtue in the world, the world repays him with interest.

The Good Imperialist of *The Conscious Lovers* is Mr. Sealand, a prominent and successful merchant and the father of the hero's reluctant fiancée, Lucinda. His name reflects both the scope of his estate and also the moral path that his life has taken; he has tried the selfish, risky, emotional approach to building his fortune, but when Providence brutally showed him the error of his ways, he reformed his character. Though we receive only vague slivers of information about his past for most of the play, they clearly reveal a man once lost who had to experience a soul-shattering tragedy before he can mold himself into a virtuous merchant who puts duty before profit. His enlightenment has made him recoil from giving his daughter's hand

¹⁴³ Peter Hynes, "Richard Steele and the Geneology of Sentimental Drama: A Reading of *The Conscious Lovers*," *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 40, no. 2 (2004): 146-147.

to Bevil Junior, whom Sealand suspects is not committed to Lucinda and is keeping a mistress. “I am a Man exercis’d, and experience’d in Chances, and Disasters,” Sealand confesses; “I lost, in my earlier Years, a very fine Wife, and with her a poor little Infant; this makes me, perhaps, over cautious, to preserve the second Bounty of Providence to me, and be as careful, as I can, of this Child.”¹⁴⁴ We learn that financial losses compelled him to travel to the Indies in search of a greater fortune and that his wife, daughter, and sister were lost at sea when they followed him. Since then, he has changed from a merchant who short-sightedly risks his family for a shot at wealth and adventure across the ocean, to a sober titan of commerce who keeps his feet on the ground and carefully cultivates his estate with his family tucked protectively under his wing. His definition of “fortune” is a life of love, comfort, and virtue, and his second daughter is the “Bounty of Providence” to which he now devotes his care and protection. Unlike many fathers in his shoes, Sealand refuses to use his daughter to secure greater fortune but instead intends to use his present fortune to secure his daughter’s happiness. Having once prioritized providing wealth over tending his family, he no longer chases economic prosperity or social prestige; now he places the most importance on preserving Lucinda’s domestic and emotional welfare.

Mr. Sealand’s values guide the moral tone of the play, and by extension, they also guide the other characters to their rightful places in Sealand’s world. He takes pride in his identity as a self-made merchant and unabashed family man and does not openly aspire to achieving social rank for his family, at least not above maintaining his principles. His example differs sharply from the elitist and pleasure-centered ethos of Sir John Bevil, the father of Lucinda’s would-be fiancé. Though Sir John is an amiable and well-meaning man, he is also somewhat spoiled and blinded by his class privilege, and Sealand has little patience for an irresponsible man of leisure

¹⁴⁴ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, in *The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 4.2.67-72.

resting on his ancestors' laurels. When he senses that Sir John is trying to pull rank on him, Sealand contrasts his own ethic of usefulness with Sir John's pride in his lineage:

SIR JOHN BEVIL: Oh sir, your servant, you are laughing at my laying any stress upon descent. But I must tell you, sir, I never knew anyone but he that wanted that advantage turn it into ridicule.

MR. SEALAND: And I never knew anyone who had many better Advantages put that into his Account...[A]s much a cit as you take me for, I know the Town and the world. And give me leave to say that we merchants are a species of gentry that have grown into the world this last century and are as honorable and almost as useful, as you landed folks that have always thought yourselves so much above us. For your trading, forsooth, is extended no farther than a load of hay or a far ox. You are a pleasant people, indeed, because you are generally bred up to be lazy; therefore, I warrant you, industry is dishonourable.¹⁴⁵

Sealand deftly reverses the upper-class narrative about the commercial classes by emphasizing the rising fortunes of merchants and the falling fortunes of the land-rich, cash-poor gentry. In a fast-paced, interconnected world where moveable property carries the advantage, the merchants are the pillars of British society: they have the resources, the character, and the economic literacy to succeed in that world, and the nation relies on them to bring their success home. The members of the gentry are the provincial bumpkins who are too lazy, ignorant, and land-bound to adapt; they are a "pleasant people," but no longer of great importance. And given that cash-strapped Sir John is the parent most eager for Lucinda and Bevil Junior to be married, Sealand seems to have an excellent point. For all of Sir John's pedigree-boasting, Sealand holds the power in their relationship. He will dictate the terms on which a marriage will take place, if he allows it at all, and he will make sure that it conforms to the values that he expects from the heirs to his fortune. In a testament to the strength and influence of the commercial classes, Sealand puts Sir John in his place, rather than the other way around.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.2.19-23, 49-57.

Sealand's values stand in even greater contrast to the greedy, ambitious, self-absorbed, effeminate fortune-chasers that populate most of the idle gentry and their hangers-on. While no one has a plausible explanation for how Sealand could have married his loathsome wife or how she became acquainted with her more loathsome distant cousin, Steele uses them to show us exactly how not to practice commerce—to draw the line between the pursuit of profit for its own sake and the pursuit of virtue that is rewarded with profit. While no one in the play is blatantly evil or malicious, Mrs. Sealand and her cousin Cimberton display an inhumane lack of concern for others' welfare and a silly, single-minded entitlement to their own privilege. The intent to profit regardless of the means, in the belief that they naturally deserve it, is what drives these characters to treat the people around them like disposable property. Vain, conceited, and socially ambitious, Mrs. Sealand is determined to elevate her station by bartering her daughter for a family connection with the Cimberton name and title, and she is equally determined to rid herself of the competition for male attention within her own house. She makes clear that she is in a hurry to marry off Lucinda because she sees her daughter as both a chit to be cashed and a rival for her social position: "I'll live no longer in anxiety for a hussy that hurts my appearance wherever I carry her and for whose sake I seem to be not at all regarded, and that in the best of my days...I'll no longer cut off the greatest pleasure of a woman's life—the shining in assemblies—by [Lucinda's] forward anticipation of the respect that due to her superior."¹⁴⁶ She senses that she can solve her money and attention problems by marrying her to Cimberton.

Possibly more shallow and odious than his cousin, Cimberton is obviously a "coxcomb" to everyone but Mrs. Sealand: he puts on intellectual and social airs, he is disrespectful to those whom he socially outranks, and he goes through the motions of social graces with no real conviction behind them, making them all the more insulting. The "wit and learning" that he

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.1.114-117,121-123.

spouts is a nonsensical and ungenerous mixture of bastardized classical references, false gentility, and dehumanizing stereotypes of people he considers beneath his concern. In the most blatant and comical display of his empty-suit qualities, he greets his potential wife by inspecting her as he would a horse, commenting on her person out loud as though she were deaf and insensible of his treatment, and half-heartedly using the language of flattery as a cover for his terrible manners. Happily, they are never in a position to have their way on their own—they are both subject to the supervision of wiser men, and they are more of a distraction than a threat to the play's commercial values. However, Mrs. Sealand and Cimberton serve an important role in the Good Imperialist narrative: while greed and its cousin, consumerism, are necessary evils in the world of commerce, those impulses reside with silly, effeminate players like idle housewives and washed-up aristocrats, not morally pure men of reason like Mr. Sealand. They, too, must be controlled by the disciplinary hand of the merchants so that negative influence may be neutralized or turned into useful forces in the perpetuation of commerce.

Even among characters with whom Sealand has little direct contact, his values shape their lives and actions and pressure them to conform. Though he is a member of the landed gentry, the main protagonist, Bevil Junior, lives by virtues that bear little resemblance to his father's at his age and are much closer to the bourgeoisie into which he is supposed to marry. Bevil Junior seems to have little of his kind's stereotypical rebelliousness, merry-making, or sensual appetites. Serious, responsible, and dutiful, he spends his time serving others rather than indulging himself. To his father, he is loyal and obedient to a fault; to his servants, he is caring and condescending. Sir John recognizes how different his son's youth has been from his own and believes that the difference comes from his nature and not from any force on Sir John's part: "[M]y son has never in the least action, the most distant hint or word, valued himself upon that

great estate of his mother's, which, according to our marriage settlement, he has had ever since he came to age...[H]is carriage is so easy to all with whom he converses that he is never assuming, never prefers himself to others, nor ever is guilty of that rough sincerity which a man is not called to, and certainly disoblige most of his acquaintance."¹⁴⁷

However, Sir John may be misreading his son's development. Like Sealand, Bevil Junior has experienced a character-shaping tragedy in his mother's death and his father's widowhood. Bevil Junior reveals how attached Sir John was to his wife and sarcastically accuses his father of trying to spare him from such heartbreak by joining him with a woman he does not love: "[S]ince you lost my dear Mother, your time has been so heavy, so lonely, and so tasteless, that you are so good as to guard me against the like Unhappiness, by marrying me prudentially by way of Bargain and Sale."¹⁴⁸ Bevil Junior recognizes the importance of valued companionship in one's life, having seen his father's lack of it, and since he already has his inheritance, he desires the happiness that comes with a marriage based on mutual esteem and affection. Moreover, the values that lay beneath this desire for spiritual fortune have been reinforced in Bevil Junior throughout his life. He seems to have been raised primarily in the city, rather than in the languid country. He is close with responsible and upstanding members of the working class; his father's long-time manservant, for example, has obviously had a prominent hand in Bevil Junior's life, and Bevil trusts him enough to enlist him as an intermediary between himself and his father. He is familiar enough with the ways of the town to help others navigate them, and he is able to offer solid advice and assistance to other characters. Like his father, Bevil Junior is a product of his age, but his age has been dominated by commerce and its participants.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.1.34-37,44-47.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 1.2.63-66.

He is in a commercial world, if not of it, and unlike many members of his class, he has adapted to the new order and made himself a better man with a brighter future.

Consequently, in spite of their different backgrounds, Bevil Junior and Mr. Sealand both hold the same middle-class definition of honor, which relies on what a man has contributed to the world rather than what the world has contributed to the man. Both value social rank much less than personal virtuous character traits that have been cultivated by experience and borne some constructive, observable improvements in one's reputation and environment. Both value service to others as a measure of personal worth. Both value the importance of personal trustworthiness as the way for one to make his way in the world, which Mr. Sealand likens to "the credit of a trader."¹⁴⁹ To Sealand and Bevil Junior, virtuous behavior is the investment that one makes in the world: the higher the quality and quantity of the investment, the greater the happiness it brings to everyone and the more it increases one's personal stock; the smaller the investment, the more it wears down the economy of happiness and decreases one's personal stock.

The code of honor by which Bevil Junior and Sealand live is validated when Bevil's merchant values lead him to fall in love with Indiana, an orphaned and impoverished woman of ambiguous class status. Despite the appearance of impropriety in their relationship, Bevil earns the trust, esteem, and love of his unfortunate lady by protecting and providing for her without expectation or agenda.¹⁵⁰ Though Bevil loves her, too, he cannot marry her without his father's

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.2.34.

¹⁵⁰ Indiana's lack of name and social position is a significant source of conflict in the play, and her relationship with Bevil Junior becomes the biggest test of the humanity of merchant values. For a discussion of how Bevil Junior repurposes economic language to defend Indiana's human value, see Nicole Horejsi, "(Re)Valuing the 'Foreign Trinket': Sentimentalizing the Language of Economics in Steele's *Conscious Lovers*," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 18, no. 2 (2003): 11-36. For a discussion of the social instability that Indiana's classlessness represents, see Lisa Zunshine, "Bastard Daughters and Foundling Heroines: Rewriting Illegitimacy for

permission, but he takes pleasure simply in being able to take care of her. “If Pleasure be worth purchasing, how great a Pleasure is it to him, who has a true Taste of Life, to ease an Aking Heart, to see the humane Countenance lighted up, into Smiles of Joy, on the Receipt of a Bit of Oar, which is superfluous, and otherwise useless in a Man’s own Pocket?” he explains to Indiana and her skeptical aunt, Isabella.¹⁵¹ Bevil’s selfless investment in Indiana’s welfare and his desire to put his wealth into useful circulation ripples through the town grapevine. When Sealand hears of the relationship and (rightfully) suspects that Bevil is in love with Indiana, he marches to Indiana’s house to (wrongfully) accuse her of seducing his daughter’s fiancé. Distraught, Indiana drops her mother’s bracelet, which Sealand recognizes as the same bracelet he gave his first wife before she died—Indiana is Sealand’s lost daughter. Overjoyed by the discovery, Sealand immediately reclaims responsibility for Indiana’s care and acknowledges her proper place as the heir to half of his estate, a gift that paves the way for her marriage to Bevil. Now that Indiana has become a woman of fortune and Bevil has been revealed as an honorable man, Sealand and Sir John can both give their blessing to Indiana’s and Bevil’s union. In a way that none of these characters could have anticipated or calculated, their dedication to virtue has more than paid for itself by providing them with both wealth and happiness. Through the painful tests that they have experienced, they have earned the good fortune that Sealand, the Good Imperialist, is able and willing to bestow on them as a reward.

In these characters, Steele emphasizes the importance of selfless generosity and service as the virtues that generate true fortune in the world. While heroes of previous generations showed their heroism through a self-sacrificing devotion to community service, the service was

the Eighteenth-Century Stage,” *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 102, no. 4 (2005): 501-533.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.2.155-159.

usually political or military and involved wielding significant degrees of self-sacrificing power over the community and violence against the hero's enemies at home and abroad. In a departure from this tradition, Bevil and Sealand engage in self-sacrifice and service through the more feminine-coded act of domestic nurture: they protect their families from emotional pain rather than evil invaders; they serve others because they enjoy seeing people safe and happy, especially those whom they love; they build their communities by growing their businesses and their households and cultivating cooperative relationships, not by engaging in combat or conquest. Instead of reducing them to more feminine serving roles, however, this behavior makes Bevil and Sealand the most influential men in the play; their credibility and services rendered give them more social power than rank or competitiveness give to other male characters in the play.

The Consequences of Self-Interest in *The London Merchant*

If *The Conscious Lovers* shows the power of the Good Imperialist to order the world according to his values and thereby spread goodness and happiness to everyone within it, George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) shows the tragic consequences of a Good Imperialist's failure to enforce this discipline. While Steele creates a world in which evil is largely absent and selfishness is mostly harmless, Lillo does not downplay the tension between public service and private gratification within commerce. On the contrary, he portrays it as a war that takes place within the hearts of even the best men of trade, and in order for a man to win this war, his reason and humanity must thoroughly defeat the animal passions that tempt him to defy the rules of commerce and break the fragile public trust that sustains the commercial world and its dependents.

Lillo begins his discourse on the lessons of financial tragedy in his dedication. Much has been written about the thoughts on tragedy that Lillo presents in his dedication, particularly tragedy's reformatory potential and the importance of having a tragic hero with whom a non-elite audience could identify. However, I would like to focus on the particular virtues that Lillo promotes and the vices he seeks to stifle by turning to the less-quoted dedicatory part of the dedication, in which he directly addresses his patron, Sir John Eyles. Eyles took the unenviable job of Sub-Governor of the South Sea Company in 1721 to rebuild the corporation and restore its credibility after the collapse of the South Sea Bubble. When the company purchased a large portion of the national debt in 1720, it was supposed to convert the debt into publicly tradable company shares and lower the government's interest payments, thereby performing a great public service for everyone involved; instead, the company directors fraudulently drove up the share prices, fueled widespread speculation, and bribed politicians and government officials into contributing to the bubble. The financial devastation that resulted from this malfeasance and the need of strong, trustworthy leadership in the aftermath were obviously on Lillo's mind when he explained his choice of patrons:

[T]he best-writ panegyric, though strictly true, must place you in a light much inferior to that in which you have long been fixed by the love and esteem of your fellow citizens...The proprietors in the South Sea Company, in which are included numbers of persons as considerable for their rank, fortune, and understanding as any in the kingdom, gave the greatest proof of their confidence in your capacity and probity when they chose you Sub-Governor of their company at a time when theirs affairs were in the utmost confusion and their properties in the greatest danger.¹⁵²

Though effusive praise for one's patron is not unusual in a dedication, the specifics of Lillo's praise are noteworthy because he encourages and celebrates exactly this type of man in his play.

When the South Sea Company's business affairs were in chaos and its reputation in shambles,

¹⁵² George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, ed. William H. McBurney, Regents Restoration Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), Dedication 94-97, 100-106.

Eyles stepped forward to restore order and integrity to the company with the strength of his own personal virtues, and in doing so, he restored some stability and prosperity to his country and his people. Lillo devotes *The London Merchant* to reinforcing this connection between the virtues that promote trust and the hard work and discipline needed to build and sustain that trust. While a man of commerce may use his trade to increase his own fortune and prestige—indeed, some private ambition is integral to the system—he is first and foremost a guardian of the public network of trust that allows commerce to function smoothly. Since that trust is fragile, a true Good Imperialist must possess iron discipline, noble character, and a flawless reputation. Tragedy results when a man of commerce does not live up to these responsibilities and allows the network of commercial trust to break.

The Good Imperialist of *The London Merchant* is Thorowgood, the prosperous and esteemed merchant who is in charge of training two apprentices in the ways of good and honest merchants. Lillo devotes the whole first scene to showing us the thorough goodness of Thorowgood in both commercial and social contexts, with the implication that the virtues required to be a good merchant are also needed to be a good Englishman: we learn that Thorowgood pays his bills promptly so that his tradesmen can stay in business and continue the circle of commerce; that he desires to see his daughter marry a man who will make her happy without regard to how that marriage might increase his prestige; that he conscientiously inspects his apprentices' accounts to ensure that they are conducting their business properly; and most spectacularly, that he and his fellow London merchants have recently thwarted a Spanish invasion of England by convincing Genoese bankers not to lend to the Spanish crown. He explains to one of his apprentices, the tellingly named Trueman, the merchant's creed that he wants him to learn from his apprenticeship:

Methinks I would not have you only learn the method of merchandise and practice it hereafter merely as a means of getting wealth. 'Twill be well worth your pains to study it as a science, see how it is founded in reason and the nature of things, how it has promoted humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situation, customs, and religion; promoting arts, industry, peace, and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole...It is the industrious merchant's business to collect the various blessings of each soil and climate and, with the product of the whole, to enrich his native country.¹⁵³

His use of the word “science” reflects his sense (and the play’s representation) of commerce as a part of a natural order to which each merchant is bound. Thorowgood emphasizes the responsibilities that merchants have to other people and to their nation at large—responsibilities to protect and nurture—and most of all, he emphasizes a merchant’s obligation to contribute to his country’s quality of life. As Thorowgood points out to Trueman early in the play, however, vice can be tempting in the personal gratification it offers: “if hereafter you should be tempted to any action that has the appearance of vice or meanness in it, upon reflecting on the dignity of our profession, you may with honest scorn reject whatever is unworthy of it.”¹⁵⁴ Honest merchants must have the self-discipline to reject whatever pleasures come at the cost of “the dignity of our profession” as well as the good judgment to know the difference. As master, Thorowgood has the duty to instill this discipline in his apprentices, the second of whom is the play’s tragic hero, George Barnwell.

Lillo projects all of the “vice and meanness” of commerce onto the wealthy prostitute Sarah Millwood, whose moral villainy is strong enough to counter Thorowgood’s virtue. Millwood has devoted her life to the perverted form of commerce that Thorowgood has devoted his life to destroying: an amoral battle of wits and wills, driven by personal greed and ambition, in which the end of profit justifies any means. More dangerously, she extends this vision of

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3.1.1-9, 25-28.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.1.19-22.

commerce to all human relationships. Having long ago been cheated and disgraced by a lover, Millwood believes that she owes no kindness, sacrifice, or honesty to anyone and that her only duties in life are to her own comfort and pleasure. Though her past injuries have left her bitter, she does not seem motivated by revenge so much as the desire to secure the prosperous life she might have had by legitimate ladylike means before her disgrace. She has learned that wealth is power, virtue is weakness, and life's winners are those with the courage and determination to fight for power. Contrary to Thorowgood's language of good stewardship, Millwood uses the language of war to discuss commerce and relationships in general, as she does in her first appearance on stage to discuss her seduction of Barnwell:

MILLWOOD. I would have my conquests complete, like those of the Spaniards in the New World, who first plundered the natives of all the wealth they had and then condemned the wretches to the mines for life to work for more...It's a general maxim among the knowing part of mankind that a woman without virtue, like a man without honor or honesty, is capable of any action, though never so vile. And yet, what pains will they not take, what arts not use, to seduce us from our innocence and make us contemptible and wicked, even in their own opinions? Then, is it not just the villains, to their cost, should find us so? But guilt makes them suspicious and keeps them on their guard. Therefore we can take advantage only of the young and innocent part of the sex who, having never injured women, apprehend no injury from them.¹⁵⁵

Millwood's self-comparison to imperial Spain marks her as a heartless villain with no respect for others' humanity, a would-be tyrant who values people only for what they can do for her and who throws them away as soon as she has "plundered" them of "all the wealth they had."

However, she has apparently been created, rather than born, such a villain. Considering how her experiences have shaped her worldview, she is as much a product of commerce's dark side as she is a contributor to it. She once placed her trust in a social system whose participants she believed were following a sexual code of ethics, and her trust made her easy prey for a greedy confidence man who, unbound by the rules that constrained others, took advantage of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.3.24-27, 31-41.

Millwood's presumption of good faith. Though Millwood's experience is a relatively small crack in the trust that powered this social network, the resulting domino effect causes tremendous collateral damage: not only does Millwood's betrayal destroy her own life but also her faith in the ethical rules of the network; consequently, she decides that her security lay outside of the rules, and she behaves accordingly.¹⁵⁶ As Thorowgood implies, and Lillo certainly recognizes, cheating tends to reproduce itself by eroding the sense of protection and common welfare that people need to feel with each other, and by inspiring people to fend solely for themselves even at others' expense. The bonds of trust are extremely difficult to reestablish once bad faith has infected the system—the surest way to preserve them is to never crack them in the first place.

These commercial conduct lessons set the stage for the play's main plot: the moral downfall and eventual redemption of George Barnwell, Thorowgood's other apprentice and the play's title character. Introduced at a sensitive point in his training, Barnwell has the enthusiastic ambition and good intentions to build a career as an honest merchant, but he has yet to learn the important self-discipline and forethought that would make him a trustworthy broker. Tragically, this mixture makes him a perfect target for Millwood's schemes. His eagerness to be admirable and his inexperience with confronting temptation make him oddly passive and easily misled, as he unwittingly foreshadows for us early in the play when Millwood questions him about love. "If you mean the love of women, I have not thought of it all," he responds. "My youth and

¹⁵⁶ My reading of Millwood and her relationship with Barnwell differs from critics who see the play as a rather straightforward tale of good versus evil and who see Millwood and Barnwell as inherently evil and innocent respectively. For examples of such readings, see Tejumola Olaniyan, "The Ethics and Poetics of a 'Civilizing Mission': Some Notes on Lillo's *The London Merchant*," *English Language Notes* 29, no. 4 (1992): 33-47; and Peter Hynes, "Exchange and Excess in Lillo's *London Merchant*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2003): 679-697. For other readings that interpret Millwood as representative of the weaknesses in the ethics of commerce, see Lisa A. Freeman, "Tragic Flaws: Genre and Ideology in Lillo's *London Merchant*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98, no. 3, (1999): 539-561; and Polly Stevens Fields, "George Lillo and the Victims of Economic Theory," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32, no. 2 (1999): 77-88.

circumstances make such thoughts improper in me yet. But if you mean the general love we owe to mankind, I think no one has more of it in his temper than myself. I don't know that person in the world whose happiness I don't wish and wouldn't promote, were it in my power."¹⁵⁷ In his purity of heart and his passion for humankind, we can see Barnwell's potential to be a virtuous and prosperous merchant. However, the extremity of his passions and his lack of control over them give Millwood the opening to direct his passions for him. He strongly desires to give happiness to anyone he can, but he has not thought much about desire. He wants to use whatever power he has to please others, but he has little experience in judging when it is wise to use that power. He cites "youth and circumstances" as his reasons for the lack of thought, probably correctly, but he is signaling to Millwood and the audience that he is woefully unprepared to act independently of his master. Though he has good instincts for sensing right and wrong, he is unable to regulate his emotions or to gauge the long-term effects of his actions on his profession and community as a whole; instead, he acts on feelings of pity, guilt, attachment, and whatever else Millwood can evoke to gain his submission to her. Ultimately, Barnwell does not recognize the difference between service and servitude—he does whatever is asked of him, rather than what he knows is needed of him.

Barnwell is so helpless to Millwood's manipulations and so terrified to confess his entanglement with her to Thorowgood that, in the moral arc of the play, he appears to be little more than a pawn in a war of values between Thorowgood and Millwood, both of whom the audience comes to know before Barnwell is introduced. For most of the play, Millwood is winning. Her intent to milk Barnwell for money is direct and short-term, and she proves to be very talented at persuading the naïve, overly passionate apprentice to do her bidding. She plays on his lust for her by professing love and seducing him into her bed; for her sake, Barnwell

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.5.31-37.

abandons his sexual purity, his post at Thorowgood's house, and his obedience and loyalty to his master. She then plays on the guilt he feels afterward and his gratitude for her attention by falsely claiming that their affair has caused her infatuated landlord to eject her from her home; for her sake, Barnwell steals money from Thorowgood's business—in other words, from Thorowgood's investors—and egregiously violates the trust his master has placed in him. Most frustrating, he receives several opportunities to stop this pattern of behavior by confessing his crimes to Thorowgood and Trueman and working with them to repair the damage he has already done to the business and his reputation. However, he is so ashamed of himself and so afraid to face the consequences of his crimes, especially his friends' and master's disappointment in him, that he compounds his sins in his attempts to hide them. Millwood's maid Lucy accurately summarizes the trap into which she sees Barnwell being drawn, as she has seen others trapped before him: "These young sinners think everything in the ways of wickedness so strange. But I could tell him that this is nothing but what's very common, for one vice as naturally begets another as a father a son."¹⁵⁸

This ladder of sin, where one sin leads to the next, is exactly how Millwood intended to pull a generally decent, well-meaning, but weak boy into a pit of trouble. And while Barnwell may believe that he is in a unique quagmire, he is actually following the well-worn path of immature, self-centered people making bad judgment calls in the process of growing up. As much as he wants to be the noble, respected, prosperous merchant that his master is, he is unable to look beyond the immediate problems facing him and his "charge" and to consider his responsibilities to his other associates and the larger communities to which he belongs; he is even less able to swallow his pride and ask for help in meeting those responsibilities. In short, despite his good intentions, he puts his desires and image before his duties and cannot control his

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.12.6-9.

worst impulses to deviate from the virtues his master has taught him. Like any addict, he cannot stop himself until he hits rock bottom: he allows Millwood to talk him into robbing and murdering his beloved uncle, and he tearfully vows to put an end to his cycle of crime while his uncle dies in his arms.

These events are Barnwell's and Millwood's contributions to the tragedy of this London merchant, but much less discussed are Thorowgood's contributions to his apprentice's downfall. While the play makes clear that Barnwell's crimes are ultimately his own, Thorowgood has also failed to fulfill his particular duties as a Good Imperialist. He excels at living the virtues that he preaches. However, given his status as a pillar of the merchant community and the master of two merchants-in-training, he has a special obligation to make sure that he transmits his virtues to the subordinates in his care, and he owes them the long-term care and discipline that will turn them into upstanding members of the merchant community, as Thorowgood himself acknowledges:

When we consider the frail condition of humanity it may raise our pity, not our wonder, that youth should go astray when reason, weak at the best when opposed to inclination, scarce formed and wholly unassisted by experience, faintly contends or willingly becomes the slave of sense. The state of youth is much to be deplored, and the more so because they see it not, they being then to danger most exposed when they are least prepared for their defense.¹⁵⁹

One of the most painful parts of this tragedy is the fact that Thorowgood knows exactly what care his young apprentice needs and why he needs it. As the wiser, more experienced master, Thorowgood is supposed to protect Barnwell from moral mistakes and dangers that he is too young to recognize, while he forges the apprentice's reason into a faculty that can resist the attacks of vice.

However, Thorowgood has allowed his own indulgent affection to obscure his attention to Barnwell's moral and professional development. Despite having several openings to intervene

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.4.17-25.

in Barnwell's self-destruction, Thorowgood chooses to spare Barnwell the pain of discipline and leave him to his own underdeveloped conscience, even when Barnwell is begging for his master's guidance. In the same moment that he delivers his short lecture on the follies of youth, Thorowgood is refusing to see those follies in his own apprentice and declines to investigate Barnwell's unexcused absences from work:

BARNWELL. ...Oh, sir, you know not the nature and extent of my offense, and I should abuse your mistaken bounty to receive 'em. Though I had rather die than speak my shame, though racks could not have forced the guilty secret from my breast, your kindness has.

THOROWGOOD. Enough, enough! Whate'er it be, this concern shows you're convinced, and I am satisfied...

BARNWELL. It will be known, and you recall your pardon and abhor me.

THOROWGOOD. I never will, so Heaven confirm to me the pardon of my offenses...

BARNWELL. Hear me, then, on my knees confess.

THOROWGOOD. I will not hear a syllable more upon this subject. It were not mercy, but cruelty, to hear what must give you such torment to reveal.¹⁶⁰

Even in the effusive language of this play, Barnwell's distress should be enough to give his master a desire to hear what he has to confess. Instead, Thorowgood recoils from causing Barnwell any further (appropriate) pain and tries to soothe him with (unearned) forgiveness. Ironically, by attempting to be kind and generous, Thorowgood unintentionally does perhaps the cruelest thing he could have in that moment: he stops his apprentice from purging his soul of sin through confession, and he creates more incentive for Barnwell to hide his shame from his astonishingly kind master. What Barnwell needs is hands-on correction, not dismissive forgiveness, and had Thorowgood mustered the courage to let Barnwell deal with the painful but necessary consequences of his actions, his most shocking crimes could have been prevented. He finally springs into action when Lucy tells him of Barnwell's plan to murder his uncle at Millwood's urging, but by the time he arrives at Millwood's house, it is too late. While

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.4.9-15, 26-28, 34-37.

Thoroughgood is able to offer Barnwell some comfort as the apprentice waits in prison for his execution, Barnwell realizes that young men in his position need strict moral instruction more than perpetual forgiveness, and he welcomes his execution in the hope that his example can provide that instruction to others: “Justice and mercy are in Heaven the same; its utmost severity is mercy to the whole, thereby to cure man’s folly and presumption which else would render even infinite mercy vain and ineffectual. Thus justice, in compassion to mankind, cuts off a wretch like me, by one such example to secure thousands from future ruin.”¹⁶¹

The Problem of Personal Virtue

Using the example of the Good Imperialist, both *The Conscious Lovers* and *The London Merchant* sell the idea of a symbiotic relationship between Britain’s financial health and its spiritual health: men of commerce, especially the most prominent, have the power and the responsibility to use their profession and their resources to promote the virtue and integrity of their nation, and that virtue and integrity will, in turn, bring greater riches. During an era in which the average Briton’s dependence on a fragile system of commerce could be frightening, the figure of the Good Imperialist suggested that wealth and virtue went hand-in-hand. On one hand, stories about the Good Imperialist’s goodness and utility promoted much-needed trust in an economy that needed it to function, and they offered an aura of legitimacy and importance to a costly commercial empire that was rapidly changing British life and identity. On the other hand, the figure of the Good Imperialist also provided a justification for continuing to divide the people within Britain’s commercial empire into two groups—citizens and commodities—and for propping up an unjust and often cruel form of global capitalism without enacting any reforms that would threaten the men who already held power. The Good Imperialist is portrayed as a

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 5.10.16-22.

man whose wealth and power come from his virtue and whose main responsibility is to promote more virtue, from which would come more wealth. By implication, those who fail or fall behind financially are lacking in some virtue that they need to climb the social ladder.

Almost never addressed is the reverse causal relationship, the idea that the Good Imperialist's virtue comes from the security of his wealth and power. Both Sealand and Thorowgood are profoundly honorable men, but they can also afford to be. With their wealth and status, they encounter little that will tempt them into breaking their code of ethics, and their interests lie in maintaining the status quo and ensuring that everyone plays their game by their rules of conduct. The same is not true of Sir John Bevil, Barnwell, or Millwood, who actually throws this point in Thorowgood's face toward the end of *The London Merchant*: "What are your laws, of which you make your boast, but the fool's wisdom and the coward's valor, the instrument and screen of all your villainies by which you punish in others what you act yourselves or would have acted, had you been in their circumstances?"¹⁶² In the shadow of the South Sea Bubble, Lillo perhaps deserves credit for including this idea, with no response from Thorowgood. However, in a project that glorifies the commercial classes, it is probably not an accident that he puts this idea in the mouth of the female villain.

¹⁶² Ibid., 4.18.60-64.

CHAPTER 4

THE RETURN OF THE NABOB: BRITISH COLONIAL FIGURES

IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA

“You are plunged into Empire in the east. You have formed a great body of power, you must abide by the consequence.”
—Edmund Burke, House of Commons debate

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the significant changes in theatrical representations of colonial figures reflect the extent to which imperialism dominated the mainstream definition of Britishness. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, colonial figures are frequently characterized by their difference from their countrymen in England. Their defining feature is the extent to which they do not fit into English society—their dress, mannerisms, and lack of regard for English social conventions mark them as barely English, if that. Characters like Captain Manly in Wycherley’s *The Plain Dealer* (1677) and the title character in Behn’s *The Widdow Ranter* (1690) are often portrayed as a cultural fringe, not quite “other” but not quite English either; the non-English qualities in their appearances and mannerisms mark them as uncivilized and often turn them into threatening or comical characters, worthy of little more than disdain until they cultivate more refinement. They dwell in a cultural limbo that they can escape only by reintegrating themselves into a traditional social hierarchy.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, colonial figures are staged as the success stories of British society rather than the rejects or problem children. While they are often as foreign in appearance and manners as their Restoration-era predecessors, they distinguish themselves as the truly British characters of their respective stories by virtue of the code of honor that governs their personal conduct and relationships. The primary virtues of this honor code include feeling, honesty, fidelity, empathy, courage, and paternal care. This code is often represented as uniquely British colonial—it is a value system that one learns in the colonies from

the process of building the empire, and it is the same value system that keeps the empire strong and growing. In a sizeable subgenre of late eighteenth-century drama, this code of honor is the gold standard of Britishness even though it is performed by characters who spend most of their lives thousands of miles from Britain.

They tend to appear on the stage in the character trope of the Nabob—the wealthy, successful, and powerful Good Imperialist who earned his fortune and his manhood in the colonies, carries the same differences in appearance and mannerisms as earlier colonial figures, but in character has become more English than those who have never tested their cultural identities by venturing out of England. Generally, these characters like Sir Christopher Curry in Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* (1787) and Sir Oliver Surface in Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) have already completed the process of becoming the Good Imperialist. They can admirably manage their own mini-empires in the colonies, and they frequently act as models and mentors to Englishmen who have spent most of their lives at home—though they may be regarded with suspicion and ridicule in the beginning, the true value of their character is revealed to the audience and/or to other characters over the course of the play. This collection of virtues shows the extent to which the perceived priorities of the true British man has shifted from investing in interests to investing in people, from building relationships on business to building them on emotional bonds. This set of values appears in domestic fiction as well, and it is fitting that playwrights apply the expectations of men in family settings to colonial settings. As we see in the colonial plays of the late eighteenth century, the key to being a good Briton is keeping the empire strong and productive, and that entails investing in stabilizing social institutions that rely on good faith and at least the appearance of humanity to keep everyone content with the structure of the empire.

At the same time, this set of values also serves to rationalize the more unsavory aspects of imperialism—notably slavery—by framing them as acts of care between family members, with colonists and slaveholders playing the part of protective fathers who regulate their children’s liberties for their own good. This framing helps paper over the cognitive dissonance between British ideals of liberty and the realities of imperialism. Defining Britishness by the Nabob’s code of honor is admirable to the extent that it promotes an ethic of paternal care, compassion, and responsibility among male colonists; however, living by this code requires that a Briton have people on whom he can act out this paternalism, and despite the earnestness of the Britons who follow this code, it helps perpetuate the injustices of imperialism by sanitizing or even ennobling them.

The Strangeness of the Colonies

Representations of the British empire and its inhabitants underwent a stark change between the Restoration and the late eighteenth-century, and the contrast between the two periods illustrates the extent to which Britons came to embrace imperialism as a normal, if not always flattering, part of their national identity. During the Restoration, imperialism was presented as dangerous, and when they were represented at all, English colonies were presented as distant wildernesses populated with strange people. The contradictions between British imperial ideals and realities appears rather explicitly in late-seventeenth century literature, but discussions of imperialism’s dangers and shortcomings tend to take place in foreign settings, embedded in fictionalized histories of real political conflicts whose outcomes are already known. The heroic dramas of the Restoration produced deeply flawed individual heroes who either learned to avoid the corrupting influences of violent conquest (like Almanzor of *The Conquest of*

Granada) or who failed to do so (like Alexander in *The Rival Queens*). However, they rarely depict heroic empires or imperial ventures and do not offer any template for what one would look like. In Restoration theater and popular literature, England's own settled colonies are conspicuous mostly by their near absence. That absence suggests the extent to which the English people considered their colonies to be a different world from their own, one that did not fit well into any common conventions of heroism or honor. When one looks at the most well-known hallmarks of colonial life, it is easy to see why the English would consider it so foreign. During the seventeenth century, the Americas were still a mishmash of native American nations struggling to maintain their homes and white settlements sponsored by a variety of European powers jockeying for dominance. England's American colonies varied in climate and lifestyle, but most had several daunting constants: they were sparsely populated by young, impoverished (and overwhelmingly male) laborers, and controlled by a tiny planter aristocracy; they contained significant slave populations of whom the white colonists lived in fear; and their environmental conditions were usually inhospitable to Europeans who were not accustomed to coping with them. Would-be colonists traveled to America in search of a better quality of life and greater opportunity for social advancement, but they arrived in a world of hard and near-continuous work, indentured servitude that was often impossible to complete, extreme deprivation, and constant threats of disease and violence.

Economically, the sugar plantations of the West Indies were "the crown jewels of the English colonial empire," as Alan Taylor puts it,¹⁶³ but for those who were not among the plantations' wealthy investors, the West Indies could appear bizarre and foreboding. English immigrants to these islands would encounter deadly tropical diseases and natural disasters, and since sugar was an expensive crop that required a fortune in seed money to begin to cultivate, the

¹⁶³ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 205.

average colonist would see little reward from a (short) lifetime of backbreaking labor. Virginia may have been the friendliest territory for the average English immigrant, and though living conditions had greatly improved by the second half of the seventeenth century, it still did not come close to matching an English standard of living. Alan Taylor points out,

The Chesapeake farms did not impress English visitors, who saw a wasteful landscape of straggling farms, girdled trees, rotting stumps, flimsy and unpainted houses, impermanent fences, weedy fields, and scrawny, neglected livestock. Although at odds with the English ideal of carefully tending scarce land, the new frontier farms efficiently conserved the scarcest factors of production in the colonies, capital and labor, by clearing land quickly to shift fields as each lost its nutrients after a few years of cropping...

...[B]y 1665 the planters had occupied all of the best tobacco lands along navigable waters, which pushed new freedmen onto inferior lands with higher transportation costs...Instead of establishing an enduring land of opportunity, the Chesapeake's brief age of social mobility led to a plantation society of great wealth and increasing poverty.¹⁶⁴

One can see where John Locke drew his idea that “in the beginning, the whole world was America,” a virgin wilderness waiting for someone to build a civilization on top of it. However, many seemed to doubt whether it was possible to do so. Compared to the relatively compact, urbanized, and well-cultivated England, many people of the mother country understandably saw their colonies as a large swath of nothing. To the extent that these territories offered any prosperity, it was available only to the class of men who already had prosperity. Colonization appeared to be a rich man's game; for everyone else, it seemed to be a waste.

These impressions of the colonies negatively influenced seventeenth-century attitudes toward the English subjects who inhabited them, and in the dramatic representations of English colonies, we can see suspicion and disdain of colonists themselves as well as the imperial enterprise that they represent. Considering how frequently the topic of imperialism appears in

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 145,146.

Restoration theater, especially in heroic drama, it is notable that empire-themed plays so rarely feature English characters or settlements. More often, they deal with empires of the relatively recent past—the Moors, the Turks, the Spanish—and focus heavily on imperial decline and corruption. When Restoration plays do focus on English imperialism, however, they are generally comedies that treat the colonies and their inhabitants as objects of mockery. On one hand, as Bridget Orr points out, the fact that we begin to see English colonial figures as distinct characters is a testament to how important the empire had become to the metropolis: “East Indies merchants, planters and colonial prostitutes begin to figure within comic depictions of the metropolis as resolvers of plots, providers of wealth and eccentric adopters of exotic custom.”¹⁶⁵ However, the plays that feature these characters are not standard comedies of manners that have simply been relocated from London to the colonies. The corruption and exoticism of English colonial figures carry the implications that these qualities are typical of the non-English world they inhabit and that this world is far removed from the audience sitting in the metropolis—the stories of these colonial figures are important mainly because of what they reveal about the colonies rather than England itself. Orr seems to suggest this when she further points out, “Generally benign in their effect, such characters also carried the threat of degeneration or even a collapse into savagery to which all travelers away from the centers of civility were presumed prone.”¹⁶⁶ A “collapse into savagery” would not be inconsequential to the colonies themselves; but insofar as it is represented as relatively “benign” to an English audience, such plays reinforce the distance between England and the colonies and exacerbate anxieties about spending English resources and reputation to promote a shaky project executed largely by the rejects of English society.

¹⁶⁵ Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 214.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

An Empire of Misfits in *The Widdow Ranter*

In that respect, these plays may be less benign in what they suggest about imperialism itself. The rare plays that feature English colonists often invert the traditional hierarchies and values that heroic dramas reinforce, and they shift the emphasis from the importance of honor to the importance of productivity and gain, precisely the kind of crass, self-serving motives that made imperialism look vulgar and parasitic—this motive, after all, partly drove the Spanish agenda in the Americas, and it is the basis of considerable ridicule of English colonists who went to America for all the wrong reasons. Plays that directly touch on the English colonial experience are often comedies that exploit colonists' foibles for laughs. The humor has a dark, biting quality that vaguely echoes the tragedy of Eastern corruption in more serious works, and it makes clear that the English are not immune to all the temptations to engage in evil and vice in the pursuit of power and wealth. Audiences may laugh at the schemes and antics of the riff raff that populate English colonies, but they are also asked to consider the possibility that this riff raff is the future of an English empire. If imperialism tends to attract evil, greedy people and corrupt even the well-intentioned ones, what will protect England from suffering the same fate of past empires or committing the same shameful crimes?

Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter* (1690) illustrates the uncomfortable position in which the American colonies put the English at home: as much as they may have wanted a benevolent empire administered by men of honor, their empire's fate rested in the hands of opportunists, rogues, criminals, and confidence men all working primarily for themselves; however, these "superfluous peoples" were the only ones who could keep the empire well-populated and productive. The heroes may identify with the same code of honor as the heroes of heroic

dramas, but in the more realistic setting of an actual English colony, they prove themselves to be well-meaning but sadly ineffective and out of place in a society where modern values of self-interest and profit have supplanted old-fashioned notions of honor. Melissa Mowry describes Behn's portrayal of Virginia politics as "a sustained thematic commitment to emplotting the perils of populist political authority."¹⁶⁷ However, those perils appear to endanger the colony's virtue more than its survival. In *Widow's* Virginia, the honor of individual heroes builds nothing; the colonists' willingness to work, hustle, and nurture their personal gains is the secret to building a self-reliant, sustainable empire. And since very few of those colonists belong to a class in which social relations are governed by any code of honor, they rely on the strict application of law to ensure that they can pursue their own gains without any destabilizing conflicts of interest. *The Widow Ranter* offers a picture of imperialism as it was presented to seventeenth-century English audiences, when it was a new and uncertain project that had yet to produce many famous heroes or narratives of national heroism. In the absence of much national lore depicting the English empire as a field of honor or heroism, this play focuses more on the importance of building a stable society that needed neither honor nor heroism to function.

The Almanzor of this play is General Bacon, who exemplifies the virtues of honorable imperialists: he is highly loyal to and protective of his people; he is fair and generous in his diplomacy and military confrontations with neighboring Indian tribes; he is hard-working and has reached his position on his own merit; he is trustworthy and extends his trust readily to others for the sake of friendship; he is selfless in his actions and considers public service to be a reward unto itself. The stately Indian King and Queen recognize and admire his virtues, and despite the fact that they are enemies, the King admits, "Sir, you've been so Noble, that I repent

¹⁶⁷ Melissa Mowry, "'Past Remembrance or History': Aphra Behn's *The Widow Ranter*, or, How the Collective Lost Its Honor," *ELH* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 598.

the fatal difference that makes us meet in Arms.”¹⁶⁸ Tellingly, they are the only characters who fully appreciate his nobility, and their special relationship ties Bacon’s values to the fading Indian culture. Despite their “fatal difference” in military contexts, they have more in common than Bacon has with his fellow colonists, and his differences with them show themselves to be far more damaging.

The bulk of the cast is comprised of misfits of varying social status, many of whom have not travelled to Virginia so much as they have fled England. Despite their shadowy pasts, however, many have risen to the top ranks of the colony without any discernible skills, virtues, or interest in the common good. Timorous Cornet, a Justice of the Peace, has not returned to England for six years and now considers it “a lost Nation” with little to do there; in Virginia, however, he considers it “a fine thing to be a good Statesman,” which Friendly confirms “you had never been had you staid in old *England*.”¹⁶⁹ Dullman and Boozer boast about their ability to reinvent themselves in faraway Virginia and escape any censure for their past even when people from their past try to warn others of their duplicity:

Dull. ...we are Scandall-Proof—They say too, that I was a Tinker and runing the Country, robb’d a Gentlemans House there, was put into *Newgate*, got a reprieve after Condemnation, and was Transported hither—And that you *Boozer* was a Common Pick-pocket, and being often flogg’d at the Carts-tale, afterwards turn’d Evidence, and when the times grew Honest was fain to fly.

Booz. Ay, Ay, Major, if Scandal would have broke our hearts, we had not arriv’d to the Honour of being Privy-Councillors...¹⁷⁰

Though some settlers are unfortunate immigrants in search of a better life, others like Dullman and Boozer are hardened, and apparently unrepentant, crooks with serious crimes in their pasts.

¹⁶⁸ Aphra Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, vol. 7, *The Plays, 1682-1696* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 309.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

Ironically, they have been able to rise to positions of great trust and authority in Virginia despite the air of scandal around them, simply by their ability to fake virtue and brush aside any political enemies who might expose or challenge them. Among men such as these, Bacon's selfless service and glorious exploits provoke suspicion rather than admiration—they react to Bacon's deeds as though they cannot imagine someone acting out of altruism and obligation to his people. In the beginning of the play, when Bacon falls into trouble with the Privy-Councilors for repelling an Indian attack and saving the lives of everyone in their community, Whimsey declares, "I would he were well hang'd, I am afraid that under the pretence of killing all the *Indians* he means to Murder us, Ly with our Wives, and hang up our little Children, and make himself Lord and King."¹⁷¹ Whimsey's fears say far more about his worldview than Bacon's character, but they reveal the lack of space in Virginia for true heroes: even an impressive defense of the colony is grounds for punishment, and those who spend all their time taking care of others endanger themselves by neglecting to watch their own backs. Even Bacon's allies consider him naïve and somewhat ridiculous, and they recognize that his code of honor is a liability for him.

The clash between these value systems comes to a head at Bacon's hearing, where it becomes clear to the audience that Bacon's honor is of little value in Virginia. Bacon's work in protecting the colony, albeit without authorization, has been gallant and courageous, but he seems to put his judgment above both the other colonists and the law. However, he has demonstrated that he is, in fact, more deserving of power than the other colonists, and the context of his decision to battle the Indians without commission perhaps should count for more than it does. While Bacon believes that he acted honorably and should be respected for doing so, the

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

Councilors see a threat from an overly ambitious man. Bacon arrives at his hearing with Whimsey and Whiff, who have been arrested for attacking him without orders to do so and have been sentenced to hang, and demands that the Council punish the would-be assassins. Colonel Wellman responds, “I think th’offence needs not so great Punishment, their Crime Sir is but equall to your own, acting without Commission.”¹⁷² The other Councilors go a step further in labeling Bacon’s alleged crimes and admit their fear that Bacon is using his military experience as a platform to take over the government.¹⁷³ Bacon is obviously operating according to a set of social conventions that the rest of the colonists neither recognize nor trust. This motley collection of strangers is bound together by a charter and their self-made laws, designed to constrain and channel everyone’s self-interest into promoting the general welfare. They have no longstanding, implied traditions of leadership, community, and codes of honor to which they could reasonably expect everyone to adhere. Bacon places all of his trust in his code of honor, and he cannot fathom why the colony’s laws and chain of command trump his obligation to serve his people to the best of his ability and judgment. While Bacon looks at his military service and sees noble leadership, the Council sees defiance, arrogance, and possible rebellion.

For much of the play, we are led to believe that Bacon has been misused—he may be arrogant, but unlike many of the “statesmen,” he is a trustworthy asset to the community. By the end of the play, however, Behn’s portrayal of Bacon’s plight suggests that his code of honor weakens him and that perhaps Wellman and the Council are partly right in looking at Bacon’s honor with suspicion. This ineffectiveness of Bacon’s honor does not necessarily mean that it is morally wrong; Melissa Mowry makes an excellent case that Behn intended for Bacon to remain the hero of the play until the end and that “he proves himself capable of commanding and

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 320.

inspiring the integrity of others to such an extent that it resutures the colony's social fabric."¹⁷⁴ However, we see repeated examples of how he makes himself vulnerable to exploitation by following social rules that no one else acknowledges; Richard Frohock notes that the council, in particular, "constitute an opponent that Bacon cannot understand: Bacon, like Oroonoko, has difficulty learning sufficient caution."¹⁷⁵ After his trial, Bacon is not afraid to flaunt the fact that he has widespread support among the commoners who appreciate his protection, and though he has been reprimanded and nearly condemned for it once, he again takes up arms against the Indians without commission. He appears to regret his rash response to the Council at the end of battle when he is found dying, and he tells his lieutenant Dareing, "[N]ow while you are Victors make a Peace—with the English Council—and never let Ambition—Love—or Interest make you forget as I have done—your Duty—and Allegiance."¹⁷⁶ (54). Frohock reads this statement as evidence that "Bacon's honor...is superficial and expedient,"¹⁷⁷ but I would suggest that Bacon recognizes his honor as misguided at the end. For all his good intentions, he has failed to realize soon enough that his particular code of honor does not serve his community well. He aspires to perform a set of duties that he finds righteous without taking into account that this community required a different form of service from him: obedience to the rule of law, promotion of the colonial government as the supreme authority, and respect for the authority and instincts of those who do not share his views. He aspires to be the hero of a colony that does not need a hero so much as a sense of shared responsibility and opportunity.

¹⁷⁴ Mowry, "Past Remembrance or History," 615.

¹⁷⁵ Frohock, *Heroes of Empire*, 70.

¹⁷⁶ Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, 349.

¹⁷⁷ Frohock, *Heroes of Empire*, 69.

While the play ends optimistically in the sense that the survival of the colony is assured, it is a dark optimism in which the honorable virtues that mark the heroes of the Restoration's heroic dramas—loyalty, courage, selflessness, honesty, generosity—have become irrelevant. *The Widdow Ranter*, as Orr points out, “bear[s] traces of an awareness that just as the Stuarts were passing into history, so too certain modes of heroic representation, in which the colonizer and the colonized figured in equally ‘Romantick’ terms, as similar and assimilable human subjects, were becoming less and less viable as vehicles for figuring the interaction of Europeans and Indians”;¹⁷⁸ one could say the same of any representations of a “good” and a “bad” empire. Plays like *The Widdow Ranter* were not explicitly anti-imperial works, but buried within their qualified support of an honorable empire, the authors included a number of strong caveats and concerns. They recognized that imperialism could bring out the worst in even well-intentioned people; could divide nations, drain them of resources, and alienate their people from each other; and would suffer a seemingly inevitable collapse.

The Emergence of a British Imperial Heroism

Even as England became Britain and the English colonies became collectively a British empire, the English did not entirely shake the image of colonists as half-savage, half-civilized pioneers. The English were well aware that the colonies had developed their own cultures that were distinct from England's even though they had much in common: colonial life was still heavily rural, exposed to invasion and the elements, and often organized in plantation systems powered by black slavery. In these respects, the colonies still appeared rougher and more savage than the more refined and civilized metropolis. Linda Colley points out that throughout the eighteenth century America was symbolized in cartoons and artwork as a native American

¹⁷⁸ Orr, *Empire*, 238.

princess: “it summoned up the idea of a noble savage and was therefore well suited to those Britons who wanted to idealise America as a second Eden, a haven untouched by the corruption and luxury of the Old World...[T]he image of an American Indian carried with it also an element of menace.”¹⁷⁹ The symbol neatly expressed England’s simultaneous attraction to and fear of the unfamiliar territories to which the English had uncomfortably yoked themselves.

However, in the century after *The Widdow Ranter* debuted, the British did grow more connected to their empire, both economically and culturally. During much of the eighteenth century, as the colonies became more significant to the livelihoods and lifestyles of people in Britain, representations of colonial figures did not grow less exotic so much as they grew more immediate to English audiences and more connected to their own lives. Eighteenth-century England relied increasingly on its colonies as sources of wealth, trade, and raw material, and colonial products were an increasingly familiar sight in English households and shops. The colonies themselves became more established and less dangerous than they had been in the seventeenth century, and as the colonial standard of living improved—and even outpaced that of England in some places—the colonies gained a more deserved reputation as a land of opportunity.

British imperialism also gained a more prestigious reputation as an honorable activity that could be fit for honorable men. Not just for rascals on the make, as in *The Widdow Ranter*, the empire could be a venue in which great men could perform heroic feats of national service, and during the eighteenth century, the British people were treated to many widely-touted examples of national heroes who represented the best features of British identity and imperialism. The reasons behind the changing face of empire had as much to do with internal changes in British society as with changes in the relationship between Britain and the colonies. One of the most

¹⁷⁹ Colley, *Britons*, 136.

significant changes within Britain during the eighteenth century was the increasing social mobility and power of the middle classes and non-English Britons, people who had been mostly excluded from English halls of power. The British empire provided spaces for the commercial classes to create for themselves the privileges and solidarity of a ruling class, and by the late eighteenth century, it had become possible for the upper middle classes, at least, to attain many of the markers of aristocratic status in the colonies. We have seen how the mercantile and financial classes tried, and to some extent succeeded, in securing the moral authority and moveable wealth in the early eighteenth century. As Daniel O'Quinn notes, "When a power vacuum emerged due to a decline in the landed gentry's capacity for rule, the commercial classes, whose power was based less on property than on contract, not only found itself compelled to rule but also exercised forms of governmental function not yet prescribed by the conventional juridical manifestations of landed power defined by the British Constitution."¹⁸⁰

The fruits of empire were not limited to those involved in trade: military service and colonial administration provided its members with a chance to earn prestige, fortune, and the thanks of a grateful nation. Linda Colley discusses the ways in which the colonies could act as a social leveler on a global scale and offer paths to the prestige that belonged to the traditional elites at home. For instance, the Scots were often eager to put to use in the colonies some of the talent that lay wasted in Britain: "Investing in empire supplied Scots with a means of redressing some of the imbalance in wealth, power and enterprise between them and the English."¹⁸¹ Those who managed to survive the disease and violence of colonial life stood a good chance of staking out a prosperous place for themselves in the British empire. These opportunities were attractive

¹⁸⁰ O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 41-42.

¹⁸¹ Colley, *Britons*, 131.

to anyone who lived as a relative outsider in Britain. While England's established avenues of commerce and political service were already cornered by Britons—usually English—with longstanding connections to and positions of power, the empire offered alternative routes to social advancement via familiar methods.

The upper classes themselves also evolved in a way that made them more invested in the British empire than they had been in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. While acknowledging that the titled elite never lost the social dominance they had traditionally enjoyed, Colley identifies several significant changes in the makeup of the landed classes in the eighteenth century. First, the widespread failure to produce heirs caused a large number of estates to pass hands through sale, often to families who were brand new to the local community. Second, the old landed families who remained intermarried with greater frequency, and as the peerages of the four kingdoms of Great Britain merged, the line between “English” and “everyone else” began to disappear, leaving an upper class that more closely identified with the nation of Britain than with their own particular political tribes. While these trends may have weakened the regional and local ties that the landed families had with their estates' surrounding communities, they strengthened their ties to a national British identity: “Those Welsh, Scottish and Anglo-Irish individuals who became part of the British Establishment in this period did not in the main sell out in the sense of becoming Anglicised look-alikes. Instead, they became British in a new and intensely profitable fashion.”¹⁸²

This sense of Britishness extended to British colonies and territories as well, especially as more upper-class men enlisted in military, civil, and colonial service. With the expansion of state power at home and abroad, combined with the protracted wars of the late eighteenth and

¹⁸² Ibid., 165.

early nineteenth century, elite men had plenty of opportunity to test their manhood and flaunt their patriotism. John Brewer notes that the government often replaced the church as the career of choice for younger sons of landed families: “The long-standing provision for younger sons through appointment to a clerical living was now supplemented by a commission in the standing army or navy, or by an appointment to government office.”¹⁸³ Though higher level appointments offered alluring financial rewards, Brewer adds that “[t]hese posts provided a competence, sometimes a comfortable and prosperous way of living, but rarely a fortune,”¹⁸⁴ so it is unlikely that most elite men took such positions with expectations of becoming independently wealthy. Colley suggests that, for men already positioned within the halls of privilege, the great perk of these posts was not the money or the political connections but rather the social prestige of national service and leadership. Leading a military unit, a civil department, or a colonial government gave them the chance to establish themselves as valuable contributors to the nation and guardians of a powerful and virtuous global empire. Though the trend of national service frequently took on the look of a self-aggrandizing show, Colley emphasizes that, to the elites, these conspicuous patriotic gestures were not just about polishing their own apples but also about finding a place for themselves and their class’s peculiar skill set in a more modern world: “Recognising that an ostentatious cult of heroism and state service served an important propaganda function for the British elite does not mean, of course, that we should dismiss it as artificial or insincere...It gave them a job, and more important, a purpose, an opportunity to carry

¹⁸³ Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 205.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

out what they had been trained to do since childhood: ride horses, fire guns, exercise their undoubted physical courage and tell other people what to do.”¹⁸⁵

As a result of these trends, the eighteenth century produced more prominent and inspiring models of imperial heroism than those that existed in the seventeenth century. These models suggested that it was possible to combine the most significant virtues of the foreigners of heroic dramas—their masculine strength, discipline, independence, and devotion to service—with some of the most significant ideals of Britishness—liberty, benevolence, and human sympathy. Moreover, these models also gave the British audience who followed their adventures a narrative of empire as a grand humanitarian project rather than a set of interconnected business ventures. Captain James Cook was perhaps the most concrete example of the ideal British imperial hero, a man who embodied all the characteristics of honor within the comfortable racial, gender, and regional boundaries that made his virtues appear distinctly British. Kathleen Wilson identifies Cook as an excellent representation of the English as an exceptional “island race”: “His renown reverberated at many social and political levels, but in all he was heralded as a particularly *English* hero who embodied and extended his country’s genius for navigation and discovery, aptitude for science, respect for merit, love of liberty and paternalistic regard for humanity.”¹⁸⁶ In the stories told in British newspapers, literature, and theater, Cook’s imperial ventures were genuine “civilizing” missions, intended to lift up rather than exploit the “savage” peoples he encountered, and his voyages were instrumental in promoting human knowledge and progress. The mythologies surrounding Cook himself frequently emphasized his humble beginnings, his natural intelligence and intellectual curiosity, and his personal integrity, evidenced by his reputed

¹⁸⁵ Colley, *Britons*, 181.

¹⁸⁶ Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 59.

refusal to consort with the Tahitian women that his crew encountered. Wilson argues, “Cook represented not only an alternative masculinity, but also a new kind of national hero, one who demonstrated both English pluck and humanity, sense and sensibility, to best advantage—the explorer’s ‘man of feeling’ who died on the altar of national service with more blood brother than bloodshed to his credit.”¹⁸⁷ This combination of character traits—along with the insinuation that only Britain could produce it—came to define the representation of British imperial figures in later eighteenth-century popular culture. Despite the implied aggression of their heavily armed exploration and settlement, the eighteenth-century heroes of the British empire tempered their strength and fire with masculine gentility and paternal tenderness toward the “lesser” peoples of the globe.

Decline and Redemption: The Return of the Nabob

Figures like Cook illustrated the potential for a humane, benevolent imperialism that need not exist entirely in realm of fantasy. They also stood in contrast to disturbing trends in British militarism and human exploitation, and consequently, they arguably obscured more than they illuminated the brutal realities of imperialism as it was being practiced in the late eighteenth century. During this period, back-to-back wars required Britain to at least partially reconstruct itself as a military power, and as its military prowess became increasingly important to its power and expansion, Britain began blatantly building its empire via a method to which it had long avoided admitting—conquest. For most of Britain’s imperial history, conquest was something the British associated with Catholic Spain, and in discussing their own empire, they had long self-consciously avoided the language of conquest and the coercion and brutality that it implied. For much of the eighteenth century, however, they could no longer avoid it due to the constant

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 62.

wars in which they became embroiled. As they brought more people and territory into the tent of the British empire through war with other imperial powers, many Britons, especially those of the upper class, began embracing a revisionist notion of conquest in which they were acting as liberators and protectors of foreign people that they had brought under their benevolent dominion.

The late eighteenth century was a period in which the British empire needed considerable revision in its mission, image, and rhetoric since there were a number of signs that the old model was failing spectacularly. The most obvious and demoralizing sign was the open rebellion of the North American colonies. It is significant that Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published around this time—his thesis contained many parallels to what many Britons thought was happening to their own ruling classes and their empire. Unfortunately, the British responded by becoming more violent and authoritarian in the way they dealt with their colonies. In places like India, the perpetual warfare against and looting of native peoples did not make the British colonists look noble or liberty-loving. It became increasingly clear that British and East India Company administrators were not in India to bring British civilization and protection to the Indians so much as to indulge their own desires for wealth, luxury, and power. O'Quinn describes the backlash against late eighteenth-century imperial practices: "All of the issues that preoccupied the autoethnographic practices of theatrical sociability were activated not only on the edges, but also at the center of debates on British governmentality in India. Questions of effeminacy, the decline of landed families, and the figuration of despotism as errant masculinity suddenly emerge as the substance of the Whig case against East India Company's flirtations with disturbing models of sovereignty."¹⁸⁸ By the late eighteenth century, the British empire had

¹⁸⁸ O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 124.

become a mixed source of pride and embarrassment, and of prosperity and turmoil. The “island race” had managed to extend its power and influence around the world, but largely by becoming a more bureaucratic version of the conquistadores and sultans they had proudly despised.

Compared to the prominence of villains like Warren Hastings and the East India Company, the heroes like Captain Cook looked more like aberrations than representatives of British imperial policy.

Part of rehabilitating the image of imperialism involved changing people’s perspective on the exercise of power in the context of maintaining an empire. In particular, it glorified the gamble of devoting considerable national resources toward a project with no guarantee of concrete returns. The stories of the Cook expeditions were captivating because of the extent to which they appealed to a British audience’s imagination and sensibility. The most celebrated results of his journeys were the contributions to his people’s understanding of the world, their sentimental impulses to “help” people they perceived as primitive, and their national pride in their countrymen’s ability to survive in some of the most unfamiliar and dangerous areas on earth. The heroes of many later eighteenth-century plays represent the same sense of adventure and paternal benevolence and treat these concepts as the true rewards of imperial power: adventure brings out the best in British men, and in turn, they use this strength of character to protect and elevate those who they perceive as less advanced. Early eighteenth-century plays emphasized the importance of stability and civic duty, on maintaining a solid economic and social foundation on which to build the nation; later eighteenth-century plays celebrate the enterprise, daring, and sense of adventure that would enable a tiny island nation to project power throughout the world. While early eighteenth-century heroes exemplify virtues like reliability,

humility, and devotion to home, late eighteenth-century heroes are bold, passionate, and pugnacious travelers to faraway lands.

In this sense, the Nabobs strongly echo the returning kings of heroic drama. Though they are not portrayed as warriors, they do define themselves by the care and protection that they extend to their people, many of whom are arguably more dependent on the Nabob's goodwill than the common people on the hero in Restoration drama. They use their passion, energy, and uncompromising virtue to combat the corrupting forces of luxury and effeminacy among their countrymen. And this time, unlike during the Restoration, the returning kings are explicitly British, which suggests the extent to which Britons had grown comfortable identifying themselves as an imperial power and seeing the issues of imperialism as their own. As imperialism becomes more important to English power and prosperity, the English theater increasingly glorified and masculinized the boldness and passion that would have appeared reckless and foolish earlier in the century, and would not even have appeared English or British in the previous century.

Trials of the Heart in *The School for Scandal*

Richard Sheridan began writing *The School for Scandal* (1777) as Britain's North American colonies were sliding into open rebellion and the East India Company's governing abuses in the Indian colonies were coming to light. Many critics have discussed the social commentary that Sheridan embedded in his portrayal of the gossip mill and image-crafting of the play's socialites.¹⁸⁹ However, little has been written about the significance of having the play's

¹⁸⁹ For examples of such readings, see Anette Pankratz, "Constructing Identity in Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Schools of Scandal, Observation and Performance," in *Mediating Identities in Eighteenth-Century England: Public Negotiations, Literary Discourses, Topography*, ed. Isabel Karremann and Anja Müller (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 89-99; John M. Picker, "Disturbing Surfaces: Representations of the Fragment in *The School for Scandal*," *ELH* 65, no.

nabob return from India to assign judgment to the Londoners and decide who will inherit his imperial legacy.¹⁹⁰ Of the two candidates, one resembles the dissipated but basically decent rake of Restoration comedy while the other resembles the sober and dutiful merchant of early eighteenth-century plays. Unlike the merchant plays of a few decades earlier, the fruits of these candidates' actions do not matter as much as their internal lives, the intentions behind their actions, and their willingness to do what they feel is right rather than what they think will yield the highest return. His judgments seem fitting in an era in which relationships based on merchants' trading interests have apparently failed to cultivate the kind of lasting human bonds that are based in feelings of kinship and can transcend struggles over wealth and power. Though the play is not explicitly anti-mercantilist, it does reject the mercantilist values that we see in early eighteenth-century plays—namely, the ideas that virtue is performative and that actions can be virtuous without the power of empathy infusing them. Instead, the play promotes a value system that is implicitly credited to the colonial aristocracy, one that is more passion than sentiment, more combative than diplomatic, and more patriarchal than paternalistic.

A towering figure who casts his shadow over the other characters before he even steps onto the stage, Sir Oliver Surface is the play's voice of moral authority and a product of the empire that, at the time of the play's debut, was crumbling under the weight of corruption and ill-management. However, one would not know it from watching Sir Oliver. He has been living in India for fifteen years, has earned a vast fortune that he intends to pass to one of his nephews, and has returned to England to decide which one deserves to be his heir. Sir Oliver's booming

3 (Fall 1998), 637-652; and Christine S. Wiesenthal, "Representation and Experimentation in the Major Comedies of Richard Brinsley Sheridan," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1992), 309-330.

¹⁹⁰ James Thompson claims that "*The School for Scandal* lacks a clearly privileged figure to guide the audience's response," but he never mentions the character of Sir Oliver Surface, who I would identify as that privileged figure. See "Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, and Aggression," *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 93.

personality, independence, and impatience with the silliness of city society causes his character to overshadow and dominate the rest, but these traits also act as a vehicle for his passion for spreading his wealth and improving the quality of life for those within his reach. He disapproves of prudence, which he associates more with caution, coldness, and calculation than with wisdom; on the contrary, the courage to explore the world on one's own, follow one's heart, and risk making mistakes is a quality that builds character. "Egad, my brother and I were neither of us very prudent youths—and, yet, I believe, you have never seen many better men than your old master was," Oliver points out to his concurring manservant.¹⁹¹ His energy and idealism is youthful but also enhanced by the level of savvy and skepticism that comes from his life experience. We can see this combination in the contrast between Sir Oliver and his old friend Sir Peter, the character who stayed home and, in Oliver's estimation, lost the exuberance and adventure that the two shared in their formative years. Unlike Sir Oliver, Sir Peter has caved to the temptation to be married and has surrendered his freedom for a comfortable, if unsatisfying, domesticity. And Oliver mocks him for it by implying that Sir Peter has foolishly emasculated himself by turning his life and household over to young country wife. "Mercy on me, he's greatly altered, and seems to have a settled married look," Sir Oliver remarks teasingly when he first sees his friend. "One may read husband in his face at this distance!"¹⁹² The "settled married look" is exactly what Sir Oliver has tried to avoid during his life by pursuing a path of greater risk but consequently greater accomplishment. He has refused to settle in any aspect of

¹⁹¹ Richard Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, in *The School for Scandal and Other Plays*, ed. Eric Rump (New York: Penguin, 1988), 218.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

his life or let anyone lead him, and he carries that determination and independence into his test of his potential heirs, resolving personally “to make a trial of their hearts.”¹⁹³

The frontier has forged Sir Oliver into a man of decisive action and strength. The only character who has lived extensively in the colonies, Sir Oliver has unique qualities that he apparently honed during that life abroad; the colonies, not the settled city, would have encouraged Oliver’s aggression, willfulness, and adventure and also affirmed the importance he places on maintaining a strong community. The colonies are where a man like Sir Oliver can become a leader rather than an unmotivated fop who spends his days sparring with women in parlors, as we see in the parallel plot of the gossips. Sheridan drops several hints in the play that Sir Oliver’s time in India has greatly changed him for the better. First, no one except his two oldest friends recognize him. In the famous scene in which a cash-strapped Charles auctions the family portraits to his benefactor in disguise, Sir Oliver’s pre-India portrait is said to depict “an ill-looking fellow”¹⁹⁴ whom Charles does not recognize as the same man who is at that moment offering to buy the portrait. His friend Careless observes that there is something pinched and bloodless about the man in the painting: “That now to me is as stern a looking rogue as ever I saw—an unforgiving eye and a damned disinheriting countenance. An inveterate knave, depend on’t.”¹⁹⁵ Several critics have cited this painting as an example of the theme of bad art and deceptive appearances that runs through the play, but I would suggest that the painter captured the younger Sir Oliver quite accurately—after all, Charles acknowledges that it does not match the man he has come to know indirectly through his generosity, and he says several times that,

¹⁹³ Ibid., 219.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 240.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 241.

far from being “stern” or “unforgiving,” “[t]he old fellow has been very good to me.”¹⁹⁶ This scene indicates that Sir Oliver has changed considerably during his time in India from an “ill-looking fellow” to a forceful, generous, protective patriarch of his family and his country.

These are qualities that Sir Oliver recognizes in Charles, too, despite his spendthrift ways. He soon discovers that while Charles may be senseless when it comes to money or maintaining a reputation of a modest, careful man—the picture of trustworthiness that we see in the early eighteenth century—the young man has qualities that Sir Oliver values more highly in the person he would like to be in charge of his vast estate upon his death. According to Sir Oliver, good sense is overrated and should be the product of age and experience—it is learned over time, and therefore the young have no business possessing that quality. What matters are the qualities that Sir Oliver seems to believe cannot be learned but rather come naturally and with feeling, namely the qualities that show a passion for mankind and a strong sense of empathy. What Sir Peter sees as foolishness and immaturity are qualities that Sir Oliver interprets as moral courage, and Charles confirms that feeling during the portrait auction scene. Though Sir Oliver is initially offended that Charles is willing to sell his heritage in such an undignified fashion, he sees that the young man’s motives are neither false nor mean when Sir Oliver offers to buy his own portrait and Charles steadfastly refuses to sell. This display of loyalty and gratitude touches Sir Oliver so deeply that he is willing to forgive Charles’s irresponsible extravagance, and his admiration grows when Charles sends him part of the auction money addressed to Sir Oliver’s other disguise, an impoverished relation named Stanley. Charles demonstrates generosity, charity, and willingness to sacrifice his own peace of mind to help a struggling family member—in short, his preference for helping others before he helps himself. Even in the midst of his own money problems and his struggle with self-discipline, Charles has the self-awareness and the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

responsibility to recognize that he still sits in a position of great privilege, can afford to deal with his creditors on his own, and has a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Charles reflects Oliver's attitude: virtue and honor comes from internal compassion and sympathy, not from good deeds done on the cheap.

Good deeds done on the cheap comprise most of Joseph's reputation. Joseph is remarkably talented at putting on displays of virtue: he says all the proper things at the proper times; he pays his bills, manages his money frugally, and avoids any appearance of profligacy; he exchanges pleasantries with everyone and hard words with no one. Despite the praise he gets from people who are impressed with his "honor" and "sentiment," Sir Oliver's distaste for Joseph comes from his caution, self-interest, and performance of morality, which Sir Oliver senses has no real conviction behind it. Sir Oliver is immediately suspicious when he hears from Sir Peter that "everybody in the world speaks well of him":

SIR OLIVER: I am sorry to hear it; he has too good a character to be an honest fellow. Everybody speaks well of him! Pshaw! Then he has bowed as low to knaves and fools as to the honest dignity of genius and virtue.

SIR PETER: What, Sir Oliver, do you blame him for not making enemies?

SIR OLIVER: Yes, if he has merit enough to deserve them.¹⁹⁷

Sir Oliver interprets Joseph's universal praise and lack of enemies as a sign that Joseph is a spineless sycophant with no discernment of character. Rather than a sign that his virtue shines so brightly that everyone recognizes it, Joseph's reputation indicates that he is a shape-shifter, neither inherently evil nor inherently virtuous: he can perform the character that anyone wants him to be at any given time, and he can please even nasty people. If everybody in the world speaks well of him, that must include the people who should be the enemies of any truly virtuous

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 219.

person, and no one with such a widely positive public “character” can possibly be truly honest about who he is and what he believes.

Even before Joseph’s greed and hypocrisy are exposed, we see that Sir Oliver has a good read on people like Joseph. In the moral universe of this play, those who lack enough merit to have enemies also lack enough merit to have friends. Unlike Charles, Joseph does not have strong principles or feelings; he has interests and calculations. Everyone speaks well of him to each other and to him, but few think well of him. His associates are willing merely to use him to promote their own interests, just as he uses them. The character who knows him best, the city gossip queen Lady Sneerwell, describes Joseph and their business-like alliance in the first scene: “I know him to be artful, selfish, and malicious—in short, a sentimental knave, while with Sir Peter, and indeed with all his acquaintance, he passes for a youthful miracle of prudence, good sense, and benevolence...and with the assistance of his sentiment and hypocrisy he has brought Sir Peter entirely into his interest.”¹⁹⁸ And that assessment comes from his most intimate “friend.” The example of Joseph undermines the idea that virtue is an action rather than a feeling or a spirit. Though he does not go out of his way to harm anyone in the play, Joseph demonstrates his heartlessness in his lack of consideration for anyone besides himself and his willingness to let others suffer for his own advancement. He performs virtuous acts as long as they enrich him in some way, but he is absent in situations in which virtue is truly needed—to help those too powerless to help themselves. Sir Oliver confirms Joseph’s untrustworthiness when he visits in the guise of Stanley to request financial assistance. Exceeding decorous but void of kindness, Joseph’s reception of the fake Stanley illustrates the difference between the appearance of virtue and the actuality of virtue:

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 193.

SIR OLIVER: ...my present poverty, I fear, may do discredit to [your mother's] wealthy children; else I should not have presumed to trouble you.

JOSEPH: Dear sir, there needs no apology; he that is in distress, though a stranger, has a right to claim kindred with the wealthy. I am sure I wish I was of that class and had it in my power to offer you even a small relief.

SIR OLIVER: If your uncle, Sir Oliver, were here, I should have a friend...I imagined his bounty had enabled you to become the agent of his charity.

JOSEPH: My dear sir, you were strangely misinformed. Sir Oliver is a worthy man, a very worthy man; but avarice, Mr Stanley, is the vice of age. I will tell you, my good sir, in confidence, what he has done for me has been a mere nothing; though people, I know, have thought otherwise, and for my part, I never chose to contradict the report.¹⁹⁹

Had this exchange taken place with the real Stanley, Joseph would have emerged as the picture of virtue. He makes sure to sound caring, generous, forgiving, and responsible: he is supposedly protecting his stingy uncle's reputation, looking out for his brother, and desirous to help "Stanley" as soon as he is able. However, since he is unwittingly and repeatedly lying to his uncle, Joseph can be exposed as the cold, worthless hypocrite that he is. The true state of his heart is revealed when he is asked to do something that he believes cannot benefit him in any way and he refuses.

In Sir Oliver's methods for testing his nephews and the contrast that he shows between his nephews, we can see how the play elevates a more aristocratic, patriarchal model of virtue over the merchant model that had prevailed in earlier eighteenth-century theater. It is likely not a coincidence that Sheridan celebrates the former in a play that debuted near the beginning of the American Revolution. Advocates of merchant values had presented virtue as something one does: usually, one's motives could be accurately judged by the public image he presented and the fruits of his actions, and if not, it does not matter as long as the actions are good. The examples of the Surface brothers suggest that one's interiority does matter and that it can easily be detached from one's public character. Sir Oliver's great challenge is in devising tests that allow

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 259-260.

him to see the boys' hearts rather than their image. Notably, he accomplishes this task by presenting each brother with requests to demonstrate virtue in situations where they have nothing to gain. The brother who passes his test—Charles—is the one who receives an intrinsic reward from doing virtuous deeds for their own sake. Joseph, on the other hand, shows the great flaw in treating virtue as a business proposition—the virtue lasts only as long as it provides dividends, and it will evaporate as soon as the incentives run against virtue.

Late eighteenth-century audiences could see a very similar set of tests play out in both hemispheres of the British empire, where American colonists were revolting against abuses designed to turn them into cash cows for British merchants and upstart East India Company middle managers were ransacking India in Britain's name in hopes of accumulating personal fortunes for themselves. Just as Sir Oliver, and by extension Charles, are tied to a noble, idealized version of British imperialism, Joseph is tied to the mean, money-grubbing, untrustworthy mercantilist method of imperialism that was collapsing all over the globe. Several critics have pointed to the significance of Joseph's screen covered in world maps and its role in the scene where his only advocate, Sir Peter, finally sees the hypocrisy behind Joseph's façade. I would call Joseph the play's main repository of all kinds of predation that echoes the exploitation involved in mercantilist imperialism as it appeared by the late eighteenth century. As Joseph represents the banality of this kind of evil, Sir Oliver and his chosen heir Charles represent a call for the return of an older kind of hero who is invested in building a reservoir of national honor rather than private wealth, and who is willing to risk or sacrifice entirely their own comfort and gain in order to preserve and nurture their nation and people. This includes the most vulnerable among their people, those least capable of caring for themselves and most in need of *noblesse oblige* from the privileged class.

In the half century since *The Conscious Lovers* debuted on the stage, the image of risk-taking is transformed from a sign of foolishness or desperation to the mark of an ideal Englishman. Steele's Sealand is punished for leaving home to pursue his fortune through travel and adventure, and rewarded for grounding himself and methodically building his fortune and family through planning and industry. Fifty years later, Oliver Surface returns home from India with an impressive fortune and a manly strength that renders him unrecognizable to everyone but his closest friends, and by refusing to have his own children or cultivate his own homestead in England, he demonstrates his ability to represent his country as a caretaker of whole peoples and not simply his own household. The way these characters contextualize their risk-taking—either as something to be avoided or emulated—is a reflection of their nation's position in the world in their respective times and the type of man that more nationalistic playwrights thought their country needed. Men of reason like Sealand built an extensive trading network with the prudence of risk avoidance; men of action like Sir Oliver Surface built an empire with the courage of risk-seeking and the inner fire to seek adventure, exploration, and combat.

Men of Feeling in *Inkle and Yarico*

The contrast between Thomas Inkle and Sir Christopher Curry in George Colman's 1787 play *Inkle and Yarico* illustrates the most important features of this honor code. The most significant difference between Inkle and Sir Christopher is their capacity for feeling and sympathy. Despite the fact that he is a slave owner, Sir Christopher is portrayed as a man of boundless sympathy and humanity, always willing to fight on behalf of those who cannot protect themselves. In contrast, while Inkle is not a villain at heart, his greatest deficiency is his lack of sympathy for those around him. Daniel O'Quinn comments about this contrast, "[T]his

substitution of a vigorous military man for the invalid merchant has immense ramifications not only for the figuration of imperial masculinity after the American war but also for the conceptualization of colonial space and imperial governance.”²⁰⁰ Sir Christopher offers the audience a model for a white, governing colonial figure that distances the Nabobs from the mercenary aspects of mercantilism, embraces a paternalistic sentimentality that would have been popular with late eighteenth-century audiences, and in the process produces “an audience-pleasing exculpation of British colonial rule.”²⁰¹

Trained as a merchant, Inkle applies the value of economy even to his own feelings, and we can see the extent to which it cripples his ability to behave honorably. Inkle’s first lesson as a child was the notion that “charity begins at home,” a principle that Sir Christopher deprecates,²⁰² and it is ironic but significant that Colman would repurpose this adage for his telling of Inkle and Yarico’s story. Brycchan Carey points out that it was commonly used as a misdirection tactic by advocates of slavery in public policy debates. Unwilling to expose themselves to accusations that they were unfeeling in the face of the slaves’ suffering, proslavery forces tried to redirect attention to more locally visible humanitarian crises where they could more enthusiastically perform sympathy and drain momentum from the abolition movement: “Those whose interest or opinion led them to support the institution of slavery could use the example of [child chimney] sweeps to argue that philanthropists should confine their attentions to their own doorsteps.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Daniel O’Quinn, *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 271.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

²⁰² George Colman, *Inkle and Yarico: An Opera, in Three Acts*, in *English Trader, Indian Maid: Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World*, ed. Frank Felsenstein (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 228.

²⁰³ Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 127.

Though Sir Christopher is no abolitionist, he is the character who opposes the moral bankruptcy of the idea that charity begins at home and who argues that a true Englishman's sympathy has no borders. Sir Christopher's activities are portrayed as less important than how he feels, and his heroism lies in his paternal feelings toward those in his power, including those whose bodies and liberties he purchases. Inkle may not provide nearly as much support to an injustice like the slave trade, but his one act of human trafficking—his attempted sale of Yarico to Sir Christopher—is empty of any sense of responsibility or care for the woman in his power. As the governor of Barbados and the conscience of the play, Sir Christopher exemplifies the moral character that the profiteering new arrival Inkle must earn if he hopes to gain Sir Christopher's respect and the status of a true Briton. In the context of this play, that moral character consists of the courage and benevolence to exercise great power in ways that mitigate as much perceived suffering or barbarism as possible. Questioning the legitimacy of such power need not be done.

The main moral conflict between Inkle and Sir Christopher could be summarized as follows: who is the better British citizen—the one who presumes that we live in an economy, or the one who presumes that we live in a society? Colman sets up this conflict at the beginning of the play with the introduction of Thomas Inkle, a merchant who travels to Barbados to pursue fortune and marry Sir Christopher's daughter, but who gets sidetracked toward America first. Inkle represents an ethic of economy, in which value is quantified and the right choices are the ones that yield the most profit (not equivalent to making a quick buck, but with the goal being production of wealth). His laser-like focus on matters of financial management—his “interests,” as he calls it—might have made him an excellent business partner back in England, and fifty to sixty years before this play, might have marked him for the audience as an admirable, competent, stable man. However, in the context of Colman's play, Inkle's attention to business seems silly

and faintly venal even before it becomes overtly so. His insistence on weighing his decisions on the cold basis of mathematics bleeds into his method of valuing human life, the most ridiculous example coming during the crisis that drives him to Yarico: as he is being chased by murderous savages and he sees his ship abandoning him, he cries out, “Confusion! my property carried off in the vessel.”²⁰⁴ Given the materialism of his worldview, it is not surprising that, when he meets Yarico and falls in love, he is not sure how to process his feelings—he is not used to dealing with feelings at all. Yarico shelters him from the other natives, pledges to protect him with her own life if necessary, and agrees to help him reunite with his ship; in return for her sacrifice, he pledges to love her and keep her by his side as they “journey all over the world both together.”²⁰⁵ It is the first indication we see that Inkle has the capacity to appreciate the value of another person for what that person does for his heart rather than his pocketbook.

In contrast to Inkle, Sir Christopher Curry represents an ethic of society, in which value is measured by feeling and the right choices are those that promote human happiness and solid social relationships. Our first description of Sir Christopher is as a man of “confounded good character,” with specific mentions of “his hospitality” and “his odd, blunt, whimsical friendship.”²⁰⁶ When we finally meet Sir Christopher, it is immediately obvious that he is a man of passion, that he considers his flaws and quirks to be simply excesses of virtue, and that he reserves his respect for those with as much heart and spirit as he has—those who, like him, “act from the impulse of nature.”²⁰⁷ He tells us, “A natural man unseasoned with passion is as uncommon as a dish of hodge-podge without pepper, and devilish insipid too...Foibles are foils

²⁰⁴ Colman, *Inkle and Yarico*, 181.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

that give additional luster to the gems of virtue.”²⁰⁸ In a London setting, Sir Christopher’s aggression, intensity, and effusions of emotion would seem vulgar. In a colonial setting, however, one can better appreciate them as virtues. The colonies are portrayed as places that are still semi-wild and dangerous; there are issues of basic survival at stake that give the work of community-building much more value than the work of wealth-building or business-related social-climbing. Sir Christopher is a straight-shooter who says exactly what he thinks, knocks people back into line when he thinks they need it, and protects as many people as possible from any hint of danger. Inkle will keep one’s books, but Sir Christopher will have one’s back—as long as his power and sense of morality is not challenged.

The two men finally meet when Inkle arrives in Barbados to marry his fiancée. For apparently the first time in Inkle’s prudent, calculated life, he is suspecting that the rational choice and the virtuous choice are not the same, but he cannot articulate to himself how to go about making the right decision. Already regretting his rash promise of undying devotion to Yarico, he is now in a quandary: does he abandon her, and if so, how can he avoid the sorrowful scene that Yarico will make? He already feels guilty, and he knows that if he is made to feel it too keenly, he might not be able to do what he believes to be his duty. He appears genuinely torn over what the right thing to do is, however obvious it should already be. While Inkle excels at objective, transactional decision-making, the multiple debts that he is facing at this point cannot be neatly quantified: on one hand, he has already engaged himself to a woman who comes with a lifetime of financial security; on the other hand, he owes Yarico his physical life for her protection while he was stranded in America. Which deal should he keep?

Along comes Sir Christopher to explain it all for Inkle and the audience. While he is perhaps more immersed in the slave trade than Inkle, Sir Christopher participates under the

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

guidance of what he considers an Englishman's code of honor: for him, the empire and its institutions demand men of loyalty who have the courage of conviction, love of humanity, and generosity of spirit to protect each other and the weaker people under their care—men who possess a paternal instinct that they can extend to all types of dependents. When Inkle sees who he thinks is a wealthy stranger on whom he can quickly unload Yarico, he decides to make his move. Sir Christopher is actually open to the idea of purchasing Yarico as an attendant for his daughter, and he tells Inkle, "I shall treat her a good deal better than you wou'd, I fancy; for though I witness this custom every day, I can't help thinking the only excuse for buying our fellow creatures, is to rescue 'em from the hands of those who are unfeeling enough to bring 'em to market."²⁰⁹ When Inkle takes offense and protests that he is an Englishman, not a "common trafficker," this just makes Sir Christopher angrier, at which point he rants, "More shame for you; Let Englishmen blush at such practices. Men who so fully feel the blessings of liberty, are doubly cruel in depriving the helpless of their freedom."²¹⁰ For Sir Christopher, buying people being sold into slavery by others is an act of rescue—he believes he will give these slaves a better, more dignified life than the typical purchaser. To some extent, it weirdly counts as advocacy of liberty—he intends to give the people he purchases as much liberty as they can appreciate.

Sir Christopher really loses his temper when he learns the details of Inkle and Yarico's brief history and discovers more grievous violations of his beloved code of honor. Inkle makes two major mistakes in dealing with the man he does not realize is Sir Christopher: he requests that the deal be kept secret, both from the governor and from Yarico until the sale is finalized;

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 221.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

and he ignores Yarico's claims to his love and loyalty and betrays her after everything she has done for him. As Yarico recounts her services to Inkle, Sir Christopher says to himself, "My blood boils at the scoundrel's ingratitude!"²¹¹ When Inkle finally turns his back on Yarico once and for all and asks Sir Christopher to take care of her, Sir Christopher booms, "Care of her!—that I will—I'll cherish her like my own daughter, and pour balm into the heart of a poor innocent girl, that has been wounded by the artifices of a scoundrel."²¹² It is notable that, when Inkle and Yarico's romantic relationship is revealed to him, Sir Christopher suddenly declares his intention to treat as a daughter this woman whom he was willing to buy for his own daughter a few minutes before. She is a poor, weak creature who needs his protection and friendship, not because Inkle has taken her freedom but because he has broken her heart and betrayed her loyalty. In Sir Christopher's eyes, his responsibility to Yarico is much like that to a daughter: he has a duty to shelter her from life's storms and from her own weak-minded mistakes—in short, to be a combination of father and gentleman. Unlike Inkle, Yarico has shown herself to be caring, subservient, and unshakingly loyal, albeit in need of a worthy guardian.

And it is in those moments where we can see the British code of honor represented by Sir Christopher merge with the interests of empire. In his reading of the play, Daniel O'Quinn notes, "The extraordinary speed with which the play is able to separate and maintain the process of racialization from the critique of slavery reflects the historical separation of the political drive to abolish the trade in slaves from their emancipation."²¹³ As admirable as Sir Christopher's stand for human rights is, there is a lot that is missing in his dialogue. He is not concerned with Yarico's right to autonomy, only with her safety and comfort; he is not angry at Inkle for

²¹¹ Ibid., 224.

²¹² Ibid., 225.

²¹³ O'Quinn, *Entertaining Crisis*, 286.

enslaving another human being (who is quite free when he meets her), but for abandoning a woman who loves him and saved his life; he never sees, speaks with, or discusses Yarico as an equal; he definitely sees her as an inferior, someone over whom he has great authority but also great responsibility to use that authority to make sure she doesn't get hurt. He seems to believe that Yarico has some right to freedom, but it is not the same kind of liberty that Sir Christopher would demand for himself—she deserves freedom from want, fear, and harm, and it is his duty to provide it.

It is worth remembering, as a number of critics have pointed out, that *Inkle and Yarico* is not an abolitionist work—at best, it is anti-slave trade.²¹⁴ As much as the play sounds like it has abolitionist overtones in places, Sir Christopher's code of honor lends itself well to an imperial, slave-holding society by establishing a set of rules that govern how powerful men treat their many inferiors. The values of self-sufficiency and prudence that Inkle learned from his father—the values that demand individuals take care of themselves and their own first, and work to better their own lives rather than hope someone else does it—are the same values that Sir Christopher calls “principles which destroy all confidence between man and man.”²¹⁵ And in a slave-holding colony, that is true. Sir Christopher speaks for the stability of his world, Barbados and the colonies—in this world, the liberty-loving British choice is to earn the loyalty of your inferiors, to repay the loyalty your inferiors show you, and to make them feel that they have more liberty than they actually have. In this world, the right thing to do is to treat one's inferiors like one's own daughter—with a firm but chivalrous hand. And that Sir Christopher emerges as the true

²¹⁴ For readings that discuss the major problems with Colman's tendency to sanitize colonial racism and slavery by distancing his protagonists from the slave trade, see Joan Hamilton, “*Inkle and Yarico* and the Discourse of Slavery,” *Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1994), 17-33; Susan B. Iwanisziw, “Intermarriage in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Literature: Currents in Assimilation and Exclusion,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 56-82; and Dana Van Kooy and Jeffrey N. Cox, “Melodramatic Slaves,” *Modern Drama* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2012), 459-475.

²¹⁵ Colman, *Inkle and Yarico*, 228.

Briton of the play suggests how much the ideal Briton has morphed from the wealthy merchant to the wealthy imperialist.

The Meaning of Britishness

The evolution in the portrayal of colonial figures from half-savages to Nabobs suggest the extent to which even the most distant portions of the British empire had come to be regarded as part of Britain itself and the extent to which the (white) people who settled those lands had come to be defined as English, regardless of how much time they had actually spent in England. In the scope of representations of empire in British theater, this evolution was not entirely different from portrayals of imperial heroes in the Restoration: after a century of the rise and glorification of more domesticated middle-class merchants, the return of the Nabob marks the reemergence of the aggressive, heroic aristocrat, this time in the bodies of ethnically British men leading colonial governments rather than armies. The Nabobs represent the idea that Britain's material and moral strength lay on the margins of its empire and that Britishness consisted of a collection of values more than visible cultural markers. It is an idea that may have been compelling enough to survive the unraveling of the empire in North America toward the end of the century, perhaps because it offered Britons a way to rationalize their methods of building another empire to the east. The Nabob signified the extent to which Britons had internalized the idea that there is such a category as "good" imperialists.

CONCLUSION

This work concludes approximately at the year 1790, not because it contains any neat endpoint or period-demarkating event but because by that time the era often called the “First British Empire” had resolutely ended. By 1790, Britons had lost the thirteen American colonies, arguably the most identifiably “British” of their imperial holdings, and had gained holdings in India, where the East India Company was directly governing millions of Indians who were at that point unassimilated into any British social system. The penal reform and abolition movements in Britain were gaining lasting momentum, while the nation’s military was increasing its presence around the world. These changes in the conduct of British imperialism brought a new set of issues to negotiating the relationship between the British empire and British national identity. One trend, which Deirdre Coleman calls “Romantic colonization,” lay in the half-utopian, half-fantasy colonial projects that began springing up in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century “for building [society] anew on a simple and egalitarian foundation”²¹⁶; they included ideas for “reformed” communities of convicts in Botany Bay and “free” black settlements in Africa. However, the noble intentions behind these projects intertwined with another trend of increased authoritarianism and militarization in British colonialism, especially when it involved non-white and/or impoverished residents of the sprawling British empire. The inhabitants of these reimagined colonies were frequently subject to a degree of social engineering, or “civilizing,” that was not present in Britain’s seventeenth- and eighteenth-century imperial planning.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

²¹⁷ See *ibid.* for further discussion of several such colonial projects of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Though they may have appeared different in form, the substance of these “civilizing” missions reflected a continuation of the imperial rationalizations that were honed in the theater through the eighteenth century. Their intensification would probably not have been acceptable without over a century of developing cultural narratives in which imperialism was portrayed as an expression of British greatness. Through the eighteenth century, the existence of a British empire was presented not just as testament to the virtues of a tiny island nation that managed to extend its power to territories around the world. It was also advertised as a gift to the rest of the world, particularly the people whom the British thought needed the kind of character-building lessons that the British were most suited to provide. Sustainable settlement, global commerce, and militarized exploration and diplomacy all became part of the definition of “good” British imperialism, which could improve the virtues and welfare of everyone who came into contact with it. By extension, imperial practices that did not reflect an idealized version of British identity could be minimized or excused as aberrations or mistakes that could be corrected. Certain practices—slavery in America or East India Company massacres in India, for instance—could be isolated and condemned as unjust, inhumane, and unbecoming a true Briton while the very existence of a British empire could go relatively unquestioned. By the end of the eighteenth century, debates on imperialism focused on how to maintain an empire, rather than on whether to maintain an empire.

Moreover, it was an empire that offered more promise than tangible benefits for the vast majority of Britons. Very few would actually make fortunes in trade, build estates on virgin soil, or become heroes in war; one would have to be white, well-connected, and probably somewhat wealthy to have the opportunity to attempt any of these goals. Even the particular narratives that I have laid out in this work would have been accessible and relatable to a minority of Britons,

likely those who lived in or frequented London, followed current events, and had the luxury of attending the theater. It was unlikely that debates on the virtues or problems of empire were followed closely by those who lived far away from any urban center, who struggled to feed themselves or their families, whose political interests focused on whether they would be displaced from their land, and who did not have the liberty to control their own destinies.

So how would a project as large, long-lasting, and influential as the British empire receive the kind of sustenance from its citizens to dominate so much of the world for as long as it did? My answer would be that Britain's empire could gain its citizens' loyalty not for what it did for the nation, but rather for what it signified about the nation in its most idealized form. Imperialism helped provide a sense of national identity and mission for those who might not otherwise be deeply invested Britain's government or national activities. Presented in an attractive and inspiring light, the existence and growth of the British empire could suggest that something was special about the British people, and that it was something that anyone with sufficient character could access. In the kinds of narratives covered in this work, a powerful empire was built by industry, resourcefulness, courage, generosity of spirit, and respect for individual freedom. The existence of the British empire served as evidence that these qualities were in abundance among Britons, and it conferred a moral value on Britishness that could make British identity attractive even to those who were marginalized within it. The national ideology attached to its empire was a point of national pride that anyone could embrace even if they did not personally benefit from or condone the practices involved in imperialism.

It was a beautiful story—as long as one did not look at it too closely, as Joseph Conrad wrote—but not necessarily one that served anyone well. In one of his many noted works on slavery and abolitionism, David Brion Davis wrote, “National pride is especially dangerous and

deceptive, as Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us, when it is based on the highest achievements of human history... [W]e do need to recognize the reality of deceptive or biased consciousness—of collective rationalizations, sometimes consciously crafted, that serve identifiable interests and help convince individuals of their own innocence and virtue.”²¹⁸ In this work, I have offered a version of such a collective rationalization, one that was crafted little by little, across multiple generations, until it became convincing enough that its adherents largely ceased questioning its most basic premises. Furthermore, I suspect that the main interest served by this rationalization was, in fact, to convince individuals of their own virtue, so that they could spare themselves the burden of considering that some of their highest collective achievements were actually dangerous, destructive, and inhumane. It would also serve as a reason for why many elements of this eighteenth-century rationalization survive in justifications for Western imperialism today.

²¹⁸ John Ashworth, David Brion Davis, and Thomas L. Haskell, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Representation*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 166, 167.

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