DOMESTICATING THE EMPIRE:
WOMEN WRITERS AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE
IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

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By
Angela Rehbein

Dr. Devoney Looser, Director

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the Dissertation entitled

DOMESTICATING THE EMPIRE: WOMEN WRITERS AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

Presented by Angela Rehbein

A candidate for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Devoney Looser, Director

__________________________________________

Dr. Elizabeth Chang

__________________________________________

Dr. George Justice

__________________________________________

Dr. Theodore Koditschek
to Ed and Phyllis Rehbein

with much love
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

 ii

## INTRODUCTION

Empire, Domesticity, and Eighteenth-Century Women’s Literature ........ 1

## CHAPTER ONE

Anna Seward and the Domestication of Colonial Discourse .................. 43
  Civilization v. Savagery: *Elegy on Captain Cook* ......................... 46
  Female Embodiment and Colonial Anxiety: *Louisa* ......................... 55
  The “Poetical Novel” and Empire .............................................. 64

## CHAPTER TWO

Jane West, the Domestic Ideal, and the Perils of Empire ...................... 84
  The Morality of History: *The Advantages of Education* .................. 89
  Maternity and Empire: *The Mother* ......................................... 104
  Dutiful Daughters and Colonial Discourse: *A Gossip’s Story* ......... 113

## CHAPTER THREE

Elizabeth Inchbald, the Idea of Africa, and Progressive Imperialism .... 133
  “Man is born to Liberty”: Progressive Discourses of Freedom .......... 137
  Nature and Art’s Colonial Utopia ............................................. 154
  Antislavery Colonization: Civilizing the “Savage” Continent ........... 165

## CHAPTER FOUR

Maria Edgeworth and the Sentimental Discourse of Empire ................ 180
  “The Grateful Negro” and the Peaceful Plantation ....................... 183
  “The life and opinions of a Lady of Quality”:
    *Belinda’s* Critique of the Novel ......................................... 192
  Lady Percival and the Sentimental Empire .................................. 211

## CONCLUSION

Rethinking Domesticity ............................................................... 229

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

 ................................................................. 242

## VITA

 ................................................................. 258
INTRODUCTION

Empire, Domesticity, and Eighteenth-Century Women’s Literature

This dissertation argues that much domestic fiction by women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries centrally engages with the British Empire, making it part of the everyday vision of life in this period. I refer to this process as domesticating colonial discourse. When using the term —domestic fiction,” I am referring to texts set entirely in England that primarily feature courtship plots and discourse on female education. Previous scholarship has shown that the domestic novel was a highly politicized genre in the 1780s and 1790s; women writers in particular used it as a vehicle for entering political debates, including responding to the French Revolution. The family unit in this fiction is often read as a synecdoche for the British nation, with the father acting as a kind of monarch whose daughters are his subjects. —Domestic,” then, has dual meanings: it describes both the household and the nation. What has gone largely unexplored is the role that this fiction played in imagining the British Empire and in troubling over its evolving moral character, despite the political significance that scholars have ascribed to this fiction. Moreover, we have not yet considered the correspondence between imperialism and the variety of political affiliations that women assumed at this time.

I examine the fiction and poetry of Anna Seward, Jane West, Elizabeth Inchbald, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth, and demonstrate that despite what appear to be their exclusively English settings and political preoccupations, each text invokes the uneven power relationships between Great Britain and a colonial other—though not
always a directly colonized other—including the West Indies, India, the Far East, and Africa. These texts draw on the qualities commonly associated with colonial territories, such as savagery and licentiousness, in order to establish their characters’ relative vice or virtue and/or to define gendered and national identities. I therefore argue that what we have often called simply conservative or progressive in these women’s writings ought to be revisited, as such labels obscure a much more complex set of ideas about what it meant to be a British citizen in a global, imperialist age. Although they ostensibly take very different political stances, these women-authored texts promote the idea that Great Britain is more culturally advanced than the othered eighteenth-century world and, therefore, entitled to rule it. Moreover, I argue that they do so at a time when Great Britain’s imperial identity was in flux. As the nation transitioned from the brutal mercantile Empire of the eighteenth century, with its reliance on the transatlantic slave trade, to the allegedly more benevolent and “natural” Empire of the nineteenth century, women writers and the domestic novel played an important and unacknowledged role in representing that Empire to the reading public and in reinforcing the power that Great Britain assumed in its imperial pursuits.

I have chosen to focus on women writers for several reasons. In the first place, women writers in this period were often understood as a group distinct from men and described in very polemical terms. The Rev. Richard Polwhele’s *The Unsex’d Females: A Poem* (1798) illustrates this phenomenon. This poem divides women writers of the 1790s into two political camps: monstrous or “unnatural” women, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Hays, and others; and, as Eleanor Ty puts it, “mild and sweet models of
female genius,’” including Hannah More, Mary Wortley Montagu, Anna Seward, Frances Burney, and others.1 The Unsex’d Females expresses the anti-Jacobin Polwhele’s horror at women writers weighing in on the “rights of man” debates surrounding the French Revolution. The poem suggests that it is “unnatural for women as the frail or gentle sex to harbour brutal thoughts, to want to be the equals of men, or to meddle in politics, all of which make them perverse or unacceptable examples of their kind.”2 In particular, Polwhele is incensed by women advocating for their rights. The opening lines of the poem highlight what Polwhele perceived as the unnaturalness of “radical” women like Wollstonecraft: —Surve with me, what ne’er our fathers saw, / A female band despising NATURE’S law, / As _proud defiance_ flashes from their arms, / And vengeance smothers all their softer charms.”3 Polwhele opposes the “softer charms” that women are supposed to possess with the “vengeance” and “defiance” of this charging female army. Moreover, Polwhele makes clear that this band of defiant women is unique to his age, a group that “ne’er our fathers saw.”

The Unsex’d Females underscores the particular social urgency that Polwhele and his contemporaries attached to the role of the woman writer in the 1790s. In their advocacy for women’s rights, women like Wollstonecraft threatened to undermine the patriarchal family, which Polwhele, Edmund Burke, and other anti-Jacobins considered the basic social unit; to undermine the patriarchal family was to undermine the very structure of society. Women writers were thus understood to play a crucial role in

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1 Eleanor Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 3.

2 Ibid., 4.

defining (or defending) the nation. At this point in history, Great Britain’s imperialism was an important part of the nation’s identity. If, in writing about the home, women such as West, Inchbald, Hamilton, and others were perceived to be writing about the nation, then the British Empire was certainly within the scope of their concern. However, current scholarship on these writers neglects imperialist concerns in texts that have long been identified as addressing national politics.

I argue that “home” meant something more to the women that I examine in this dissertation than has previously been acknowledged: it involved a wide range of ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and national identity formed in and around colonial “contact zones,” to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term. In a variety of guises, the Empire serves as an important backdrop in each text that I examine, yet these writers’ engagement with both the contemporary ideology and the political reality of the British Empire has been overlooked in our scholarship. As Felicity Nussbaum, Kathleen Wilson, and others have convincingly argued, a discussion of what it meant to be a British citizen in the eighteenth century must attend to the way that discursive categories such as gender, race, and nation were produced by England’s expanding awareness of the “rest” of the world. For example, to assess the qualities assigned to Englishwomen in the late eighteenth century leads us to examine the way Englishwomen were imagined alongside women in colonial territories. Such a reading compels us to think about the nation in a

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4 Pratt defines “contact zones” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination — like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today,” in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

5 For example, Felicity Nussbaum suggests that women native to colonial territories, such as those in the British West Indies, were conceived in opposition to Englishwomen: because they lived in hot climates—the “torrid zones”—colonized women were perceived to be sexually lascivious, thereby providing a contrast to chaste Englishwomen. Englishwomen’s perceived difference from “savage” women
global context, which is necessary not only in eighteenth-century fiction featuring colonial settings but in so-called domestic fiction as well.

These concerns have thus far been largely overlooked in the growing body of scholarship on late eighteenth-century fictional and non-fictional texts by women. Pursuing such an analysis compels us to deepen what we think of as eighteenth-century women’s “domestic” concerns. How did the British Empire influence the domestic Englishwoman’s ability to imagine the nation and her place within it? What did eighteenth-century women writers think about Great Britain’s increasing national wealth and territorial expansion? How did growing awareness of the Empire and its “other” impinge upon the middle-class morality promoted by women writers such as Hannah More? To ignore such questions, or to presuppose that women like More, West, and others, didn’t think or write about such issues is to affirm the limiting assumption that the domestic scene (narrowly defined) is the woman writer’s primary terrain during this period.

The texts that I examine in this dissertation domesticate colonial discourse at a transitional point in British history: from the “first” to the “second” British Empire.

Wilson offers a succinct survey of the differences between the first and second empires:

The “first” empire was enabled by English political domination of Ireland and Union with Scotland, and centered on British overseas settlements in North America and the West Indies and the establishment of British supremacy in the slave trade. The “second” empire (1763-1840) was


Kathleen Wilson describes what she refers to as the “circuitry of empire”—the interconnectedness of colonial and metropolitan territories in forging ideas about Englishness in the eighteenth century. Wilson argues: “[W]omen’s bodies and minds functioned symbolically and literally as the bearers of national values and ideals, just as their alleged ‘characters’ were taken to encapsulate the best and worst features of national manners.” Such national ideals and constructions of femininity, Wilson contends, were inextricably linked to eighteenth-century British imperialism. *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17, 93.
defined by a turn towards the East (especially in the wake of the revolt of the American colonies), a more regulatory and rationalized imperial apparatus, and the extension of British power over a proliferating range of peoples and territories, such as India, New South Wales (1788), and Gambia and the Cape of Good Hope (1795).6

As Wilson points out, the loss of the North American colonies was a significant factor in the reorientation of imperial efforts in the late eighteenth century. The American Revolution also engendered a crisis in imperial authority, as the justness of British rule came under scrutiny. Debate about the slave trade was one arena in which this scrutiny took place.

In writing the first history of abolition, Thomas Clarkson described the "natural" virtue of British society and proposed a religious and moral narrative to explain efforts to abolish slavery in the 1780s and 1790s. In his History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament (1808), Clarkson suggested that slavery was abolished as part of a divinely ordained process whereby Great Britain realized its inherent virtues. As Christopher Leslie Brown describes: "Clarkson was the first to characterize the campaign as the working out of impulses deeply embedded in the society from which it emerged, as the elaboration of principles essential to British Protestantism, as the expression of a distinctly British devotion to liberty and the rule of law." Victorian and Edwardian British historians continued to rely on Clarkson’s model, suggesting that Britain’s mercenary past, its "old commercialism," was relinquished in the 1780s and 1790s, replaced by "Britain as the

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purveyor of civilization, justice, and order ... the British state concerned historically with the welfare of African peoples, even, it was noted, at a cost to itself.” The texts that I examine in this dissertation advance the moral narrative that Clarkson identifies. Even in novels that critique its social institutions, such as Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* (1796), the British nation is still portrayed as freer, more civilized, and more favored by God than Indian, African, or Middle Eastern nations. In each text, Great Britain assumes its presumably natural position of moral and political authority over the colonial world. As such, the texts that I examine suggest that women writers helped to establish the efficacy of these ideas in the expansion of the second empire.

Moreover, although they often acknowledge the Empire’s potential perils, the texts that I examine also associate the Empire with respectability and with domestic stability and portray it as a convenient financial annex to the nation, a place necessary for supporting British families. In doing so, these texts elide the actual mechanisms of territorial expansion and colonial government. Mary Wollstonecraft’s domestic novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) exemplifies this kind of portrayal, as well the contemporary transition between empires. In *Maria*, Wollstonecraft critiques the commercialism of the former British colonies in North America and promotes the expansion of empire in India. *Maria* helps to inaugurate the literary stereotype of the

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7 Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 5, 8. Brown surveys the expansive body of scholarship on abolition in the introduction (1-30). He points out that a number of skeptics questioned Clarkson’s narrative, such as advocates for the working class, Europeans who saw the dismantling of the slave trade as an attempt to destabilize their own trading enterprises, and the descendents of British Caribbean slaves, among others. In the twentieth century, as Brown describes, Eric Williams’s influential *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) explicitly links the profit motivations of industrial capitalism to the success of abolition: “The abolitionists campaigned against the slave trade and slavery, Williams insisted, when it became economically convenient to do so. ... The gospel of free trade, Williams suggested, mattered as much to the abolitionists as the gospel of Christ” (13). This link between slavery and capitalism—what Brown calls “the dynamics of economic change” (20)—influenced much subsequent scholarship on this issue.
―Ugly American‖ in the character of Henry Darnford, who spends some time in North America and describes its residents as crass and materialistic, its landscape ugly. By contrast, the heroine Maria’s uncle earns a fortune by going to India as a nobleman’s secretary and uses this wealth to support his family upon returning to England. The British Empire in India becomes a natural—even necessary—extension of the British domestic household, free of the kind of danger and corruption associated with the former North American colonies. Tara Ghoshal Wallace locates Maria at this transition between Western and Eastern empires and points out that it makes empire safe, respectable, and beneficial to the home (both local and national). Wallace reads Maria alongside Tobias Smollett’s Humphry Clinker (1771) and argues:

Both texts claim that honest and even accidental fortunes can be acquired in India, that Britons can return from India with scalps and reputations intact, and that money accumulated from the East is put to good use in the home country. While America inflicts physical and mental bruising, while it leads to dangerous transculturation or disgusted disillusionment, India beckons the adventurous and industrious Briton to wealth and respectability. Both Humphry Clinker and Maria counsel turning away from the Wild West to witness the sun of the British Empire rise in the East.\(^8\)

Although Wollstonecraft portrays the British Empire in India in positive terms, the process of securing British imperial rule was fraught with cultural conflict and violence, none of which Wollstonecraft acknowledges. Christopher Bayly reminds us that —the growth of European and American dominance over the world’s economies and peoples‖ in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was experienced unevenly by those nations involved in this process:

A large part of humanity had been converted into long-term losers in the scramble for resources and dignity. The polite, commercial societies of

\(^8\) Tara Ghoshal Wallace, Imperial Characters: Home and Periphery in Eighteenth-Century Literature (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 113.
London, Boston, and the ports of Brittany flourished, in part because of the huge volume of cheap raw materials which slaves and dependent peasantries across the world produced to fulfill the labor or revenue dues in the wake of national independence or colonial conquest.\textsuperscript{9}

In the following chapters, I explore the role that British women writers played in defining the differences between the winners and the losers, to use Bayly’s terms, and the role that they played in domesticating the Empire's emergent moral narrative.

In pursuing these issues, this dissertation highlights the intensely political nature of the domestic sphere in the eighteenth century. As many scholars have demonstrated, narratives of courtship and marriage were far from benign in the fiction of this period. Eighteenth-century Britons understood the domestic realm as a site of public significance. Marriages and household arrangements in fictional texts outlined the class-based and gendered arrangements that applied to British society at large.\textsuperscript{10} Eve Tavor Bannet points out that in the eighteenth century the term “domestic” did not indicate the ideology of “separate spheres” that we often assume was in place, with the public sphere a site of masculine discourse and matters of state, the private sphere a site for feminized domesticity. Bannet argues: “Enlightenment ideology recognized a distinction between private and public ... but it did not assume a binary opposition”; Enlightenment writers and philosophers “all thought that the nature, happiness, and prosperity of the Public ... was a function of the nature, happiness, and prosperity of the private (i.e., particular)


\textsuperscript{10} See Nancy Armstrong’s landmark study of the politics of domesticity, \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Armstrong examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic novels and conducts books, which she positions as key disseminators of an emergent discourse of middle-class domesticity. She argues: “[T]he formation of the modern political state—in England at least—was accomplished largely through cultural hegemony” (9). Armstrong contends that this hegemony was produced, in part, by novels: “I regard fiction, in other words, both as the document and as the agency of cultural history” (23). In Armstrong’s formulation, the domestic woman came to embody this emergent middle-class discourse.
persons composing it. They thought the happiness and advantage of each particular or private person was analogical to, and continuous with, that of the public, the community, state, or nation at large.”

The welfare of the public and the private were thus intimately connected in Enlightenment discourse and in contemporary domestic fiction.

The supposed “naturalness” of particular domestic arrangements is also important to the texts that I examine because the presumption of naturalness conceals political implications. A number of Enlightenment thinkers (such as Rousseau, Hume, Montesquieu, and Hutcheson) conceived of the family as the most ancient and “natural” social unit, thus positioning it, according to Rousseau, as “the first model of political societies.”

Because the family was conceived as a natural institution, the political uses to which it was put could be elided. The Hardwicke Marriage Act (1753) provides an example of this phenomenon. This Act instituted the forms of state authority that have since been naturalized as part of the wedding ritual: marriage licenses, parental permission for minors, witnesses, authorized clergymen, and recording the marriage in a register. The Act replaced a prior system in which marriage vows took place in private and required no such surveillance for their validity. In essence, marriage became an issue

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11 Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 130. Bannet points out that “domestic” and “private” were also distinct from one another: one’s “domestics” referred to the servant class in a household and thus to a hierarchical structure, whereas the “private” individual stood in a similar rank with the rest of his community. Moreover, Bannet outlines:

In the eighteenth century, the word *domestic* was still applied to men as well as to women, arguably to men more properly than to women. ... The word *domestic* was applied not only to people living in the same household but to members of different households who shared the same chief or family head. ... By extension, the term *domestic* was applied to men within the same country or nation who share the same monarch or governor ... *domestic* originally designated ministers, courtiers, chaplains, and other servants in a king’s or prince’s household. (127, 128)

Bannet reminds us how important it is to historicize our use of terms such as “public,” “private,” and “domestic.”

12 Qtd. in Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*, 132.
of state concern. Bannet contends that this assumption of authority took place, in part, in
order to promote the economic interests of the nation. The heterosexual household—that is, the so-called “private” sphere—thus assumed a very public role in political discourse. The Hardwick Marriage Act helped to secure the family’s function as a unit of the state. Because the family unit was conceived as a “natural” state, “[t]he political uses of the marital institution were thus naturalized, and its natural uses politicized.” This process of naturalizing the political uses of marriage is a key element of my analysis. In the texts that I examine, the British Empire assumes a role of “natural” authority over its colonized territories via apparently apolitical domestic arrangements, such as marriages and father/daughter relationships; the home becomes a contact zone.

A number of scholars have theorized the discursive function of the home in fictional texts, and their definitions inform my own analyses of eighteenth-century domestic narratives by women. For example, in a postcolonial study of what she calls “global English” literature, Rosemary Marangoly George theorizes “home” as a site that rests on inclusion and exclusion: it conveys notions of comfort, belonging, and safety, and attempts to keep at bay any forces that might threaten these ideas. George argues: “Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home ... along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject.” In other words, the parameters of one’s home determine the parameters

13 Bannet, The Domestic Revolution, 132. Furthermore, Bannet argues: “Political economy decided that monogamous unions were most likely to propagate and raise children who would grow up to produce wealth in both its contemporary forms: children and industry” (103).

14 Rosemary Marangoly George, The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2. In her analysis of postcolonial fiction, George also deconstructs the public/private, masculine feminine/binary and demonstrates that “homemaking” is both a local and national project, undertaken in a similar fashion by both men and women: “What becomes clear however, with the advent of the imperial novel is that the tales and tasks of
of one’s identity—on both a local and a national scale. Similarly, Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose suggest that home signifies security and known limits. Necessarily, then, home relies on exclusion and difference: —its always unstable and a space that must be defended.”

Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling remind us that in discourse about European empires, the home replicates the nation, in either its actual or its ideal state. They argue that the idea of home —has been mobilized and contested in ways that shape and reproduce the discourses, everyday practices and material cultures of nation and empire. ... The home on a domestic scale is intimately bound up with imperial, national and indigenous politics.”

They suggest that nineteenth-century exhibitions such as the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886 and the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1908 reveal the symbolic power of the household in imagining imperial relations. These exhibitions portrayed colonial others as domesticated subjects of the British Empire and portrayed British colonies as suppliers of goods for British households. The home, in other words, was a site for representing British imperial dominance. I demonstrate that the home as a site for domesticating colonial discourse predates these more overt displays of imperial power, appearing in narratives with no explicit interest in colonial politics.

The English country estate as —home” is a site at which the authors I examine test theories of gender, race, and nationality, and at which they work through the instabilities inherent to creating these categories. Establishing difference is a central part of this

homemaking (understood to be gendered female) are not very different from the tales and tasks of housekeeping on the national or imperial scale (usually gendered masculine)” (5).

15 Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., At Home With the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.


17 Ibid., 145-146.
project: difference between Englishwomen and “other” woman, between noble savage and corrupt European, between Creole and English gentleman, between Christianity and African obeah. The Empire is fundamental to each of these oppositions. The writers I examine invoke contemporary perceptions of the Empire in all of its manifestations—British sugar colony, African “Colony of Freedom,” the “Oriental”—against which they define the self as individual and as synecdoche for the nation; the heterosexual household is the site at which colonial relations are reinstated or challenged. These texts integrate potentially subversive colonial “others” into the home, place them at a geographic remove from the home, or dispatch them altogether in death. For example, in Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda (1801), the marriage of a former slave named Juba and a white servant girl named Lucy integrates Africa into the British household. By portraying this marriage as cause for celebration in the entire community, Edgeworth suggests that the merging of domestic and colonial is not only acceptable, it is desirable. She establishes this discourse in the home. In Jane West’s A Gossip’s Story (1796), Louisa Dudley’s rejection of Sir William Milton’s marriage proposal protects her from the presumed sexual danger of the West Indies, in which he has indulged in the “dissipated” luxuries of planter society. West thus secures the integrity of her heroine by sparing her even a tangential connection to the Empire. Each text I examine betrays similar anxiety about disruptions to the home and variously resolves these anxieties in courtship plots. Moreover, each conceives of that home against a global—not merely European—backdrop.

These texts’ manner of weaving the British Empire into the very fabric of the household reflects the larger ways in which empire was part of the late eighteenth-
century British cultural landscape. I build on Catherine Hall’s contention: Empire was part of everyday life for Britons between the late eighteenth century and the end of World War II, when decolonization began. ... Britons encountered the empire in myriad ways. It was nothing special, just ordinary, part of the world in which they lived.”

Crucially, Hall contends that the “ordinariness” of empire in this period went beyond material culture—e.g. commodities such as coffee, tea, silk, and other imported goods—and encounters with colonized people. She argues: “Ideas about Empire played a significant part in the imaginative life of Britons.” Indisputably, literature was a fundamental element of Britons’ imaginative life in this period. I demonstrate that narratives by

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18 Catherine Hall, “Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain,” in The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives, ed. Sarah Stockwell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 199, 200. As Hall notes, this idea of the “ordinariness” of empire has been criticized by some historians. For example, Bernard Porter argues that the majority of Britons “probably” were not aware of the Empire and that it had no immediate material bearing on their lives: “Imperialism can be regarded as ubiquitous, if it is defined broadly and loosely; but the more broadly and loosely it is defined, the less useful it becomes as a descriptive and analytical tool.” The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24. In essence, Porter suggests that for purposes of postcolonial criticism we can manipulate the term “imperialism” to encompass everything and everyone that might have been involved (directly or tangentially) with the British Empire: colonial administrators, missionaries, military men, traders, merchants, textile factory workers, etc.; each was involved with some aspect of the Empire, such as the production or exchange of material goods, the consumption of commodities such as tea, the spread of Christianity, military conflict over colonial territories, etc. But the very looseness of this term, Porter argues, makes imperialism less useful: if it is everything and everywhere, then it ends up signifying nothing in particular.

19 Hall, “Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain,” 201. In the introduction to A New Imperial History, which she edits, Wilson outlines the various levels at which eighteenth-century Britons recognized the Empire as part of their everyday existence:

These influences of empire were not uniformly felt, and were uneven in their impact, but they were still powerful: the layout and specimens within botanical gardens, horticultural practices on landed estates, architectural styles, clothing, fabric, and food fads, coffee, sugar, and chocolate and the rituals and institutions they generated, scientific societies, the national museum, religious missions: all were predicated upon colonial goods, imperial trading connections, and knowledge and artifacts culled from exploration, colonization, and colonial emissaries abroad. (8)

Conversely, Porter suggests of colonial commodities that “any overt imperial references were usually washed out,” and that few colonial imports were easily recognizable as colonial in the forms in which they arrived in the shops” (The Absent-Minded Imperialists 36). In other words: because most Britons weren’t conscious of the ways that colonial goods circulated around them, or weren’t conscious of their participation in domesticating these goods, or were not actively involved in colonial administration, Porter contends that the presumably deep impact of imperialism on British culture has been exaggerated in some scholarship.
women reflect the Empire’s “natural” place in the domestic landscape. In a sense, to use Hall’s terms, the Empire is “nothing special, just ordinary” in the texts that I examine. In the instances when characters refer directly to the Empire or to its people, it is generally unremarkable. Scholarship on these texts, which I will survey in each subsequent chapter, is generally silent on the Empire’s presence. It is often noted as a backdrop, but its significance is rarely considered in any detail. In a sense, our scholarship has inherited the very naturalness I am describing: we fail to notice the importance of the Empire in a novel like West’s *The Advantages of Education* (1793) because we are accustomed to its more overt appearance in the fiction of this period. Or, perhaps, we take West at her word and assume that female education is the central issue in this novel, without noticing the ways that West couches this education in ideas about the Empire—as I will explore in chapter 2.

Indeed, the apparently unremarkable quality of the Empire in the narratives I examine does not empty it of significance. Rather, I argue that this unremarkability is precisely what deserves our attention. The texts I consider are part of the cultural field that enabled Britons to imagine their nation as enlightened, benevolent, and entitled to rule and to exploit far-flung territories. Or, as Suvendrini Perera contends, the novel in this period was part of a discursive field that “prepared for, or made possible a climate for receiving or accommodating, empire”; the Empire was “processed or naturalized” by the

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20 Hall and Sonya O. Rose repeatedly use the term “naturalize” to describe the process whereby empire is made “ordinary,” “commonplace,” “everyday,” and “taken-for-granted.” Moreover, they foreground the importance of literature to this process: “Imaginative literature ... provided a space in which wishes relating to empire and its discontents could be expressed as heightened and highly condensed stories and figures, soldering together disparate elements in the national imaginary. Readers absorbed and identified with the charged poetics of empire so that social fantasies embedded in fiction and poetry became woven into their own subjectivities and so into their everyday lives.” *At Home With the Empire*, 29.
I refer to this process as "domestication" because of the implications of this term. The OED defines "domesticate" as: "To make, or settle as, a member of a household; to cause to be at home; to naturalize," "to familiarize," "to tame or bring under control," "to civilize." With this definition in mind, the narratives I examine domesticate the Empire in several important senses. First of all, they do so by imaginatively taming those colonial subjects who were thought to be savage, uncivilized, or otherwise threatening to the health of the nation as home. For example, Lady Delacour in Edgeworth's *Belinda* is cured of her addiction to opium and its association with the Orient as a crucial part of assuming her role as wife and mother—that is, her role as an Englishwoman. Edgeworth brings Lady Delacour under the control of the British heterosexual household and rids her of her "other" associations. She is domesticated, then, in several senses: in order to "be at home," I argue, she must divest herself of the Orient.  

Second, the narratives I examine domesticate the Empire by naturalizing the national and racial discourses of which there were real political consequences in this period. For example, as I explore in chapter 3 on Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796), the colonization of Africa in the 1780s and 1790s was conceived, in part, as what Rudyard Kipling would later deem the "White Man's Burden": as a process of bestowing

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22. Amy Kaplan provides a definition of "domesticity" that is useful in this discussion: Domesticity ... refers not to a static condition, but to a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien. "Domestic" in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. Domestication implies that the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed; domesticity monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage as it regulates the traces of savagery within its purview. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 25. This definition is worth quoting at length because it plays a central role in the chapters that follow. The texts I examine "monitor the borders" of the home in very literal ways: who marries whom; who is allowed to live in the home, and on what terms; where and how should the home be constructed.
the benefits of Western civilization on a presumably dark continent. This —civilizing”
mission rested on Great Britain’s certainty in its own superior national character. *Nature
and Art* makes this colonization process seem natural, as it is supposed to arise from the
natural hierarchy that exists between Britain—and Europe more generally—and the entire
African continent. In the example I’ve cited above from *Belinda*, the —natural”
degeneracy of the Orient is precisely why Lady Delacour must free herself from her
opium addiction.

Importantly, this process of domestication elides the darker realities of
colonization and imperialism. In doing so, the texts that I examine participate in what
Michael Billig terms —*banal nationalism.”* Billig uses the term —*banal nationalism”* to
describe the process whereby the idea of the nation attains sacred status in the minds of
its citizenry. Billig builds on Benedict Anderson’s argument that the nation is an
—*imagined community”* and argues that this community is reproduced for its citizens in a
number of contexts that go unnoticed:

[I]n established nations, there is a continual —*flagging,”* or reminding, of
nationhood. ... In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of
their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so
familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding.
The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being
consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed
on the public building.\(^{23}\)

The flag hanging on the public building is part of the familiar landscape, rarely noted,
though no less powerful for its unremarkability. In fact, the very banality of this form of
nationalism is what secures its power: because we fail to notice the continual —*flagging”
of nationhood, we are less likely to note its influence on our politics or our worldview.

\(^{23}\) Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 8. See also Benedict Anderson,
*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (New York:
Billig thus argues that nationalist behaviors are not restricted to groups that exist at the fringes of society, such as fascists, as has commonly been perceived; rather, nationalism resides at the center of modern nation-states. I am particularly interested in Billig’s contention that banal nationalism reminds citizens of their place in a world of nations: he reminds us that the nation is conceived relationally, is constituted by the other, even if we regularly fail to notice this process. He contends: “Because the concept of nationalism has been restricted to exotic and passionate exemplars, the routine and familiar forms of nationalism have been overlooked.” I would argue that the texts I examine in this dissertation are among the “routine and familiar forms of nationalism” in the late eighteenth century: to use Billig’s term, they subtly “flag” Great Britain as an imperial power in ways that easily slip beneath the radar. They locate Great Britain in a world of nations and help to naturalize—to make banal—the nation’s imperialism.

Crucially, however, Billig reminds us that banal is not the same as benign—that banal nationalism contains a dark undercurrent of what he describes as a complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting.” He contends: “[N]ations forget the violence which brought them into existence ... once a nation is established, it depends for its continued existence upon a collective amnesia.” Our failure to notice the continual “flagging” of nationalism and the ease with which we forget our nation’s violent history

24 Billig, Banal Nationalism 8.

25 Ibid., 37, 38. In making this argument, Billig follows Ernest Renan, who argues: Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality ... [T]he essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things. “What is a Nation?” trans. Martin Thom, in Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.
are of apiece. The banality of empire in the domestic narratives I examine assist in a process of forgetting just what territorial expansion entailed. In several of the novels I examine, the West Indies are just “there,” an ordinary, ever-present backdrop, a place British men go to make a fortune or to keep a mistress. The slave labor required to attain this fortune, however, is persistently invisible. Both of the novels by West that I examine in chapter 2 contain this West Indian backdrop, yet neither acknowledges the day-to-day operation of plantation culture—that is, exploited human labor. Rather, West depicts the West Indies as a place of sexual and cultural degeneracy, and a site for demonstrating the power of feminine virtue. In these and other texts I examine, the West Indies are simultaneously visible and invisible: visible in ways that serve an author’s didactic agenda, invisible for their participation in the traffic in human bodies. They represent the “collective amnesia” required to maintain such a system.

In making this argument, I follow Hall’s contention that in the eighteenth century the perceived ordinariness of the Empire served the very practical purpose of assuaging national guilt: “The scale of conquest and dispossession, the numbers of deaths, the reliance upon violence to maintain colonial possessions, the realities of poverty, of ill health and of famine—these were the aspects of empire that most Britons preferred to ignore—whilst enjoying the cheap goods and labour and comforting themselves with stories of British justice, of the introduction of roads and railways, and of the ‘civilizing mission.’”26 In other words, narratives about Great Britain as a supplier of civilization and as a provider of material comforts and moral compass palliated the darker realities of territorial expansion. The texts I consider similarly elide these dark realities. In Seward’s Louisa, the death of Emira, a woman associated with the anxieties of the colonial world,

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26 Hall, “Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain,” 206.
secures the moral authority of the domestic Englishwoman who takes her place in the household. That Emira proclaims the justness of her own death transforms the destruction of the colonial other into a natural and, indeed, a positive course of events.

The home, then, is a space that not only includes and excludes, but conceals. Billig suggests that this concealment is necessary to the sense of comfort we derive from our national identity. Similarly, Greg Noble locates a process of “backgrounding” as essential to the way we establish a sense of comfort and security in the home, understood as both as an individual domestic structure and as a nation. His argument is useful for understanding the compensatory function of domesticating colonial discourse. He argues that in order to achieve a sense of comfort in the home, we must conceal the various kinds of labor that go into building and maintaining it, such as wiring, plumbing, and support beams. Invisible, too, is the exploited human labor required to produce the commodities that supply the home. Moreover, Noble argues that the objects that make up our homes, such as chairs, must fade into the background even as we use them; in order to enjoy the objects that we use, we cannot be continually conscious of them. Noble argues: “The extent to which we feel a sense of being ‘at home,’ therefore, rests on the capacity of objects to withdraw, to become ‘invisible’ elements of an embodied, practical knowledge of familiar space.” This retreat is an important part of what Noble calls “nation-ed environments,” in which objects with national associations become natural—that is, not understood as national but as part of the everyday. The process of backgrounding that takes place in the home mirrors our experience of the nation;

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27 Greg Noble, “Comfortable and Relaxed: Furnishing the Home and Nation,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 58, 61. For example, in his analysis of lower- and working-class homes in Western Sydney, Australia, Noble locates items such as ceramics and paintings with indigenous flora and fauna as “nation-ed” objects whose owners do not necessarily recognize them as such.
ultimately, it results in —a regressive, ideological politics of comfort—papering over disenfranchisement and exclusion.”28 The texts I examine participate in the —politics of comfort” that Noble identifies: they effect the backgrounding of the Empire to such an extent that its exploitative practices—involving those parts that compose it and the labor that they perform—largely disappear.

At this point, I want to make clear that I do not assign any sort of conscious intent-to-conceal in the texts that I examine. That is, I am not arguing that Seward intended to represent the Orient as expendable, that Inchbald wrote to promote African colonization, or that West set out to conceal the violence of plantation culture. This dissertation does not engage in the type of conspiracy theory argument of which Porter is so skeptical.29 Rather, the group of texts I’ve selected for analysis suggests that the concept of domesticity in eighteenth-century British women’s literature is much more globally and ideologically complex than we have yet acknowledged, with or without a conscious affiliation with the Empire. Kaplan’s analysis of nineteenth-century American literature and empire provides a model for the kind of analysis I undertake and that future scholarship on eighteenth-century British women writers ought to take into account.

Kaplan looks at texts by American women such as A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841) by Catherine Beecher and Sarah Josepha Hale’s Godey’s Lady’s Book (1830-1878) for what she describes as a discourse of —imperial domesticity” or —Manifest Domesticity.” In such texts, the process of nation building is quite literally domesticated,

28 Ibid., 54.

29 In The Absent-Minded Imperialists, Porter refers to postcolonial literary scholars as —code-breakers” who read into British novels a colonial discourse that does not exist. For example, he suggests that there is nothing particularly significant about the fact that Dickens sends Magwitch to Australia in Great Expectations: Australia is merely an —elsewhere” and could be anywhere, its status as a British penal colony irrelevant to interpreting the novel.
transformed into narratives about the proper ordering of the household and of the nation-as-home rather than a narrative of coercion and exploitation. For example, Kaplan surveys the institution of Thanksgiving Day in America in 1863, which Hale promoted in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* beginning in 1847. As part of her advocacy for this holiday as a day of national unity, Hale describes the founding of New England while making no mention of the displaced Native American population. Hale’s ideas about home were racialized, separating white landowners from Native Americans and from free or enslaved blacks in the exclusionary space of the household. In other words, by ordering the household in a particular way, rituals like Thanksgiving also ordered the nation in the imaginations of its populace. The Thanksgiving ritual domesticated—or naturalized—a power structure in which whites belonged within the bosom of the nation and non-whites did not. Such texts, Kaplan argues, "work to efface all traces of violent conflict."³⁰

Attending to the connections between domesticity and the effacement of colonial violence also allows us to access the wide range of political functions played by women’s literature in this period and to understand their contributions to the national culture in more complex ways. The questions I ask in this dissertation emerged in response to what I consider limitations (or, perhaps, unexplored avenues) in a rich body of scholarship on eighteenth-century women writers. More than twenty years of scholarly conversation on eighteenth-century women’s literature has debated the degree of radicalism or conservatism these author’s writings exhibited, especially in the work of French Revolution-era women novelists. Lisa Wood looks at the fiction of Jane West, Hannah More, Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, and Elizabeth Hamilton for the ways that their novels

functioned as conservative—what Wood calls “anti-revolutionary”—propaganda.  

Similarly, Eleanor Ty examines the work of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, who have traditionally been labeled conservative novelists, and argues that they elevate the position of women in society by valorizing traditionally feminine characteristics: “In some instances, they rewrote the codes of masculinity and femininity; in others, they attempted to invest more dignity to those tasks that were customarily viewed as female ones; or else they questioned the way women were traditionally represented in literature, in religious and popular texts.” Ty refers to this process as “empowering the feminine.” Anne Mellor makes a related argument. She contends that women writers played a significant role in defining the British nation 1780-1830 as a moral entity, and that feminized domestic virtues became part of the national character because of women writers’ participation in the public sphere. Conservative writers such as Hannah More positioned the domestic woman—specifically, the mother—in a position of national authority: “It is in the role of mother that More’s ideal of the well-educated, fiscally responsible, and morally pure woman finds her fulfillment. But it is crucial to

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31 Wood points out that poststructuralist critics such as Roland Barthes and M. M. Bakhtin devalue didactic fiction because it presumes to convey monologic, univocal meaning: “By devaluing overtly didactic elements in fiction, these critics effectively locate conservative writing beyond the limits of the acceptably ‘literary.’” Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 18. I would contend that the same holds true for progressive fiction. Overtly didactic fiction of whatever political affiliation has often been presumed not to merit consideration for its supposed lack of artistry. This bias, however, as Wood points out, comes from a twentieth- and twenty-first-century perspective, and was not shared by those writing fiction in the late eighteenth century.

recognize that More’s mother is the mother, not just of her own family, but of the nation as a whole.”

At the other end of the binary trend in scholarship on this period, several important studies examine women writers generally labeled “radical” or “progressive.” An earlier study by Ty looks at the work of Wollstonecraft, Inchbald, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, and Charlotte Smith, women who were viewed by conservative politician Edmund Burke as “responsible for social upheaval and political insurrection.”

By critiquing women’s position in society, Ty contends, these women were perceived as unfeminine and threatening to the existing social order. In a similar study, which includes both male and female authors, Miriam L. Wallace focuses on Jacobin novels of the 1790s. Wallace examines the ways that these writers entered debates about subjectivity and identity formation—that is, debates about whether or not subjectivity is constituted by innate natural properties or by social relationships. According to Wallace, “the Jacobins’ double project” was to present women and working people as citizen-subjects with whom readers could sympathize, and to imagine this “self” as made

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33 Mellor, Mothers of the Nation: Women’s Political Writing in England, 1780-1830 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 29-30. More’s allegedly powerful feminine model, then, is limited to the heterosexual household; that is, although More locates the female figure as politically powerful, she does so within extremely limited parameters. Mellor does not acknowledge this limitation.

34 Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries, 6.

35 Gary Kelly points out that the term “Jacobin” was applied by those who supported the status quo in Church and State”—i.e. Anti-Jacobin conservatives like Jane West—rather than those who actually held pro-Revolution positions. Anti-Jacobins portrayed so-called Jacobins in a cartoonish fashion, though, in fact, Jacobins held a variety of nuanced stances on issues related to the Revolution. Organized English Jacobinism primarily took the shape of societies and politicians’ clubs, such as the Society for Constitutional Information, the Corresponding Societies, and the Friends of the People. However, Kelly notes, “In spite of their various connections with organized English Jacobinism, the English Jacobin novelist were sceptical [sic] of the real benefits of political association. ... The literary Jacobins worked best for reform within their own informal circles, which allowed them to theorize and argue without the irritating necessity of facing real political action.” The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 1, 5.
relationally, not pre-given.” These and other studies acknowledge the political significance of the household and of social constructions of gender. Each argues that throughout this period women wrote about traditionally masculine concerns such as war, politics, and revolution, not only the traditionally feminine and domestic concerns with which they are often associated. This dissertation adds another crucial layer to the political dimensions of eighteenth-century women’s writing by considering the connections between conservatism, progressivism, and imperialism.

Although acknowledging the significant contributions of existing scholarship, I question the binary lenses we have sometimes used for talking about eighteenth-century women writers. Such binaries generally serve to define women against a pre-existing and static set of concerns. I am influenced by scholarship aiming to introduce a greater degree of historical nuance to our discussion of this period and of women writers in general. Margaret J. M. Ezell, for instance, uncovers the way anthologies of women’s literature beginning in the eighteenth century shifted from valuing what Ezell deems a woman writer’s “androgyny”—her presumably “sexless” command of wit and rationality—to celebrating women writers who exhibited traditionally feminine qualities such as softness, delicacy, and modesty. Such anthologies effectively defined feminine writing in a way that still influences modern scholarship on women writers. Ezell contends that

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38 Margaret J. M. Ezell, Writing Women’s Literary History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
current feminist scholarship relies on masculine assumptions and paradigms even as it aims to recover “lost” female voices.

Paula Backscheider makes a related point about the so-called “Great Tradition” (and women’s long exclusion from it). She wryly notes, “It is intriguing to contemplate how seriously we have taken male poets’ own statements and cultural signals that they are Poets; believing them, we have looked for Poetry in their works and traced their careers, undoubtedly learning what to valorize in this way.”

In other words, Backscheider contends, our patriarchal culture has taught us to value male poets’ statements of cultural authority, and these male poets have told us what to read and how to read it, effectively defining the terms used to measure what is and isn’t “good” poetry. Eighteenth-century anthologies of women’s writing compiled by men such as George Ballard display the same tendency, effectively defining the qualities we still confront when talking about women’s writing. I would argue that similar masculine paradigms often structured the debate over eighteenth-century women’s radicalism or conservatism, which was essentially a debate about women’s deviation from or conformity to masculine institutions. My work attempts to look beyond such paradigms, or to approach them in new ways.

Several studies of eighteenth-century women writers introduce the kind of political nuance I strive to produce in this dissertation. Bannet demonstrates similarities of vision between novels that are often perceived to be very different in their aims. In her discussion of women’s fiction, she replaces the terms conservative and radical with “Matriarchal” and “Egalitarian.” According to Bannet, Matriarchal feminists (including

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Mary Astell, Lady Masham, Jane West, and Hannah More) and Egalitarian feminists (including Hays, Wollstonecraft, Smith, and Judith Drake) shared a concern for elevating women’s social status, though they pursued this agenda via different avenues. Egalitarians promoted equal relations between men and women, seeing them as possessing “equal aptitude to sense and virtue,” while Matriarchs promoted women’s superiority over men via their domestic skills. Bannet argues: “Matriarchs and Egalitarians both stressed the virtue and the practical necessity for ladies to refashion themselves as ‘domestic women’ whose ‘profession’ it would be to govern the family, educate their children, and assist the needy for the public good.”

Bannet’s labels give us a different set of terms through which to comprehend women’s writings. Angela Keane’s study of women writers and nationalism also deconstructs the conservative/progressive binary. Keane examines the ways five women writers negotiated national belonging in the Romantic period: More, Wollstonecraft, Smith, Williams, and Ann Radcliffe. Keane bases her study on several definitions of the term “belonging”: on one hand, it refers to the ownership of property—i.e. one’s belongings. Because of their exclusion from property ownership, Keane points out that married women in the Romantic period were themselves often belongings rather than proprietors. The concept of belonging also refers to one’s membership in a national community. For women in the Romantic period, this membership was contingent upon their fulfillment of domestic and maternal roles that occupied an important place in nationalist discourse. Keane argues:

In the Romantic national imaginary, the woman who wanders, who defines herself beyond the home and as a subject whose desires exceed or preclude maternity, divests herself of femininity and erases herself from the familial, heterosexual structure of the nation. Her belonging depends on her belonging to another, desired not desiring, and her romantic

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attachment to person and place is sanctioned only by her literal and symbolic reproduction of the national family.  

Women who repudiated feminine and maternal norms in their political affiliations or intellectual activities were deemed sexually licentious, masculine, and/or monstrous. Keane points out that Wollstonecraft and More were vilified for similar reasons, despite their very different political leanings.

Similarly, Claudia Johnson contends that binary constructions such as Jacobin/anti-Jacobin, or conservative/progressive, misrepresent the various stances women writers took in relation to the social debates of their time. Johnson points out that both Jacobin and anti-Jacobin writers used the discourse of sensibility to support their arguments: Jacobins suggested that sensibility was central to the political imaginary, while anti-Jacobins encouraged sensibility (or affection) as regulated by the family. In other words, writers in the French Revolution era shared a vocabulary for articulating their concerns, and often made similar arguments (or made similar points in support of different conclusions). Johnson argues: —Austen and her less-doctrinaire contemporaries do indeed participate in a polemical tradition, but to invoke a polemic is not necessarily to accept completely the loaded terms on which it is conducted or to endorse the foregone

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41 Angela Keane, Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3-4. In her discussion of women and nationalism, Leanne Maunu examines the work of Hannah More, Frances Burney, Mary Hays, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Wollstonecraft. She argues that women writers in the late eighteenth century theorized an imagined community of women that transcended the imagined community of the nation. She suggests that gender and nationalist discourses were mutually constitutive for women writing with a variety of political agendas: —While the claims that were being made by the women writers differed according to the political inclinations and agenda of each individual author, each author still availed herself of the figure of the nation and its relation to France to further her own cause as it related to gender issues.” Women Writing the Nation: National Identity, Female Community, and the British-French Connection, 1770-1820 (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 20.
This dissertation builds on Bannet, Keane, and Johnson’s projects of adding nuance to the ways we talk about women’s political writing at the end of the eighteenth century. I highlight another vocabulary shared by Austen and her contemporaries: the Enlightenment grand narrative that positioned Great Britain as the most developed end of a continuum of civilizations—a narrative used to justify Britain’s territorial expansion into the nineteenth century.

In pursuing this project, however, I take seriously Ezell’s indictment of the impulse to mine literary history for women writers who support current feminist agendas—writers who seem appropriately angry at patriarchy or who appear to express some emerging feminist sentiment before such rhetoric was said to exist. This pursuit ultimately distorts our understanding of what women in the past wrote and why. My aim, then, is not to prove that women were especially sympathetic to the plight of colonial subjects, or to unearth coded critiques of imperial institutions, or other sentiments emerging from a twenty-first century feminist and postcolonial perspective. Such critiques may exist—as in More’s *Slavery: A Poem* (1788). Yet women also wrote in explicit support of the British Empire (such as Seward in her *Elegy on Captain Cook*) and expressed ambivalence about the ultimate stability of overseas empires (such as West in *A Gossip’s Story*). This dissertation aims to describe what Devoney Looser deems the “complexities, contradictions, and contours” of writings by women, rather than aiming to apply received, simplifying labels. Wood helpfully reminds us that acknowledging the full range of women’s ideas throughout history, even if they are anathema to

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contemporary feminism, is an important feminist project: “[F]emininity at any given historical moment is highly complex and constituted by a range of ideological, social, cultural, and economic influences. ... By foregrounding only those qualities we find most compatible with our current political position, we deny women the status of full historical subjects.” I aim to endow the women writers and texts I study with a greater degree of complexity than we have sometimes accorded them.

Susan Staves’s advocacy of a multi-genre approach to scholarship on women writers also influences the methodology of this dissertation. Staves argues that attention to genre (to the novel in particular, as studies of the novel comprise a significant portion of recent scholarship on the eighteenth century) distorts or limits our understanding of what constituted the literary production of women at this time. She examines poems, prayers, familiar letters, and other less-treated though popular genres. Though novels constitute an important part of my project, and though I hope to contribute to the conversation about the rise of the novel in the long eighteenth century, I do so in conjunction with other genres because the women I study wrote in multiple genres: dramatic texts, novels, poetry, literary criticism, and pamphlet literature are all part of these writers’ oeuvres, and they each allow us to consider the multiple avenues by which women participated in the literary culture of their time.


46 Harriet Guest’s *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) is an exemplar for this approach to scholarship on women writers. Guest asks questions pertinent to my own investigation. She suggests that in the second half of the eighteenth century, “women acquire a new importance in the narratives of the progress of civilization” (17); such narratives emerged as a way of understanding Great Britain’s relationship to the New World. Guest also examines permutations of the term “domestic” and women’s representations of it. Karen O’Brien’s *Women and
This dissertation builds on the work of several important studies of domesticity and empire. For example, Maaja Stewart examines the connections between imperial and domestic discourses in Jane Austen’s novels, and her methodology significantly influences my own. Specifically, Stewart argues that elder and younger sons in Austen’s novels represent the late eighteenth-century “struggles for mastery” between the system of primogeniture and the merchant and naval classes, respectively. In pursuing this analysis, Stewart establishes “concrete connections between the courtship narrative and central shifts in the culture from estate to mercantile economics and ideology.”

Moreover, she locates Austen’s novels within the second British Empire, roughly between the years of 1757 and 1813, which saw intense debate over the slave trade and the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, then governor-general of Bengal. Both of these phenomena challenged the justness of Britain’s imperialism; the Hastings trial, in particular, constituted “the first systematic and widespread critique of imperialism.”

Given this historical context, Stewart argues that Austen’s novels “register cultural anxieties created by the new economic systems and the social disruptions during the remarkable years in which she lived.” This dissertation builds on Stewart’s work in several important ways. Like Stewart, I am interested in the ways that domestic courtship narratives register the colonial anxieties of the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, like

Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) also considers women’s relationship—both as writers and historians and as subjects of inquiry—to Enlightenment grand narratives about historical progress. The essays collected in British Women’s Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), edited by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, constitute literary scholarship that destabilizes binary categories and asks rich questions about the political and authorial concerns of eighteenth-century women writers.

47 Maaja A. Stewart, Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen’s Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 2, 3.

48 Ibid., 2, 3.
Stewart, I locate my study within the second British Empire and the contemporary struggle to reconcile an increased awareness of the moral and economic uncertainties of empire with Britain’s imperial ambitions.

However, Austen is not central to my project, though she is something of an absent presence throughout. In existing studies, Austen is the woman writer most frequently drawn upon to demonstrate connections between imperialism and domesticity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Perera reads Anne Elliot’s marriage to Captain Wentworth in Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818) as symbolic of the penetration of naval/imperial power in the English domestic sphere of the early nineteenth century; she highlights the incorporation by marriage and moral improvement ... occupation[s] made possible by the progress of empire.”

Similarly, Katie Trumpener argues that Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) promotes a gradualist” (i.e. ameliorationist) approach to slavery, and suggests that the connections between West Indian plantation and English manor house form the most important backdrop for the novel. She contends that in Fanny Price’s unanswered question about the slave trade, Austen acknowledges a legacy of political thought and abolitionist fiction whose achievement is to link the British manor, and the fate of national life, to that distant ‘other setting’ of British rule.” These studies reveal the richness of Austen’s fiction for accessing the collusions between domesticity and imperialism. By focusing on other women writing in the same decades as Austen, I show that Austen’s engagement with domestic and imperial discourses is not singular or


exceptional, but characteristic of her time. In doing so, I show that such connections are more pervasive in the fiction of this period than we have yet acknowledged.

Carolyn Vellenga Berman’s attention to national boundaries is crucial to my project. Berman looks at domestic fiction and literature of the abolitionist movement. She demonstrates that these two apparently disparate bodies of work address linked concerns related to the moral character of the British nation. Advocates for women’s rights (such as Wollstonecraft) compared women to slaves. Both pro- and anti-slavery literature invoked the image of the household in order to describe the relationship between slaves and slaveholders.51 Berman locates the figure of the Creole woman as a point of convergence for these discourses because the term “Creole” transmits a variety of racial, geographic, and national meanings. The Creole woman is both inside and outside the nation, as it were; the Creole woman is produced in the colonial contact zone, yet she maintains an ambiguous relationship to it: “[T]he Creole’s national belonging is always in question. Who and what is a Creole? ... The blurred national identity of Creole characters testified to the shifting borders of overseas empires, where colonial possessions often changed hands.”52 Like Berman, I am interested in questions of belonging: how did women writers conceive of what it meant to belong in the British nation? What limitations did they impose upon this belonging? How did the Empire influence the conditions of national membership?

51 George Boulukos investigates the paternalistic terms used to describe slavery, from both pro- and anti-slavery positions, in The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

I am also interested in the ways that women writers approached the instabilities of the Empire, both material and moral. In pursing this inquiry, I follow Wallace, who examines texts that "rehearse the risks incurred in the course of imperial expansion," or the "unstable, even contingent, nature of colonial loyalties to the home government." She refutes the assumption that eighteenth-century texts depicting the colonial contact zone always do so in a supportive manner—that is, that they always portray the benefits of colonial expansion. Rather, Wallace argues, "Popular and authoritative British writers from Alexander Pope to Walter Scott warn that imperial power poses grave social and moral dangers for the metropole. If at times these warnings come in the shape of fear of contagion from colonial possessions ... such xenophobia coexists with a recognition that European imperial values and practices taint both colonizer and colonized." The writers Wallace examines are anxious about the stability of British national character, which proves vulnerable to degenerative native influence. Moreover, Wallace contends that these texts question the very justness of imperialism. The writers I examine in this study are also anxious about the dangerous effects of contact with colonial territories, and occasionally they subtly undermine those characters they offer as moral exemplars. West depicts patriarchal figures whose health—both moral and actual—is undermined by their time in the British West Indies. Similarly, Edgeworth depicts the moral lethargy that overtake British colonials who do not show proper concern for the welfare of their slaves.

In questioning the political labels we apply to women writers, I follow Perera, who highlights the Empire's centrality in domestic courtship narratives produced in the

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53 Wallace, *Imperial Characters*, 18, 23.

54 Ibid., 18.
nineteenth century. Perera troubles the political affiliations we assign to texts and suggests that a novel with explicitly anti-expansionist politics might not necessarily also be anti-imperialist, as we might expect. She thus argues that we should not accept the political sentiments of a given text at face value because "the set of ideas and perceptions around empire is often more complicated and contradictory" than simplistic labels imply. This argument is certainly true of the texts I analyze in this dissertation. Although Inchbald includes what appears to be an anti-imperialist statement in *Nature and Art*, this statement is undercut by the subtler ways the novel promotes African colonization. How, then, do we describe this novel’s politics? We should pause before we apply political labels such as imperialist, progressive, or conservative.

In the chapters that follow I aim to problematize these easy distinctions and to identify fruitful new avenues for understanding eighteenth-century women writers’ relationships to the political institutions of their day. In order to do so, I have chosen to include authors and texts that have been generically labeled conservative or progressive in order to demonstrate the similarities between them on a variety of colonialist registers. The conservative writings of Jane West and Anna Seward share much in common with the progressive fiction of Elizabeth Inchbald in the hierarchical relationships that these writers construct between Great Britain and the colonial or "othered" eighteenth-century

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55 Ibid., 3, 5. In what seems a trenchant anticipation of the argument Porter would later make in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Perera suggests that if we reduce colonial plot details such as Little Emily’s migration to Australia at the end of *David Copperfield* to merely convenient literary devices, then the racial, sexual, and imperialist discourses that efface the implications of such details have succeeded. As Perera herself puts it: "When the migrations and transportations at the end of Victorian novels are seen as occurring outside their social and discursive contexts, as an arbitrary recourse to ‘plot’ or ‘textual’ solutions or as a kind of geographical *Deus ex machina*, the ideology of Carlyle’s green, untenanted deserts seems to do its work almost too well" (55). In other words, Porter’s contention that Australia could have been anywhere outside of England in Dickens's *Great Expectations* does precisely the ideological work of an imperialist document such as Thomas Carlyle’s essay *Chartism* (1839): that is, it elides imperialist and expansionist brutality, transforming it into "effortless and natural occupation" (55).
world. Noticing these similarities allows us to identify the inadvertent collusions between various political stances at this time—to show the ways that women who might have understood themselves as supporting very different causes worked together in assuring the success of the Empire. I have also chosen texts that deal with different parts of the colonial world in order to demonstrate the geographic expansiveness with which eighteenth-century Britons thought about their nation. The British Empire was not of a piece; neither is its presence in eighteenth-century women’s fiction. Of course, the texts I have chosen are by no means exhaustive in their treatment of these issues. But they do demonstrate a variety of strategies whereby women writers negotiated their empire in literary texts—strategies we might fruitfully examine in the work of their male contemporaries in order to better understand what Perera calls the “reaches of empire” in eighteenth-century literature.

In chapter 1, “Anna Seward, the ‘Poetical Novel,’ and the Domestication of Colonial Discourse,” I explore what I call a process of “literary domestication” in Seward’s Elegy on Captain Cook (1780) and Louisa. A Poetical Novel (1784). In both of these texts, Seward domesticates a popular prose form by transforming it into verse, a genre that she considered more morally stable and better suited to writing her nation’s history. In doing so, she domesticates each text’s colonialist discourse. In her Elegy on Captain Cook, Seward rewrites the awkward prose of The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery (1777) as an epic poem and makes the English

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explorer and cartographer into a hero of epic proportions. The epic poem, with its historical associations, supplies both Cook and the Empire he represents with a sense of cultural authority and permanence. Because of its obvious connections to empire, *Elegy on Captain Cook* is the text most frequently cited when considering Seward's thoughts on the British Empire. However, I demonstrate that the colonial discourses at work in the *Elegy* are also an important part of Seward's domestic novel *Louisa*. This text is "domestic" in all the senses that one expects when talking about eighteenth-century fiction: it depicts courtship and marriage and delineates virtuous from licentious female behavior. However, it does so through the cautionary tale of a woman with multi-layered associations with the colonial world, a novelistic character who seems informed by two infamous "colonial" women from classic novels by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. In *Louisa*, this figure dies by the narrative's end. By writing a novel in verse, transforming a popular prose form into what she perceived as a more elevated poetic form, I argue that Seward legitimizes the novel's colonial affiliations even as she questions the genre's artistic merit. The poetical novel domesticates the sexual discourse of empire by endowing this discourse with a sense of cultural permanency, even inevitability, I argue.

Seward's *Louisa* is something of an anomaly in this dissertation: for one thing, it is the only novel in verse that I examine. And unlike West, Inchbald, Hamilton, and Edgeworth, whom I consider in subsequent chapters, Seward apparently did not write this domestic novel with didactic purposes in mind. She does not seem to have written *Louisa* in order to promote a political agenda, nor does she demonstrate a particular interest in women's education, as do the other writers that I consider. Throughout her career,
Seward was most interested in earning a place in literary posterity for artistic abilities that she considered timeless. So why, then, include her in this study? As I have outlined in this introduction, this dissertation explores the process of domesticating colonial discourse: I propose that women’s writing in the late eighteenth century helped to naturalize a discourse about the morality and benevolence of the British Empire. To naturalize is to make familiar, mundane, and ordinary; to be naturalized is to become part of the everyday, to go unnoticed. In important ways, then, *Louisa* is even more revealing in terms of my project for its apparent lack of direct interest in politics. *Louisa* shows that domestic literature in the narrowest sense of the word nonetheless depends on the relationship between the domestic and the colonial—that the domestic is *constituted by* the colonial. Moreover, *Louisa* shows how easily this domestic/colonial dynamic can slip into the background of literary texts and can become so natural as to go unremarked. This process of naturalizing colonial discourse is constitutive of each subsequent text I examine.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the significance of colonial discourse in the pro- or anti-Revolution domestic fiction of the 1790s. In chapter 2, “Jane West, the Domestic Ideal, and the Perils of Empire,” I examine two of West’s novels, *The Advantages of Education* (1793) and *A Gossip’s Story* (1796), and her book length poem *The Mother* (1809). In all three texts, West domesticates the Empire in parent/child and spousal relationships and demonstrates its moral, sexual, and financial perils. *The Advantages of Education* and *The Mother* highlight the imperial significance of maternity: in mothers such as *The Advantages of Education*’s Mrs. Williams they suggest that women serve as moral exemplars in the theater of empire and that they are responsible for teaching their
daughters to do likewise. Mrs. Williams also educates her daughter Maria according to a historical model that assigns inferior status to the New World. All three texts depict men—in particular, father figures—as acutely vulnerable to corruption in colonial territories, such as India and the so-called torrid zones of the British West Indies. *A Gossip’s Story*, in particular, portrays men whose moral and well as physical health are undermined by their military service in the West Indies and by their participation in transatlantic trade. However, I argue that this novel ultimately celebrates colonization and the men who execute it, even while acknowledging its perils.

When taken together, these three texts add a significant layer to our understanding of West’s politics. They expose the imperial affiliations of the institutions that West and her conservative contemporaries defended, such as patriarchy and the Church of England—affiliations that have largely gone unremarked in the scholarship on West. They also reveal the Empire’s centrality to West’s definitions of male and female identity. Moreover, these texts process the colonial world in a very similar fashion to the so-called radical fiction of West’s contemporary Elizabeth Inchbald.

In chapter 3, “Elizabeth Inchbald, the Idea of Africa, and Progressive Imperialism,” I demonstrate the connections between progressivism and imperialism in Inchbald’s novel *Nature and Art* (1796). I do so by examining this novel alongside several contemporary plans to colonize the African continent, including the so-called “Colony of Freedom” at Sierra Leone and the “Free Community” on the African island of Bulama. I read *Nature and Art* alongside C. B. Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community* (1790), which details his plans for the failed settlement at Bulama. Both texts link social progress to a colonialist impulse. *Nature and Art* also portrays Africa as a savage
continent that requires the civilizing intervention of Europe, an idea that was important to
the spread of Empire in this period. Although critics generally label Inchbald’s novel
progressive, I demonstrate that her progressivism resembles the conservatism of her
contemporary, Elizabeth Hamilton. Like Nature and Art, Hamilton’s novel Memoirs of
Modern Philosophers (1800) suggests that Africa is inherently barbarous and inferior to
Great Britain. Furthermore, this novel demonstrates that Hamilton was keenly aware of
the connections between progressivism and imperialism at this time: she openly mocks
the utopian colonial visions of philosophers like Wadstrom. Given the dialogue between
Inchbald and Hamilton on this particular colonialist register, I question the continued
usefulness of the labels radical/conservative as the principal way of describing women’s
political writing in this period.

In my final chapter I look at Maria Edgeworth’s short story “The Grateful Negro”
(1804) and her novel Belinda (1801). “The Grateful Negro” is perhaps the most obvious
text for accessing Edgeworth’s ideas about Britain’s overseas Empire. Published in the
collection Popular Tales, “The Grateful Negro” depicts an attempted slave revolt in
Jamaica in 1760. In the idealized plantation owned by Mr. Edwards, a paternalistic slave
owner who retains his slaves’ loyalty through his kind treatment of them, Edgeworth
illuminates the potential for the Empire to operate as a benevolent organization despite its
propensity for violence. She also suggests that the Empire is a “natural” and necessary
institution for both the colonizer and the colonized. Mr. Edwards allows his slaves to
achieve a small degree of autonomy by providing them with plots of land to cultivate
during their free time, yet his ownership of them remains necessary because of their
“natural” inferiority.
I identify these same colonial discourses in Edgeworth’s domestic novel *Belinda*, which is far less explicitly concerned with questions of colonial management. This novel domesticates colonial discourse in several important—and related—senses. In the character of Lady Ann Percival, the domestic woman plays a pivotal role in integrating potentially troublesome colonial characters into the domestic sphere and in eliding the violence implicit to the production of colonial commodities. *Belinda* domesticates the violence of plantation culture in the character of Mr. Vincent, a Creole suitor who pursues the novel’s heroine Belinda. The source of Mr. Vincent’s wealth—i.e. the system of slavery depicted in the “Grateful Negro”—disappear beneath his superior sensibility, which is the term on which Lady Ann Percival pleads his suit. Lady Percival also sanctions the intermarriage of a former slave and a white woman, integrating the slave into the British home while maintaining his subordinate position. *Belinda* crystallizes the home-and-abroad relationships that I trace throughout this dissertation and indicates the entrenchment of colonial discourse in the late-century British domestic novel.

The questions I pose in this dissertation have been fruitfully applied to a number of literary texts long considered canonical by scholars of the eighteenth century. Sally Godfrey’s banishment to Jamaica in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Pamela II* (1741), Sir Thomas Bertram’s plantations in Antigua in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), the Fortunate Mistress’s Turkish dress in Daniel Defoe’s *The Fortunate Mistress [Roxana]* (1724): scholars have exposed crucial layers of meaning by attending to characters and plot devices ostensibly occupying the margins of these narratives, revealing the intimate relationship between domestic scenes and colonial territories and peoples. My dissertation contributes to this growing body of scholarship on empire in
eighteenth-century literature, contributing as well to the production of a richer, more
detailed history of women’s writing.

At first glance it may be difficult to see what the Empire has to do with women’s
domestic fiction about companionate marriage and female education. I argue that the
often-overlooked presence of the colonial territory necessitates our refocusing on this
subgenre. By examining the ubiquity of Empire in eighteenth-century women’s writing
we stand to gain a more complete understanding of its significance to the literary and
intellectual contexts in which these authors wrote, as well as how the sexual discourses
shaping their literary careers were forged. This study of the domestic and the colonial
contributes to a fuller history of women’s writing and to a more capacious version of the
rise of the novel in English. Looking at the global eighteenth century as it was imagined
by women writing texts set at “home” enriches our postcolonial scholarship in literary
studies across centuries and geographies.
CHAPTER ONE

Anna Seward and the Domestication of Colonial Discourse

Anna Seward’s (1743-1809) public literary career began with the publication of *Elegy on Captain Cook* (1780). Based on volume II of *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery* (1777), the *Elegy* recounts the famed English explorer and cartographer’s second voyage aboard the *Resolution*, 1772-1775, during which he was accompanied by botanists Johann Reinhold Forster and his son George, artist William Hodges, and botanist Anders Sparrman.\(^1\) During this voyage Cook crossed the Antarctic Circle three times and anchored at various points on the coast of New Zealand and among the Society Islands (including Tahiti, Tonga, Easter Island, and other islands in the South Pacific).\(^2\) *Elegy on Captain Cook* commemorates Cook’s death on 14 February 1779 during his third and final voyage, aboard the *Resolution*. Cook and four other mariners were killed while anchored in Kealakekua Bay on the island of Hawaii, following a scuffle with Hawaiians over the theft of the *Discovery’s* cutter.

In the *Elegy*, Seward transforms the rambling and often awkward prose of Cook’s *Journals* into epic poetry, supplying excerpts from the *Journals* in footnotes and calling


\(^2\) The *ODNB* offers a succinct survey of Cook’s three voyages. For more information on Cook’s second voyage, see the introduction to the Hakluyt Society edition of *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, edited by Beaglehole, who divides this voyage into five parts and outlines the islands visited in each (xlix-l). For a thorough analysis of the cultural discourse surrounding Cook’s second voyage, see Harriet Guest, *Empire, Barbarism, and Civilisation: James Cook, William Hodges, and the Return to the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Guest examines Hodges’s paintings and other illustrations, various texts and travelogues produced by Cook, the Forsters, and Hodges, and is broadly concerned with “particular moments which expose the difficulties and uncertainties of constructing an imperial vision in the South Pacific” (20). Philip Edwards offers an insightful analysis of J. R. Forster’s *A Voyage Round the World* (1777), appearing before Cook’s official version, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* published later that year, in *The Story of the Voyage: Sea-narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), chapter 6, “Cook and the Forsters.”
our attention to the way she revises this text. In doing so, she transforms Cook into a national hero and a figure of the supposed benevolence of the British Empire. What Rod Edmund deems the “godlike” qualities Seward assigns Cook persist in subsequent literary and visual representations of him, such as Helen Maria Williams’s *The Morai: An Ode* (1786), William Cowper’s *Charity* (1782), and John Webber’s engraving of “The Apotheosis of Captain Cook” (1785), which Glyndr Williams locates as “the visual representation” of Seward’s *Elegy*. In a similar vein, Seward published *Monody on Major Andre* (1781), a poem elegizing Major John Andre, the one-time lover of Seward’s friend Honora Sneyd who was hanged as a spy during the American Revolution. As Guest demonstrates, while memorializing “great men” and their service to the nation, these poems also highlight the domestic consequences (that is, the consequences for women) of men’s public deeds. As such, *Elegy on Captain Cook* and *Monody on Major Andre* are the most obvious places for us to go when talking about Seward and the discourses of gender, imperialism, and domesticity.

Seward’s *Louisa. A Poetical Novel* (1784) is far less obviously concerned with such issues. This verse novel is set entirely in England and focuses on the courtship and marriage of a virtuous young Englishwoman, Louisa, and her lover Eugenio. Their union is initially thwarted when Eugenio is forced to marry a wealthy woman named Emira in order to save his family from poverty. At first glance, *Louisa* is only tangentially interested in Britain’s empire: Seward alludes to the fact that Eugenio’s father Ernesto


4 Guest, *Small Change*, 252-267. Backscheider offers *Elegy on Captain Cook* as an example of the way eighteenth-century women poets used the elegy to address both gendered and national concerns. See Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, chapter 7, “The Elegy.” Both Guest and Backscheider consider the position in the poem of Cook’s widow, whom Seward describes as an “ill-fated Matron.”
loses the family fortune by investing in overseas trade, yet the narrative is primarily driven by the lovers’ courtship plot. However, *Louisa* and *Elegy on Captain Cook* have much more in common than it first appears. The colonial discourses that are overtly important in *Elegy on Captain Cook*, with its explicit interest in the Empire and in defining the differences between Englishman and "savage,” are no less important in *Louisa*’s domestic narrative. Though it contains no such savages, *Louisa* nonetheless establishes a hierarchy elevating England above the colonial world and naturalizes the moral authority of English domesticity.

In this chapter I argue that the key similarities between Seward’s *Louisa* and *Elegy on Captain Cook* are not only thematic, but formal: both texts revise a popular prose form of Seward’s day—the epistolary novel and the travel narrative, respectively—by rewriting them in verse. I argue that in both texts, this process of revising prose into verse domesticates colonial discourse. *Elegy on Captain Cook* tames Cook’s unwieldy prose narrative in the controlled patterns of heroic couplets. Seward resolves the uncertainties of the colonial contact zone by reducing them to neat oppositions, such as civilized European v. savage New Zealander. These binaries supply the Empire of the *Elegy* with the moral certainty Cook’s *Journals* do not so explicitly establish. Furthermore, this poem transforms the recently murdered Cook, a contemporary hero and a figure of ongoing imperial expansion, into a figure with epic and historical associations, incorporating Cook into the national narrative of the civilizing virtues of Britain’s Empire.

This same process is at work in *Louisa*: like the *Elegy*, *Louisa* tames what Seward perceived as an ephemeral prose form—in this instance, the epistolary novel—by
rewriting it in verse. In doing so, *Louisa* also resolves the sexual and financial crises of empire by reducing them to a binary construction: the female sexual opposition of Louisa the chaste Englishwoman v. Emira the woman of empire. Louisa’s domestic virtues ultimately triumph over Emira’s licentious symbolic associations with the colonial world, much as Cook’s domestic virtues triumph over the “savages” he encounters. Moreover, I argue that the verse novel offers the kind of closure and moral stability absent from the prose novels from which Seward takes her cues. Like Seward’s *Elegy*, the verse form of *Louisa* stabilizes the inherently unstable world of capitalism and imperialism and domesticates the colonial discourses that underpin this world. *Louisa* thus exposes the intimate relationship between the Empire and eighteenth-century domestic narratives. The remaining chapters in this dissertation persist in troubling the categories of “domestic” and “colonial” and in exposing the complicity of narratives like *Louisa* in bringing the Empire home.

**Civilization v. Savagery: Elegy on Captain Cook**

For a number of biographical reasons, Seward has proved a fruitful subject for scholars interested in feminism, authorship, women’s education, and domesticity in the eighteenth century.⁵ A clergyman’s daughter, educated at home by her father and by her mentor Erasmus Darwin, Seward devoted her life to the written word. She actively participated in an intellectual coterie meeting regularly in her dressing room and took part

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⁵ For biographical information on Seward, see Margaret Ashmun, *The Singing Swan: An Account of Anna Seward and Her Acquaintance with Dr. Johnson, Bowell, and Others of Their Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931) and E. V. Lucas, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London: Methuen and Co., 1907). More recently, Teresa Barnard’s excellent *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life. A Critical Biography* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) examines Seward’s previously unpublished correspondence and does much to deepen our understanding of her life and literary career. See also the entry on Seward in the *DNB*. The *Orlando Project* is an excellent resource for information on Seward and other contemporary British women writers: [http://orlando.cambridge.org](http://orlando.cambridge.org).
in a literary circle hosted by Lady Miller of Bath Easton. She never learned classical languages such as Latin and Greek and received no formal training in the sciences; yet, as Teresa Barnard demonstrates, she openly challenged the scientific thinking of her day in her poem —‘The Terrestrial Year, on Her Progress thro’ the Signs of the Zodiac’ (1800). She wrote with great candor about Samuel Johnson, a towering figure in the male literary establishment, and painted unflattering portraits of him in her posthumously published 

*Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807* (1811), which she specifically intended for publication. Seward’s biography also carries the hint of scandal and of unconventional life choices: an unmarried and childless woman, she maintained a lifelong friendship with a married man, John Saville, and her *Letters* frequently critique the inequities of the marriage market and other domestic concerns associated with women at this time.

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6 In this poem Seward revised Western poetic tradition by charting the earth’s progress through the seasons rather than the sun’s. As Barnard outlines, Seward composed —‘The Terrestrial Year’ after attending a scientific lecture by Robert Evans Lloyd in Lichfield in 1800. Seward took issue with the way Lloyd explained the signs of the Zodiac, citing examples from English literature, such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, as evidence to support her disagreement. Seward subsequently undertook her own course of study in astronomy. In a preface to her poem, which Seward called the —‘Proem,’ she contends that Lloyd’s scientific methods were outdated —and that he had misrepresented the relation of the Earth to the sun in his public lecture.” —*Anna Seward’s _Terrestrial Year_: Women, Poetry, and Science in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Partial Answers* 7, no. 1 (2009): 14-15. Melissa Bailes also contends that scientific knowledge—specifically, knowledge of natural history—was formative to what Bailes deems Seward’s —order of poetics,” as well as to the charges of plagiarism Seward levied against Charlotte Smith and Erasmus Darwin. See Bailes, —The Evolution of the Plagiarist: Natural History in Anna Seward’s Order of Poetics,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 33, no. 3 (2009): 105-26.

7 *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1811), 2: 319. Hereafter cited parenthetically. When compiling what might be described as his hagiographic *Life of Johnson* (1791), James Boswell excluded a contribution he initially solicited from Seward: her description of Johnson berating a young woman named Jane Harry for converting to the Quaker faith, an exchange Seward witnessed. Seward’s account portrays Johnson as bullish and hostile to Harry, an image which James D. Woolley argues was —deign to the idea of the man which shaped [Boswell’s] own *Life of Johnson.*” Woolley traces the textual history of this letter, which Seward sent directly to Boswell before revising it for inclusion in her own *Letters*, including its circulation as a pamphlet among Quakers in North America. —Johnson as Despot: Anna Seward’s Rejected Contribution to Boswell’s _Life,”*” *Modern Philology* 70, no. 2 (1972): 140-45.
As her *Elegy on Captain Cook* and *Monody on Major Andre* demonstrate, Seward’s interest in domesticity extended to the Empire of her day. *Elegy on Captain Cook* is frequently cited as one of the more popular textual representations of Cook circulating in the late eighteenth century.\(^8\) This poem has been examined through a variety of lenses in existing literary scholarship, and these readings generally share several points of interest, namely: Seward’s portrayal of Cook as a sentimental hero and a reflection of eighteenth-century discourse about the benevolence of empire; Seward’s commentary on Britain’s commercial interests; and her consideration of women’s roles in supporting the British Empire. For example, Anthony Saglia suggests that Seward “did not just commemorate the hero, but also interpreted his figure as symbolical of Britain’s modernity and its widening horizons.”\(^9\) Bernard Smith suggests that Seward sought to portray Cook as “a highly idealized and tragic hero while attempting at the same time to convey vivid impressions of the countries and regions through which he passed.”\(^10\)

Examining the poem’s portrayal of the bustling commercial metropolis of London, from which Cook departs, Saglia suggests that *Elegy on Captain Cook* offers “sentimental

\(^8\) A number of studies (both literary and historical) concerning Captain Cook, the South Pacific, and late eighteenth-century maritime exploration highlight the popularity of *Elegy on Captain Cook* and situate this poem in relation to contemporary poems and paintings with similar elegiac purposes. For example, Edmond points out that *Elegy on Captain Cook* “was widely admired” and “roundly praised” by the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, in *Representing the South Pacific*, 26. Alan Frost offers Seward’s *Elegy* as evidence of “how much the age associated Cook with its awareness of the humanity of non-Europeans,” *Captain James Cook and the Early Romantic Imagination,* in *Captain Cook: Image and Impact*, ed. Walter Veit (Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1972), 94. See also Guest, *Empire, Barbarism, and Civilisation*, 145; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 120-121; Glyn Williams, *The Death of Captain Cook: A Hero Made and Unmade* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 67; Wilson, *The Island Race*, 60.


\(^10\) Smith, *European Vision*, 121.
praise of commerce.” Guest offers a different reading of this scene, identifying Seward’s London as a site of corruption from which Cook must depart, suggesting instead that he was prompted to voyage to the South Pacific by his disgust for the luxurious fruits of empire corrupting London society.” However, existing scholarship does not attend to the textual source material for the Elegy or to the ways that Seward manipulates this material, nor does it consider why Seward made this choice.

One important transformation from Cook’s Journals to Seward’s Elegy is the alteration of Cook’s relative neutrality toward the inhabitants of New Zealand to Seward’s decisiveness as to their danger and inferiority. For example, after successfully landing at New Zealand, Cook first spots the island’s inhabitants near a waterfall in what he deems — Cascade Cove,” in which he finds — good anchorage and all other necessaries.” He relays this initial contact matter-of-factly, assigning no overtly positive or negative qualities to the people that he sees: — it was in this cove we first saw the Natives” (119). Cook notices that the — natives” are quartering within 100 yards of him and relays that he found some of them to shelter [in] a very Snug Cove, on the SE side of Anchor Isle, from all Winds, which we call’d Lunchen Cove because here we dined on Craw fish on the side of a pleasant brook under the shade of the trees” (119). As this passage demonstrates, the landscape Cook describes is idyllic and hospitable; its inhabitants are merely part of the scenery, noted alongside the meals that Cook and Forster eat.

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12 Guest, Small Change, 145.
13 Of course, the term — native” has several pejorative associations in the history of its use. The OED defines the term — native,” in part, as: — Born in a designated place; belonging to a particular people by birth; spec. belonging to an indigenous ethnic group, as distinguished from foreigners, esp. European colonists,” which seems to be the sense in which Cook uses the term. The OED also points out that this term was used to mark particular groups of non-Europeans as inferior: — Of, for, designation, or characteristic of a black African ... Now chiefly hist., and avoided as offensive.”
Following these initial sightings, Cook invites several of the New Zealanders aboard his ship and portrays them as benighted yet relatively benign:

[I]n the morning the Chief and his Daughter were induced to come on board while the rest of the family went out in the Canoe afishing, before they came on board I shew’d them the Sheep and Goats which they viewed for a moment with a kind of stupid insensibility ... the Chief wanted to know where I slept and pry into every part of the Cabbin every part of which he viewed with some surprise but it was not possible to fix his attention to any one thing a single moment. (122)

Certainly, Cook portrays this Chief and his daughter as intellectually inferior: they gaze with ―stupid insensibility,” exhibit a childlike curiosity, and have no attention span, the chief’s attention being impossible to ―fix.” These ideas were important to producing the sense that Cook and the nation he represents were culturally superior. Yet there is nothing overtly threatening about this portrayal, nothing that portends Cook’s eventual death.

Seward portrays Cook’s earliest encounter with New Zealand in a decidedly different fashion, as Cook’s inferior yet benign New Zealanders become sinister residents of an equally menacing land:

And now antarctic Zealand’s drear domain
Frowns, and o’erhangs th’ inhospitable main.
On its chill beach this dove of human-kind
For his long-wand’ring foot short rest shall find,
Bear to the coast the olive-branch in vain,
And quit on wearied wing the hostile plain. —
With jealous low’r the frowning natives view
The stately vessel, and adventurous crew;¹⁴

Unlike the idyllic coves of Cook’s Journals, Seward portrays New Zealand as unwelcoming and offering no sustenance. Both the landscape and its inhabitants frown at Cook’s approach, and Seward’s New Zealanders are unresponsive to Cook’s gestures of

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goodwill. In other words, *Elegy on Captain Cook* supplies the colonial contact zone with a savage danger absent in Cook’s *Journals*.

In contrast to the “frowning natives” of New Zealand, Seward converts Cook into a hero of heightened sensibility, pathos, and benevolence. He “pours new wonders on th’ uncultur’d shore / The silky fleece, fair fruit, and golden grain; / And future herds and harvests bless the plain” (38). Here Seward makes a clear distinction between the cultured Englishman and the uncultured people whom he blesses. Cook makes no such grand proclamations about his role as purveyor of the future, and, in fact, is decidedly humble. For example, in the general introduction to the *Journals* Cook begs the reader’s forgiveness for any inadequacies of style and for the narrative’s lack of artistic flourish, recounting his life-long naval service and reminding the reader:

> It is a work for information and not for amusement, written by a man, who has not the advantage of Education, acquired, nor Natural abilities for writing; but by one who has been constantly at sea from his youth. ... After such a Candid confession he hopes the Public will not consider him as an author, but a man Zealously employed in the Service of his Country and obliged to give the best account he is able of his proceedings.

Similarly, in the introduction to his *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* (1777), Cook begs, “After this account of myself, the Public must not expect from me the elegance of a fine writer, or the plausibility of a professed book-maker; but will, I hope, consider me as a plain man.”\(^{15}\) If Cook intends his *Journals* to instruct rather than to amuse the reader, *Elegy on Captain Cook* has a decidedly different effect. Seward converts the naval adventures of this self-professed “plain man” into the stuff of history and of high literary discourse. In effect, Seward interprets Cook’s *Journals* and applies to them the narrative of national virtue integral to Britain’s identity as an imperial power.

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\(^{15}\) *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* (London, 1777), xxxvi.
As part of this process, Seward highlights the epic and heroic qualities Cook downplays (or entirely omits). For example, Seward transcribes a dramatic scene in which the Resolution, preparing to cross the Antarctic Circle, is surrounded under darkness of night by what Cook calls “Ice Islands” (98). In Cook’s version of events he describes —“hazy weather with Sleet & snow together with a very strong gale and a high Sea from the East,” all of which make these Ice Islands “equally as dangerous as so many rocks” (98). However, Cook downplays the drama of the situation by suggesting that “great as these dangers are, they are now become so very familiar to us that the apprehensions they cause are never of long duration” (98). Seward transcribes this Antarctic scene in the fourth stanza of the Elegy, imbuing the scene with the drama and pathos absent in Cook’s more matter-of-fact version of events. The Goddess HUMANITY stands at the prow of the ship as it enters the “dreary deep”:

    She points the ship its mazy path, to thread
    The floating fragments of the frozen bed.  
    While o’er the deep, in many a dreadful form,  
    The giant Danger howls along the storm,  
    Furling the iron sails with numbed hands,  
    Firm on the deck the great Adventurer stands;  
    Round glitt’ring mountains hears the billows rave,  
    And the vast ruin thunder on the wave. (37)

Seward supplies the excitement and the heightened sense of danger (literally, “The giant Danger”) downplayed in Cook’s prose. She also transforms the humble Cook into a

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16 Seward’s footnotes, appearing after “floating fragments” and “Furling the iron sails,” refer to passages separated in the Journals by some 200 pages, though each describes Cook’s encounter with what he calls “Islands of Ice” (98). Seward puts quotation marks around the text supplied in these and other footnotes, appearing to cull them directly from the Journals—though, as Jennifer Kelly points out, “This does not appear to be a direct quotation, nor do her subsequent quotations” (318, note 5). Indeed, the passages to which the notes refer generally do not contain the exact phrasing Seward supplies. The first quotes Cook asserting, “In one part the pieces of ice were so close, that the ship had much difficulty to thread them.” However, this phrase—that of “threading” the ice—does not appear in the Journal. The language of the second note, outlining “Our sails and rigging were so frozen, that they seemed plates of iron,” matches more closely: Cooks writes, “Our ropes were like wires, Sails like board or plates of Metal”
figure of singularity and greatness. Cook employs the plural pronouns "we" and "us" throughout the Journals, making him but one in a group of men, while Seward isolates the single man, the "great Adventurer." Seward plays up Cook's "noble sentiments" by having him gaze on his crew with "a glist'ning eye" and making him a man who acts under concern for others: "Not for himself starts the impassion'd tear, / Congealing as it falls" (37). This tear falls in service to the supposedly humanitarian aims of the empire.

The Elegy's thematic interest in British imperial dominance goes hand in hand with the formal differences between the travel narrative and the elegiac poem. Women like Seward writing poetry in the eighteenth century had a keen sense of the cultural value of different poetic forms. As Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia describe, "Critics, poets, and readers understood the expectations and limitations of various poetic kinds and their relative value within a poetic hierarchy. ... Poetic kinds that originated in a previous classical form retained the prestige, historical weight, and high cultural value of that form." Among the more elevated kinds were the ode and the elegy, the latter of which "shares the epic's complexity of form and its role in constructing a nation's history." As Backscheider and Ingrassia suggest, Seward and her contemporaries associated the elegy with history—in particular, with national history. By bringing Cook's voluminous prose under the controlling structure of the elegy and its historical associations, Seward supplies both Cook and the Empire he represents with legitimacy.

(308-309). Seward's footnotes, then, are paraphrases of Cook rather than direct quotations. Nonetheless, it remains important to her to call her readers attention to her use of the Journals.

17 Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine E. Ingrassia, introduction to British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century: An Anthology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 3, 6. Backscheider and Ingrassia suggest that the classical origins of poetic kinds posed a challenge to women poets while also giving them a forum in which to experiment and to innovate—to "make them their own" (5).

18 Ibid., 6.
and historical value. In doing so, the poem also solidifies the differences between the colonizer and the colonized. These transformations domesticate the colonial contact zone—a process of “taming” or “bringing under control” the uncertainties of empire. Moreover, as part of this process of domestication, the violence of the contact zone disappears beneath the sentimental narrative symbolized by Cook’s tears.

The elision of colonial violence and the stabilizing colonial binary are equally significant in Seward’s verse novel Louisa. The lovers Louisa and Eugenio each compose two of the novel’s four verse epistles, which together narrate their history; all four epistles are directed to a third party named Emma, Louisa’s childhood friend. After Eugenio’s father Ernesto loses the family’s fortune, Eugenio is forced to marry the wealthy heiress Emira, with whom he eventually fathers a daughter. The vilified Emira eschews her domestic duties as wife and mother and has an affair with a swarthy opera dancer. Louisa and Eugenio are reunited upon Emira’s death in the novel’s final epistle. On her dramatic deathbed, Emira bequeaths her daughter to Louisa and begs that she raise her to be a virtuous woman. Published four years after Elegy on Captain Cook,

19 Elegy on Captain Cook constitutes what M. M. Bakhtin describes as “the epic incorporation of the contemporary hero into a world of ancestors and founders.” In defining the properties of the novel and those features that distinguish it from other literary genres, particularly the epic, Bakhtin describes what he considers the novel’s fluidity, openendedness, and contemporaneity. The novel, Bakhtin contends, is different from other genres because it is incomplete, its formal properties changing rather than fixed. This incompleteness corresponds to the novel’s involvement with the present. The novel exists in what Bakhtin describes as “the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness.” The temporal sphere of the novel is always “now,” and as such, the novel form can never be complete. By contrast, the past is the temporal sphere of the epic, a form wholly detached from the present. The completeness of the epic form provides the aura of completeness for its subject—that is, the epic’s subject becomes an intrinsic, irremovable, and inaccessible part of a history wholly separate from its audience. The history depicted in the epic, Bakhtin contends, is beyond question: “Absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past.” Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 15, 11, 16.

Louisa domesticates the colonial concept of civilization v. savagery by weaving it into a fairly conventional narrative of courtship and marriage. We understand what —home— means in Louisa by what it excludes or refuses to accommodate—namely, the sexual licentiousness associated with the colonial world, embodied by Emira, who dies for her Orientalized sins. Seward portrays this death as justified by Emira’s moral inferiority. Like the frowning New Zealanders of the Elegy, Emira serves as a foil to Seward’s eponymous heroine, the novel’s domestic exemplar. Furthermore, like the Elegy, Louisa stabilizes the colonial contact zone and authorizes its hierarchies via the high literary discourse of the verse epistle.

Female Embodiment and Colonial Anxiety: Louisa

Louisa has been examined through a variety of lenses in existing scholarship, though its connections to empire are relatively unexplored. Masae Kawatsu argues that the relationship between Louisa and Emma exhibits the qualities of the eighteenth-century female —romantic friendship,” in which passionate (though asexual) attachment exists between women. This kind of friendship, Kawatsu contends, is —an aspect of eighteenth-century lesbianism which was compatible with heterosexual society.” Gillen D’Arcy Wood examines what he deems a —Handelian ethos of sociability,” arguing that we must read this verse novel in the broader musical culture of late eighteenth-century Britain. Elizabeth Fay briefly highlights the colonialist aspects of the text, but she is primarily interested in genre; she argues that in Seward’s experimentation with the verse novel, she produces a new feminine sensibility grounded in Romanticism, as Louisa incorporates thematic elements which came to be integral to Romantic poetry. Kawatsu,
Fay, and Daniel Robinson each suggest that in Louisa and Emira, as Robinson puts it, Seward treats sexuality through binary opposition—chastity versus sexual licentiousness,” though they do not elaborate on the colonial implications of this binary.²¹

Louisa’s courtship plot and its female sexual binary capture eighteenth-century anxiety about the pursuit of wealth on both a local and a national scale. Indeed, its female sexual binary is also a colonial binary. Louisa’s plot is akin to Samuel Richardson’s Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded (1740). Like Richardson’s Pamela, the virtuous Louisa is rewarded with the husband she is supposed to deserve. Alternately, Emira is punished with disease and death for her pursuit of pleasure and her neglect of domestic duty. These narrative ends are fairly typical in domestic novels of this time, and they demonstrate Seward’s familiarity with contemporary fictional conventions. However, Louisa’s gaze extends beyond the confines of the home to the contemporary British Empire. Both implicitly and explicitly, Louisa invokes the world of commerce and international trade in which Great Britain was embroiled at this time. Moreover, Seward feminizes this commercial world and implicates it for disrupting domestic stability. For example, even before he is forced to marry Emira, the commercial world forces a separation between Eugenio and Louisa:

Where Thames expands with freedom’s wealthy pride,
Attractive Commerce calls him [Eugenio] to her tide;
As with firm step she runs along the strand,

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And points to the tall ship, the distant land.
His rising interests on the call attend,
For with a father’s prosperous fate they blend.
Thus, with these interests, duty’s filial power
Unites to tear him from LOUISA’s bower;
But parting sorrows yield them to the force
Of strong necessity’s resistless course[.] (106)

Suvir Kaul points out that eighteenth-century poets often glorify the Thames as the national river that allows easy access to the global flow of oceans, and thus to all the commodities and territories that lie within reach,” as Seward does in this description.22 Note that each of the terms Seward uses to describe the Thames implies development, progress, and forward motion: “xpands,” “calls,” “runs,” and “points.” Wilson contends that such concepts were linked to the way eighteenth-century Britons understood race and national identity in the colonial context. New World territories, such as those explored by Captain Cook and studied by Johann Forster, were perceived to be in a state of transition, in an earlier stage of development and making progress toward civilization. As a result of such theories about race, geography, and history, Wilson argues, “Empire provided a panorama in which the progress of modernity could, ideally, unfold before the observer’s eyes.”23 In its forward motion, Eugenio’s departure represents this “progress of modernity”—the civilizational advancement that Seward’s contemporaries associated with their empire.

The commercial progress personified in this passage in the female figure of “Attractive Commerce” sharply contrasts with the rural setting from which Eugenio

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23 Wilson, The Island Race, 9.
departs: "LOUISA’s bower.” Louisa reclines in her bower when she first meets Eugenio.

Moments prior to their meeting, Louisa sings Milton’s *Il Penseroso*, plays her lute, and describes the scene thus:

Beneath my trembling fingers lightly rung  
The lute’s sweet chords, responsive while I sung.  
Faint in the yellow broom the oxen lay,  
And the mute birds sat languid on the spray;  
And nought was heard, around the noon-tide bower,  
Save, that the mountain bee, from flower to flower,  
Seem’d to prolong, with her assiduous wing,  
The soft vibration of the tuneful string;  
While the fierce skies flam’d on the shrinking rills,  
And sultry silence brooded o’er the hills! (101)

Notice Seward’s emphasis on the silence and stillness of the scene: the “mute birds” are “languid”; “sultry silence” hangs in the very air. The only movement is that of a bee, whose buzzing wings seem to suspend the last note Louisa produces. In its stillness, I would argue that this bower is akin to the “spot of time” in the poetry of William Wordsworth. The spot of time, Saree Makdisi suggests, is constituted by both aural and visual suspension, outside of and opposed to the overwhelming blur of sensory data—that is, the modernity—Wordsworth encounters, for example, in the London of Book VII in *The Prelude* (1850). The stillness of the spot of time is one of its signal qualities.

Examining this trope in Wordsworth’s *An Evening Walk* (1793), Makdisi contends: “The defining characteristic of this spot of time is its fragile separation from the social world, its persistence as a knot of heterogeneous time in a surrounding world of production and development ... [T]his space is not visibly marked by any social, economic, or political inscriptions. It is, however, negatively defined by these inscriptions, in that it is separated

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from them."

Louisa relies on a similar kind of negative definition: Louisa's bower presents no narrative of a son's "rising interests" or his father's "prosperous fate"—that is, it presents no narrative of social or commercial progress. Nonetheless, it relies on narratives of commercial progress in order to establish its difference as a space of stillness. Seward fuses the object of Eugenio's desire, Louisa, to this rural space, divorced from the wider commercial world. The commercial world—a world of production and development—"tears" Eugenio from Louisa's still and silent bower and thrusts him toward the unseen "distant lands" of empire.

Although Seward construes their separation as a "strong necessity," she also renders Eugenio something of a passive agent: it is the "resistless course" of commerce to which he "yields"—indeed, it seems to act upon him. Throughout Louisa both Eugenio and his father Ernesto are passive characters and are prey to a feminized and perilous financial sphere. For example, Ernesto describes losing the family fortune as a kind of seduction in which he is dazzled out of his rational mind:

BELMOR has deceiv'd my boundless trust,  
To friendship treacherous, and to faith unjust!  
Unhappy hour, when confidence entire  
Lur'd me to follow that misleading fire,  
Those gay commercial visions, false, and vain,  
The glittering meteors of his artful brain! (122)

Although Ernesto is literally misled by Belmor, a male financial advisor, J. G. A. Pocock points out that in the eighteenth century women were associated with the kind of

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25 Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Cultural of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60. Makdisi argues that the spot of time is not ahistorical—it is not conceived as having no history—but poses an alternative to the teleological narrative of modernity; it is heterogeneous rather than homogenous, synchronic rather than diachronic. On the surface, this opposition is between nature (the bower) and civilization (London), though Makdisi argues that these spaces are mutually constitutive and produced by modern subjectivity. Nature is not "natural," then; it too is a manmade construct. The spot of time is both a place and a temporality: it is a different history. See chapter 2, "Home Imperial: Wordsworth's London and the Spot of Time," 23-44, and chapter 3, "Wordsworth and the Image of Nature," 45-69.
artfulness and unstable financial speculation Ernesto describes. Writers such as Daniel Defoe invoked figures like Lady Credit to symbolize the seductive power of speculative investment. What Pocock deems the “new economic man” of the eighteenth century, who made his living through speculation tied to global trade, was “the creature of his own hopes and fears” who “does not even live in the present, except as constituted by his fantasies concerning a future.” The gendered dimension of the new economic man is crucial to his character, as Pocock makes clear: he was seen on the whole a feminized, even an effeminate being, still wrestling with his own passions and hysterias and with interior and exterior forces let loose by his fantasies and appetites.26 Ernesto’s “gay commercial visions” and “rash hopes” reflect what Pocock calls “fantasies concerning a future,” and Ernesto’s appetites are his undoing. Moreover, he is “deceived,” “lur’d” by a “misleading fire” and the “glittering” schemes of an “artful” man—that is, he is seduced.27

26 J. G. A. Pocock, “The mobility of property and the rise of eighteenth-century sociology,” in Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 112, 114. Pocock examines the transition that took place in the eighteenth century in which the man of “civic virtue” was replaced by the “new economic man.” Prior to the Financial Revolution of the late seventeenth century, Pocock outlines, the man of civic virtue was able to exercise this virtue because his property consisted largely of land (as opposed to stock and other moveable forms of property such as colonial commodities). Freed from the responsibility of buying, selling, and investing in order to financially subsist, the landed aristocrat’s stable and inheritable property provided him with the independence and autonomy as well as the leisure and liberty to engage in public affairs” (109). For history and analysis of the Financial Revolution, see P. G. M. Dickson, The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit (New York: St. Martin’s, 1967).

27 As Catherine Ingrassia, in Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Sandra Sherman, in Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth-Century: Accounting for Defoe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and others have contended, the emergence of speculative investment and the feminization of the new economic man coincided with the rise of the novel, a relationship Louisa highlights. Both financial and literary discourse at this time, Ingrassia maintains, used gendered terminology to describe the cultural changes taking place, and both systems relied on the imaginative participation—the investment—of the reader/consumer. Ingrassia argues: “In these two different yet similar environments, individuals disenfranchised from the traditional avenues of power—women, non-aristocratic men, members of the middling and lower classes—gained new opportunities through paper credit” (7). The rise of the novel posed such a threat to Pope and to others of the Augustan tradition precisely because it
These anxieties about masculinity, domestic stability, and the pursuit of wealth are embodied and ultimately resolved in Louisa’s two central female figures. As I have already described, Louisa sets up an opposition between virtuous and corrupt femininity in Louisa and Emira, respectively. However, this female binary is more complicated than it first appears: it draws on eighteenth-century ideas about the colonial world and creates a hierarchy between English self and colonial other. Though both Louisa and Emira are Englishwomen, Seward negatively associates Emira with wealth. This wealth, in turn, is linked to the supposed avarice of the Orient. The text invokes this connection even before Emira physically appears in the poem. Addressing Eugenio after learning of his marriage, Louisa exclaims:

Ah! what avail the riches of thy bride!
Can they avail, remorseless as thou art,
To tear the wrong’d LOUISA from thy heart?
Gold, and ye gems, that lurk in eastern cave,
Or to the sun your gay resplendence wave
Can joys sincere, one heart-felt transport live
In aught ye purchase, or in aught ye give?
A bliss, to rival those thy avarice lost,
Insolvent INDIA shall but vainly boast! (107)

Emira’s “riches” are insidiously linked to gold “lurking” in eastern cave” and to “Insolvent India”; desire for this wealth “tears” Eugenio from Louisa, in much the same way that his father’s “rising” financial interests tear him from her bower. By contrast, accompanied this broader democratization of culture. Ingrassia argues that the goddess Dulness in Pope’s *The Dunciad* (1728) embodies this anxiety. Those who wrote novels, Pope contended, were “hack writers,” and many of these hacks were women. As such, the genre came to be associated with a dangerous mixing of sexual distinction and sex roles and with transgressive versions of femininity. Seward borrows Pope’s gendered poetic vocabulary for lamenting these broader cultural changes. Moreover, this process constitutes what Laura Brown deems the “fetishization” in eighteenth-century texts. Brown argues that in the eighteenth century the figure of woman became “a proxy for male acquisition or a scapegoat of male violence” due to woman’s association with trade, commodification, and consumption.” Brown contends that as women’s labor was devalued in the eighteenth century, they were re-figured as consumers rather than producers. As such, they became the ideological *raison d'être* for British colonial expansion, morally absolving the men who carried out the colonial mission. *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19, 18.
Seward indicates that Louisa is virtuous precisely because she lacks such wealth and because she inspires no material desire. Prior to his father’s loss of fortune and his marriage to Emira, Eugenio describes Louisa to his family in terms that explicitly highlight her lack of these dangerous qualities: —*Sice no ambition gloomed my father's brow, / No thirst of wealth reproached my plighted vow; / He scorned to name LOUISA‘s want of gold, / But gladly listened while her worth I told*” (114). Eugenio distinguishes two kinds of worth in this statement: material worth and Louisa’s worth, divorced from the material. Indeed, it is precisely Louisa’s *lack* of wealth—her lack of association with gold—that makes her a desirable wife. Not only does Louisa lack gold, Eugenio’s father is able to value her because he has not yet developed a thirst for it—that is, he has not yet been seduced by the feminized —*glittering meteors*” of the commercial world embodied by Emira.

Louisa’s disassociation from material wealth—that is, her difference from Emira—is a crucial aspect of the emerging gender discourse of the eighteenth-century novel. Drawing parallels between eighteenth-century conduct literature and the novel, Armstrong argues that conduct literature promotes the idea that the purpose of a woman’s education was to make her a desirable wife, an object that all men could desire. In order to be desirable she —*had to lack competitive desires and worldly ambitions*” which were conceived as naturally belonging to man—thus the domestic sphere came to be her primary purview. Furthermore, the domestic was presented as antithetical to the economic in such texts.28 The domestic woman had to be emptied of desire for worldly things, such as money, material goods, and political power. Her lack of such desire required that she be educated to avoid moral corruption, relegated her to the home, and

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28 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* 59.
authorized her husband’s role in public life. Armstrong thus contends that the domestic woman was the first to wrest ideological power from the aristocracy and to secure the moral and economic triumph of the middle classes. That such a figure appeared politically disinterested is precisely the reason she wielded so much power: an image of classless virtue, the domestic woman—like Seward’s Louisa or Richardson’s Pamela—was conceived as a universal ideal, her “frugal domestic practices” translatable to any household. Thus aristocratic women like Emira came to be “the very embodiments of corrupted desire” because they “sought ... gratification in economic and political terms.”

Emira’s essential difference from Louisa, couched in economic terms, thus points to the correspondence between this ―poetical novel” and the prose fiction from which Seward takes her cues. The very term poetical novel draws our attention to Louisa’s hybridity and asks us to think about the expectations that come with genre labels. More importantly, its hybrid status allows us to identify those features that Seward considered most salient to working within the conventions of fiction. Louisa is Seward’s only attempt at writing under the genre label ―novel.” In her Letters she generally denigrated prose fiction, in one instance deeming it “sweet poison for the age’s tooth” (Letters II: 319). By contrast, she considered poetry the genre with enduring cultural value and the genre most appropriate to writing her nation’s history. In the preface to Louisa, Seward defines her project in this text as merging the heroines of two neo-classical poems: Alexander Pope’s Eloisa and Abelard (1717) and Matthew Prior’s Henry and Emma (1708). In the preface to Louisa, Seward suggests that she intends to “unite the impassioned fondness of Pope’s ELOISA, with the chaster tenderness of Prior’s EMMA;
avoiding the voluptuousness of the first, and the too conceding softness of the second” (97). But neither of these poems includes a female character like Emira. Though each describes lovers’ travails, they do so without the other woman—that is, they lack the kind of courtship plot that constitutes many eighteenth-century novels. The Louisa/Emira female binary, then, belongs to the tradition of English prose fiction that Seward attempts to elevate by writing a novel in verse. In composing her version of a novel, Seward’s inclusion of both an idealized domestic woman and her Orientalized female counterpart signals that these figures were an important part of what she understood the eighteenth-century novel to be. And like the transformation of Cook’s prose into epic poetry in Seward’s *Elegy on Captain Cook*, the transformation of the novel into the verse epistle in *Louisa* solidifies the differences between civilized and savage nations. In both of these texts, form and content work together to institute the boundaries of the home and to domesticate a hierarchical relationship between Great Britain and the colonial world.

**The “Poetical Novel” and Empire**

*Louisa* exposes important connections between the eighteenth-century novel and the Empire—specifically, the ways that eighteenth-century fiction domesticates the violence of colonization. *Louisa* supports Firdous Azim’s contention that the birth of the novel coincided with the European colonial project; it partook of and was part of a discursive field concerned with the construction of a universal and homogenous subject. This subject was held together by the annihilation of other subject-positions.”30 In other

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30 Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30. Azim historicizes the teleology of the so-called rise of the novel, coined by Ian Watt’s classic study bearing that name, within the history of Britain’s Empire. Watt posits that the genre emerged in the eighteenth century in conjunction with the newly powerful middle classes. The eighteenth-century explosion of print culture, increased
words, Azim contends that the novel appeared contemporary to a cultural desire to define the European self as distinct from the colonial other, a desire that coincided with Europe’s contact with the New World. In Azim’s framework, the self/other binary is not incidental to the eighteenth-century novel, but constitutive of it; as such, “the novel is an imperial genre.” The success—the moral and economic superiority—of the European subject required the failure of the colonial other, a dynamic exhibited in many eighteenth-century novels. The failure of the colonial other is fundamental to Seward’s poetical novel. Moreover, Louisa renders this failure in domestic terms, as maternal and conjugal.

Several critics have noted the importance of novelistic discourse in Louisa, though they have not considered it in conjunction with Azim's framework. Susan Staves situates Louisa alongside other contemporary women's works in prose fiction and suggests that it exhibits “an overlap in experiments with the function of landscape in poetry and in the novel.” However, Staves’s history of women’s writing (by her own stated intentions) is descriptive rather than analytical, so she does not pursue this connection. In his analysis of Seward’s experimental use of form, Robinson argues that Louisa’s fusion of the heroic verse epistle and the epistolary novel allows Seward to comment on and to subvert the conventions of both genres. According to Robinson,

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leisure time (especially among middle-class women), concentration of the population in urban centers such as London, increased rates of literacy, and the variety of popular print forms circulating at this time (newspapers, periodicals, travel narratives, conduct books, and others) are said to have contributed to the novel’s success and to the codification of its generic conventions.


31 Azim, Colonial Rise of the Novel, 30.
Louisa (like Pope’s Eloisa and Prior’s Emma) embodies poetic convention in her emphasis on psychological states and sensibility, while Emira embodies novelistic convention in her more plot-driven contribution to the narrative. Particularly in the first and third epistles, Robinson suggests, “[d]escription and feeling consistently postpone incident”; Louisa defers narration, postpones movements, to elevate the poetic over novelistic convention.”

Robinson highlights an important aspect of Louisa’s relationship to the rise of the novel—namely, the belabored differences between Louisa and Emira, as well as the subtle presence of anxiety about empire which Emira embodies and which is ultimately laid to rest upon her death.

Emira’s failure as a wife and mother, her eventual death, and her symbolic connections to the colonial world link her to two similarly doomed female characters from the tradition of English prose fiction. However, Louisa establishes the closure of Emira’s tale to a far greater degree than either of her fictional predecessors. On one hand, Emira seems informed by the heroine of Daniel Defoe’s The Fortunate Mistress (1724), commonly referred to as Roxana. A courtesan turned businesswoman, Roxana amasses a fortune through savings and savvy investment after being abandoned by her spendthrift husband and forced to give up her children. In a scene that has received a great deal of attention from postcolonial critics, Roxana entertains the King’s court in her apartment and dances for her company while wearing Turkish dress: “The Robe was a fine Persian, or India Damask; the Ground white, and the Flowers blue and gold, and the

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32 Staves, A Literary History, 368; Robinson, “Forging the Poetical Novel,” 26, 27. D’Arcy Wood makes a similar point in “The Female Penseroso.” The lyric voice in Louisa, Wood argues, achieves the effect of a Handelian oratorio. She contends that in the epistles emphasizing description over plot, Louisa calls attention to the quality and movement of her voice—that is, to her performance—which become more important than her physical surroundings and circumstances. As such, according to Wood, Seward’s lyric voice ultimately sublimates plot. Wood refers to the “lyric voice” in Louisa as “a form of antitheatrical, antinarrative resistance” (472).
Train held five Yards; the Dress under it, was a Vest of the same, embroider’d with Gold, and set with some Pearl in the Work‖; hanging from her ‗Turban, or Head-Dress‖ is ‗a good Jewel.‘‖33 In this scene Roxana embodies the luxury, opulence, and sexual licentiousness that Defoe’s contemporaries associated with the East. As Robert Markley points out, in the early modern period the Far East was a powerful and economically superior region of the globe; to the English, it represented ‗both an insatiable market for European exports and a vast, inexhaustible storehouse of spices, luxury goods (from tea to textiles), and raw materials.‘‖34 In a similar vein, as an opulent courtesan Roxana both fulfills and engenders desire, and her Eastern dress renders her visually mesmerizing: ‗The Company were under the greatest Surprise imaginable; the very Musick stopp’d a while to gaze‖ (150-51).

In *Louisa*, as Eugenio relays the circumstances under which he met Emira, she too is a visual spectacle with Eastern associations; like Roxana, we ‗stop a while to gaze‖ on Emira, a quality that immediately sets her apart from the immaterial and desireless Louisa. Eugenio initially comes upon Emira in the woods after hearing her ‗piercing shriek‖ and rescues her from assault by ‗a guilty band of desperate slaves,‖ her ‗tresses torn and frantic with her fear‖ (115). Emira is immediately sexualized as the object of a potential rape. Having saved her from this band of slaves, Eugenio describes:

> Then, as emerging from the darkling wood,  
> Along the moon-bright dales we slowly rode,  
> Surpris’d his gorgeous trappings I behold,  
> The net of silver, and the thongs of gold;  
> While all the vestments of the lovely dame

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The pride of elevated rank proclaim.
The costly lace had golden leaves imprest
Light on the borders of the pearly vest;
Her taper waist the broider’d zone entwines,
Clasp’d by a gem, the boast of orient mines;
On as we pass, on ev’ry side it gleams,
And to the moon, in trembling lustre, streams. (116)

Her horse’s luxurious —trappings” and its —ne of silver” foreshadow Eugenio’s future
marital entrapment. —Trapping” literally refers to the ornamental dress covering the
saddle and harness of a horse, yet the second definition listed in the OED defines trapping
more generally as: —Ornaments; dress; embellishments; external, superficial, and trifling
decoration.” Like Emira herself, her horse’s —gorgeous trappings” dazzle the eye and
contribute to the seductive wealth she represents. Seward lists a variety of commodities in
introducing Emira: —costly lace” with —golden leaves,” a —pearly vest,” and—most
tellingly—a —gem, the boast of orient mines.” This Oriental gem is mesmerizing,

seductive, glinting with moonlight and gleaming —on ev’ry side.” Similarly, in epistle
four, Ernesto describes Emira departing for an opera in —licentious vestment,” part of
which is —Th’ lofty turban, from whose surface rais’d, / Glitter’d the silver plume, the
diamond blaz’d” (139). The gold, pearl, and gleaming gem of Emira’s costume borrow
from Defoe’s Orientalizing imagery, and like Roxana, Emira is a —fortunate” (that is,
wealthy) and sexualized woman.35

35 Seward may have derived the name Emira from the term —emir,” which the OED defines as: —A
Saracen or Arab prince, or governor of a province; a military commander,” and —A title of honour borne by
the descendants of the prophet Muhammad.” Both of these definitions link Emira to the Arab world.
Furthermore, the OED defines —saracen” as —a name for the nomadic peoples of the Syro-Arabian desert
which harassed the Syrian confines of the Empire; hence, an Arab; by extension, a Muslim,” and —A non-
Christian, heathen, or pagan; an unbeliever, infidel.” The name Emira thus reinforces the character’s
otherness in this text, as well as her connections to Eastern cultures and religions. Many thanks to Noah
Heringman for drawing my attention to this term.
The ultimate irony of these women’s “fortunate” nature is also shared. In the course of one paragraph, Roxana meets with what she calls —a dreadful Course of Calamities” (267) which are never named or described. We know only that they result from having murdered a daughter, once abandoned, who has resurfaced and demanded recognition. In a similar vein, Emira’s tale ends in death because she, too, fails as a mother. While conveying Louisa to Emira’s deathbed, Ernesto relays a memory that exemplifies Emira’s maternal failure: an evening on which she chooses to abandon her daughter so that she can attend an opera. Before she departed, Ernesto recounts, Eugenio unsuccessfully uses their daughter in order to persuade her to remain at home: “O smile, my child, and lure, / To the maternal transports, soft and pure, / That lovely bosom! – let thy opening bloom / Charm my Emira” (140). Emira briefly “clasp’d the infant to her breast” and shed two “crystal” tears on the child’s forehead. However, when Eugenio kisses these tears, he breaks Emira’s brief spell of maternal tenderness: “Earnest on him the fair-one’s moisten’d eyes / Turn! – some rays benign of soft surprise / Meet his kind gaze – but ah! the transient dawn / Of virtuous feeling, instant is withdrawn” (141).

Emira’s lack of “virtuous” maternal feeling is highlighted a number of times in Louisa’s final letter, underlining its significance to the final judgment she receives.

Importantly, Emira’s maternal feelings have been supplanted by sensual pleasure, and her breast is used as an emblem of this replacement. Ernesto laments that —in the female breast, so form’d to prove / The sweet refinements of maternal love, / Disdain, and guilty pleasure, should controll, / And to its yearnings indurate the soul” (138). In other words, despite having given birth to a “sweet cherub daughter” (138), Emira’s breast is sexual rather than maternal, devoted to pleasure rather than nurturing. As Toni
Bowers describes, motherhood was an embattled cultural position in Augustan England, with both gender and class implications. Eighteenth-century conduct literature prescribed the set of behaviors that constituted “virtuous maternity,” which included breastfeeding. Bowers contends that in the eighteenth century, “the desire to breastfeed attained status as one of the attributes of ‘natural’ motherhood and a central part of virtuous womanhood itself.” Moreover, Bowers suggests, “in eighteenth-century conduct books ... aristocratic mothers tended to be denigrated as unloving pleasure-seekers who refuse to be inconvenienced by breastfeeding.”

Ruth Perry contends that the “maternal breast” became “[t]he locus—both symbolic and real—of [the] new appropriation of women’s bodies for motherhood” in the eighteenth century.

Momentarily clasping her daughter to her breast, Emira’s maternal feelings cannot coincide with her Orientalized sensuality. She is “the seraglio’s wanton inmate” (139), and her sexualized breast is the site on which she experiences the first pangs of punishment for her corruption. Entertaining a lover, a “swarthy opera dancer” (142), and giving herself over to the pleasures of the town, Emira succumbs to illness: “Consuming fever hurls her fiery dart; / Deep in EMIRA’s breast behold it stand, / And life’s wanton current shrink beneath the brand!” (143). Her life’s “wanton current” is explicitly linked to her status as the “wanton” inmate of the Oriental seraglio. Nussbaum contends that in the eighteenth century the conceptual split between maternity and sexuality was important to the political and economic demands of imperialism, in order to distinguish


clearly the Englishwoman from her sexualized others as well as to foster maternal
domesticity.”38 In their doomed narrative ends, pursuing wealth and pleasure and
eschewing their maternal duties, both Roxana and Emira exhibit this split.39

By contrast, Louisa lacks sexual desire and the Orientalized corruption associated
with it, a quality revealed through the decidedly disembodied way Seward renders her.
Although she is the poem’s title character, we never get a clear impression of Louisa’s
physical appearance. In the epistles Louisa composes she essentially becomes part of the
landscape around her, drawing attention away from her own and even from Eugenio’s
body. For example, this scene in her bower in which Louisa describes Eugenio declaring
his love for her: "But oh! when doubt, in that dear moment, fled, / A calm more sunny
o’er my bosom spread! / As the gay lark his last clear carol sung, / And on a slanting sun-
beam warbling hung” (104). These lines draw attention away from her physical person,
her “bosom,” and toward the natural world—the “gay lark” and “slanting sun-beam.”
Even her happiness is rendered in naturalistic imagery, as a “sunny” calm. Louisa only
obliquely refers to her physical experience, and it is so closely allied with nature that it is
difficult—if not impossible—to separate them. In a sense, the natural world replaces or
supplants—perhaps sublates—Louisa’s body. To the same degree that Emira is a
sexual pleasure seeker, Louisa is an asexual figure of feminine virtue.

Nussbaum, Torrid Zones, 32.

Their deaths represent an annihilation, to borrow Azim’s term, of the colonial other, which is a
plot device carried out elsewhere in Defoe’s fiction as he deals with Eastern culture. Defoe, Markley
argues, was deeply troubled by the economic superiority of countries such as China in the early modern
period because it weakened claims to the cultural and moral superiority of English Protestantism. In
Defoe’s The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), having left his island Crusoe travels through
China and attempts to dispel any notion that the Chinese are culturally competitive with the English. He
mocks their learning, their government, and their level of civilization. When Crusoe encounters a Chinese
religious symbol, he is forced to destroy it because, as Markley argues, it “challenges a western ethics and
ideology of representation and therefore an entire worldview,” The Far East, 194.
The colonial sexual binary established via Louisa and Emira also recalls Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Pamela II* (1741), in which Richardson opposes the sexually transgressive Sally Godfrey, a woman relegated to the colonial margins, with his virtuous eponymous heroine. In *Pamela*, shortly before marrying the aristocratic Mr. B, the sexually virtuous servant girl Pamela learns of a woman named Sally Godfrey with whom Mr. B had a youthful affair and fathered a child. Sally Godfrey, we learn, now lives in Jamaica. Catherine Hall points out that the practice of “absenteeism” in eighteenth-century British sugar colonies like Jamaica, in which landowners attempted to rule their plantations from England, meant that the colonies —offered a model of disorder, licentious sexuality, illegitimacy, [and] irregularity.” Richardson dispatches Sally Godfrey to these colonies, separating her from the domestic virtue of his English heroine. Before marrying Mr. B., Pamela becomes obsessed with Sally Godfrey’s fate and worries that she may become “Sally Godfrey the Second.” In *Pamela II*, published following the great success of *Pamela*, Sally Godfrey—now a married woman, still living in Jamaica—sends Miss Goodwin, her daughter with Mr. B., to be raised by Pamela. Richardson includes letters from Sally Godfrey in *Pamela II*, in which she wholly relinquishes her maternal rights, celebrates Pamela’s domestic virtue, and laments her own wicked past.

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42 *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded. In a Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel to her Parents: And afterwards, in her Exalted Condition...* vols. 3 and 4 (London, 1742). Hereafter cited parenthetically.
Sally Godfrey's letters go to great lengths to portray these women as vastly different, their respective fates justified by their divergent moral characters. These differences are geographically realized as well, with Pamela’s English country estate opposed to Sally’s residence in a British sugar colony. The degree to which Richardson belabors their literal and symbolic separation reveals anxiety about the way readers interpreted Sally Godfrey’s banishment. Richardson introduces the “Affair of Sally Godfrey” in Pamela II in a series of letters Pamela exchanges with Mr. B’s sister, Lady Davers. In one such letter Sally Godfrey expounds upon Pamela’s “deserved” happiness, referring to Pamela as “illustrious, truly illustrious” (4: 294), as possessing “generous Goodness” and “unexampled Kindness” (4: 294, 295), as “bless’d in an Honour untainted,” enjoying “every well deserv’d Comfort” (4: 296). She closes the letter with the proclamation, “[M]ay you receive the Reward of your Piety, your Generosity, and your filial, your social, and Conjugal virtues!” (4: 297). By contrast, Sally depicts herself as “deplorable,” “unhappy” (4: 293), possessing “odious Weakness” (4: 294), a “poor Creature ... so deplorably, so inexcusably fallen” (4: 295-96). As these terms make clear, Richardson is at pains to paint a wide gulf between these two women. This polarization serves his didactic intentions: Sally Godfrey is what Wood calls the novel’s “negative exemplary heroine”—that is, the heroine who serves as a cautionary tale to the female reader, punished with “dysphoric plotlines.”

However, by way of subtle ambiguities, Sally Godfrey’s narrative ultimately refuses the closure Richardson assigns it. Speaking directly to her daughter from within this letter, Sally Godfrey laments, “Only poor Sally! ... If you ever fail in your Duty to your new Mamma, to whose Care and Authority I transfer my whole Right in you,

43 Wood, Modes of Discipline, 63.
remember that you have no more a Mamma in me, nor can you be intitled to my Blessing, or to the Fruits of my Prayers for you” (4:295). This does not sound like a woman who has accepted—indeed a woman who supports—relinquishing her maternal rights. Rather, she deeply grieves the loss, and is merely “as happy, as a poor Creature can be” (4:295). This admission begs the question: is Sally Godfrey “happy at last,” as Pamela insists? Richardson certainly wants us to believe so: she signs the letter, “Your most unworthy Admirer, and obliged humble Servant” (4:297).

Like Pamela II, the conclusion to Louisa belabors a moral message about the danger of sexual activity while also drawing a sharp line between the exemplary woman and the negative exemplar. On her dying bed, a penitent Emira begs Eugenio to summon Louisa to her side:

If you have pity, to LOUISA fly;   
Sweet, injur’d excellence! would she impart  
Her pardon to this self-accusing heart,  
‘Twould cheer my spirit, hov’ring on its flight  
To the dark confines of eternal Night.’  
She said—and dear LOUISA will bestow  
The adjured forgiveness on repentant woe;  
Will feel its sufferings all her wrongs atone,  
And in EMIRA’s pangs forget her own. (144)

This passage underlines Emira’s wickedness and also the culpability she feels for having kept the lovers apart—though it is worth remembering that Eugenio essentially used Emira for her fortune, making the true “victim” in this scenario somewhat harder to identify. Clearly Seward wants us to identify Louisa as such, much as Richardson wants his reader to side with the virtuous Pamela, no matter the potential injustice of Sally Godfrey’s abandonment with child. And like Sally Godfrey, Emira makes clear that her
daughter's education is now in the hands of her marital successor, and she makes a specific request about the way Louisa should raise her daughter:

Love her, LOUISA – love her – I implore,
When lost EMIRA – wounds thy peace no more!
Oh! gently foster in her opening youth,
The seeds of virtue – honour – faith – and truth,
For thy EUGENIO’s sake! – who gave her birth,
And gave – I trust – the temper of his worth! (146)

However, despite its tonal similarities to *Pamela*, in this scene Seward makes a move that distinguishes her narrative from Richardson’s. She skirts the dangerous ambiguity of Sally Godfrey’s letter—that is, the dangerous ambiguity of text—by replacing it with the abject female body. Unlike Sally Godfrey, Emira does not linger on the colonial periphery of the plot; her narrative comes to a clear and explicit end. Seward vividly paints the scene of Emira's death: “Now roll the eyes in fierce and restless gaze! / Now on their wildness steals the ghastly glaze! / Till o’er her form the shadowy horrors spread / The dim suffusion that involves the DEAD” (147). Just as her body with its colonial and sexual associations forms the site of her corruption, it is Emira’s body on which we read the final closure of her tale.

Seward and many of her contemporaries were troubled by the effects of fiction on readers, young female readers in particular. In transforming the novel into verse, then, I would argue that *Louisa* also attempts to excise what Seward perceived as the novel’s potential for moral ambiguity. This sense of ambiguity is palpable in *Pamela II*. For example, in Letter 9 Lady Davers asserts that she is “very glad” Mr. B informed Pamela of his affair with Sally Godfrey, and orders her: “give us an Account of the Manner in which he did it, and of thy Thoughts upon it; for that is a critical Case; and according as he has represented it, so shall I know what to say of it before you and him: For I would
not make Mischief between you for the World” (3: 47). Clearly, Pamela’s knowledge of Sally Godfrey is limited to Mr. B’s potentially inaccurate or incomplete representation of the affair, which Lady Davers wants to avoid rupturing by accidentally revealing something Mr. B excluded. Thus the novel points to the questionable means by which such narratives are constructed and assigned determinate power. Mr. B’s version of the affair is the final and authoritative version, which Pamela has no choice but to accept. In *Pamela*, Mr. B. asserts, “And so, you see, Pamela, that in the whole Story on both sides, the Truth is as much preserv’d as possible” (483)—a troubling claim Pamela is eager to support, immediately asserting, “I am glad she is so happy at last!” (483). Pamela repeats this refrain several times in the novel’s concluding pages, as though repetition endows it with the power of truth. Nonetheless, the ambiguities that surround the “whole Story” of Sally Godfrey are difficult to escape.

*Louisa* makes even more explicit the didactic messages of both *Pamela* and *Roxana* while excising their potential ambiguity. In Defoe’s and Richardson’s texts, Roxana and Sally Godfrey’s ultimate ends remain somewhat unknown: although we know that Roxana experiences what she calls the “Blast of Heaven” (267), the specifics of this punishment are left to our imaginations; we know Sally Godfrey has been forced out of England, but she remains alive—and, indeed, remarried—at the end of the *Pamela II*. By contrast, Seward draws her domestic narrative to a finite conclusion: death for what Fay calls the “Oriental serpent woman” Emira, and marital happiness for Louisa and Eugenio.44 Seward thus locates a twofold anxiety in Emira: anxiety about the colonial encounter and anxiety about the moral work of literature and of the novel in particular. She uses Emira’s death to resolve both dilemmas.

44 Fay, “Reading *Louisa,*” 132.
As she expresses a number of times in her *Letters*, the verse form signified cultural permanency to Seward. With this idea in mind, I would argue that for Seward, transferring novelistic characters to a poetic text is a form of domestication: that is, a process of transforming a genre that she considered unstable and morally dangerous into one that is stable, apprehendable, and permanently valuable. Frequently skeptical about its artistic merit, Seward mentions only a handful of novels in the six volumes of her published correspondence. She exhibits discomfort with the novel and investment in poetry beginning in her earliest literary production: a series of 39 letters written when she was between the ages of 19 and 25, addressed to an imaginary correspondent named Emma. At this early stage in her career Seward was already self-conscious about her literary persona and composing nascent literary criticism.\(^{45}\) In a letter to Emma dated October 1762, Seward describes herself as having a heightened sensibility, one with —a very different foundation from the giddy violence of novel-reading misses, who plighted their first-sight friendships with solemn earnestness, because they think it pretty and becoming to have plighted friendships.\(^{46}\) In other words, Seward associates the novel with flightiness and with false ideas about the world—or, perhaps, with young women’s failure to properly value their relationships. Referring to Jean Jacques Rousseau’s epistolary novel *Julia, or the New Heloise* (1761), she entreats Emma: —You talked of

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\(^{45}\) Early biographers such as Ashmun have repeated the claim that Seward’s parents forbade her to write poetry at the age of 16, possibly because her father (also an aspiring poet) felt jealous of her talent, and that Seward complied with this request. As recently as 1999, this claim was repeated in a scholarly edition of selected poems and letters. In her introduction to *Bluestocking Feminism*, vol. 4, *Anna Seward*, Kelly asserts, —Seward was encouraged to take up more conventional pursuits and she did so with, apparently, no ill-feeling” (xi). Even if this scenario were true, Barnard’s recent critical biography of Seward makes it clear that she had not ceased to write. In fact, Seward continued to write prolifically.

\(^{46}\) *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence*, ed. Walter Scott, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1810), 3: xlvii.
reading the New Eloisa; throw it aside, I beseech you.”⁴⁷ This aversion to prose fiction recurs throughout the letters Seward composed and revised as an adult.⁴⁸

The few novels that she praises, such as Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), are clearly positioned as exceptions to the rule. In part, it is the newness of the novel that incurs Seward’s aversion. In her estimation, the novel is of the present, with no concern for history or posterity because it has no historical precedent: “I read not, neither doubtless do you, the Novel trash of this day,” she writes in 1794 (*Letters* 3: 389). By contrast, Seward declares, there is nothing “more unfashionable” (*Letters* 1: 172) than poetry. In a letter to her friend the poet and biographer William Hayley, she sharply declares, “The contemptible rage for novel-reading, is a pernicious and deplorable prevalent taste, which

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⁴⁷ Ibid., 3: xlviii.

⁴⁸ In 1780, following the acclaim she received upon the publication of *Elegy on Captain Cook*, Seward determined that her correspondence would constitute her literary legacy and began rewriting her letters, copying them into letter books meant for future publication. Barnard suggests that Seward carefully assembled them to construct a rounded persona for herself,” *A Constructed Life*, 9. The views expressed in her published correspondence were unfortunately altered by those to whom she entrusted their care. Many of the letters originally meant for publication were posthumously excluded by Sir Walter Scott, Seward’s literary executor, and Archibald Constable, the Scottish publisher to whom she left her meticulously edited correspondence. Scott and Constable removed any content that they perceived as anecdotal, gossipy, or overly critical of the literary establishment (Constable in particular was thus concerned). Some letters were discarded outright, others excised of their potentially subversive content. Barnard examines this previously unpublished correspondence and does much to deepen our knowledge of Seward’s career and to correct long-standing misconceptions about her life.

Even in their altered state, Seward’s letters constitute her major contribution to literary criticism, and she uses them as a platform from which to express her thoughts about poetry, authors, and (less frequently) novels. Choosing the epistolary form for her literary legacy allowed Seward to avoid the potential charge of vanity associated with writing one’s memoirs or publishing one’s journal. It also softened Seward’s claim to cultural authority, as the letter was a “private” genre, in contrast to the essay, pamphlet, or other form meant for publication. In the letters themselves, Seward employs a number of strategies to assert her opinions without seeming assertive (as it were). For example, in her juvenile letters, Seward uses the somewhat awkward device of pretending to answer a question Emma has posed (“You asked...” etc.) as a means to elaborate on subjects of interest to her without appearing audacious. Barnard also suggests that Seward likely returned to these juvenile letters later in life, as she began preparing her literary legacy, and expanded on particular scenes or episodes: “he added a mature perspective to a collection of youthful anecdotes by fleshing out her thoughts with sophisticated literary critiques and philosophical musings,” *A Constructed Life*, 9. Barnard maintains that an unmistakable strain of didacticism infuses Seward’s letters to Emma, which has the effect of placing Seward in a traditionally masculine position of reason, rationality, and authority. These early assertions of literary authority point to Seward’s later confidence in approaching and reimagining familiar texts and established literary forms such as the novel. The troublesome gender implications of doing so also persist.
vitiates and palls the appetite for literary food of a more nutritive and wholesome kind” (*Letters* 2: 319). With these food metaphors in mind, Seward’s suggestion that the novel is —sweet poison for the age’s tooth” is provocative: it calls to mind the concepts of pleasure, consumption, corruption, and rot; it suggests competing desires. In writing a poetical novel,” by contrast, Seward imagined herself producing literary food meant for nourishment, continuation, and sustenance, rather than mere transitory satisfaction.

By extension, the poetical novel domesticates the sexual discourse of empire by endowing this discourse with a sense of cultural permanency, even inevitability. To understand how *Louisa* accomplishes this work, William C. Dowling’s analysis of the eighteenth-century verse epistle is illuminating. Dowling highlights this genre’s compensatory role, for writers such as Alexander Pope, in challenging the crisis of what Marx would later deem the “blind or impersonal [capitalist] system” emerging in the eighteenth century, and in aligning their own ethical stance with permanent value. The verse epistle accomplishes this task, Dowling suggests, by allowing the reader to eavesdrop on the “otherwise private world of civilized discourse and high ethical concern” shared by letter writer and addressee.49 The elevated poetic discourse of the verse epistle makes this —private world” seem to exist autonomously; it presents the epistolary world as timeless and universal, opposed to the self-interested and unstable world of capitalism and modernity. Moreover, Dowling contends that the eighteenth-century verse epistle responds to the crisis of Lockean solipsism—that is, the notion that the world exists only as a series of fleeting individual impressions, with no sustainable or stable reality” available for us to access—by making permanent not only the

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individual's (the letter-writer's) perception of the world, but also the community of which s/he is a part. The letter-writer being only one half of the poetic situation, the addressee must, necessarily, exist: the demands of the genre make it so.\(^50\)

Importantly, the "private world" of Louisa's verse epistles does not oppose the capitalist and imperialist system taking hold at this time. Rather, these epistles stabilize and authorize this world and resolve its sexual and financial crises. The ethical stance that these epistles uphold explicitly celebrates the death of a woman who signifies the colonial world. Louisa thus legitimizes the novel's imperialist discourse even as it undermines the novel's cultural value. The very poetic situation of Louisa links the domestic and the colonial, as each letter addresses Emma, Louisa's friend in the East Indies. At the beginning of the first epistle Louisa imagines Emma's residence: —HEE, EMMA, four slow circling years have seen / Press, with thy pensive foot, savannas green; / Seen thee ... / Wind round the shadowy rock, and shelving glade, / Where broad Bananas stretch their grateful shade" (99). We are asked to consider Emma's body—her pensive foot and longing eyes—and are given vivid details of the territory surrounding her before we meet any of the main actors in Louisa's English domestic drama. The colonial setting preempts the domestic. The introductory image of Emma also fuses the East Indian setting to the performance of filial duty:

\(^50\) The verse epistle also offered great freedom for innovation, as Bill Overton suggests, because its subject matter is unrestricted. Many kinds of poems may be written as epistles ... the style and tone will vary as widely as the subject.” Overton, “The Verse Epistle,” in A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry, ed. Christine Gerrard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 417. A great variety of verse epistles were composed in the eighteenth century, by both men and women, though the form itself has suffered critical neglect because many of those who wrote verse epistles are now obscure. Overton outlines the various forms and themes such epistles took up and identifies Samuel Whyte’s Peruvian Letters (1772) as an example of the verse epistle taking on a "broadly narrative basis,” arguing that the Peruvian Letters constitute a rare attempt to reclaim for verse the territory occupied so successfully by epistolary prose fiction after the appearance of Richardson’s Pamela in 1740” (Ibid., 421). Overton neglects Louisa in this survey of the genre, though it too encroaches on the territory staked out by Richardson and makes use of the conventions Richardson helped establish.
Now, as with filial care thy light step roves,
Through India’s palmy plains, and spicy groves,
To bless thee, exil’d thus in youth’s gay prime,
May sprightly health resist the torrid clime,
Temper the sickly blast, the fever’d ray,
And peace, and pleasure, lead the shining day! (99)

This description subtly aligns disease and death with the exotic “spicy groves” of India, and it is in service to her family that Emma subjects herself to this corrupting climate at the height of “youth’s gay prime.” With no further explanation as to the circumstances that brought Emma to the Indies, Seward swiftly redirects our attention to Louisa as she begins to relay her tale of disappointed love. The Indian setting is replaced with the English, as Louisa paints a picture of “ENGLAND’s fading scene,” an autumnal scene where sickly yellow stains the vivid green” (99-100).

At first glance, then, Emma and her East Indian setting seem incidental, even tangential, in their swift dismissal. However, there is nothing tangential about either the Eastern setting or the woman residing there. Rather, the swift move from the East to the West in this opening vignette introduces the many levels on which Louisa fuses domesticity, femininity, and empire—that is, the many levels on which it domesticates colonial discourse, both formally and thematically. Louisa’s “private world,” to use Dowling’s terms, is the colonial contact zone, which thus becomes a natural element of the nation.

Though they appear very different in scope and concern, Louisa and Elegy on Captain Cook ultimately perform the same task for two very different facets of the British imperial imagination of the late eighteenth century. Louisa establishes the authority of British domesticity over the luxury and licentiousness associated with the East, while Elegy on Captain Cook does so over the presumably savage and uncivilized inhabitants.
of the New World. And like Cook’s sentimental tear in the *Elegy*, the domestic bliss achieved at *Louisa*’s conclusion omits the actual operations of the Empire and the imbalances of power on which it depends. *Louisa* ends with Louisa and Eugenio’s joyful union, which Louisa describes to Emma: “As spring’s fair morn, with calm, and dewy light, Breaks through the weary, long, and stormy night, / So now, as through the vale of life we stray, / The STAR of JOY relumes, and leads us on our way!” (147-148). This celebratory conclusion follows closely on the heels of Emira’s ghastly death, her “rigid lip, and faltering tongue, / The stiffening spasm, the suffocating breath” (146). In essence, Emira’s death is subsumed by Louisa and Eugenio’s conjugal triumph: the “dreary silence of the tomb” is immediately followed, in the succeeding line, by Louisa’s command that Emma “rejoice with me” (147). We must look beyond this assumption of conjugal bliss to its political and imperial implications. Berman reminds us:

> [G]endered images and models of domestic life were crucial for domestic fiction’s project of thinking through the moral and geographic boundaries of the modern nation-state and its government ... [W]e must suspend our own preconceptions of what is “domestic” and what is not before we can fully comprehend the political interventions of domestic fiction. This means hesitating to sort “domestic” concerns from “political” or “colonial” matters, and halting before we isolate “domestic” from “foreign” literatures as well.

Louisa indicates the inseparability of domesticity from ideas about foreignness and otherness in late eighteenth-century literature, even (or especially) in texts that avow no interest in these issues. It also reminds us that literature played an important part in “thinking through” the nation’s boundaries and in determining who belonged on the inside.

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51 Berman, *Creole Crossings*, 190, 191.
Louisa’s sexual and colonial binary maintains its salience in women’s novels written in direct response to the French Revolution. These novels, such as those by Jane West that I examine in the next chapter, also elide the mechanisms of colonization by focusing on moral tales of fathers, daughters, and suitors. These narratives succeed in making the Empire commonplace and bear out Hall and Rose’s claim: “The trope of the family naturalises social hierarchies and helped to foster the domestication of Britain’s imperial relations on the home front. In other words, the homely terms of family helped to make empire ordinary and a part of everyday life.”52 The very ordinariness of the Empire in domestic literature requires that we make the familiar strange—that we investigate the full implications of the “dim suffusion” of death for women like Emira who stand in for the colonial world.

52 Hall and Rose, *At Home With the Empire*, 27.
CHAPTER TWO
Jane West, the Domestic Ideal, and the Perils of Empire

Though born in London, where she lived for her first eleven years, Jane West (1758-1852) spent the majority of her life in the English countryside. Married to Thomas West, a farmer and a tradesman, she raised her children and cultivated a prolific career as a writer while residing in the rural village of Little Bowden. West often referred to herself as a "simple country girl" and a "village maid."¹ One of her better known poems, "To the Hon. Mrs. C-----e" (1791), reflects this self-conscious bucolic image: "You said the author was a charmer, / Self-taught, and married to a farmer. / Who wrote all kinds of verse with ease, / Made pies and puddings frocks and cheese. / … Her conversation spoke a mind / Studious to please, but unrefined."² This image of the simple farmer's wife, minding her duties at home while also answering the call of her pen, was an important part of West's authorial persona. A letter published in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1802, for example, describes West in these terms: "As a wife, mother, daughter and a farmer's wife, she is an example to be held up to every female."³ This writer goes on to praise West for the butter and cheese she makes in her dairy and for her devoted attention to the minutiae of life on

¹ Marilyn Wood, Studious to Please: A Profile of Jane West, an Eighteenth-Century Author (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 1, 9. Wood's profile of West is the source of most of our biographical knowledge of her, along with Pamela Lloyd's excellent Jane West: A Critical Biography (Diss. Brandeis University, 1997).

² This poem first appeared in Jane West, Miscellaneous Poems, and a Tragedy (York, 1791), 115-21.

³ Qtd. in Wood, Studious to Please, 61.
a farm. West was anxious that her career as a writer not seem to take precedence over her
domestic life, once writing, “My needle always claims the pre-eminence of my pen.”

Scholars of West’s fiction tend to take the author at her word, ascribing primarily
domestic motivations, narrowly defined, to West’s politically interested novels, such as
*The Advantages of Education, or, The History of Maria Williams* (1793), *A Gossip’s
Story and a Legendary Tale* (1796), and *A Tale of the Times* (1799). Like other women
writers of the 1790s West turned to writing novels to add her voice to public debates over
individual rights and governance of the body politic in the wake of the French
Revolution. What did it mean to West to write on behalf of her nation in this tumultuous
political climate? The critical consensus is that West wrote for and about women: wives,
daughters, grandmothers, and spinsters all occupy central roles in her novels. Critics
contend that West and other so-called conservative writers—such as Hannah More and
Elizabeth Hamilton—reinforced British patriarchy as a necessary social institution and
upheld the father as a kind of divine monarch requiring female allegiance. West, in
particular, outlined the proper education of daughters, warned her readers about the
dangers of sentimental fiction, and argued for the importance of filial duty to the
maintenance of the domestic sphere. Women like More and West are often set up in

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4 Qtd. in Wood, *Studious to Please*, 57.

5 In her *Critical Biography*, Lloyd argues that West thought of herself as a poet first and turned to
writing novels specifically in response to contemporary social issues. She claims, “Almost everything that
has been written about Jane West has focused on her novels. … But Jane West’s early ambition was to be a
serious poet,” iv-v.

6 West scholarship largely focuses on West’s anti-Jacobitism following the French Revolution and
on her apparently rigid and conservative constructions of gender. For example, M. O. Grenby includes *A
Gossip’s Story* among a list of novels that displayed “zealous anti-Jacobitism,” *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British
Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 197. See
also Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution*. Johnson argues: “The novels and conduct books by Hannah
More and Jane West advance the strictest programs for female subordination and the most repressive
standards of female propriety to counteract the influence of progressive ideas about women,” *Women,*
contrast to "radical" women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, though this kind of polarizing discussion oversimplifies the concerns each woman writer addressed. My aim in this chapter is to deepen the discussion of West's fictional and non-fictional work by examining two of her novels, *The Advantages of Education* and *A Gossip's Story*, and her critically neglected book-length poem *The Mother*, as instruments of imperial domesticity. In each of these texts, West domesticates the Empire in a parental figure and her or his relationships with their children. Each illustrates the moral dangers associated with the Empire while offering implicit and explicit support for imperialism.

In *The Advantages of Education*, West feminizes British imperial authority in the novel's maternal figure, Amelia Williams. Through Mrs. Williams, West teaches her young female reader that she is responsible for the moral health of her nation and its

Politics, and the Novel, 16. Johnson's reading of West's fiction in many ways typifies early critical responses to West and other so called "conservative" women writing in the 1790s. More recent scholarship, however, accords West a greater degree of nuance, especially in her portrayal of patriarchal figures. For example, Caroline Gonda suggests that "many novels in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [including *A Gossip's Story]* ... present fathers who have failed to make proper material provision for their daughters ... their impotence given bodily form by sickness and death," *Reading Daughters' Fictions 1709-1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175. Lloyd similarly sees West questioning patriarchal power, emphasizing the number of patriarchal figures who die in West's novels (including Mr. Dudley in *A Gossip's Story*), in *A Critical Biography*, 5-8.

West's narrative techniques have also received critical attention. For example, Patricia Meyer Spacks examines the position of Prudentia Homespun, West's narrator in *A Gossip's Story* and four other novels, claiming that "the gossip ... typifies the novelist" because the gossip "functions explicitly as the originator of compelling fictions," *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 181. Similarly, Anna Uddén deconstructs the narrator's position in *A Gossip's Story* and argues that "Jane West's construction of a narrative voice ... is not only to be seen as a struggle for discursive authority; she also questions the premises of such authority and redefines them by her practice," *Veils of Irony: The Development of Narrative Technique in Women's Novels of the 1790s* (Uppsala: S. Academiae Upsaliensis, 1998), 71. For a discussion of West and the romance genre, see Mary Anne Schofield, *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Disguising Romances in Feminine Fiction, 1713-1799* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990).

Empire. As the head of her household, responsible for her daughter's education, Mrs. Williams presides over the home in both domestic and colonial contexts. She follows her husband to the West Indies and imposes “a degree of order and oeconomy” and “enforce[s] at least the appearance of decorum” in the morally compromised planter society that threatens his well being. Her imposition of order is a form of domestication, a taming of the disorder associated with plantation culture. Furthermore, in Mrs. Williams's education of her daughter Maria, West shows the efficacy of historical narratives in explaining or justifying imperialism. Studying the development of previous civilizations—for example, the Roman Empire—allowed eighteenth-century Britons to articulate their own progress narratives—to understand how and why their society developed and their empire expanded in particular ways, or to justify or explain that expansion. History provided a discourse through which Britons understood their position in a world of nations. According to the historical model by which Mrs. Williams educates Maria, Britain’s position is one of enlightenment and essential difference from the savagery of the New World. In other words, the subject of history teaches Maria Williams the hierarchical model of international relations used to account for colonial rule into the nineteenth century. Crucially, this education takes place in the home, which becomes a site of imperial significance.

West elaborates the imperial significance of maternity and domesticity in The Mother. However, The Mother takes these discourses further and directly advocates the spread of Empire as a vehicle for spreading Christianity. The poem emphasizes a religious narrative that many of West’s contemporaries associated with imperialism. This

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poem also elaborates several of the key anxieties West links to the Empire in *The Advantages of Education*. Specifically, it illustrates the difficult circumstances in which women find themselves when their husbands or sons leave home to serve the Empire, as well as the risk of masculine moral decay that accompanies the pursuit of wealth.

*A Gossip’s Story* enacts these anxieties about masculinity and moral stability in the death of its patriarchal figure, Mr. Dudley, a plantation owning merchant who loses and eventually regains his fortune in transatlantic trade. *A Gossip’s Story* presents a nuanced and complicated picture of what the Empire meant at this time, explicitly supporting British overseas trade while acknowledging the precarious nature of a transatlantic empire. The novel domesticates the Empire in the relationship between a father and his daughters. As West outlines in the preface, *A Gossip’s Story* upholds —CONSISTENCY, FORTITUDE, and the DOMESTICK VIRTUES,” and intends to —afford instruction, as well as amusement to the younger part of the female world.”

As part of this project, the novel advocates a young woman’s loyalty to her plantation-owning father. As critics have noted, the patriarchal figure stood as a symbol of state authority in the fiction of this period and —the family and the state were analogous bodies.” Wood claims that in the 1790s femininity —was intimately tied to the preservation of the state, the family, and the national church.” Guest suggests that women writers such as West —more or less explicitly represent the condition of women as

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the key to the moral and political condition of the national culture.”\textsuperscript{12} If young women represent the English subject in the didactic fiction of this period, the father figure representing state authority, West’s portrayal of these characters in \textit{A Gossip’s Story} against the backdrop of Britain’s Caribbean colonies alters the way we understand the national culture she promotes. \textit{A Gossip’s Story}’s overt message—the importance of filial duty—urges the female reader not just to be a good daughter but to be a good daughter of the British Empire.

\textbf{The Morality of History: The Advantages of Education}

\textit{The Advantages of Education} tells the story of the young Maria Williams, introduced as an \textit{amiable unaffected girl, who, to all the enthusiasm of youthful innocence, united all its impetuosity and inexperience” (1: 7). Sent to boarding school at a young age when \textit{[p]ecuniary distress” (1: 7) forces her parents to leave England for the West Indies, Maria spends her earliest years receiving an inconsistent education at the hands of her governess, Mrs. DuPont, with whom \textit{she was whipped one day for what she was caressed the next” (1: 9). Upon the death of her father, Maria is reunited with her mother, Amelia Williams, who removes Maria from boarding school in order to educate her at home. The remainder of the novel illustrates this education, while also charting the shifting tides of friendship between Maria and her youthful companion Charlotte Raby, Maria’s courtship by the rakish Sir Henry Neville, and her eventual marriage to the worthy Mr. Herbert. Throughout these episodes, West’s narrator in this and five other novels—a spinster named Prudentia Homespun, who sometimes stops to \textit{adjust my spectacles, stroke my cat, or take a pinch of snuff” (1: 214)—pauses the narrative in order

\textsuperscript{12} Guest, “Hannah More and Conservative Feminism,” 159.
to elaborate its moral messages. In the preface to the novel, West states that her purpose is to "enstruct, rather than to entertain" the inexperienced part of her own sex" (1: n.p).

She also suggests that her female readers’ sphere is limited: "She wishes to convince them, that it is but seldom that they will be called to perform high acts of heroic excellence, but that they will be daily required to exert those humble duties and social virtues, wherein the chief part of our merit and our happiness consists" (1: n.p.). Despite this caveat, which separates women from heroism and from excellence, the novel illustrates the crucial role women play in maintaining social stability.

The West Indies are an important backdrop in this novel and its discourse on women’s education, for it is in the West Indies that the domestic Englishwoman emerges as a moral compass. This role is revealed in the narrative of Maria’s father, whose story Mrs. Williams relays to Maria in volume 2. At the beginning of the novel, Maria knows nothing of her father, from whom she had been separated at too early a period, to retain

13 Several critics have examined the role of Prudentia Homespun in this and West’s other novels and used Prudentia to consider West’s complicated stance toward authorship and the eighteenth-century literary marketplace. For example, Lloyd argues, "From the first, West explores the nature of the novelist through Prudentia"; Lloyd contends that West uses Prudentia’s frequent interruptions of the narrative to emphasize that what the reader is doing is reading a fiction, not experiencing a second-hand reality" (Critical Biography, 106, 109). In a similar vein, Daniel Schierenbeck suggests that Amelia Williams and Prudentia mirror one another in providing "narrative commentary." —Reason and Romance: Rethinking Romantic-Era Fiction Through Jane West’s The Advantages of Education,” in Miriam L. Wallace, ed., Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750-1832 (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 80. Prudentia helps the reader understand the novel’s moral messages, and Amelia Williams helps Maria elucidate the morality of the historical texts she reads; both assist the reader. Taking this argument further, Schofield suggests that Prudentia’s continued interruptions of the narrative work to "[destroy] the illusion that a novel exists," part of West’s project of dismantling the romance genre (Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind, 183). David Thame focuses on the literary marketplace and contends that West employed Prudentia as a device for navigating the moral dilemmas posed by being a woman novelist. West and Prudentia form the "good sister/bad sister" binary that critics, such as Ty in Empowering the Feminine, have identified in West's fictional characters. Prudentia, an unreliable gossip and the "bad sister," serves up the scandalous fictions meant to indulge public taste for sentimental novels, allowing West to stand apart from such questionable plots as the morally-virtuous "good sister" and author. Prudentia, Thame contends, "as a satire on the impious rival novelists whom West sought to displace and simultaneously a cover-story authorizing experiments with alternative fictional recipes," "Cooking Up a Story: Jane West, Prudentia Homespun, and the Consumption of Fiction," Eighteenth-Century Fiction 16, no. 2 (2004): 232.
the least recollection of him” (1: 7). He remains a shadowy presence throughout the novel's first half; Maria knows only that "[a]s to her father, it was universally agreed, that he was a great villain, but particulars were never enlarged upon" (1: 9). His absence and the villainy surrounding his reputation are part of what places the matriarchal figure in a position of moral authority. Amelia first meets Mr. Williams while living with her friends Mr. and Mrs. Brereton, with whom she is forced to live following the death of her own father. In Amelia's first interview with Mr. Williams, she relays that he "addressed me in that gay style of passionate adulation, which I knew was always significant of licentious designs” (2: 110). Licentiousness and predatory sexual behavior are immediately linked to Mr. Williams’s character, even though he swiftly desists when Mrs. Williams bursts into tears.

West links Mr. Williams's sexual licentiousness to his desire for wealth, and connects both of these negative qualities to his association with the Empire. Mr. Williams is a merchant who surrounds himself with "base flatterers,” and he is "[i]nitiated by these miscreants into an early course of dissipation” (2: 111) which is heightened during his subsequent emigration to the West Indies. West first construes wealth negatively with regard to Mrs. Williams's early married life: she spends the first years of her marriage to Mr. Williams forming superficial social connections with those who "seemed the flattering followers of fortune” (2: 125), experiencing "every pleasure dissipation could bestow” (2: 126). The Williams' early wealth evaporates when Mr. Williams discovers the pleasures of the gaming table, and he eventually disappears when their home is repossessed by creditors. Maria is born in the midst of these dire circumstances. Following her birth, Mrs. Williams receives what she describes as "a wild incoherent
letter” (2: 130) from Mr. Williams, who informs her that he has landed in prison for his debts. Eventually leaving debtors’ prison, Mr. Williams emigrates to his estate in the
West Indies, which, Mrs. Williams describes, —now appeared to us an exhaustible mine, though formerly, from its insignificance, it was overlooked in the redundance of our possessions” (2: 134). The Indies (and, more broadly, the British Empire) appear to offer financial rescue and appear to supply stability to the domestic scene.

However, the Indies are ultimately the site at which patriarchal authority and domestic stability come undone, necessitating Mrs. Williams's moral intervention. The villainy attributed to Mr. Williams early in the novel is heightened in his absence. During the period of his separation from his wife, he sends letters offering a variety of excuses as to why Mrs. Williams cannot come to the Indies herself. These letters construct a shadowy aura around his activities: “There was always some vague excuse, and some distant scheme held forth to amuse my anxious wishes” (2: 136). This period of separation lasts for seven years, and Mrs. Williams’s anxiety comes to a head when she receives a letter from her friend Mrs. Herbert, who resides in the Indies with her husband. She entreats Mrs. Williams to come to the Indies at once, offering a somewhat ambiguous rationale for this entreaty, and Mrs. Williams complies, telling Maria, “From a hint in Mrs. Herbert’s letter, I expected to find Mr. Williams’s affairs in extreme disorder” (2: 139). Mrs. Williams demurs from bringing Maria to the West Indies, claiming that she —felt alike unwilling to expose your constitution to the baleful influences of the climate, or your tender mind to be vitiated by the no less pernicious examples of pride, cruelty, and luxury, which is unhappily prevalent in a spot, where there is too great distinction in the human species” (2: 143). West associates a litany of negative qualities with the
Caribbean colonies and suggests that they would undermine her daughter's physical and moral development.

The wildness and incoherence of Mr. Williams's letter reflects the presumed wildness of West Indian society. Upon her arrival in the colonies, Mrs. Williams first meets her friend Mrs. Herbert, who describes Mr. Williams's circumstances:

His faults ... are no more than the common vices of the island. The planters, generally speaking, countenance each other in irregularities, at which an English libertine would blush. The redundant fertility of these tropical climes, and the bad habits which slavery introduces, are not favourable to the cause of virtue. The lord of the soil, accustomed to the mean subservience of those around him, who think themselves honoured by being made the instruments of his crimes, soon overcomes every restraint of conscience, and pleads example to conceal, if not to extenuate his fault. (2: 140-41)

Though West obscures the subject, this passage is about sex. The "irregularities" in which Mr. Williams engages are "common" among the planters and are attributable to the West Indian climate, which West's contemporaries associated with sex for several reasons. West refers to the "redundant fertility" of the tropics and invokes the contemporary perception that climate is directly linked to national character. Roxann Wheeler points out that as trading networks expanded, Britons encountered people who "organized their societies quite differently from Europeans."\textsuperscript{14} As a result, eighteenth-century philosophers theorized links between climate, economic structure, government, race, and religion in order to explain these cultural differences and to offer evidence of European superiority. A foundational text in this school of thought, Adam Ferguson's \textit{Essay on the History of Civil Society} (1767), charts what Nussbaum deems "the geography of sexual desire" in the eighteenth century—that is, the idea that human

sexuality (and, more broadly, cultural identity) is linked to geography. According to Ferguson, hot climates—the so-called "torrid zones"—are naturally inclined toward sexual freedom and are governed by the human passions, by "burning ardours" and "torturing jealousies" rather than rational thought and civil government. West invokes this school of thought and links Mr. Williams's residence in the West Indies to his descent into libertinism.

Furthermore, while West indicts the planters' sexually licentious behavior, which is modeled and even encouraged by the plantation manager (or the "lord of the soil"), she refuses to openly acknowledge or to represent this behavior. She suggests that slavery introduces "bad habits," but these seem to have nothing directly to do with the ownership of human beings. Rather, the system of slavery threatens the "cause of virtue."

Eighteenth-century plantation culture had particular associations with supplying goods to satisfy English desire—chiefly, sugar. Men in the West Indies could satisfy other kinds of desires as well and were known for keeping mistresses among the local population. As Hall puts it, "England was for families, Jamaica was for sex." West never directly states that Mr. Williams keeps a mistress or engages in sex with another woman, yet this possibility resides just below the surface of this description. Just what are the "irregularities" in which he participates, at which even a libertine would blush? West retreats from answering this question and leaves unrepresented the actual behaviors of Englishmen in the colonies. The novel thus enacts one important means of domesticating

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16 Qtd. in Ibid., 9.


18 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 72.
the Empire, which recurs throughout the literature of this period: the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of the colonies, a status that acknowledges their existence while veiling their actual operations.

West introduces the ordering power of the domestic Englishwoman into this disorderly West Indian society, a role she thus upholds as crucial for her young female readers. Upon arriving in the West Indies, Mrs. Williams exerts a civilizing influence over her husband, having quickly discovered that “the necessity of my presence was but too evident” (2: 143). She introduces “a degree of order and oeconomy” (2: 144) to plantation society, and relays that “my presence restrained open profligacy, and enforced at least the appearance of decorum” (2: 144). As these examples illustrate, West aligns English femininity with moral order: Mrs. Williams embodies the domestic ideologies—order, economy, and decorum—necessary to the home and, by extension, to the nation. These concepts stand in stark contrast to the vice, irregularity, and lack of restraint associated with the West Indies. In effect, Mrs. Williams’s imposition of order feminizes imperial authority: Mrs. Williams embodies what Kaplan describes as “the extension of female influence outward to civilize the foreign.”¹⁹ West shows the usefulness of female domesticity in not only a national but an imperial context.

Moreover, in describing the methods whereby Mrs. Williams educates Maria, West reminds her female readers that their national duties begin in the home. *The Advantages of Education* upholds the idea that women should be educated with due attention to their moral and intellectual capacities, as opposed to an education focused on superficial notions of female “refinement” such as dress, dancing, and drawing. Critics generally agree that the novel promotes women’s capacity for rational thinking and the

importance of developing their ability to govern their emotions. As such, it has much in common with the educational philosophy of those women writers often positioned as radical in contrast to West’s conservatism. For example, Lloyd suggests that West uses Wollstonecraft’s *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) — almost as a blueprint” for *The Advantages of Education*, particularly in West’s advocacy of the idea that “the purpose of [women’s] education was to instill virtue and that its nature should be, most essentially, a moral one.”

Schierenbeck also compares the novel with several of Wollstonecraft’s educational treatises, and contends that both West and Wollstonecraft emphasize the importance of reason to female virtue and to the exercise of women’s social duties, and that both writers promote a realistic, anti-romantic ideology. Such arguments highlight the inherent limitation of merely placing West and Wollstonecraft in a simplistic binary.

The cornerstone of Maria’s education is the study of history. During a home history lesson, Mrs. Williams tells Maria: “I have been thinking ... that a work very serviceable to young people might be formed, entitled the Morality of History” (1: 169), because historical narrative might teach young people to “rectify their conduct” (1: 170).

As Devoney Looser notes, historical texts were increasingly included in women’s educational curricula in the eighteenth century: history was believed to provide lessons of the past (whether negative or positive), taking on a powerful conduct book force.”


21 Some attention has been given to the didactic role of history in Maria’s education. For example, Schierenbeck points out that as West portrays it, “history is no more a narrative of real events’ than fiction, but has to be constructed with a providential plotline, just as West constructs her novel” (—*Reason and Romance*” 80). The second part of the novel’s complete title, *The History of Maria Williams*, highlights this overlap between novelistic and historical discourse. Lloyd argues that the “masculine” education Maria receives via her history lessons teach her values such as [p]atriotism, firmness of virtue, independence, [and] integrity,” which Lloyd suggests were not typically considered part of a woman’s education at this time (*Critical Biography* 143).
idea that historical writing was — a form superior to novels and romances earned it a high ranking among British females' educational subjects throughout the century.”

Maria's study of history, then, was typical of her time. Classical history is the subject from which Maria derives most of her lessons. For example, disappointed that her mother will not allow her to attend a masquerade, Maria "took up the Roman History" (1: 54) and reads the story of Regulus, whose "self-denying virtue" and "fortitude" (1: 54) inspire her to act in a similar fashion. At first merely imitating Regulus, Maria finds that she authentically begins to feel the sentiments she affects: "Elevated by these exalted ideas, she soon felt the calmness she at first only assumed" (1: 55). Mrs. Williams introduces this classical history with the ultimate goal of teaching Maria to perform her part in [the world] with consistency and comfort” (1: 40).

———. Devoney Looser, British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 16, 17. In The Advantages of Education, West offers history as a replacement for the novel—as a form of entertainment with no overt political implications. West points out that although the historical texts Mrs. Williams offers Maria do not offer the same degree of amusement and were not so much "addressed to the passions," they "bear the stamp of truth" (1: 41), a property much more important to her aim of teaching Maria moral duty. In the preface to the novel, Prudentia declares, —it is my intention to explode those notions which novel reading in general produces, by delineating human life in false colours, expectations are formed which can never be realized" (1: 3). Much of Maria’s education is driven by the same goal of exploding fictional expectations, and reading history is supposed to effectively ground her education in truth.

———. Pam Perkins examines the importance of classical history to both men’s and women’s education in the eighteenth century. Specifically, she examines the gender-based expectations such an education was supposed to provide. For young men, Perkins contends, —Roman history was inescapably connected to contemporary politics in the eighteenth-century British view, and there was a clear sense that the main lesson that boys would gain from it was the knowledge of how to be a right-minded, active citizen,” —Too Classical for a Female Pen'? Late Eighteenth-Century Women Reading and Writing Classical History,” Clio 33, no. 3 (2004): 247. Having no direct role in the public sphere, young women had a much more problematic relationship to classical history. Reading history was supposed to be superior to reading novels, and for bluestockings such as Hannah More, knowledge of classical history was supposed to improve polite conversation. Rather than teaching them to be active citizens, however, reading history was often perceived as merely providing women with a more refined and morally-respectable form of entertainment. The lessons young women might derive from Roman history, Perkins suggests, were largely perceived as applying to their relatively powerless position in the domestic sphere. Women might be taught —properly respectful admiration for the English government” (249) and other patriotic sentiments; Roman history might —enable a careful teacher to inculcate the domestic virtues in a female student” (250), though such attempts also highlighted the difficulty of treating Roman history as though it were timeless and apolitical (251). Generally speaking, however, as Perkins argues, —[T]he moral and cultural lessons offered
This attention to Maria's part in the world introduces the wider colonial resonances of the writing and study of history in the eighteenth-century. Historical narrative became a vehicle through which Britons imagined their nation as it came into contact with foreign territories, such as those Cook encountered in the New World. Furthermore, history provided Britons a context in which they might narrate not only their past, but their present and their future. Wilson argues: "[History] emerged as a primary vehicle of national self-understanding and identity as well as philosophical reflection, promoting a cosmopolitan perspective and a deeply grounded sense of national specificity." Koditschek argues that the problem of explaining coercion and inequality as they related to the nineteenth-century British Empire could be managed, and sometimes provisionally resolved, through discourses about history.

The world Maria encounters in history (and other subjects such as geography) is organized according to the historical discourses Koditschek describes, which arranged the globe according to a hierarchical model of national development. This model was advanced by Adam Smith and other philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Koditschek examines the variety of ways administrators, historians, novelists, and philosophers employed this discourse to reconcile imperialism with liberal politics,

by classical history ... were often directly opposed to what women were taught about their places in society. Selfless patriotism and public-spirited self-sacrifice might be all very well, but they were not values of much practical application in the formation of domestic womanhood" (252).


25 Koditschek, *Liberalism*, 2, 3. Koditschek goes on to suggest that in the nineteenth century, "the new Empire became a national project": Though aristocrats benefited disproportionately as soldiers and colonial administrators, many motives drew in sectors of the middle class: the desire to spread Christianity, to redeem the suffering slaves, to save aborigines (or to settle their lands), to protect existing possessions, and to cure the evils that the first Empire had left behind all inspired the second Empire in different ways. In each case the call to action was built on a particular reading of history that drew out the progress narrative in a particular way. (4)
particularly as the British Empire transitioned to what was perceived to be a more enlightened institution in the nineteenth century. The four-stage enlightenment model proposed by Smith categorized nations along a continuum from "savage,” to "barbarian,” to "agricultural,” to "commercial.” This model of national development, conceived as occurring over time and at different rates in different geographic locations, provided the rationale for imperial government in the second British Empire of the nineteenth century:

Under conditions of uneven development, it was widely believed that more advanced societies would dominate those at lower stages of development, and that a liberal, commercial capitalist society like Britain had a right (perhaps even a duty) to exercise formal or informal control over various far-flung primitives, either for their own benefit, to spread market freedom, or to save them from being exploited by some other powerful autocratic state.26

West subtly introduces this emerging imperialist discourse in the line of development Maria traces in her nation’s history: "In the annals of our own nation, [Mrs. Williams] taught [Maria] to observe the gradual development of the mental powers, and to trace with nice discernment, the varying manners of her countrymen, from the rude Briton to the haughty Baron, and from thence to the elegant politeness of the present age” (1: 41). In history Maria is able to discern the gradual refinement of her nation’s intellectual character from a former state of rudeness to a present state of "elegant politeness.” Importantly, as the phrase "present age” implies, this process of refinement occurs over time. As an industrial capitalist nation, West positions Great Britain and its "elegant politeness” at the most developed end of the enlightenment continuum.

Mrs. Williams also introduces Maria to the study of botany and geography, the latter of which builds on this imperialist progress narrative. Her study of geography reinforces connections between climate and national identity. For example, in receiving

26 Koditschek, Liberalism, 3. He refers to this model of development as the "progress narrative.”
an entertaining geographical account of the known world," Maria also gained a competent knowledge of the effect of climate and situation, in forming local prejudice and national character” (1: 79). Eighteenth-century theories about climate were temporal as well as geographic: the torrid zones were supposed to exist in the past, a time of savagery and barbarism. In Adam Ferguson’s formulation, traveling from the torrid to the temperate zones was equivalent to traveling from the past into the present. Wilson contends that as explorers such as Captain Cook returned to England with accounts of the New World, relationships between parts of the world became conceptualized as temporal ones.”

Travel around the world was perceived as a kind of time travel; the primitivism of Pacific Islanders was supposed to provide a glimpse into Britain’s own past. Not only were the torrid zones perceived to exist in the past, but they were assumed to exist outside of historical discourse. Antithetical to enlightenment ideals, Ferguson outlines in his History of Civil Society, “the torrid zone, every where round the globe ... has furnished few materials for history” and “has no where matured the more important projects of political wisdom.”

As Ferguson implies, a nation’s political and economic make-up were directly linked to its state of superiority or inferiority. The absence of both a Western system of government and of industrial capitalism (with its advanced trading relations) was supposed to signify a state of inferiority. According to Maria’s course of study, in his state of “elegant politeness” (1: 49) the eighteenth-century Briton is a properly historical agent. In effect, West presents the study of geography as another kind of historical education.

27 Wilson, The Island Race, 9.

28 Qtd. in Nussbaum, Torrid Zones 9.
This geographic/historical education teaches Maria that national character is divinely ordained. This divine ordination renders hierarchical (i.e. imperial) relations similarly so:

Taught to reflect, even when amusement was the object, [Maria] saw less ridicule in customs different from her own; and felt her pity for those people, who seemed less favoured by nature, considerably abated, by reflecting that Providence had wisely given them attachment to customs and situations, which makes the inhabitants of Greenland exulting boast of their long night of revelry and ease, and induces the naked savage panting at the lines, to —Bask in the glare, or stem the tepid wave, / And thank the gods for all the good they gave.” (1: 79-80)

This is a curious passage. On one hand, in studying geography and being inclined to "reflect," Maria seems to learn respect for the customs of other nations, to locate them as neutrally "different" rather than negatively so. However, this passage subtly casts such "savage" lives as less cognizant of and less "favoured" by Providence—in short, as lesser. In West’s formulation, the "inhabitants of Greenland" exist in darkness and unproductivity, the antitheses of enlightenment; the "naked savage" pants like an animal, his nakedness a signal part of his inferior character. Wheeler highlights the symbolic significance placed on clothing in the eighteenth century, arguing that the mere presence of European dress was one important signifier of Europe's perceived superiority: "Nakedness signified 'negation of civilization'... The degree to which native assimilation to religious instruction was gauged successful” in British colonies was perceptible in the dress the native converts adopted—or failed to adopt.”\(^{29}\) In each subject that she studies, Maria’s education reinforces these binaries of civilization v. savagery.

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Along with reinforcing such colonial binaries, Maria’s education also reinforces a binary construction for female sexuality akin to that in Seward’s *Louisa*. This construction subtly underlies the classical history Maria studies:

> The Grecian and Roman empires furnished various narratives, in which the force of patriotism, the firmness of virtue, and the astonishing greatness to which independence and integrity elevate the human mind, are exemplified. From the story of eastern nations, and the luxurious effeminacy that marked the declining days of Rome, she endeavoured to inspire the attentive girl with an abhorrence of extravagance, corruption, and licentious pleasure. (1: 40)

The phrase “luxurious effeminacy” draws together two important strands of eighteenth-century gender discourse. On one hand, West invokes the differences between the terms “effeminacy” and “femininity.” E. J. Clery contends that in the eighteenth century “effeminacy” or “effeminization” signified the sum of a complex of derogatory ideas ... including corruption, weakness, cowardice, luxury, immorality and the unbridled play of passions.” According to the historical narratives Maria reads, their effeminacy caused the decline of the eastern and Roman empires. By contrast, the terms “feminine” or “femininity” were associated with positive qualities such as sociability, civility, compassion, domesticity and love of family.”

30 Moreover, the term “luxury” invokes what Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger have termed the “luxury debates” spanning centuries in Western thought and which took on particular urgency in the eighteenth century. At this time, luxury signified both the increased refinement of an individual and a nation or, conversely, their descent into decadence. Luxury was also a gendered term: From classical times, woman functioned as a “sign” of dangerous excess. Luxury was

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associated with weakness, effeminacy and perilous female desire." In the phrase "luxurious effeminacy," West invokes two nearly interchangeable terms. Via historical narrative, West thus teaches Maria (and, by extension, her female reader) to "abhorr" luxury and effeminacy and their association with "extravagance, corruption, and licentious pleasure." These are the very phenomena Mrs. Williams’s femininity—her domesticity—counterbalances when she arrives in the West Indies.

Ultimately, in this novel the advantages of education are both national and imperial. West shows that women are responsible for maintaining the home in both domestic and colonial contexts. They must protect the boundaries of the home by "abhorr[ing]" those effeminate qualities—the "irregularities" (2: 140) and "unbridled play of passions" West and her contemporaries associated with the colonial world—that threaten its moral integrity. Furthermore, via the morality of history, young women like Maria Williams learn to perform their "part" in the world: that is, they learn to be good daughters and to secure virtuous husbands, as Maria eventually does in marrying Mr. Herbert. They learn to regulate their passions, to resist the superficialities of masquerades, and to perform charitable duties in their villages, all of which Maria does throughout the course of the novel. Yet they also learn their nation’s part in a world of nations, and learn to distinguish its superior level of development from those savage nations it seeks to rule.

West also assigns women’s spousal and maternal duties an imperial significance in her book-length poem *The Mother* (1809). Scholars have long argued that West wrote for and about women. Curiously, given its eponymous interest in women, *The Mother* is

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largely absent from West scholarship.\textsuperscript{32} \textit{The Mother} amends our understanding of West as a political writer by evincing her explicit interest in the British Empire and in women’s roles within it, particularly when read in conjunction with her discourse on maternity and empire in \textit{The Advantages of Education}. \textit{The Mother} offers overt support for the colonial wars and missionary endeavors in which Britain was engaged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As part of this project, the poem emphasizes the significance of women like \textit{The Advantages of Education}’s Amelia Williams in maintaining domestic stability. \textit{The Mother} stresses the links between the household and the nation as well as the political significance of maternity. This book-length poem, composed in blank verse, charts the life cycle of a mother’s relationship with her children, from “Infancy” (Book 1), to “Religious Instruction” (Book 2), “Education” (Book 3), “Separation from Children” (Book 4), and finally to “Maternal Sorrows” (Book 5). Guest argues: “\textit{The Mother} ... represent[s] domesticity as the fullest expression of feminine duty.” However, Guest contends that West construes the domestic sphere in negative terms, “as a space evacuated of almost any possible subjectivity, any positive content,” and that the mother’s subjectivity “cannot extend to the alien world beyond the home.”\textsuperscript{33} Unlike Guest, I read West’s positioning of the mother in the home as crucially significant to the world beyond it.

\textbf{Maternity and Empire: The Mother}

Like \textit{The Advantages of Education}, \textit{The Mother} questions the paternal (and the masculine more generally) as a source of moral stability and locates the maternal (and the

\textsuperscript{32} In her biography of West, Wood points out that in \textit{The Mother} West called for a strengthening of religion in Britain’s colonies” (\textit{Studious to Please} 87). In \textit{Small Change}, Guest examines this poem in chapter 13, “The Neutral Situation of Domesticity,” 313-339.

\textsuperscript{33} Guest, \textit{Small Change}, 320, 322, 321.
feminine) as central to the national project. Mothers, the poem implies, serve their sons and their nation by educating their children (both sons and daughters) in the best British values; they assist their daughters in supporting British men in times of war: “Then to your weeping daughters turn, and say, / This is no time for sloth; Prepare the scarf, / Pride of the chieftain; weave the warm attire / For the brave soldier, who unshrouded lies / On the damp earth’”; they assume the care of grandchildren when their sons are killed in service to the British Empire. In each instance, it is the female figure that holds sway and that maintains the nation. The Mother even explicitly warns young women of the danger in placing too high a faith in men, whom West locates as frail and disappointing beings: “Only in haunts of fable or of song / Does perfect man reside; on earth he walks / By folly and infirmity pursu’d” (13). In assigning such high value to mothers (and to women more generally), West offers a very particular version of femininity as ideal: frugal, virtuous, and opposed to the moral corruption associated with the Empire and the east. In essence, the ideal Mother in this poem is identical to Amelia Williams of The Advantages of Education.

Broadly speaking, The Mother supplies the British mission in India with heroic sentiment and pathos and demonstrates how crucial it is for British women to support their men in imperial adventures. One such narrative involves Amelia, a “wo-worn gradame” who cares for the children left behind by her son and his wife who are killed in the Indian city of Agra, possibly while taking part in the Second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803-1805. West describes these children as “orphans of a sire / Who with misfortune struggled, till he fell / In Indostan, planting his country’s flag / On Agra’s distant walls” (202). Amelia receives letters from her son which arrive in his stead accompanied by his

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children aboard the homebound fleet ... / Charg’d with the wealth of India” (203). One of these letters, transcribed in the poem, outlines the financial rescue offered by British exploits in India: “We soon, / He writes, shall sail for England. Wisdom plans / A vast achievement, and my share of spoil / Will dower frugality with ample means” (204). As this letter details, frugality will be replaced with the spoil of empire, and the family unit will be restored to completeness and multiplied, as her son brings a numerous family to join / His pious offices” (204). Arriving in England without their father or mother, both killed in India, Amelia’s genderless grandchildren offer this heroic explanation of their fathers’ death:

He died at Agra: conquest crown’d his sword,
But the lance pierc’d him as he bravely tore
The crescent from her walls. We bring transcrib’d
The general orders which decreed his corpse
A soldier’s trophied grave.” (205)

In these lines West introduces the religious rhetoric that will become increasingly potent in the closing pages of Maternal Sorrows”: Amelia’s son tears the crescent,” a sign of Islam, from the walls at Agra, an action West deems “brave” and which results in his trophied grave.” Amelia sees her son’s image in her grandchildren, “that man of woes, / Whose bones at Agra whiten” (205). She sees his sports, his early gallantry, / His noble firmness” (205), and is acutely aware that it is her duty to educate his children.

Ultimately, this seems to be the signal message of Amelia’s narrative in Maternal Sorrows”: women must be ready, at all times, to serve the Empire from the home. They do so in large part by educating the new generation. If the grand-dame like Amelia does not take on these duties, West asks, “Who with such thrifty justice will expend / Their
[the children’s] scanty stipend, with such tender care / Watch their exotic humours, or refine / Their souls to virtues worthy of their birth?” (206).

_The Mother_ also indsicts women who fail to show fortitude in service to their nation and their children. For example, Amelia’s son’s wife—a nameless woman —late wedded and much lov’d (202)—displays weakness when faced with her husband’s death. One of her children describes:

Our mother liv’d
To hear his [her husband’s] fate, then sicken’d, and expir’d,
And left us friendless. She was weak of soul,
And should have staid to save the wealth our sire
Bought with his blood from Indian treachery.
We liv’d among the natives, orphan babes
Of those they hate as conquerors (205)

Despite her willingness to accompany her husband to India, this woman ultimately lacks the strength to execute her duties to him and to her children by guarding his wealth. Amelia, by contrast, is firm enough to “expend” the “scanty stipend” left to her grandchildren. West urges her readers to possess similar firmness and shows that the nation’s financial health is at least partially in women’s hands.

Much like Seward’s _Elegy on Captain Cook_, West’s poem draws our attention to the close ties between the domestic and the colonial—to the ways mothers (and women more generally) are left to mourn the affairs of “great men.” “Maternal Sorrows” surveys a variety of foreign scenes in which British men died. These scenes include the Indian city of Maida (219) at which the Battle of Maida took place in 1806; the Egyptian city of Aboukir, at which the British (led by Sir Horatio Nelson) defeated Napoleon’s army in 1789 (219); Caffraria in South Africa (221); the Battle of Seringapatum, taking place along the Cauvery River in India (222) between the British East India Company and the
India Kingdom of Mysore (223); and Ceylon, —str of isles” (223). In each instance, West uses a British victory on foreign soil as an occasion to celebrate national triumph and to imagine the effects of international affairs on the mothers left at home. Of Caffraria in Africa, for instance, in —east Afric’s southern wilds” (222) where British soldiers are wasted by the harsh climate, West suggests that —hope still lingering chain’d / The fond maternal soul, and imag’d there / Her wandering child a savage or a slave, / Panting for social life, tho’ long estrang’d / From all its joys” (222). Similarly, of the Battle of Seringapatum, West writes, —So fell suspense, of miseries worst, thy fangs / Tortur’d full many a mother, when the banks / Of Cavary, in India’s chersonese, / Disclos’d a scene of bloody fraud” (222-23).

As an antidote to these bloody scenes, West advocates the spread of Christianity to the wild savages and slaves who murder Britain’s sons and bring grief to British mothers. In the final pages of the poem, West apostrophizes to Great Britain and declares:

Queen of ocean! with regret
I must accuse thee, tho’ thy victor-flag
Flames like a steady cynosure, ...
Bears not that banner, in its ample field,
The Christian symbol? Christian are thy hosts,
And on the word of God thy Christian crown
Recumbent lies. Why then like Carmel’s churl
Withhold thy living waters, and thy bread
Of life from hungry strangers, subject now
To all thy laws, except thy laws divine? (225)

The remainder of the poem elaborates this sentiment, addressing the many corners of the globe to which Britain has begun to extend its reach at this time. While extending its empire and waving its flag on foreign soil, West indicts Great Britain with failing to offer the —living waters” of Christianity to colonized people. She urges: —Sanctify / Thyself for
the high mission, and become / In purpose, as in fact, heav’n’s minister” (226). West draws these religious discourses back to the mother: the rationale for spreading Christianity around the world, West implies, is to soothe the mother’s fears for her children’s safety. Or, perhaps, the mother symbolically registers the social benefits of Christianity: when all men worship —one common God” (232), West contends, —then shall the anxious mother, when she yields / Her child to distant realms, lose half the fears / Which now oppress her soul” (232-33). Once Christianity takes root on foreign soil, West suggests, all the evils of empire will be abated: the —worst enemies of man” will be —exil’d” (234). At the end of the poem the mother becomes the Christian mother, who dies surrounded by her grateful children: —In holier bliss / The Christian mother dies, when round her bed / Her kneeling progeny, with pious prayers, Waft her pure soul to heaven” (238).

Despite this triumphant conclusion, the poem’s support for imperialism is not without its anxieties. Not only does West show that women suffer acutely as a result of men’s adventures in the theatre of empire, she is anxious about her nation’s pursuit of wealth and its potential descent into decadence. In the first place, like The Advantages of

35 Despite this direct exhortation, West also includes a lengthy footnote in which she —disclaims having any intention, by these reflections, to excite government to subdue paganism in our Indian possessions by coercive measures” (226). She does not call for a militant spread of Christianity, but the (apparently) more benign act of making Christian texts available for study, as she elaborates in this footnote: —What is required of the ruling powers is, to found a religious establishment at every settlement, and to patronize the translation of the holy scriptures into all the native languages” (227).

Of course, as a number of historians and postcolonial scholars have demonstrated, there was nothing benign about the forced study of English (or the imposition of Christianity) in colonized territories. See Andrew Porter, Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). On the study of English in Africa, see Chinua Achebe, —The African Writer and the English Language,” in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, ed. Patrick and Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 428-434, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, —The Language of African Literature,” ibid., 435-455. Thiong’o contends, —In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language, and all others had to bow before it in deference ... The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised” (442).
Education, The Mother displays acute anxiety over luxury and effeminacy and the danger they pose to British masculinity. In Book I, “Infancy,” in which she addresses new mothers, West outlines the importance of raising young men to oppose these qualities:

While the young plastic mind from thee receives  
Its first impression, studiously imprint  
The stamp of fortitude, and wisely raze  
Fastidious niceness, feeling falsely nam’d;  
Lydian and British manners will not blend.  
Thou dost not nurse some feeble Sybarite,  
Pain’d by a crumpled rose-leaf, and annoy’d  
To madness by a choir of nightingales  
Chaunting their loves to Cynthia. Other arts  
Thy sons must learn than wanton serenade,  
Or trim the curvets of the agile dance,  
With all the soft voluptuousness that waits  
On pamper’d appetite. (34-5)

When West suggests that “Lydian and British manners will not blend,” she opposes two systems of value: the Lydian, according to the OED, offers both an allusion to the wealth of Crœsus king of Lydia” as well as “the designation of one of the modes in ancient Greek music, characterized as soft and effeminate.” The “feeble Sybarite,” aligned here with Lydian manners, refers to “A native or citizen of Sybaris ... traditionally noted for its effeminacy and luxury” as well as “[a] person devoted to luxury or pleasure; an effeminate voluptuary or sensualist.” According to the contrast West sets up, then, British manners oppose the wantonness, “voluptuousness,” and “pamper’d appetite” of the Lydian. In essence, Britishness is opposed to effeminacy. Such effeminacy, West implies, imperils the nation, and Great Britain alone remains a “Last refuge of integrity and worth, / To which religion, liberty, and peace / Have flown as to an ark” (37). As in The Advantages of Education West locates a particular version of
femininity as dangerous: the feminized sensuality of Europe (the French) and the luxury and sensuality associated with the Empire.

The seductive wealth associated with the British Empire in India looms in the background of several important narratives included in Book 5, “Maternal Sorrows,” and West links this wealth to imperiled masculinity. West also shows that women suffer for the ways that the wealth and sensuality of empire corrupt British men. In “Maternal Sorrows,” a young woman named Louisa secretly marries Raymond, whose father is an enemy of her own father and who has abandoned her to live in British India. At the beginning of this narrative Louisa’s mother Amanda notes that her daughter, “most lovely, most belov’d” (206), exhibits a melancholy air, a “sickly languor” and “strain’d gayety” (207). Amanda initially believes this languor to be the result of a broken heart, as a man named Henry, whom she believes to be the object of Louisa’s affections, has just married another woman. However, Louisa at last confesses, “Along thy plains, / Fertile Bengal, my husband roams; for him, / Wedded in thoughtless childhood, and estrang’d / By habit, time, and distance, flow these tears” (211-12). Louisa equates her courtship with Raymond with the star-crossed love of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, and she experiences constant misery because of his residence in colonial India; she is left to dream of its “fertile” plains. Her husband’s continued absence drives her mad, and West expounds on the deep corruption of his character:

Where wild excess
Revels in tropic regions, and bestows
Nature’s best products on a sensual lord
Unworthy of her gifts, young Raymond’s name
Was heard with detestation. Merciless,
Ev’n in the bow’r of wantonness, to those
Who fed his brutal appetites; unjust,
Where he had strength to wrong, yet prone to bend,
Th’ expectant sycophant of wealth and power.
Such was Louisa’s husband! (215)

West associates Raymond with the dangerous qualities of "wild excess," sensuality, wantonness, and "brutal appetites"—each of which opposes the "stamp of fortitude" (34) British men should exhibit.

Raymond’s dissipation recalls the dissipated character of Mr. Williams in *The Advantages of Education*. Both men feed their "appetites," material or sexual, outside of England. However, Raymond becomes an even more menacing figure, as he attempts to manipulate his wife with his colonial station: "Raymond woos her now / With tempting tales of eastern pomp, and vows / Of love renew’d, and many a smooth excuse / For past unkindness" (215-16). This promise ultimately drives Louisa mad:

[T]he fair maniac, freed
From sense of true misfortune, wanders now
Amid the visions of distemper’d thought.
Oft o’er the sea she sails, and welcomes oft
India’s well-painted shores. In fancied state
She decks her hair with berries, as with gems,
Ascends her palanquin, and round her calls
Her tawny slaves, and tells the silver moon
To light her o’er the Ganges to her love. (216)

West’s India is similar to the "Gold, and ye gems, that lurk in eastern cave” in *Louisa*, in which "Insolvent INDIA” (107) initially wrecks the happiness of Seward’s heroine: mesmerizing, almost romanticized, and domestically destructive. Despite West’s support for the men who carry out imperialist missions, then, she reminds us that the Empire also poses a threat to the health of the home and the nation. It threatens the moral well being of the men who work in the Empire, as well the domestic success of Englishwomen.

West’s second Prudentia Homespun novel, *A Gossip’s Story*, shows us in more specific ways just how the Empire imperils masculinity and domestic happiness. *The*
Advantages of Education confines the moral contagion of empire to the West Indies, where Mr. Williams grows ill and dies despite his wife's interventions. A Gossip's Story brings this moral contagion home to England, where the uncertainties of empire threaten the health of the novel's patriarch, Mr. Dudley, and the marital happiness of its heroine, Louisa Dudley. Mr. Dudley openly avows the virtue of Britain's transatlantic trade, which included the trade in slaves, yet the precariousness of his own trading endeavors makes him physically ill. Ultimately, despite its acknowledgement of the threats posed by empire, the novel locates Mr. Dudley—and the imperialist discourses he symbolizes—as its moral center. Furthermore, the licentious sexuality associated with the West Indies follows Louisa's first suitor, Sir William Milton, home in the form of an abandoned mistress and her bastard children. This mistress, Miss Morton, illustrates the influence of eighteenth-century colonial discourse on female sexuality. Like Emira of Seward's Louisa, Miss Morton serves as the negative exemplar to West's heroine. The differences between West's Louisa and Miss Morton show the mutually constitutive relationship between Englishwoman and "other" woman at this time. Moreover, the West Indies remain an absent presence in this novel and are veiled in ways that elide the realities of plantation economy.

Dutiful Daughters and Colonial Discourse: A Gossip's Story

A Gossip's Story tells the story of the Dudley family who reside in the English market town of Danbury. As the novel opens, Mr. Dudley, a widower with two daughters named Louisa and Marianne, returns to England after attending to his plantations in the British West Indies. The colonial backdrop to the novel's domestic setting is immediately
apparent: one of the first things we learn about Mr. Dudley is that he united the character of the true Gentleman to the no less respectable name of the generous conscientious merchant” and that he possessed a considerable estate” (1: 14) in Barbados. Louisa, the novel’s example of filial piety, accompanied him to Barbados where she was educated amongst the luxuriant bounty of nature, and the fierce contention of the elements” (1: 16)—an environment that contributed to forming her superior intelligence and character. By contrast, Marianne stayed in England to be raised by her grandmother, where she experienced all the fond indulgence of doating love” (1: 16). Despite her father’s wishes to the contrary, Marianne rejects her first suitor Mr. Pelham, as he does not suit the romantic sensibilities she has cultivated through prolific novel reading. She eventually marries Mr. Clermont, a man who shares her romantic sensibility, and their marriage is disastrous. Louisa likewise rejects her first suitor the wealthy Sir William Milton, and eventually marries Mr. Pelham. She ends the novel a happy woman, rewarded for abiding by her father’s wisdom and choosing a husband he approves. Scholarship on *A Gossip’s Story* generally focuses on the didacticism of these courtship plots, debating what they reveal about West’s stance toward patriarchal authority.36 Critics have also located Louisa and Marianne as source material for Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), as the sisters seem to embody these qualities in a generic way: Louisa as Sense, Marianne as Sensibility.37

36 For example, see Ty, *Empowering the Feminine*, especially chapter 5, “Abjection and the Necessity of the Other: West’s Feminine Ideals in *A Gossip’s Story*.“ See also Wood, *Modes of Discipline*: Wood claims *A Gossip’s Story* is typical in its use of the courtship plot for didactic purposes” (70).

We cannot fully understand the novel’s insistence that women adhere to patriarchal norms without examining the mercantilist layer of Mr. Dudley’s character. Underwriting the courtship plots in *A Gossip’s Story* is the eighteenth-century plantation culture of the British West Indies as well as England’s maritime conflict with other European empires—in particular, the Spanish and French. Damage to his Barbados plantations necessitates Mr. Dudley’s initial return to England, as “the terrible devastations of a hurricane” force him to abandon “the schemes of improvement he had projected upon his estates” (1: 20). Although the novel never explicitly addresses this aspect of Mr. Dudley’s profession, as a West Indian plantation owner Mr. Dudley is likely a slave owner as well. *A Gossip’s Story* is set before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 (though the 1790s saw fierce debate over the issue of slavery) and West Indian plantations at this time depended on slave labor to supply their workforce: as Hall outlines: “Plantations could vary hugely in size, from 80 to 2,000 or more acres, the latter requiring the labour of 500 or more slaves;” His likely participation in the slave trade is invisible in West’s description of Mr. Dudley’s “considerable” West Indian estates, though an eighteenth-century reader could fill in this gap. West clearly does not see this participation in slave culture as a blemish on his character. Mr. Dudley’s position as the novel’s moral compass effectively merges patriarchal and slave-owning colonial authority.

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38 For analysis of women’s participation in this debate, see Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992), particularly chapters 7-11. For a history of slave uprisings in the 1790s, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Indeed, at times the novel reads as explicit colonial propaganda. For example, in a dispute between Mr. Dudley and Louisa’s first suitor Sir William Milton, Sir William suggests that Mr. Dudley’s masculine virtue emerged only after he “retired from mercantile pursuits” (1: 182). Mr. Dudley’s rebuttal reads like a pamphlet circulated to promote trade and colonization:

If, by reminding me of the profession I once followed, you mean to throw any reflection on the general character of a British merchant, you rather expose your own want of information respecting the resources and wealth of this empire, than discredit me. I glory in having stimulated the industry of thousands; increased the natural strength of my country; and enlarged her revenue and reputation, as far as a private individual could. (1: 182)

This speech relies on common tropes of representing the Empire to the English public: beginning in the seventeenth century, “the literature advocating voyages of discovery, new trades or colonies often gives the impression that the promoters were concerned with nothing more nor less than the public good: in contemporary terms, the common weal.”

The “public good” included employment for the so-called “idle poor,” English independence from foreign goods, and increased national revenue. These representations elided the merchant’s mercenary desires as well as the public’s desire for luxury goods. Such propaganda continued into the eighteenth century, during which debates over the consumption of luxury goods increased as a result of growing trading relations and expanding colonial territory. Through Mr. Dudley, West characterizes the English colonial as a benevolent figure working in service to his nation.

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41 For a discussion of the so called “luxury debates,” see Berg and Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*. 
Despite its celebration of Mr. Dudley’s identity as a plantation owner and a “generous conscientious merchant,” however, *A Gossip’s Story* is not simplistically pro-empire. West differentiates between the virtuous prosperity sought by English merchants like Mr. Dudley while condemning the empires of other European nations—in particular, Spain, with whom Great Britain long maintained a rivalry over trading privileges and colonial territories.42 For example, in a letter to Louisa written while in London managing debts accrued via trade, Mr. Dudley proclaims, “Integrity is no less a character of an English merchant than enterprise” (1: 173). West sets up this sense of integrity in stark contrast to “the suspicious spirit with which the Spaniards conduct their colonial affairs, and their jealousy of the commercial importance of England” (2: 141). Mr. Dudley’s difference from avaricious Spanish merchants contributes to his peculiarly *English* character. According to West, then, being English means both commercial and moral superiority—indeed, the two are intimately intertwined in this text. It is in part through the honesty of Mr. Dudley’s commercial dealings that the reader ascertains his patriarchal virtue.

However, West also shows that such dealings have a destabilizing potential, for Mr. Dudley’s commercial activities are his ultimate undoing. We understand his superior character in the transatlantic theater of empire, yet West subsequently shows us that the Empire has the power to destroy domestic stability. Following the initially dismal portrait of his hurricane-damaged estates, Mr. Dudley’s loss of financial prospects looms large throughout the novel as the Dudley family’s financial security gradually unravels. Mr. Dudley attempts to recoup some of his plantation losses through further investment in trading enterprises, yet continually receives letters from his “London correspondent.”

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relaying “unpleasant” (1: 167) intelligence, such as the loss of ships and goods to French pirates. He is forced to leave his estate in Danbury in order to deal with these crises, first moving to the country in Seatondell with Louisa then traveling to London and even proposing a trip to Spain. In an oblique way, financial peril kills Mr. Dudley. As his fortune fails (none of his financial ventures pay off) so does his health: his physician tells Louisa that “his uneasiness of mind has encreased his disease” (2: 178). Mr. Dudley ultimately dies in London, but not before expressing final distaste for the “haughty indolent inhabitants” (2: 184) of Spain. His deterioration, both financial and physical, illuminates the precariousness of overseas empire in the late eighteenth century, during which scenarios such as those facing Mr. Dudley—for example, a report he receives outlining that “the French had detached a squadron to lay wait for the West-India fleet; which was destitute of adequate means of defence against an unexpected attack” (1: 167)—were a reality for merchants and investors.

Furthermore, the West Indies play a destabilizing role in A Gossip’s Story’s courtship plots in both subtle and explicit ways. A less central (though no less significant) female character who at one time resides in the Indies, Miss Morton, deepens the way we think about femininity and courtship in this novel and allows us to read Louisa and Marianne’s various narrative ends in more complicated ways. Specifically, Miss Morton’s characterization reveals the connection between eighteenth-century perceptions of colonial territory and constructions of female sexuality. Following Louisa’s return to England at the beginning of the novel, as Sir William begins to pursue her, she receives a letter from a “poor widow woman” claiming that Sir William seduced, impregnated, and abandoned her daughter Miss Morton while in the Indies. Presumably, he promised to
marry her, and so at last ruined her” (1: 169). The arrival of this letter effectively aborts one of the novel’s first significant courtship plots, as Louisa and Mr. Dudley had been debating the merits of this match. Louisa initially expresses trepidation about marrying Sir William, whose character is cast into doubt upon their introduction: “To judge by his countenance, a gloomy suspicious soul seemed to lour from under his dark bent eyebrows” (1: 56). Despite this unfavorable impression, she is willing to consider the match at her father’s urging because of the financial security it offers, a security necessitated by Mr. Dudley's plantation losses. Miss Morton disrupts the possibility of this marriage and ushers into the novel the sexuality associated with the Caribbean colonies.

Sir William’s affair with Miss Morton points to the way female sexuality in this novel is couched in anxiety about empire, which is also anxiety about masculinity: West portrays Miss Morton as a powerful seductress, Sir William as the seduced victim. Mr. Dudley ultimately absolves Sir William of culpability upon learning the “true” version of the affair: “The Mortons, my love, are artful women,” he asserts. Despite her mother’s claims to the contrary—she insists that her daughter is “a very handsome, well-behaved young woman” (1: 168)—Mr. Dudley relays that the young Miss Morton was educated for the infamous purpose of attracting the notice of some man of fortune.” While in the Indies, she “laid such snares” as were “impossible” (1: 219) for the unfortunate Sir William to resist. This scenario reflects eighteenth-century anxieties about female sexuality … [and] male degeneracy” as well as growing concern over women’s agency, sexuality and their control. As West portrays her, Miss Morton’s apparent sexual power threatens social order in its ability to so completely undermine masculine authority. Sir William is rendered weak and effeminate by Miss Morton, who is able to

43 Wilson, *The Island Race*, 141.
exercise sexual power in a British colonial outpost known for its supposed sexual
degeneracy. In this novel, as in *The Advantages of Education*, the Caribbean colonies are
untamed spaces in which European men engage in non-marital sex. When Mr. Dudley
learns of Sir William’s West Indian affair, he grants that “the influence of dissipated
society” and the “unrestrained freedom of manners in which Europeans indulge
themselves” can be accounted for (even excused) by the “luxurious climate of the east”
(1: 180). The “glowing fertility of the tropical islands” (2: 48) lingers in Mr. Dudley’s
memory long after he leaves the islands behind. Note the feminized language in this
description, which recalls that of *The Advantages of Education*: West portrays the
Caribbean as a feminized site for reproduction and sensuality. In her association with the
torrid zones, Miss Morton represents everything a good daughter (and a virtuous
Englishwoman) like Louisa cannot be if she wants to secure a husband and end the novel
happily.

However, I do not wish to draw a simple contrast between Louisa and Miss
Morton. Rather, I mean to suggest the fundamental connections between them despite
their very different characterizations and narrative ends. In the eighteenth-century
imagination these women were conceived in tandem with one another, just as the colony
and the metropole, according to Hall, were “mutually constitutive.” The Englishwoman
embodied by Louisa and Marianne was “invited” alongside the “other” woman of
empire,” the “exotic, or “savage” non-European woman” in the colonial space. Each
figure’s legibility relied on the existence of the other, and neither could exist in isolation.

Though Miss Morton is not a non-European woman, but an Englishwoman residing in the

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Caribbean, I would argue that she nonetheless occupies the position of the “other” woman in this novel; Nussbaum suggests that in the eighteenth century sexuality in all women was associated with the Other. Miss Morton is a powerful figure who made [Sir William’s] lofty spirit submit to what she pleased to propose” (1: 219) and she casts a persistent shadow over the narrative, surfacing several times even after Louisa formally rejects Sir William’s marriage proposal. Though she is never an embodied character—spoken of but never physically present—Miss Morton highlights the sexual discourses West relies on and illustrates the negative consequences available to women who, simply put, have non-marital sex.

Miss Morton represents what Charlotte Sussman deems “characters the novel self-consciously pushes to the margins” because they violate the conventions the novel upholds. By identifying those elements that the novel is most at pains to suppress we can identify its most salient categories of meaning—in this instance, the female body. We are given two very different versions of Miss Morton’s tale: that relayed by her mother, Mary Morton, and a supposedly absolving explanation offered by Mr. Dudley. The mother’s version contains an unmistakable suggestion of Miss Morton’s physical deprivation. After describing the history of her daughter’s involvement with Sir William, Mary Morton laments, “Poor creature, the worse for her now. For at last he quarreled with her, and left her behind him when he came to England, and would do nothing for her, and she is come home in great distress indeed. She has two children, Madam, and I have hard work to maintain myself these bad times” (1: 169). The very real threat of

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46 Ibid., 26.

47 Charlotte Sussman, “I Wonder Whether Poor Miss Sally Godfrey Be Living or Dead?: The Married Woman and the Rise of the Novel,” *Diacritics* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 101.
poverty and starvation underlies this narration, as Mr. Dudley acknowledges, but this threat is soon neutralized. Writing to Louisa from London, Mr. Dudley outlines, “[Miss Morton] was at length left without any provision, but this was not wholly her paramour’s fault, as at their quarrelling she stubbornly refused to accept any. Nothing was done for the children” (1: 219). In this explanation West effectively dismisses Sir William’s objectionable sexual behavior and again blames Miss Morton for her own dire circumstances, as she is the one who will not accept assistance. Eventually Sir William is persuaded to settle “one hundred a-year upon each of them [her children]” (1: 219), and Miss Morton ultimately ends up forming another, apparently miserable, connection with Sir William at the novel’s end.

Miss Morton’s association with reproduction and sexual power (in her eventual settlement with Sir William she still makes his haughty spirit bend to her control” [2: 222]) points to West’s broader concern with governing the female body, which extends to all its central female characters. In its anxiety about the body, A Gossip’s Story participates in the regulation of sexuality outlined by Michel Foucault. This regulation (as Foucault notes) was connected to the eighteenth-century discourse about climate that I examined earlier in this chapter.48 A Gossip’s Story bears out Caroline Gonda’s claim that the sentimental family depends for its success on the construction of a particular kind of female heterosexuality—a sexuality anchored by self-policing and self-regulating daughters.49 In other words, the sentimental daughter is the opposite of the sexual other.

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49 Gonda, Reading Daughter’s Fiction, 30, 32.
woman of empire. Indeed, Louisa’s success in *A Gossip’s Story* hinges on her self-policing and her ability to find pleasure and comfort in the resources of her own mind” (1: 190)—that is, Louisa derives pleasure from her *mind* rather than her body. It is the “loveliness of intellectual beauty” (2: 193) that attracts Mr. Pelham to seek her hand in marriage. Marianne, lacking these intellectual properties, ends the novel in a physically deteriorated state, “faded by sickness and distress” (2: 208). Echoes of Miss Morton’s “great distress” resonate in Marianne’s withered form. The narrative ends of Louisa, Marianne, and Miss Morton ultimately imply that women who are too *bodily*—too prone to physical excitement and, presumably, sexual arousal—are dangerous to themselves as well as to others.

The female body in *A Gossip’s Story* is thus both a site for discipline—for punishing women who fail to perform their filial duties—and also a visible register for the moral virtue women were expected to uphold. West compares Louisa and Marianne’s varying degrees of control over physical excitement and associates this control with their respective happiness or misery. The first extended descriptions of them display West’s interest in policing the female body and emphasize Louisa’s crucial control of it. We learn that Louisa was tall and elegant” and that her eyes expressed intelligence and ingenuous modesty” (1: 18)—that is, we read her superiority via her physical person. Her manner is placidly reserved” rather than obtrusive or sparkling,” and [even in] gayer moments her mirth indicated an informed well-regulated mind” (1: 18). Outwardly contained, any excitement Louisa might experience (bodily or otherwise) is mediated by her mind. Or, to put it differently, Louisa is not overly susceptible to pleasure, her mirth” never superseding her moral duty. In a trenchant analysis of the link between
moral virtue and imperialism Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Saree Makdisi contends that Sir Thomas Bertram’s return from his plantations in Antigua to find his household engaged in a production of the play *Lover’s Vows* is offensive to him in part because it is a pursuit of idle pleasure. Pleasure, Makdisi points out, was associated with Oriental despotism, therefore threatening to moral order. West subtly reassures the reader that Louisa’s pleasure—her *mi*rth*—is never beyond the reach of the moral order she is expected to uphold, allowing her to perform both her domestic and social duties.

The metaphors with which West invokes Louisa’s regulated body are also subtly infused with the material culture of empire: —*Science in her might be compared to a light placed behind a veil of gauze, which without being itself apparent, sheds a softened radiance over each surrounding object*” (1: 18). Here Louisa’s intelligence appears as diffused light: it does not shine directly, but is filtered through cloth portrayed as a *veil*—a feminine article that obliquely evokes covering the body. As Brown notes, women such as Louisa represented commodity culture and overseas trade in eighteenth-century literature in part through their association with material goods such as cloth and through the frequently depicted act of dressing their bodies in colonial commodities, an association exemplified by Belinda’s dressing table in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1714). West fused these discourses—of bodily discipline and commodity culture—in her description of Louisa’s intellectual veil. Though a much less literal rendering of a woman dressing than that presented by Pope, who portrays the *nymph* Belinda *rob*ed in white” and gazing on the spoils of empire glittering on her dressing table, West

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nonetheless uses a feminine commodity as a mediating element. Louisa ultimately achieves a happy marriage to "polite, tender husband," becoming his "unassuming wife" who often surprises him by the discovery of some new virtue, or graceful accomplishment; which unobtrusive delicacy had hitherto concealed from his observation" (2: 217). Her deftness at concealment and control are the keys to her success.

In stark contrast, Marianne enters the text as an ungovernable body and lacks the self regulation for which Louisa is celebrated. Her narrative end is decidedly different from her sister's—a difference initially signaled by Marianne's failure to control her physical person. West describes, "Her features were formed with delicate symmetry, her blue eyes swam in sensibility, and the beautiful transparency of her complexion seemed designed to convey to the admiring beholder every varying sentiment of her mind" (1: 18-19). Marianne's "transparency" is dangerous and in direct opposition to the "veil of gauze" which metaphorically covers Louisa. Importantly, it is Marianne's body that signifies her lack of discipline: "her looks expressed what indeed she was, tremulously alive to all the softer passions" (1: 19). Marianne enters this text as a body—a body that trembles and weeps and refuses to contain itself. Marianne's failure to govern herself leads to her selecting an improper marriage partner in Mr. Clermont, against her father's advice. The disastrous turn Marianne's life takes—she ends the novel in misery, childless and estranged from her husband—enacts the punishment due her for failing to self-regulate. Early in the novel, the suggestion that "[Marianne's] natural good health had hitherto preserved her from bodily sufferings" (1: 19) subtly introduces the punishment

she will ultimately experience, expressed in physical terms. At the beginning of the novel, Marianne’s sensibility is described as “agonizing” (1: 17); at the novel’s conclusion, “Her time passes very uncomfortably” (2: 220), with her beauty “withering under the worm of discontent, her features contracted by peevish melancholy” (2: 212). The perceived danger of women’s bodies, a fear emerging from anxiety about empire, infuses the novel’s women.

Moreover, West subtly connects female sexuality to the debate over women’s education taking place in the 1790s, part of the larger French Revolution-era debate over the rights of man. As Wallace outlines, a crucial component of these debates was whether or not the political subject is constituted by inherent “natural” properties (a Cartesian model of subjectivity) or through social relations and ideology (including education—a Lockean model of subjectivity), and to what degree these models overlap and inform one another. If examined with Wallace’s discussion in mind, Louisa, Marianne, and even Miss Morton (educated to entrap men) emphasize the social and relational nature of identity formation, as their educations determine their fates. Lloyd deems Louisa’s West Indian education “masculine,” a claim that seems to emerge from the subtly gendered terms in which West describes it—and, more generally, from Louisa’s natural propensity for this education: “From her earliest years” Louisa discovered a disposition to improve both in moral and mental excellence ... Instructions thus enforced by example,

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52 Wallace, Revolutionary Subjects. Wallace suggests that Jacobin writers—those novelists generally deemed “radical” in contrast to West’s supposed conservatism—questioned the proposition that only land-owning men should be considered political subjects and drew attention to the social forces that govern identity formation. Moreover, Wallace argues that women were particularly attuned to the ways in which embodiment impinged upon idealized independent subjects (22)—that is, conceptions of sexual and gender difference, rooted in the body, created the idea that women were biologically determined for specific social roles and impeded their quest for political subjectivity.
sunk with double weight into her retentive mind” (1: 15). Louisa possesses what educators stereotypically considered a masculine capacity for mental improvement, as she is capable of more than the feminized physical sensuousness lambasted by Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The West Indies offers a traditionally masculine context in which Louisa might exercise her capable mind: its climate exhibits fierceness and demands fortitude. At the most literal level, Louisa’s education is masculine because she is educated by a man, though West is careful to point out that —she commenced her education under a female eye [her mother’s]” (1: 16)—a necessary early arbiter in a novel supporting patriarchal authority.

Though its implications are quite different, Louisa’s West Indian education is framed in terms similar to Miss Morton’s seduction of Sir William: both are kept geographically separate from the domestic terrain of the novel. West reassures her readers: —Though her [Louisa’s] education had extended to particulars not usually attended to by females, there was nothing in her conversation to excite the apprehension which gentlemen are apt to entertain of learned ladies” (1: 18). This description reinforces the connection between the West Indies and potentially disruptive women, in that the —particulars” of Louisa’s education include its unusual colonial setting, and there is certainly a sexual connotation in the fear that Louisa might —excite” the gentlemen. As elsewhere in the novel, the colonies operate as a foil to the English domestic scene: in this instance, as a place where it is possible to educate daughters as one would educate sons. West exports such an education to the West Indies, diffusing its potentially radical implications. In essence, West protects the boundaries of the home from those forces that threaten it.

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The body as a site for discipline and regulation is notably absent in West's portrayal of masculine authority: there is no male counterpart to Miss Morton's "great distress" or Marianne's "agonizing" sensibility. Thus the body (and its policing) becomes a strictly female property in this novel; uncomfortable narrative ends are female terrain. As we have seen, bodies—female bodies in particular—are dangerous in their susceptibility to desire and in their ability to lead masculine virtue astray. It is thus notable that Mr. Dudley remains physically absent throughout much of the novel despite the fact that his authority underpins its moral messages—or perhaps his body is absent because he is the novel's moral center. His precepts are frequently conveyed via letters sent while he is away from Danbury attending to his crumbling finances. Following her marriage to Mr. Clermont, for example, Mr. Dudley commands Marianne via letter to "respect your husband's virtues, and divert your attention from his failings" (2: 135)—one instance of the novel's emphasis on obedient wives and daughters. Mr. Dudley delivers this letter as a presumably enduring form of communication: "I had much to say to you, my dear child ... and it is of too important a nature to be intrusted to the vague impression conversation imprints upon the mind" (2: 129). In essence, Mr. Dudley suggests that his letters are the preferred vehicle for transmitting his wisdom; hence West portrays authority as textual and transmittable across space, a concept that is implicit to the maintenance of empire.

A scene near the conclusion of A Gossip's Story neatly brings together the various strands I have been tracing in this analysis—specifically, West's emphasis on patriarchal authority, dutiful daughters, and (though more subtly) colonial discourse. Immediately following their nuptials and Mr. Dudley's death, Louisa and Mr. Pelham retire to his
country estate. As she wanders through the grounds, admiring the property, her attention was suddenly arrested by one object superlatively interesting; a fine bust of her father in white marble, was placed at the upper end of the building” (2: 213). Louisa weeps upon encountering this bust, and Mr. Pelham lovingly tells her, “Here, my Louisa, we will often retire to hold communications with our own hearts, and to form a just estimate of life. ... We will recollect your father’s precepts, and consider it as a chequered scene, from which the virtuous well-regulated mind may derive many advantages” (2: 214). This speech expresses a number of the novel’s interwoven domestic and colonial ideologies. First of all, Louisa is married, and she apparently occupies the appropriate position in her marriage, effectively subsumed by the “we” of Mr. Pelham’s instructive speech. Following this scene, Louisa’s voice makes no more appearances in the novel’s concluding pages; her husband has the last word on her behalf. Crucially, we are made to understand that Mr. Dudley’s precepts will remain present even in his physical absence. Given my observations about the importance of his role as an English merchant and plantation owner (and likely slave owner), we can add a significant layer of meaning to this marble bust: Mr. Dudley ultimately signifies the British Empire’s most idealized version of itself and it is to this image of colonial authority that Louisa bows.

Each of the texts I’ve examined in this chapter succeeds in bringing the Empire home via domestic relationships: mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, husbands and wives. Furthermore, in their various courtship plots and discourses on female education, commerce, and history, they alter the ways that we understand West as a

54 Ty examines this scene in chapter 5 of Empowering the Feminine and argues: “This phallic image of the father’s statue watching over his descendants and his patrimony is an apt and literal rendition of the type of society and familial structure Jane West was promoting. Patriarchal teachings and the father’s law abides even without a real father” (99).
conservative writer. We expect a conservative writer in the late eighteenth century to advocate Christianity and to support the Church of England; however, in *The Mother* West advocates Christian *missionaries*, who maintained a complicated (and continually changing) relationship to the British Empire. We expect a conservative writer to encourage young women to defer to patriarchal authority; however, West shows that patriarchy is continually challenged and frequently undermined by its involvement in the Empire. We expect a conservative writer to remind women that their domestic duties are nationally significant; West reminds us that this nation was much more territorially expansive than the British Isles, and that nationalism frequently meant imperialism. In my next chapter, I look at a novel by Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art*, published the same year as *A Gossip’s Story*. Inchbald is generally considered radical in contrast to West’s conservatism, in that she attacks the social institutions West upholds. Nonetheless, Inchbald draws from the same four-stage historical discourse through which Mrs. Williams educates her daughter in *The Advantages of Education*, placing Africa at a lower stage of the civilizational continuum. When we notice these similarities, received political labels begin to break down. To call either of these novels merely conservative or radical is to engage in the kind of forgetting Billig indicts as essential to national identity: in essence, we forget what nation building entailed at this time, its colonial violence and coercion—a project in which West, Inchbald, and their female contemporaries were intimately invested.

Such concerns are worth exploring on several fronts. For one thing, the popularity of the novel in this period made it an ideal tool for promoting political agendas—and, in

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turn, for disseminating colonial ideology. Wood argues: “The novel, more than any other literary genre, was used to promote the ideas of radicals and moderates as well as antirevolutionaries.” She suggests that despite “deep ambivalence” about the novel as a genre due to its association with sentimentality and romance, women writers like West chose the novel in large part because it was expedient. It gave them potential access to a large reading audience” and “provided a form and a readership for writers hoping to reach young women in particular.”

The Advantages of Education and A Gossip’s Story thus raise provocative questions that deserve more scholarly attention: to what degree did didactic literature promote the cultural hegemony associated with British imperialism? How might the didactic novel have naturalized—even sanctioned—the sexual proclivities of Englishmen in colonial territories, or reinforced racialized notions of sexuality? In what ways did such texts educate the public about what the Empire was and what it signified?

Moreover, in their concern for moral virtue—feminine virtue in particular—The Advantages of Education, A Gossip’s Story, and The Mother are constituted by what Makdisi identifies as an emerging imperialist discourse, taking hold in the nineteenth century, contingent on the moral virtue of the self-regulating subject. This discourse is more difficult to recognize as imperialist because more covert, or more deeply imbedded, than plot details such as plantations in Barbados. In his discussion of Mansfield Park, Makdisi suggests that we must look past the more direct ways Austen represents colonial relations—such as Sir Thomas Bertram’s plantations in Antigua—to the moral codes embedded in the subjectivity of the novel’s characters, and to the way such codes

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56 Wood, Modes of Discipline, 13.

57 Ibid., 14, 15.
produce support for the colonial mission. *Mansfield Park*, Makdisi contends, celebrates
—the discourse of self-regulating moral virtue,” which became a cornerstone of colonial
administration in the nineteenth century, as —–proclaimed mission of European
imperialism was precisely to teach non-Europeans how to regulate themselves.”58 In
Makdisi’s terms, West’s emphasis on regulated pleasure is not politically disinterested,
nor is it restricted to making daughters suitable for marriage: it extends to forming
subjects suitable for colonial administration. This argument has powerful implications for
the way we read West’s fiction and other contemporary texts written specifically for the
education of daughters. That such connections to empire are harder to see in this
literature makes even more crucial their exposition, and calls for revising the lenses
through which we look at texts that have often fallen under the radar of postcolonial
criticism. In the nineteenth century, as a result of its ——civilizing” mission, Great Britain
would come to control 25 percent of the globe. Such civilizing began at home.

58 Makdisi, —*Asten, Empire and Moral Virtue,*” 205, 203.
CHAPTER THREE

Elizabeth Inchbald, the Idea of Africa, and Progressive Imperialism

Henry Norwynne, the hero in Elizabeth Inchbald’s (1753–1821) *Nature and Art* (1796), leaves England after quarreling with his brother William and emigrates to the fictitious “Zocotora Island” off the western coast of Africa, taking with him his son, also called Henry. Zocotora Island functions as a schoolroom in which the elder Henry teaches his son not only the “natural” virtues that he perceives as important, but his difference from the “savages” who reside there. In a letter he sends to his brother William, Henry describes his son’s education:

I have kept him also from the knowledge of everything which I have thought pernicious in the conduct of the savages, except that I have now and then pointed out a few of their faults, in order to give him a true conception and a proper horror of them. At the same time I have taught him to love, and to do good to his neighbour, whoever that neighbour may be, and whatever may be his failings. Falsehood of every kind I have included in this precept as forbidden, for no one can love his neighbour and deceive him.¹

As this passage shows, *Nature and Art* captures the contradictory ideas about Africa circulating in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England. On one hand, Inchbald describes Africans as violent “savages” who elicit the “horror” of her English characters, and describes Zocotora Island as a place of “gloomy deserts and a barbarous people” (56, 131). On the other hand, Africa offers a kind of utopia in which the novel’s hero, the young Henry Norwynne, grows into a man freed of the moral corruption of European society. This utopian vision of Africa exploits the trope of the noble savage. According to Kathleen Glenister Roberts, “[T]he noble savage tends to embody Western

dissatisfaction with its own civilization and a projection of ‘freedom’ onto a remote persona. ... [D]uring the Enlightenment this stereotype evolved into an exoticized contemporary ethnic Other from the ‘New World.’”

As Inchbald’s noble savage, raised in Africa, young Henry’s virtues sharply contrast with the moral corruption of his cousin William, who was educated in England by the finest tutors.

Although *Nature and Art* is set in England, the idea of Africa is far more significant to the novel’s politics than scholars of Revolution-era women’s literature have yet acknowledged. In this chapter I argue that these two visions of Africa—as utopia and as dangerous backwater—underlie Inchbald’s ability to imagine alternatives to English society. *Nature and Art* critiques the religious and legal establishments of the late eighteenth century, as well as the sexual exploitation to which women were prey. These political stances have led critics to label this novel radical or progressive, particularly in contrast to the conservative fiction of a writer like Jane West. In doing so, critics have relied on generic ideas about what progress means in the fiction of this period: they have assumed that it means abandoning ancient systems of class distinction, promoting more egalitarian relationships between men and women, and other forms of the ‘old’ advancing and becoming the ‘new.’” However, if we do indeed take *Nature and Art* as an example of the progressive novel, then its portrayal of Africa requires us to revise what we call ‘progress.’” This novel is certainly interested in the gender and class-based issues that dominate the scholarship on Inchbald’s fiction. However, *Nature and Art* also participates in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conversation about colonizing the African continent. In this novel, progress entails not revision to the

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existing society, but complete removal from that society to found a new one elsewhere. A number of radical thinkers and writers in Inchbald’s day, including the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey and the Swedish abolitionist Carl Bernhard Wadstrom, theorized colonization as a solution to social inequality. Their progressivism, therefore, coexisted with their nation’s imperialism.

Similarly, *Nature and Art* imagines a morally just society according to the free community colonial model of Emanuel Swedenborg, Wadstrom, and others who promoted the British government’s efforts to establish colonies at Sierra Leone and the African island of Bulama in the 1780s and 1790s. Swedenborg envisioned a “New Jerusalem” in the African interior, unburdened by the ills of industrial capitalism. Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community* (1790) builds on this fantasy. *Nature and Art’s* conclusion is very similar to Wadstrom’s utopian vision for a British colony at Bulama: the novel ends with young Henry, his wife Rebecca, and his father establishing their own colony at a remote distance from society, where they celebrate their poverty and subsist by their own labor. This conclusion appears fairly benign, even puzzlingly so, given the novel’s general vehemence toward its subjects of critique. Yet it is the benign nature of this conclusion that is so important to understanding its similarities to the colonialist rhetoric of philosophers such as Wadstrom. The sentimental and idealized manner in which Inchbald describes the Norwynnes’ seaside cottage distracts from what she is actually proposing: that ideal societies might be built outside normal social boundaries in ambiguous “other” spaces. In this novel and in Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community*, freedom is only achievable through physical distance. Certainly, in *Nature and Art* the site at which the Norwynnes build their residence is extremely generic, lacking any
topographical or other details that might give us a clear sense of where it is located. Yet it is still an *elsewhere* on which Inchbald projects social fantasies. Although Swedenborgians projected their utopias onto a known continent, their knowledge of Africa was distorted and incomplete; one of the continent's most important qualities was its generalized location –out of the bounds of Europe.”

Elizabeth Hamilton's novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), which scholars generally label conservative, mocks such thinking. The novel lampoons a society of Jacobins, or “New Philosophers,” for their utopian visions of Africa by comparing them to “Hottentots,” the label applied to the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope region of southern Africa. In mocking utopian colonial visions like Wadström’s, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* also mocks the radical vision of *Nature and Art*. Yet both novels rely on the assumption that Africa is an inherently barbarous place. As I have indicated, in *Nature and Art* this way of thinking coexists with a vision of Africa as a utopia. Both novels reinforce the presumption of African savagery underlying what Brown deems “antislavery colonization” schemes in the 1780s and 1790s. Proponents of colonization argued that “civilizing” the continent would save it from the barbarity of the slave trade and would, in turn, promote Europe’s trading interests. What, then, does it mean to call *Nature and Art* a progressive novel? *Nature and Art* demonstrates the coincidence of progressivism and imperialism during the decades surrounding the French Revolution, a coincidence we might more readily apply to a conservative text like Hamilton’s, or even

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3 Plan for a free community upon the coast of Africa, under the protection of Great Britain; but entirely independent of all European Laws and Governments ... Embellished with a large and elegant View of Sierra Leona, on the Coast of Guinea (London, 1789), xiv.

West’s. The similarity of ideas about Africa in these novels significantly troubles the radical/conservative binary in which women writers of this time are often placed. It also reminds us that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, literature played a part in imagining imperialism as progress.

“Man is born to Liberty”: Progressive Discourses of Freedom

*Nature and Art* tells the story of the brothers Henry and William Norwynne. Following the death of their father, a country shopkeeper who had lately died insolvent (41), they journey to London. Henry is naturally gifted at playing the violin, and the brothers subsist upon the money Henry earns performing for wealthy and socially connected audiences. William resents his dependency upon Henry, even though Henry’s wages pay for his education. Henry’s social connections ultimately secure William—a living of five hundred a year” (45). William is ordained, achieves the rank of Dean, and marries a member of the aristocracy, Lady Clementina, while Henry continues to play music and marries a public singer. William and his wife disapprove of this marriage, creating a rift between the brothers. When Henry’s wife dies suddenly in their first year of marriage, he takes their infant child and emigrates to a supposedly uninhabited island off the coast of West Africa, the above-mentioned Zocotora Island. Following Henry’s departure, Lady Clementina gives birth to William’s son, also called William. The younger William receives the best education, which Inchbald presents in a negative light:—This unfortunate youth was never permitted to have one conception of his own—all were taught him—he was never once asked „what he thought?‘ but men were paid to tell him „how to think’” (53). One day a young boy appears at William’s doorstep bearing a
letter from Henry. This letter outlines that the boy is his son, also called Henry, whom he has educated on Zocotora Island without the benefit of books—an education that Inchbald construes positively. Young Henry and young William form the “Nature and Art” of Inchbald’s title: young Henry is a child of nature, raised far from European civilization, imbued with “natural” virtues; young William is the product of all the artifices and falsehoods of his society.

Inchbald uses young William to critique the Church of England, the aristocracy, and the legal system. As a youth, William seduces a beautiful village woman named Hannah Primrose and then abandons her in order to marry Miss Sedgeley, niece of Lord and Lady Bendham. Hannah gives birth to William’s bastard son and in a moment of desperation leaves the infant in the woods to die. Young Henry finds the baby and brings him to Rebecca Rymer, the virtuous young woman with whom he has fallen in love. Although Rebecca attempts to raise the baby in secret, it is eventually discovered and returned to Hannah. Young William, who has entered the legal profession, never lays claim to the child and offers Hannah no financial assistance. Hannah is eventually forced to resort to thievery in London in order to survive. When she is caught and put to trial, she goes before William, now a judge, who does not recognize her and condemns her to death. Only after she has been executed does he learn who she was. He attempts to locate their child, but learns that he, too, has died. Meanwhile, despite having received permission to marry Rebecca, Henry goes in search of his father, securing passage on a ship bound for Africa. He recovers the elder Henry, still living among “savages” on the African island, and the two return to England in time to learn that the elder William, now a bishop, has died. Young Henry marries Rebecca, who has been faithfully awaiting his
return for over 20 years. The three form—an humble scheme for their remaining life, a scheme depending upon their own exertions alone” (152), and live in a cottage by the sea.

Inchbald composed *Nature and Art* during the politically charged decade of the 1790s, a period of increased fear of the French Revolution and of so-called “Jacobin” sentiments taking hold in England. She was one among a group of writers who supported the French Revolution and who were vilified as social “levellers.” Marilyn Butler locates Inchbald with a “group of London radicals” including Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, and with less polemical though still politically interested writers such as Mary Robinson and Charlotte Smith. Gary Kelly examines Inchbald in tandem with radical novelists Robert Bage, Thomas Holcroft, and William Godwin. Godwin’s treatise *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) was subject to much scrutiny and critique by anti-Jacobins. Kelly argues: “What the English Jacobins and the English Jacobin novelists insisted on was simply that reason should decide the issue in human affairs and human government, not power based on money, age, rank, sex, or physical strength.”6

The plot details I’ve summarized above certainly indicate this political commitment: Dean William and his son are powerful because of their affiliations with the Church and the State, yet they lack compassion or true moral compass. The elder and younger Henrys, who live outside traditional spheres of power, possess these qualities, yet they must leave their society behind in order to achieve happiness.

Indeed, the French Revolution is a crucial context in which to read *Nature and Art*, not only for the novel’s content, but for its publication history. Inchbald changed the working title twice: originally called “A Satire Upon the Times,” followed by “The

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Prejudice of Education,” Inchbald finally settled on the more abstract *Nature and Art* in order to downplay the novel’s radical content. Moreover, although Inchbald completed a manuscript of the novel in 1794, Amy Garnai suggests that she withheld publishing it until 1796 because of the Treason Trials taking place in 1794. *Nature and Art* also reminds us of the gender-based constraints placed upon women writers at this time. In her study of the writing of Inchbald, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Robinson, Garnai suggests that their contemporaries understood them as a politically linked group, even if the women had no actual affiliations: “The original reception of the writings of Smith, Robinson, and Inchbald ... presents them together as a kind of collective representation of the subversive potential inherent in women’s politically-informed writing.” For example, these women were pejoratively linked in Thomas J. Mathias’s poem *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794) and *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (1800). All three women revised their works following attacks on pro-Revolution politics, such as the 1794 Treason Act and the 1795 Gagging Acts. Ty locates Inchbald as one of five women novelists who represent what the Reverend Richard Polwhele deemed (in 1798) “unsex’d” women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Charlotte Smith. These women, Ty contends, resisted the existing social order and wrote about women’s oppressed status. As such, they were perceived as unfeminine. Ty contends that in varying degrees, all [were] reacting to the conservative, patriarchal position promoted by Burke” in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Because of this

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7 Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, 4-5. Kelly points out that Inchbald showed the manuscript to Godwin, Holcroft, and George Hardinge, who encouraged her to withhold it. He argues: “*Nature and Art* was written at the height of liberal ferment in England and remains a document of fundamental interest in the history of the English Jacobin novel” (*The English Jacobin Novel* 99).

8 Ty, *Unsex’d Revolutionaries*, 5.
context, scholarship on *Nature and Art* primarily focuses on the issues of gender, social class, sexual inequality, education, and these issues’ links to 1790s radical politics.¹

Rather than replacing the French Revolution with a different social context, I hope to widen the lens through which we think about the Revolution’s influence on this novel. Specifically, Africa forms an important backdrop to the radical politics of *Nature and Art* in ways that have not yet been acknowledged. Scholars have noted, though not fully considered, the significance of Africa in this text, though discourse on the continent has important connections to Revolutionary discourse. The “rights of man” debates of the

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¹ For example, in an early study of Inchbald, James R. Foster deems *Nature and Art* a “doctrinaire” novel whose characters are first of all reformers and figures to demonstrate ideas and only afterward human individuals.” Dismissing *Nature and Art* as inferior to Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791), he contends that Inchbald’s sympathetic treatment of Hannah is typical of the liberals who regarded the fallen woman as a victim of society rather than as a willful transgressor,” *History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1949), 225, 257. See Vivien Jones, “Placing Jemima: Women Writers of the 1790s and the Eighteenth-Century Prostitution Narrative,” *Women’s Writing* 4, no. 2 (1997): 201-220, and Susan Staves, “British Seduced Maidens,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 2 (1980-81): 109-34, for discussion of Hannah Primrose as *Nature and Art*’s variation on the eighteenth-century trope of the “fallen woman.” In *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind*, Schofield claims that Inchbald pares down the conventions of the romance to its “skeleton structure, the stark confrontation between a man and a woman”; according to Schofield, the lack of a happily-ever-after ending signifies Inchbald’s critique of the romance genre, which Inchbald “unmasks” (182). Shawn Lisa Maurer examines the institutional forces—such as religion, education, social class, and family—that shape masculine identity in *Nature and Art*. Together, according to Maurer, these forces refute the assumption that Inchbald presents masculinity (and patriarchy) as a static construct against which we read the novel’s female characters. Rather, men and women are equally victims of their society, “Masculinity and Morality in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Nature and Art,*” in *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s*, ed. Linda Lang-Peralta, 155-176. Nancy E. Johnson examines *Nature and Art*’s participation in debates about the transition from monarchy to constitutional government. She argues that young Henry provides something of a model for the new citizen in his courageous confrontation of artifice, his emotional responsibility, and his call to political action,” *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and the Law: Critiquing the Contract* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 92. For further discussion of social class in the novel, see Mona Scheuermann, *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993). See also Scheuermann, *Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), and Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*.

1790s were one manifestation of the period’s larger interest in defining the very nature of civilization, of humanity, and of the role of culture in forming national identity. Ideas about Africa were deeply embedded in these debates. Fairchild helpfully reminds us that the Revolution era in Europe was dominated by debates over the “natural” rights of man, and that romanticizing a supposed “state of nature,” embodied by the noble savage, played an important part in these debates. He argues: “Throughout this period, the Noble Savage is a convenient example of whatever a writer may wish to prove. The perfectibilitarian can use him to suggest what man, once free, might become; the deteriorationist can use him to show what man formerly was, and never more will be.”

In other words, Fairchild suggests that Revolution-era writers such as Godwin, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Day use the noble savage either to illustrate society’s potential or its downfall. Either way, these writers idealize an “uncivilized” state.

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10 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 142. Fairchild surveys the development of the trope of the “noble savage” throughout the Romantic period. As Fairchild describes, the noble savage has long been perceived as a figure of beauty, innocence, and virtue, living in a perpetual state of nature, thus exposing the corruption of “civilized” society in his difference from it. Fairchild suggests that the noble savage was originally linked to native inhabitants of the Caribbean because of their supposedly greater physical beauty. He points out that the trope was later extended to Africans because of the “humanitarian current of the Romantic Movement” (10), by which he refers to the debate over slavery (a debate far more nuanced than he acknowledges). To a modern reader, there are some troublesome biases underlying this otherwise useful survey of the trope. Fairchild traces this trope to traveler’s tales published throughout the early modern period, though he approaches these texts without acknowledging their culturally biased perspectives. For example, he argues, “By fusing the more or less objective and irreflective narrations of the explorers with various long-current traditions, the philosopher arrives at important generalizations about the virtue of savage man and the deteriorating effects of civilization” (21). In validating the objectivity of narratives by Columbus and Michel de Montaigne, Fairchild authorizes their Eurocentric worldview. In essence, Fairchild’s discussion of the noble savage relies on the same kinds of thinking as the Enlightenment philosophers he cites: he unquestioningly uses the term “savage” to refer to the “Negro,” the “American Indian,” and other colonized groups, and seems persuaded of their backwardness and their lesser human status.

Like Fairchild, in *Alterity and Narrative* Roberts traces the trope of the noble savage to the early modern travel narrative, a genre in which the West negotiated its identity in the face of what Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes*, deems an expanding “planetary consciousness.” Among the earliest uses of this term, Roberts suggests that Amerigo Vespucci emphasized the noble savage’s “childlike innocence,” while Montaigne emphasized his “natural rationality” (119).
Inchbald’s portrayal of Africa extends beyond the noble savage tradition to the colonialisist interests of her day. By sending Henry Norwynne to the fictional “Zocotora Island,” Inchbald participates in a larger contemporary project of imagining African islands—and the African continent more generally—as blank spaces on which utopian communities could be projected.11 Two such schemes, the British colonies at Sierra Leone and Bulama, are important to understanding what Zocotora Island might have signified to Inchbald and her radical contemporaries. Both were founded on discourses of freedom and “natural” liberty: Sierra Leone was conceived as a “Colony of Freedom” for former slaves, Bulama as a “Free Community” for European citizens who sought alternatives to their society. These discourses of freedom illuminate the colonialisist ethos of the society portrayed at the novel’s conclusion: *Nature and Art* ends by attaching the idea of social progress to the act of forming a colony.

The founding of the British colony at Sierra Leone, to which *Nature and Art* directly refers, reminds us of the benevolent guises colonization efforts often assumed at this time—efforts that linked humanitarianism and the colonialisist impulse. Established in

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11 In *Islands in History and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith examine the symbolic meanings of islands across multiple centuries. Among them, two basic interpretations are often repeated, particularly in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of travel and exploration: islands are figured as “paradise or utopia” (1)—as inhabited spaces offering pleasure and relief, or as empty spaces ready for colonization. These two interpretations can, of course, coexist. Furthermore, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, islands are perceived as spaces in which the individual can exercise his self-sufficiency, or where that self-sufficiency is debunked. The separateness and boundedness of islands have also been important to their discursive uses. Edmond and Smith contend that islands have often been perceived as self-contained units populated by self-sustaining communities—“something static, unmixed and singular” (12). As such, islands are imagined to make entire species and cultures available for observation and interpretation, and to reveal the apparent power of geography to determine human character” (2). For example, they point out that Charles Darwin used the Galapagos Islands as the laboratory in which to formulate his theories of evolution. Their isolation and separateness have also made islands ideal sites for quarantine and for dumping those elements (such as criminals and the poor) that the metropole cannot (or will not) accommodate. Edmond and Smith argue: “The desire to perceive the island as a bounded and therefore controllable space seems to link writing on islands across the sciences and humanities, connecting the most fantastic of island utopias with the most careful of scientific treatises” (5). Inchbald’s use of “Zocotora Island” in *Nature and Art* follows Edmond and Smith’s contention that “the island has often been simplified and mythologised by continental cultures nostalgic for some aboriginal condition” (12).
1787, Sierra Leone was expected to solve the “problem” of the increased population of freed yet unemployed blacks in London, many of whom were liberated from slavery when they pledged their loyalty to Britain during the American Revolution in the decades prior to the abolition of the slave trade. Or, as Tcho Mbaimba Caulker puts it, establishing a colony at Sierra Leone reserved for former slaves was seen as an opportunity to remove an unwanted black population from England”; according to Antonio McDaniel, one of Sierra Leone’s primary purposes was providing the British government legitimate reason to rid London of the destitute beggars” populating its streets.\(^{12}\) Inchbald makes explicit reference to the Sierra Leone expedition as young Henry contemplates setting off to recover his father:

> Previously to this time he had made all the enquiries possible, whether any new adventure to that part of Africa in which he was bred, was likely to be undertaken. Of this there appeared no prospect, till the intended expedition to Sierra Leone was announced, which favoured his hope of being able to procure a passage, among those adventurers, so near to the island on which his father was (or had been) prisoner, as to obtain an opportunity of visiting it by stealth. (120)

Here Inchbald frames travel to Africa as an “adventure” and uses the term “adventurer” to refer to those departing for Sierra Leone. The *OED* defines “adventurer,” in part, as “one who undertakes, or shares in, commercial adventures or enterprises; a speculator.” Although Inchbald does not refer to the specifics of the Sierra Leone expedition, she subtly alludes to its financial purposes.

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Indeed, along with humanitarian aim of providing subsistence to former slaves, the promotion of British trade was always an important consideration in the founding of the colony. The coastal site at which Sierra Leone was located was strategically important in international commerce for centuries prior to its colonization. In establishing a “Colony of Freedom” at this location, the British government could pursue its own financial interests under the appearance of concern for the welfare of its disenfranchised. Caulker surveys the history of Sierra Leone through the various treaties establishing the colony. He notes an increasing degree of possessiveness in the language of these treaties, as the colony at Sierra Leone transitioned from a “Colony of Freedom” in 1787 (reaffirmed in a treaty of 1788), to being controlled by the joint-stock Sierra Leone Company in 1791, to a full British Crown Colony in 1808. In other words, the documents detailing the history of the colony could be taken to indicate that the government founded Sierra Leone under pretences of humanitarianism and freedom that gradually gave way to economic pursuits. In actuality, Caulker notes that the earliest settlement treaties of 1787 and 1788 demonstrate the government’s persistent interest in promoting trade. The ambiguous language in these early treaties confuses the actual terms on which Britain acquired the territory, subtly undermining the authority of African rulers and affording the British the freedom to create the settlement terms most profitable for them. The trajectory of these treaties, Caulker argues, “has one on a pathway through the evolution of the power relationship depicting the decline of indigenous sovereignty and the rise of colonial subjectivity.”

The moral narrative promoted by the British government when founding Sierra Leone served the interests of the British Empire at a crucial time following the loss of the

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North American colonies. Specifically, the "Colony of Freedom" supported the Empire’s "civilizing" mission. Brown traces connections between the Sierra Leone colony and the rhetoric of the abolitionist movement in Great Britain and North America, observing:

"The [American Revolution] directed unprecedented attention to the moral character of colonial institutions and imperial practices. ... Support for slavery could become an embarrassment if and when the virtue of imperial rule became a public question. At the same time, moral capital might be accrued by framing antislavery initiatives as an emblem of the national character."\textsuperscript{14} Following the American Revolution, Brown points out that maintaining the freedom of black loyalists was not a foregone conclusion, and that there were a variety of uses to which the British government might have put former slaves, such as selling them to partially recoup the cost of the war. Brown thus locates an expedient moral narrative in the decision to create a colony for "the Black Poor" at Sierra Leone. By supporting black loyalists, the British government could tout its moral superiority and reinforce ideas about British love of liberty, which would in turn support efforts to more permanently colonize the African continent: "[M]oral purpose emerged from an entirely amoral set of decisions. ... Recognizing the liberty of those who had fought for the crown became an end in itself by the early 1780s. If the British stood to gain little in material terms by guaranteeing the liberty of the escaped, there seemed no reason to squander the moral capital their emerging reputation for benevolence produced."\textsuperscript{15} The founding of Sierra Leone thus projected ideas about the British nation convenient to the contemporary crisis of imperial authority.

\textsuperscript{14} Brown, \textit{Moral Capital}, 27.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 312.
These lofty ideas about liberty and self-realization underpinned the founding of the later British colony at Bulama, established three years after Sierra Leone. Deborah Coleman contends that in the 1780s and 1790s, a number of philosophers, colonialists, and natural scientists viewed Africa as a utopia in which they might establish colonies lacking the burdens of social class and property. Influenced by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, these men envisioned what they deemed a “New Jerusalem” in the African interior populated by Africans untainted by the ills of Western civilization. Chief among these men were the Swedish abolitionist Carl Bernhard Wadstrom and the Swedish alchemist August Nordenskjold, who lived in London and collaborated on several important texts outlining their theories. These texts include the Plan for a Free Community (1789), co-authored by Wadstrom, Nordenskjold, and two other men, and Wadstrom’s An Essay on Colonization (1794-95). These men, and others of their ilk such as the agrarian reformer Thomas Spence, critiqued the same elements of European society as social radicals and Jacobins in England at the time of the French Revolution, such as Inchbald in Nature and Art: corruption in the clergy, in the institution of marriage, and in the aristocracy, among others. Empire provided the theater in which their radical visions might be realized; as Coleman describes, they believed that “old world corruption ... might be rectified in their new world colonies.” Of Bulama in particular, Coleman argues, —velling was the hall-mark of its politics.”

Wadstrom made an exploratory trip to the coast of West Africa in the 1780s, which piqued his

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16 Deborah Coleman, Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 67, 86. For Coleman’s rich and detailed discussion of these issues, see chapter 2, “The „microscope of enthusiasm‟: Swedenborgian ideas about Africa,” 63-105. Part of this chapter also appears as “Bulama and Sierra Leone: Utopian Islands and Visionary Interiors” in Islands in History and Representation, ed. Edmond and Smith, 63-80.
interest in penetrating the interior of Africa in search of an ideal society as well as his later interest in undertaking his own colonial project on the island of Bulama.

As Coleman makes clear, Swedenborgians’ ideas about civilization were complex and contradictory. On one hand, they elevated these imagined African societies above European society, speculating that the residents of New Jerusalem possessed superior wisdom in matters such as conjugal love and that they lived in perfect harmony with one another and with nature. They thus sought to replicate these ideal societies in their own African colonies. However, these idealized visions coincided with Swedenborgians’ belief that Africa was a less civilized continent and that it might be “improved” by introducing European-style commerce. For example, in Wadstrom’s Essay on Colonization, he contends:

The author has ever thought that the most likely way to promote the civilization of mankind, would be to lead their activity into the cultivation of their country, as the best exercise for their affections ... Thus, cultivation and commerce established upon the right principles, rendering the mind active, would easily dispose it for the reception of pure moral instruction: commodities in this case could not fail to become the vehicles of ideas and inventions; the best systems of morality or religion would of consequence soon prevail and the human species thereby would be ultimately improved and exalted.17

As this passage demonstrates, Wadstrom contends that the production of commodities would transform the inactive mind into an active one, and he locates the cultivation—or the development—of the country as a vehicle for moral instruction. The implication of this passage is that Africans lack mental activity and that they require improvement, so long as this improvement is undertaken “upon the right principles.” Wadstrom goes on to lament that Africa has been “so long overlooked by the industrious nations of Europe”

17 Carl Bernhard Wadstrom, An essay on colonization, particularly applied to the Western Coast of Africa ... Also brief descriptions of the colonies already formed, or attempted, in Africa, including those of Sierra Leona and Bulama (London, 1794), iii-iv. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
(iv) in pursuing commerce and civilization. Swedenborgians such as Wadstrom thus perceived of Africa as both superior and inferior to the European societies that they hoped to escape.

As a colonialist document, Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community* is a case study for the links between progressivism and imperialism in the late eighteenth century. It is also an important document for understanding the utopian colonial vision that concludes *Nature and Art*. This text outlines Wadstrom and his collaborators’ vision of the colony that was later established on the island of Bulama, located two hundred miles north of the coastal colony of Sierra Leone. Bulama was a short-lived enterprise. The Bulam Association formed in 1791 in London, at which time the land on the island of Bulama was auctioned off to potential settlers and subscribers. Disease quickly ravaged the eventual settlers, a number of whom were women and children: “At least sixty colonists died on the island in the first few months,” and “[b]y the middle of 1793 the colony was reduced to a handful of men, protected by a half-built block-house and a single cannon”; the colony was completely evacuated by November of that year. The colony’s failure speaks to the planners’ ignorance as to the actual living conditions on the island. The imaginative purposes Bulama served were far more carefully interrogated by its founders, as outlined in Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community*.

The French Revolution-era discourse of the “Rights of Man” and the promotion of “natural” liberty are central to Wadstrom and his associates’ *Plan*. In the introduction, they highlight a widespread dissatisfaction with existing societies: “Wherever we travel throughout Christendom, in Europe, America, or elsewhere, we find great numbers of Men, of all descriptions, very much dissatisfied with their condition; or in other words,

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with the State of the Society they are connected with.” As this statement makes clear, their social critique extends to the entire Western world; as the full title of the Plan implies, the proposed colony would be free of all European Laws and Governments,” not merely English ones. Furthermore, they assert the law of natural rights when they proclaim: Man is born to Liberty, and according to his ability and industry, he is intitled to all the prerogatives that the Community can afford him; but Liberty is restrained, and all true access to every thing agreeable in life is shut up” (iv). This passage implies that an individual’s labor, his ability and industry,” is what entitles him to his position in society—a sentiment that directly challenges the system of primogeniture that Burke and other social conservatives defended at this time. This kind of rhetoric recurs throughout the Plan: they repeatedly lament the miserable bondage” to which men are consigned by their societies and celebrate the opportunity for a state of Liberty and Felicity” (xii) made possible by their colonial scheme. Like Wollstonecraft and other progressives who critiqued the position of women in society, the Plan argues that women are educated to a variety of useless models, falsely called accomplishments, which, in case of Marriage, scarcely fail to entail misfortune and misery on their Husbands and Children, or otherwise become a pest and a burthen to the Community” (vii). Wadstrom and his collaborators contend that women should be educated so that they might be true companions for their husbands and better mothers to their children.

Furthermore, like other socially progressive texts of this time, the Plan for a Free Community critiques the existing economic system, which fails to reward the laboring classes for their labor. The coauthors of the Plan advocate abandoning the system of

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19 Plan for a free community upon the coast of Africa, under the protection of Great Britain; but entirely independent of all European Laws and Governments ... Embellished with a large and elegant View of Sierra Leone, on the Coast of Guinea (London, 1789), iii. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
commodities exchange, paper currency, and the division of labor that characterize a capitalist economy, and advance a system in which labor is both communally and personally rewarding. The coauthors describe the overarching evils of a capitalist community thus:

Two things may be said to constitute the Political Hell of a Community, viz. the *Lust of Dominion*, originating in the love of self; and the *Lust of Possession*, originating in the love of the world. By higher and higher degrees of dignity in a Community, a Man comes into uncontrolable exercise of the former, and in general, by such means he exalts himself above his fellow citizens; and by greater and greater degrees of wealth, he comes into the uncontrolable exercise of the latter, and in general, by such means, to the possession thereof, either in reality or in credit. (x)

The key evils isolated in this passage are the possession of wealth and dominion over one’s fellow man, the latter engendered by the former. The more wealth a man possesses, the more wealth he desires, which in turn leads to him procuring more possessions – either in reality or in credit.” The *Plan for a Free Community* repeats this mantra several times: the desire to possess leads directly to tyranny. At its root, as Coleman points out, Swedenborgian visions of Africa were anti-capitalist: “The problem, as [Wadstrom] saw it, was that an acquisitive monetary system had begun to reduce Europe’s labouring poor to mindless automatons.” Wadstrom envisioned a classless and egalitarian rural community, where the land was communally cultivated and its produce equally consumed by all.”

The *Plan for a Free Community*’s indictment of the class system and its advocacy for the communal value of labor are important for understanding *Nature and Art*’s social vision because each text ultimately proposes an external location—a colony—as the site for their new society. The *Plan* might well be describing the corrupt social world of

Inchbald’s novel, which the Norwynnes ultimately relinquish, in the following
pronouncement:

[W]e find every where People of the best abilities, and most diligent
industry in performing the most valuable uses, oppressed with intolerable
labour, obliged to make their way through life, not only in the sweat of
their brows ... but also under an abject servility to innumerable monied
Tyrants: for it cannot be denied, that many men of the best hearts and most
zealous activity for the welfare of Mankind, are continually trodden under
and pressed by the grievous yoke of the dignified proud Man, who has
nothing but his Wealth, or his Place, for the ground of that indifference,
scorn, and unmerciful insolence, which he pours upon the more worthy of
his own species who are below him. (iv-v)

Here Wadstrom and his collaborators contrast the laboring classes and the aristocrats who
oppress them. An important part of their indictment of the aristocracy is the apparent
virtue of work: they contrast the industry, labour, servility, and activity of those who bear
the “yoke” in their society—those who actively produce with the “sweat of their
brows”—with those who passively possess wealth that they have not earned. Later, in
outlining “the most powerful and most common natural evil,” the Plan points to the
“Tyranny of Money” (32) as a primary source of social corruption. Money, Wadstrom
argues, “which ought to represent the exercises of Industry and Activity, now on the
contrary represents Intrigues and Idleness” (ix). Money signifies the absence of labor; in
turn, labor signifies moral virtue.21

The virtue of labor that is so vital to Wadstrom and his collaborator’s colonial
society is the linchpin of the ideal society Inchbald presents at the conclusion of Nature
and Art, as is the abandonment of the class system that the Plan for a Free Community
deems so corrupt. As such, Nature and Art also reveals important links between

progressivism and imperialism. After returning to England with his son, one of Henry’s first desires is to be reconciled with his brother, and the two Henrys travel to William’s (now a bishop) estate in time to witness his funeral procession. They encounter a “poor labourer returning from his day’s work” (147) who informs them that William did “Nothing at all for the poor … [I]f they asked for any thing, he was sure to have them sent to bridewell … He has sent many a poor man to the house of correction” (147, 148).

Bridewell was the name of a London prison, but Maurer points out, “More generally, the term refers to any prison” (148, note 1). Inchbald critiques the aristocracy for its failure to provide for the poor and for its reliance on unjust punitive solutions to social injustice. Moreover, hearing the peasant’s tale, Henry laments not only his brother’s death and apparent cruelty but a larger class-based social discord: “The malicious joy with which the peasant told this story, made Henry believe … that there had been want of charity and christian deportment in the conduct of the bishop’s family. He almost wished himself back on his savage island, where brotherly love could not be less, than it appeared to be in this civilised country” (148). Although he is something of a victim, the peasant in this scenario is nonetheless “malicious,” and Inchbald presents him in a negative light for rejoicing at the bishop’s death. The lack of “brotherly love” Henry laments thus extends beyond William’s lack of charity to his society as a whole. Inchbald clearly means for us to question the terms “savage” and “civilised” and implies that they have been wrongly assigned, which is a central trope of the noble savage tradition. However, Inchbald’s emphasis on class-based inequality simultaneous to questioning the meaning of “civilization” also indicates the similarity between this novel’s political vision and Swedenborgian visions of Africa.
The progressive discourses of *Nature and Art* thus have wider colonial resonances. *Nature and Art* is certainly progressive in the ways that it critiques English society, at least according to the conservative/progressive continuum generally used to describe Revolution-era novels. Hannah Primrose's abandonment by William and her eventual death by execution bring home Inchbald's biting portrayal of the corrupt legal establishment and the ways that women suffer at its hands. However, *Nature and Art*'s ultimate solution to this problem is best understood in the context of the colonial projects undertaken at Sierra Leone and Bulama, particularly when it comes to understanding what scholars have located as the novel's perplexing conclusion. In the final chapter, Inchbald portrays a self-sustaining society free from what Wadstrom calls the “Tyranny of Money,” a society that rewards the virtue of labor and in which man can exercise true liberty. In their similarity to the philosophy of Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community*, *Nature and Art*'s Revolutionary discourses are also colonial discourses. The community Inchbald celebrates at the end of the novel presents a prototype of a British colony as an ideal society. Furthermore, the Norwynnes establish their seaside estate to serve the cause of freedom, which is akin to the British government using a narrative of freedom to justify exporting impoverished former slaves to Sierra Leone. In other words, like the settlement treaties suggesting that Sierra Leone will atone for the evils of slavery, *Nature and Art* subtly makes colonization progressive, even heroic.

**Nature and Art's Colonial Utopia**

At the end of the introduction to the *Plan for a Free Community*, having surveyed the society that they wish to escape, Wadstrom and his collaborators state:
Here then the reader is presented with a Plan, entirely new, and perhaps before unthought of, for the formation and use of a Free Community. It only remains, that a number of zealous friends to humanity combine themselves to form and promote such a Community, in some place out of the bounds of Europe, where the natives shall be found in a simple state of nature, comparatively innocent, because uncorrupted by the vices which have hitherto sprung from a disordered circulation. We may expect then soon to find many People, from all the nations of Europe, presenting themselves as useful Members, wishing to partake of the privileges of this Community. (xiii-xiv)

This passage is worth quoting at length because it embodies the collusion between the contemporary colonial and Revolutionary discourses that are so important to *Nature and Art*. Wadstrom and his co-authors present their colonial project as advancing benevolent interests: "friends to humanity" will join together to form this new society, surrounded by noble savages in a "simple state of nature." This is also the first moment in the Plan that the authors acknowledge a native population, though in their virtuous simplicity the "natives" merely heighten the appeal of the plan to colonize. Apparently the co-authors anticipate no protest over forming a community on co-opted land. This passage also repeats the rhetoric of virtuous labor, as the members of the proposed community are expected to be "useful" in order to "partake" of its benefits. And, importantly, this community is only possible "out of the bounds of Europe."

The conclusion to *Nature and Art* builds on these tropes as Inchbald creates her own colony at an apparent (though ambiguous) remove from England as a solution to the social problems she identifies. She sends her heroic characters to a symbolic island to establish a colony "on the borders of the sea" (153). The ambiguity of this location is noteworthy. On one hand, it suggests that Inchbald didn’t know quite where such a

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22 Maurer links the rural abode to Zocotora Island and suggests that the "small house or hut" (153) by the sea constitutes a "social, if not ‘savage’ island,” and argues that this "island existence ... represent[s] a move outside of class relations per se” to a "pre-lapsarian world of Edenic hunter-gatherers, concerned with survival instead of with the production and ownership of goods" (Masculinity and Morality" 172).
society might be possible, only that it had to be outside the novel’s existing social world. This ambiguity also subtly echoes the lack of specificity that ends the introduction to the *Plan for a Free Community*: it is akin to the “some place out of the bounds of Europe” at which Wadstrom and his collaborators want to establish their Free Community.

Furthermore, at the end of the novel’s final chapter, in what some critics have read (or, I would argue, misread) as a capitulating move, young Henry declares, “Let the poor then ... no more be their own persecutors—no longer pay homage to wealth—instinctaneously the whole idolatrous worship will cease—the idol will be broken” (154). Though Henry might appear to argue that the poor should be content in their poverty, I would argue that this is, in fact, a radical vision. Ultimately, Inchbald wants to “break” the social system that *Nature and Art* exposes. Rather than dismantling the existing social world of her novel, however, Inchbald realizes her vision at an imaginative distance.

Self-sufficiency is a signal quality of Inchbald’s new society. In the novel’s final chapter, the elder Henry, his son, and his son’s wife Rebecca join together to form “a humble scheme for their remaining life, a scheme depending upon their own exertions alone” (152). In turn, in order to achieve their scheme, they remove themselves from the systems that structure English society: “Exempt from both patronage and from controul—healthy—alive to every fruition with which nature blesses the world; dead to all out of their power to attain, the works of art—susceptible of those passions which endear human creatures one to another, insensible to those which separate man from man—they found themselves the thankful inhabitants of a small house or hut, placed on the borders of the sea” (153). Here again Inchbald opposes nature and art: the group is “alive” to the fruits of the natural world—i.e. they exist in a state of nature—and “dead”
to the works of art.” The geographic remove of this residence reinforces other important removals, as the group retreats from the corrupt system of patronage embodied by the now-deceased bishop William and his equally corrupt son. This new society is defined by human connection rather than division. Though this passage does not explicitly say so, social class seems to be among the divisions to which they are immune.

Like the colonialist ethos of the Plan for a Free Community, Inchbald’s vision of domestic contentment relies on the virtue of labor: “Each morning wakes the father and the son to cheerful labour in fishing, or the tending of a garden, the produce of which they carry to the next market town” (153). It is important that this labor is cheerfully performed: labor is no longer the burden that leaves them trodden under and pressed by the grievous yoke of the dignified proud Man” (v), as Wadstrom puts it in the Plan, but the activity that gives them satisfaction. Inchbald reinforces their joy in labor and their self-sufficiency several times: on one particular evening, they dine on a supper of roots from their garden, poultry that Rebecca’s hand had reared, and a jug brewed by young Henry” (153). Inchbald’s ideal community also participates in the debate about women’s education. Young Henry’s wife is skilled in making their home a comfortable place as well as participating in intellectual communion: “The evening sends them back to their home in joy; where Rebecca meets them at the door, affectionately boasts of the warm meal that is ready, and heightens the charm of conversation with her taste and judgement” (153). Rebecca’s skills extend beyond the useless accomplishments” Wadstrom and his co-authors (and Wollstonecraft) critique.

The conversation that follows this opening description of the Norwynnes’ seaside residence has been the subject of much debate in the existing scholarship on this novel.
Inchbald seems to retreat from her otherwise pervasive critique of social inequality and to suggest that the poor should rejoice in their stations rather than to agitate for change—what many would identify as a conservative stance. For example, as they eat the “warm meal” Rebecca has prepared for them, Henry declares, “I once ... considered poverty a curse—but after my thoughts became enlarged, and I had associated for years with the rich, and now mix with the poor, my opinion has undergone a total change ... Were we, my Rebecca, of discontented minds, we have now too little. But conscious, from observation and experience, that the rich are not so happy as ourselves, we rejoice in our lot” (153). Henry suggests that because they have rejected their society’s system of value—namely, its class system—they are content in their poverty. This contentment is mental as well as physical, as they have learned to value and to derive pleasure from their labor: the elder Henry declares, “Labour gives a value to rest, which the idle can never taste” (153). Young Henry even suggests that the rich are in an equally miserable station as the poor: “I know that in this opulent kingdom, there are near as many persons perishing through intemperance, as starving with hunger—there are as many miserable in the lassitude of having nothing to do, as there are bowed down to the earth with hard labour” (154). Rather than advocating the more equal distribution of resources and the removal of ancient systems of class distinction—what Burke negatively termed “levelling”—this exchange reorients poverty as the preferable station in life because of the moral and mental satisfaction it provides. When the younger Henry claims, “[T]he rich are so much afraid of dying, they have no comfort in living,” Rebecca adds, “There the poor have another advantage ... for they may defy not only death, but every loss by
sea or land, as they have nothing to lose” (154). Having “nothing,” Inchbald seems to imply, is to one’s advantage.23

Inchbald’s apparent advocacy of poverty has struck many as a failure of the novel’s politics. For example, Kelly suggests that Inchbald concludes her novel with that sentimental view of the superior moral virtue inherent in poverty which was fast becoming one of the shibboleths of the Evangelicals and others who preached quietism against those who were beginning to ask why the poor are always with us.”24 Kelly compares this ending to the conservative sentiments of Hannah More’s Cheap Repository Tracts (1796-99), which sought to reconcile the poor to their present circumstances rather than to demand the restructuring of society. Scheuermann also reads the rural retreat as a simplistic conclusion to the radical protests the novel otherwise seems to level: “According to Inchbald it is only because everyone, rich and poor, has been educated to revere wealth that the poor are unhappy ... If the poor could rid themselves of this false estimation of value, they would be happy.”25 Ty also sees the novel’s conclusion as a disintegration of its radicalism: “[Inchbald] terminates the novel with a rather idyllic,

23 Their disinterest in what Maurer calls “the production and ownership of goods” is one of the Revolution-era discourses that Inchbald upholds, as Johnson describes in The English Jacobin Novel. Johnson contends that the concepts of rights, property, and the law were central to debates about the “right of man”; the Jacobin novel demonstrates that to be engaged in civil society, one has to be a legal subject endowed with rights, and those rights are a function of property” (3). However, Johnson argues that the very nature of property changed in the 1790s: the concept of property shifted from what one owns (material forms of property such as land and titles) to ownership of oneself, which is not explicitly tied to material property. As such, as described in John Locke’s Two Treatises of Government (1690), “the chief property necessary to enfranchisement is the property one claims in oneself” (3). Such a sentiment appears radical and inclusive. Because of their lesser legal, economic, and human status, women and other disenfranchised groups such as slaves were excluded from this discourse. According to Johnson, because of these limitations, “the English Jacobin novel betrays a wariness of the continued dependence of agency on property” (4). Although it might appear emptied of political sentiment, Johnson argues that the novel’s conclusion is a radical re-imagining of the distribution of resources in society, as well as of the relationship between the rich and the poor. Nature and Art imagines the end of the hierarchical system of patronage and the emergence of the “powerful independent self” (93).


romantic end”; Ty admits that this conclusion might seem like a facile solution to the problems presented in the earlier sections of the novel.”

However, there is another way that we might see the sudden appearance of this conservatism: namely, we might see this celebration of poverty and self-sufficiency not as a retreat from the novel’s radical politics, but as a point of exposure, a point at which the colonialist fantasies of Inchbald and her contemporaries collide with their progressivism. The coincidence of progressivism and imperialism at this time was not confined to the proposals of Wadstrom and other Swedenborgians. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, Inchbald’s literary contemporaries, devised radical colonialist fantasies of their own in their plans for a Pantisocracy in the Susquehanna Valley of Pennsylvania; the term Pantisocracy means government by all.”

Coleridge and Southey wanted to create an ideal society freed from European corruption, the principles of which Coleridge intended to outline in his never-written Book of Pantisocracy.” Pantisocracy bears obvious similarities to the free community model proposed by Wadstrom and Swedenborg: both were founded on the desire to abandon the artificial distinctions of the European class system and both required a territory external to Europe to realize their vision.

Coleridge relied on Wadstrom’s Essay on Colonization to describe his vision of idyllic communal living. Other colonialist documents influenced Coleridge’s plans as

26 Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries, 112. Because Inchbald never tells us how Henry and his father purchase this land, Maurer suggests that this ending is inviable (“Masculinity and Morality” 173). Anna Lott argues, “The novel leaves open the possibility that the children of Henry and Rebecca might lead the way to a more egalitarian future, one based on merit not wealth, in which individuals take responsibility for one another,” Elizabeth Inchbald’s Revolutionary Writings,” in Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, ed. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2010), 250.

27 For a brief history of this movement, see Maurer, introduction to Nature and Art, 28-30.
well: according to James C. McKusick, Coleridge and Southey’s vision for Pantisocracy derived, in part, from eighteenth-century accounts of travel and exploration. For example, Southey was fascinated by a pamphlet detailing the mutiny aboard the *Bounty* in 1789, led by Fletcher Christian, after which Christian and the other mutineers established a community in Tahiti. Southey was particularly captivated by Christian, whom he envisioned as a bold adventurer striking out against tyranny; the sailors’ mutiny was regarded as an English equivalent of the Fall of the Bastille.” Coleridge was fascinated by George Keate’s *Account of the Pelew Islands* (1788), which tells the story of the shipwrecked crew of the *Antelope* who were saved by inhabitants of the Pelew or Palos Islands in the Western Pacific. McKusick contends: “For Coleridge, as for Southey, the initial appeal of Pantisocracy was its offer of escape from British tyranny to an exotic paradise resembling the tropical islands described by South Sea explorers since the time of Cook.”

Europe’s colonialist fantasies underwrote their progressive ideas.

The anti-Jacobin domestic fervor of the early- to mid-1790s played an important part in the Pantisocracy movement. Kenneth R. Johnston argues: “A good deal of the outrage in the Southey and Coleridge families—when they got wind of the Pantisocracy plan—seems to have had more to do with its apparent republicanism than with its danger

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28 James C. McKusick, “Wisely forgetful’: Coleridge and the Politics of Pantisocracy,” in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110, 113. Both Pantisocracy and Swedenborgian visions of Africa rely on inherent contradictions that undercut their egalitarian aims. As McKusick points out, Coleridge and Southey’s vision retained the very class structure they sought to relinquish. For example, Southey imagined a class of people immigrating to the Pantisocratic colony with the express purpose of completing necessary physical labor, leaving him free for intellectual pursuits; working class men and educated men would thus remain separate. Southey also imagined bringing with him “some poor negro whom I have bought on purpose to emancipate” (qtd. in McKusick 126) who would be his companion in taming the wilderness. This desire is inherently paradoxical: Southey wanted to emancipate a slave so that he would remain as such, like Crusoe’s Friday; a hierarchical relationship between the English poet and the African slave would remain intact. Similarly, the “free community” proposed by Wadstrom on the island of Bulama and the “Colony of Freedom” that was to be Sierra Leone relied on belief in the inherent savagery” and dependency of Africans.
or impracticality. They did not see it so much as a wild venture into the wilderness as, rather, in effect, a kind of treason, in the context of the treason trials which the government had been conducting since 1792.”

Indeed, the kind of property-sharing social arrangement central to Pantisocracy was dangerously similar to the social “levelling” feared by Burke. As McKusick outlines, Coleridge and Southey imagined “the equal government of all” and “the generalization of individual property” in a society ruled by “the egalitarian ideal of brotherly love.”

Johnston points out that such an arrangement would never have been permitted (and still might not be permissible) in England, so radical were its implications. Furthermore, Johnston reminds us that Pantisocrats like Coleridge and Southey sought refuge from very real historical circumstances. He argues: “If Pantisocracy was an escape, it was an escape from something real and dangerous: the effectiveness of Pitt’s and Portland’s systematic crackdown against domestic dissent was by 1797 just about complete.”

Coleridge and Southey’s imagined (though never realized) plans for a Pantisocratic community reveal important connections between Revolution-era progressivism and the colonial imagination. For Coleridge and Southey, as for Wadstrom and Swedenborg, only a space exterior to Great Britain (and Europe more generally) offered the imaginative freedom on which to project their political fantasies. This “other” space, exterior to the existing society, is inextricable from the progressive politics of Inchbald’s *Nature and Art*. Indeed, the idyllic domestic landscape “on the borders of the

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sea” (153) at the novel’s conclusion has important colonial resonances, as the ever expanding horizon long provided fuel for imperialist fantasies. Moreover, to transcend the corrupt old money system she so vehemently attacked, Inchbald had to quite literally remove her virtuous characters from it, as though she (like Wadstrom) despaired of reforming the system itself. In her discussion of Swedenborg’s 『New Jerusalem,』
Coleman reminds us that interiors can function as islands—that Henry and Rebecca need not literally occupy an island for their community to constitute an island colony, a fantasy of autonomy and isolation akin to Wadstrom’s failed colonial vision.

The vagueness of Inchbald’s seaside colony also points to the failure of schemes such as Coleridge’s Pantisocracy and Wadstrom’s Bulama. The community Inchbald presents at the conclusion of Nature and Art is both highly idealized and highly ambiguous. Presumably, Inchbald wants her reader to desire the communal structure in which Henry, his son, and Rebecca so blissfully exist. She makes it clear that the labor of one’s own hands provides the greatest satisfaction, and that the class system must be abandoned if one is to achieve this satisfaction. However, Inchbald provides no real roadmap as to how such a society might be established. Indeed, despite her best efforts to remove her heroes from the trappings of English society, they remain marginally involved in it: they carry the “produce” of their garden to the next market town” (153).

Late eighteenth-century utopian colonial visions relied upon this kind of ambiguity and upon their planners’ ignorance and misunderstanding of the territories on which they projected their new societies. Of course, there are important differences between North America and Africa, particularly as they were understood in the 1790s. The recently emancipated colonies in North America were familiar to Britons for their
successful repudiation of the British government several decades before. Perhaps this success at rebellion is why this territory appealed to Coleridge and Southey.

Geographically, North America was better known, less of a “blank” space. By contrast, Africa was lesser known and it maintained a dual aura of promise and of menace in the British imagination.

*Nature and Art* suggests that Inchbald shared with her literary contemporaries, both progressive and conservative, the sense that the African continent required the civilizing influence of Europe. The process of spreading civilization often assumed humanitarian guises. In the advertisement that begins his *Essay on Colonization*, Wadstrom pleads the cause of African colonization on “humane” rather than commercial terms and suggests that those who are similarly interested in humanity should do likewise: “The period indeed seems fast approaching, if it has not yet arrived ... when persons of property, discarding all commercial maxims, and adopting those of benevolence, which is but another word for true policy, will successfully labour to reconcile self interest with the interests of mankind.”

Wadstrom offers a sentimental defense of imperialism, though it might not appear as such: “benevolence” and the “interests of mankind” are to supplant “property” and “commercial” concerns. However, benevolent interests weren’t really replacing commercial ones in such schemes; rather, benevolence became the partial *raison d’être* for colonial outposts that allowed Britain to expand its international trade, such as the “Colony of Freedom” at Sierra Leone and the “free community” at the failed island colony of Bulama. As a progressive novel, *Nature and Art* participates in establishing the cultural hierarchy that justified the scramble for Africa into the nineteenth century.

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Antislavery Colonization: Civilizing the “Savage” Continent

The idea of African savagery contributed to colonization efforts in this period similar to those undertaken at Sierra Leone and Bulama. Brown surveys the curious (and seemingly contradictory, from a twenty-first-century perspective) phenomenon of “antislavery colonization” schemes in the 1780s and 1790s. As Brown describes, this period saw escalating interest among merchants and government officials in expanding the British Empire into Africa and in exploiting its rich natural resources. Some also saw Africa as a possible site for replacing the lost North American colonies. In the earlier decades of the eighteenth century the trade in slaves was Britain’s most profitable commerce with the continent. However, British slave traders had little to no authority, paying rents to the African rulers on whose land they established trading posts. These limited circumstances led to proposals for establishing more permanent (and more lucrative) colonies in Africa that would focus on trading commodities rather than bodies. As Brown describes, one early proponent of colonizing Africa, Malachy Postlethwayt, “considered the West African hinterland a vast, unimproved common,” ideal for the cultivation of crops valued in European markets.” A committed supporter of the Royal Africa Company, which asked its agents to promote export trades in cotton, indigo, pepper, medicines, and potash,” Postlethwayt promoted the abolition of slavery as a means of increasing this commerce. Taking an abolitionist stance secured Postlethwayt a position of moral authority, transforming his intent to colonize Africa in order to secure material (rather than human) commodities into a kind of humanitarian endeavor. Schemes such as those promoted by Postlethwayt relied on the linked presumptions that Africans were savage beings and that they were capable of attaining civilization and (perhaps most

33 Brown, Moral Capital, 272, 265-66.
importantly) learning the forms of skilled labor that would assist the British Empire in producing goods for export.

Inchbald introduces Africa in *Nature and Art* in terms that point to the antislavery colonization” context Brown identifies: as an uncivilized site with the potential for financial exploitation. Having been estranged from Henry for some time due to their disagreement over Henry’s choice of a wife, William learns that on his wife’s decease, unable to support her loss in the surrounding scene, Henry had taken the child she brought him in his arms, shaken hands with all his former friends—passing over his brother in the number—and set sail in a vessel bound for Africa, with a party of Portuguese and some few English adventurers, to people there the uninhabited part of an extensive island” (51). It is clear that this is an enterprise in colonization, as Henry’s company plans to “people” the African island. There is also a commercial layer to this expedition. In Henry’s later letter to William, delivered by the young Henry, he relays that he left England in part because he had injured his arm and could no longer play the violin, leaving him “to try my fortune with some other adventurers” (55). In a modern edition of *Nature and Art*, Maurer points out that the term “adventurer” suggests that the people with whom Henry travels may have been involved in the slave trade” (51, note 1). The commercial connections Maurer makes are persuasive. However, with Brown’s discussion of antislavery colonization in mind, it is equally possible that this band of adventurers aim to promote a broader commerce than the trade in slaves. Whatever the nature of the “fortune” Henry seeks, it is linked to his desire to establish a colony. Caulker argues that in the eighteenth century “emerging economic and philosophical systems ... were combined to form a colonial philosophy linking European economic
success with the so-called civilization of Africa.” Caulker examines the literary texts, travel narratives, official histories, trading records, and other documents that portrayed Africa as a savage continent requiring European cultivation, a process they in turn linked to Europe’s economic growth.

*Nature and Art* follows this contemporary perception and portrays the African island to which Henry emigrates as a savage wasteland. For several years after Henry’s departure, William is anxious to hear from him: “But many years having elapsed without any intelligence from him, and a report having arrived that he, and all the party with whom he went, were slain by the savage inhabitants of the island, William’s despair of seeing his brother again, caused the desire to diminish” (52). In his later letter to William, Henry recounts, “You have, I suppose, heard that the savages of the island put our whole party to death” (55). Thus it appears that the “uninhabited” island was not so after all, its “savage” residents decimating the Europeans. Much later in the novel, as young Henry heads to Africa to recover his father, Inchbald portrays the elder Henry as having lived “apart from civilised society” (130) where he lay “imprisoned in his dungeon” (131) until released by the king who has kept him captive. Here Inchbald clearly opposes civilization (England) with savagery (Africa). As part of the didactic message Inchbald intends in *Nature and Art*, Henry takes comfort in knowing that even though his physical circumstances have been miserable, he has lived an honest and virtuous life: “This was the resource that cheered his sinking heart amidst gloomy deserts and a barbarous people;

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34 Caulker, *The African-British Long Eighteenth Century*, 57. Caulker highlights important connections between eighteenth-century moral and economic philosophy, as exhibited in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Despite the fact that these two texts are often seen to address separate concerns, Caulker argues that moral arguments in fact undergird economic ones: the view that Africans lacked basic humanity led to a theoretical dynamic in which the establishment of moral and religious foundations through colonial civilization and a disciplinary system of regulation “works hand in hand with any potentially fruitful economic model” (72). In other words, Smith and others saw the successful civilization of Africa as crucial to its profitability.
lulled him to peaceful slumber in the hut of a savage hunter, and in the hearing of the
lion’s roar; at times impressed him with a sense of happiness; and made him contemplate
with a longing hope, the retribution of a future world” (131). When young Henry lands
on the island to rescue his father, ―scarcely had the interview between the father and the
son taken place, than a band of natives ... came to attack the invaders‖ (133). In each of
these points in the novel, Inchbald paints a picture of Africa that is both threatening and
vague: we know that lions, hunters, murderous savages, and despotic kings are among the
island’s inhabitants. However, Inchbald includes no topographical or other specific
details. Although Africa is clearly portrayed as a deadly locale, in these instances it is
simultaneously so vaguely described that its incitement of fear becomes its most
noteworthy—indeed, its only—quality. 35

Although it may seem contradictory, a negative perception of Africa and the
desire to colonize it frequently coexisted at this time; Nature and Art demonstrates both
of these perceptions. Caulker summarizes the phenomenon, noted by many scholars, that
in eighteenth-century literary texts, —Africa, in many ways, becomes a sort of fetish
landscape ... a geographical backdrop or stage on which European fears, desires,
fantasies, and so forth are played out for an audience of readers.” 36 Tracing literary
precedent for this process in Oroonoko (1688), Caulker argues that in the Europeanized
and —civilized” figure of the Royal Slave, Behn fantasizes the potential for the entire
savage continent of Africa to be civilized through the labor of benevolent Europeans.

35 Garnai, Revolutionary Imaginings, 136. Maurer emphasizes that we don’t know much about the
actual place in which young Henry is raised: “[the novel] provides not the smallest glimpse of the young
Henry’s life upon the African island; the only description of his upbringing comes obliquely” (“Masculinity
and Morality” 164).

Behn does so, in part, in descriptions of Oroonoko that emphasize the work involved in fashioning his superior person: for example, the art of straightening his hair, "of which he took particular Care." Behn also makes clear that Oroonoko's degree of civilization is the result of "much work and training" on the part of generous Europeans. However, by the end of the text Oroonoko reverts to a state of inherent savagery when he learns that his wife Imoinda is pregnant, at which point he embodies "the lingering element of savage danger, or savage possibility, that lurks beneath the aesthetically pleasing exterior and the gentle mimicry." This reading of Oroonoko highlights eighteenth-century fantasies about the African continent as capable of attaining civilization while maintaining a dark and dangerous essential identity.

Of course, both Oroonoko and Nature and Art harshly criticize the nature of European civilization, and it might seem a natural extension of this project to criticize European overseas empires. For example, having been tricked aboard a slave ship, Oroonoko critiques both the religion and the honor of the ship's captain. When Oroonoko resolves to starve himself to death rather than be a slave, the captain promises to set him and his fellow Coramantiens ashore on the next habitable land they encounter. Behn describes: "Oroonoko, whose Honour was such as he had never violated a Word in his Life himself, much less a solemn Asservation, believed in an instant what this Man said," and requires that his chains be removed as proof of the captain's constancy. When Oroonoko learns that the captain has no intention of removing his chains, he responds, "Let him know I Swear by my Honour, which to violate, would not only render me

37 Ibid., 9.

contemptible and despised by all brave and honest Men, and so give myself perpetual
pain, but it would be eternally offending and diseasing all Mankind, harming, betraying,
circumventing and outraging all Men” (312). Here Behn sets up a contrast between the
captain’s deception—his lack of honor—and Oroonoko’s exhibition of bravery and
honesty. Moreover, Oroonoko points to a universal code of honor which “all Mankind”
acknowledges and which the supposedly more “civilized” Europeans violate. Similarly,
Nature and Art highlights the ways English society disguises its bad deeds in semantics.
Young Henry’s “childish inattention” to the “proper signification” of words forms
Inchbald’s critique: “He would call compliments, lies—Reserve, he would call pride—
stateliness, affection—and for the words war and battle, he constantly substituted the
word massacre” (63). This confusion predictably enrages Dean William, whose career in
the clergy relies on the ameliorative power of language. Oroonoko and Henry, both noble
savages, question the moral authority of an allegedly superior European culture.

However, although Nature and Art openly critiques English society, it still relies
on the underlying assumption of African inferiority—a colonialist sentiment. Inchbald
makes a statement of apparent ant-imperialism when, in the elder Henry’s letter to Dean
William in which he relays that the band of European adventurers has been killed by
Africans, he concedes: “I was heart-broken for my comrades, yet upon the whole I do not
know that the savages were much to blame—we had no business to invade their
territories; and if they had invaded England, we should have done the same by them”
(55). Because of this concession, Maurer contends that the novel explicitely condemns
British imperialism,” and indeed, Henry expresses sympathy for the Africans’ actions.39

39 Shawn Lisa Maurer, introduction to Elizabeth Inchbald, Nature and Art [1796] (Peterborough:
Broadview Press, 2005), 11.
However, despite his claim that the Europeans had “no business” in Africa, the presumed savagery of the continent persists here and throughout the text. *Nature and Art’s* otherwise vehement critique of the English government does not extend to its imperialism. To be sure, *Nature and Art* does not openly advocate colonization. However, it implicitly reinforces the discourses that were used by Inchbald’s contemporaries in order to do so.

Political labels such as radical and conservative begin to break down when we attend to the similar ways that the fiction of this period theorizes the rest of the world. Elizabeth Hamilton’s novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) shares much in common with *Nature and Art*, particularly in its conception of Africa as a savage continent, despite the fact that the novel openly mocks the politics of Inchbald and her ilk. Like *Nature and Art*, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* creates a hierarchical relationship between Africa and England. This novel offers three competing versions of femininity in the characters of Julia Delmont, a naive reader of novels who is seduced and abandoned by a Jacobin; Harriet Orwell, a pious Christian who is Hamilton’s model of domestic virtue; and the anti-heroine Brigetina Botherim. Hamilton models Brigetina after the progressive novelist Mary Hays, author of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). Brigetina is a rather vicious caricature of Hays: foolish and physically deformed, she is “[n] entirely ridiculous figure” who “spouts mangled Godwinisms at every opportunity,” as Julie Murray puts it.\(^4\)\(^0\) Brigetina associates with a group of equally ridiculous social radicals, or “New Philosophers,” which includes the appropriately named Mr. Glib; Vallaton, the foppish hairdresser who

seduces Julia; Mr. Myope, a Godwin figure and Anabaptist; and the Goddess of Reason, who speaks in an exaggerated French accent. During one meeting of this group, Mr. Glib produces François Le Vaillant’s *Voyage dans l’interieur de l’Afrique*, or *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa* (1790). This text immediately incites the interest of the group, who see a society structured according to the tenets of the New Philosophy in La Vaillant’s descriptions of the Gonoquais Hottentots. La Vaillant portrays Hottentots as noble savages and emphasizes their supposed artlessness and natural virtue—the very qualities Inchbald aligns with young Henry Norwynne in *Nature and Art*. According to Linda E. Merians, this text received an enthusiastic reception from Britain’s more liberal literary and political circles.\(^{42}\)

The group’s identification with the Hottentots is one way that Hamilton asks her reader to see the foolishness of radicalism: she relies on the contemporary idea that Hottentots were among the most debased societies in existence. Merians argues that “Hottentots” were the ultimate other to the English throughout the early modern period: they were perceived as quintessentially barbarous and beastly, a perception that reaffirmed beliefs in the superiority of English culture: “In short, those who imagined themselves as humanity’s best found it equally necessary to envision humanity’s worst.” This perception derived, in part, from classical texts such as those by Herodotus, Solinus, and Pliny, which began a tradition in western literature of imagining Africans as physically ugly and monstrous, sexually promiscuous and brutal, and technologically


backward in comparison with Europeans."[^43] The term Hottentot referred to the indigenous residents of the Cape of Khoikhoi (or the Cape of Good Hope) region of southern Africa. A number of early-modern travel narratives describing the Cape Khoikhoi region stop short of providing a full account of Khoikhoi clans; such narratives suggested (inaccurately) that these clans were already well known to the English. In fact, the Khoikhoi remained a generalized, presumably dangerous, and largely unknown other. This descriptive failure points to the fear and uncertainty with which the English approached the region. The tumultuous nature of the sea near Cape Khoikhoi, at which the South Atlantic and Indian oceans meet, only heightened the English’s sense of its danger. Furthermore, Merians points out important differences between the ways that Hottentots and Native Americans were perceived: because of Great Britain’s colonial...

[^43] Merians, *Envisioning the Worst* 14, 19. Merians provides a useful overview of European contact with what came to be known as the "Hottentots," or the clans who resided at Cape Khoikhoi in southern Africa (14-18). The earliest contact came in the late fifteenth century when Portuguese sailors, led by Bartholomeu Dias, "rounded the Cape" and "landed eastward of it at what is now Mossel Bay" (15). In the 1590s Europeans began to use the Cape as a regular stopping point along trading routes. The first English explorers to claim the Cape were Andrew Shilling and Humphrey Fitzherbert in 1620; however, because of domestic turmoil in England at this time, King James I’s Privy Council ignored this move (16). The Dutch East India Company began establishing trading posts in the region in 1649, recognizing its colonial potential. From 1649-1677, during which the Dutch were the dominant European presence in the area, the Cape Khoikhoi were not sold or transported as slaves, as the Dutch recognized the importance of maintaining good relations with them. The French began to settle in the area in the late 1680s. Merians argues: "European population in Cape Town and in other regional towns and interior settlements increased from 125 in 1670 to approximately 20,000 in 1798. ... The Cape Khoikhoi suffered because of the European presence at the Cape, and many began to disperse into the interior of the country" (17-18).

Merians deliberately puts quotation marks around the term "Hottentot" in order to distinguish this term and its function in the English imagination from the actual residents of the Cape of Khoikhoi region. By contrast, in *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Claude Rawson uses the terms "Bushman" and "Hottentot" rather than the indigenous Khoi for Hottentots and San for Bushmen ... because European perceptions are my subject and these are the terms in circulation" (114). Although I understand Merians’s intentions, I follow Rawson’s approach to this issue. Rawson surveys early nineteenth-century visual representations of Sartje Baartman, or the "Hottentot Venus," for their participation in the period’s larger interest in Hottentots’ supposedly aberrant genitalia: "The genitalia of Hottentots had ... long exercised European imaginations. Males were widely reported to have only one testicle as a result of ritual surgery, during which it was said that the patient was urinated on. The principal peculiarity of Hottentot women was a large genital apron or tablier, widely reported, notably in the *Encyclopédie*, as a racial characteristic" (116). Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, "became a widely exhibited and publicized example of the enlarged posterior mainly associated with some South African peoples" (114). She is now most known for a profile of her by Jacques Christophe Werner, first published in 1824.
interests in North America, texts that depict Native Americans emphasize their ability to be civilized and converted to Christianity. No such conversion narrative is applied to the Hottentots because the English lacked colonial ambition in southern Africa. In likening the New Philosophers to Hottentots, Hamilton suggests that radicals like Inchbald might as well be African savages.

Hamilton was not the only writer at this time who referred to Le Vaillant's *Travels* in satiric or didactic ways and whom modern scholars have labeled conservative. Maria Edgeworth makes similar use of La Vaillant's text in her *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801): her socially inept character Mr. Forester lists La Vaillant as his "favourite traveller." Merians argues: "Conservative authors such as Edgeworth and Hamilton foresaw how a romantic notion of the 'Hottentots' could be seductive to young men and women caught up in the revolutionary spirit of the times, as well as how it could be counterproductive to maintaining colonial rule." Claire Grogan argues that during the 1790s, fear of foreign otherness infiltrating the British body politic preoccupied anti-Revolutionaries such as Hamilton. In *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Hottentots supply this dreaded otherness. According to Grogan, Hamilton associates the Hottentots' supposedly aberrant sexual behavior and physical abnormality with the physically deformed Brigetina. Ultimately, Grogan argues: "Hamilton uses Brigetina to awaken the reader's fears of foreign horrors and the threats they pose to critique not the Hottentot but the New Philosopher—equally foreign and repugnant—as a dangerous threat to the moral

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44 Hottentots were also associated with other cultures presumed to be inferior to the English, such as the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh. See Merians, *Envisioning the Worst*, chapter 4: "Hottentots' at Home and Abroad," 118-150. Rawson points out that "analogies between Hottentots and Irish was a staple of English writing about the Irish" (God, *Gulliver, and Genocide* 110).

Even while making very different arguments about English society, *Nature and Art* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* share this vision of Africa as a barbarous place.

Beyond these more easily identifiable similarities, Hamilton herself deepens our vision of *Nature and Art* in that she seems to recognize the connections between progressivism and imperialism that I have been tracing in this chapter. For one thing, Mr. Glib’s excitement upon reading La Vaillant’s account of the Hottentots derives from his celebration of the same colonialist fantasies outlined in Wadstrom’s *Plan for a Free Community*:

> See here, Citizen Myope, all our wishes fulfilled! All our theory realized! Here is a whole nation of philosophers, all as wise as ourselves! All enjoying the proper dignity of man! Things just as they ought! No man working for another! All alike! All equal! No laws! No government! No coercion! Every one exerting his energies as he pleases! Take a wife today: leave her again to-morrow! It is the very essence of virtue, and the quintessence of enjoyment. (141)

Mr. Glib echoes Wadstrom and his coauthors’ disdain for the class system and for what they considered the corruption of most marriages, or what they called “anti-Conjugal” life, and he similarly sees Africa as a place at which he might escape this conjugal corruption. One of the more controversial aspects of the colony at Bulama was Wadstrom’s advocacy of intermarriage between European men and African women, which he saw as a means to secure peaceful social relations. Mr. Glib directly refers to this aspect of Wadstrom’s plan when he declares his intention of “leav[ing] shop, and wife, and children” to “get a wife among the Gonoquais” (144). Moreover, Hamilton mocks Mr. Myope’s proclamation that his society of Jacobins should “form a horde in the

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neighbourhood of Haabas, and from the deserts of Africa send forth those rays of philosophy which shall enlighten all the habitable globe” (144). This pronouncement sounds strikingly similar to Wadstrom’s grandiose declaration in the Plan for a Free Community that the society he aims to found will be a continually growing emblem of the LORD’S Kingdom in the Heavens, which is eternally increasing in its magnitude and numbers, also in its harmony, symmetry, and perfection, which constitutes its beauty and glory” (xiii). Not only does Hamilton mock Mr. Glib for his political progressivism, in the absurd grandiosity of his fantasies she mocks him for seeing colonization as a viable alternative to living in England.

Furthermore, Hamilton seems aware that Swedenborgian fantasies are fantasies of possession. She subtly introduces this connection in Brigetina’s excitement upon first encountering La Vaillant’s descriptions of Africa: “It was indeed a day of much importance; a day which opened upon her mind the grandest view, the most extatic prospect, that was ever presented to an enlightened imagination” (141). The OED defines “prospect” in several important and related ways: “The view (of a landscape, etc.) afforded by a particular location or position; a vista; an extensive or commanding range of sight,” and “Expectation, or reason to look forward to something; the thing anticipated, a future occasion or event.” In its lush topographical descriptions, La Vaillant’s Travels presents to Brigetina and her fellow Jacobins the enticing prospect of the African landscape and also enables them to begin projecting their revolutionary visions onto it—visions that include their colonization of the continent. Hamilton subtly points out that in radical utopian fantasies Africa serves as both a “real” place and a tabula rasa for the English political imagination.
However, although she mocks the imperialist ambitions of some English Jacobins, Hamilton does not offer an anti-imperialist statement. Like Inchbald's, Hamilton's politics are more complicated than scholarship on conservative literature has often allowed. Julie Murray reminds us that French Revolution-era conservatism need not—indeed, frequently is not—Burkean in nature. That is, women like Hamilton and More do not unquestioningly argue for the preservation of tradition, as modern critics often assume. Rather, as Murray demonstrates in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, conservatism was sometimes founded on notions of historical progress and sometimes assumes a decided ambivalence towards the past. Murray draws a number of compelling comparisons between Hamilton's and Wollstonecraft's ideas about social progress and female education that complicate the political labels we apply to both women. She identifies Harriet, Hamilton's heroine, as a "harbinger of the modern" who represents "the most advanced state of commercial society." Rather than reading Harriet's domestic virtue as nostalgia for a previous feminine model, Murray reads *Memoirs* through the lens of "philosophical or conjectural history." As exhibited in texts such as Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), conjectural history identifies women as the measure of a society's level of civilization. According to this model, a society in which women are kept in slavish dependence on men, hyper-sexualized, denied rationality, and treated as property is barbarous and uncivilized. In Hamilton's *Memoirs*, the Jacobin Vallaton's seduction and abandonment of Julia exemplifies this kind of barbarity. Brigetina's and the other Jacobins' idealization of Hottentot society satirically emphasizes this point: in the novel's social world,

47 Murray, "Histories of Female Progress," 692.

48 Ibid., 688, 692, 677.
Jacobins and Hottentots are all barbarians. By contrast, Murray argues, Harriet is a "modern" woman who embodies a new model of female domestic virtue similar to the one Wollstonecraft promotes in her *Vindication*. This new domestic woman represents the rise of industrial capitalism. According to Murray, Hamilton thus links conservatism with social progress, radicalism with social regression.49

Hamilton’s awareness in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* of the collusions between progressivism and imperialism is an important signal that we should attend to the ways that these concerns overlap in a variety of texts that were written at this time. This awareness suggests that novelists writing in the Revolution era recognized connections between their domestic politics and their Empire even if they are more obscure to modern critics. Hamilton, Inchbald, and their female contemporaries had complex ideas about what it meant for their society to achieve progress. Hamilton relies on the same historical model to describe her feminine ideal whereby Amelia Williams educates her daughter Maria in Jane West’s *The Advantages of Education*: both novels attach notions of historical progress to Western culture (and to Western femininity), notions of backwardness and barbarity to the New World and to the east. *Nature and Art* imagines the colonial world in a similar way and suggests that progress comes at a remove from British society. This philosophy underpinned the colonization plans of writers, philosophers, and government officials in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Until they form their own colonial society at the novel’s conclusion, the Norwynnes are more at home in Africa than in England. *Nature and Art* thus conceives of

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49 Murray argues: “The ‘dignity of domestic employment,’ far from being demeaning, is what the novel presents as the very advancement that will rescue women from their ‘slavish’ dependence on libertine men... and their dependence on a culture that remains barbarous in its archaic treatment of women” (Ibid., 686).
Africa as a possible extension of the home and domesticates its place in the national imagination. The texts that I have examined in chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation thus indicate that we should expand our discussion of women’s responses to the French Revolution to consider a more global context. All three of the women I consider in these chapters, whether “conservative” or “progressive,” support the British Empire’s progress narrative in their fiction.

In my final chapter I turn to Maria Edgeworth, whose Anglo-Irish ancestry has received a great deal of attention from literary critics and historians. In particular, a number of critics have read her novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800) as an allegory for the colonial situation in Ireland. I turn my attention to Edgeworth’s interest in the colonial world outside of the British Isles—namely, the British West Indies. Of the writers I examine in this dissertation, Edgeworth makes the strongest case for the Empire as a civilized entity, perfectly reconcilable with the best of British values. Like her female contemporaries, Edgeworth’s fiction helps to bring the Empire home and to make it a project in which women in particular are intimately involved.
Chapter Four
Maria Edgeworth and the Sentimental Discourse of Empire

Maria Edgeworth’s (1767-1849) short story “The Grateful Negro” (1804) is a fictionalized account of a 1760 slave uprising in Jamaica. This rebellion is planned by slaves on the plantation of Mr. Jeffries, a man akin to Jane West’s Mr. Williams: Jeffries (despite being married) indulges in wine, women, and other pleasures of “dissipated” planter society. At a pivotal moment in the story, the night before the planned slave uprising (of which Mr. Jeffries is unaware), Edgeworth introduces his wife: “Mr. Jeffries was a languid beauty; or rather a languid fine lady, who had been a beauty, and who spent all that part of the day which was not devoted to the pleasures of the table, or in reclining on a couch, in dress.”¹ As this description indicates, Mrs. Jeffries is a superficial woman who gambles and whose interests are restricted to cultivating her reputation as a woman of fashion. As one of Mrs. Jeffries’s slaves removes a new gown from a chest that she has received from London, she tears it on a nail. Mrs. Jeffries, “roused from her natural indolence by this disappointment to her vanity,” orders the slave to be whipped. This slave turns out to be the wife of Hector, the slave leading the coming uprising, and this fresh injury worked up his temper, naturally vindictive, to the highest point” (60). Mrs. Jeffries’s actions are a dangerous tipping point in an already volatile situation: this incident “determined numbers who had been undecided” (60) to join the uprising. Mr. Jeffries also orders his slaves whipped for trifling violations and is generally indifferent to their well being. Edgeworth contrasts Mr. and Mrs. Jeffries to Mr. Edwards, who treats

his slaves with compassion and is rewarded with their loyalty. His "grateful slave" Caesar warns him of the coming slave uprising and ultimately saves his life.

As these plot details attest, "The Grateful Negro" depicts both "good" and "bad" colonials. Mrs. Jeffries and her husband are "bad" colonials who treat their slaves cruelly and who mutually indulge in the dissipations of planter society. This tale also reminds us of women’s complicity with the system of colonial management undertaken by men: Mrs. Jeffries mirrors her husband’s violence towards his slaves and his general moral lassitude. In Edgeworth’s domestic novel Belinda, women’s complicity with the Empire is less apparent though no less significant. In this chapter I look at both Belinda and "The Grateful Negro" and argue that they domesticate British colonial authority both "Abroad and at Home," as Edgeworth called her original sketch of Belinda. I begin this chapter "Abroad" by looking at "The Grateful Negro," composed in 1801 and published in Popular Tales (1804). In this tale Edgeworth supports a benevolent model for managing slaves and domesticates the violence of plantation culture. In the idealized society of Mr. Edwards’s estate, at which slaves are treated "with all possible humanity and kindness" (40), Edgeworth writes the brutality of the plantation out of existence. She portrays Mr. Edwards’s slaves as a "pleasing spectacle" benignly accepting their enslaved status.

Edgeworth restricts cruelty towards slaves to Mr. Jeffries’s plantation, where they are

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2 Several stories included in Popular Tales, such as "Lame Jervas" and "The Grateful Negro," examine the relationship between colonial subjects and administrators, the ethics of pursuing wealth on a national scale, and the role of education in the individual’s pursuit of upward mobility. As Patricia Comitini outlines, Edgeworth published Popular Tales for a working class audience. Comitini situates Popular Tales in an emergent discourse of "self help" and argues that in the late eighteenth century, this philosophy replaced a system of charity based on monetary aid: that is, the poor were to be taught to improve their lives rather than to receive financial assistance: "Charity had shifted from doling out money to the production and dissemination of discourses designed to improve the habits, values and behaviors of the lower orders, which compelled voluntary changes in their behaviors, and enabled the middling classes to serve as their guardians." Examining Popular Tales alongside Hannah More’s Cheap Repository Tracts, texts that were a "powerful source of social control as well as social reform," Comitini contends that women writers played a key role in defining class relations in this period, Vocational Philanthropy and British Women’s Writing, 1790-1810 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 67, 71.
subject to the “cruel and barbarous methods” (49) of the overseer Durant. The contrast between these two estates implies that despite its potential for cruelty, the Empire can be a compassionate entity and can operate without coercive violence.

I then explicate these same colonial discourses “at Home” in *Belinda*, a novel of courtship, marriage, and female education. Like Jane West’s Amelia Williams of *The Advantages of Education* and the variety of maternal figures populating West’s *The Mother*, the character of Lady Anne Percival in *Belinda* demonstrates the role played by the woman in domesticating the Empire. However, Lady Percival does so in less obvious ways than West’s heroines. She does not travel to the colonies to save a dissipated husband from the vices of planter culture, nor does she assume the care of children whose father has died in service to the Empire, as West’s maternal figures do. Nonetheless, as *Belinda’s* domestic ideal for women, Lady Percival serves as what I am calling the novel’s “colonial mediator” in several important senses. First of all, she helps to make invisible the slave labor through which the plantation system in the West Indies produces wealth. Second of all, she helps to make the Empire’s subjects—such as Creoles and former slaves—a natural part of the domestic landscape. She accomplishes both of these goals by promoting marriages between colonial subjects and young English women on largely sentimental terms, as unions justified by these characters’ virtue and superior emotional capacity. The darker realities of plantation culture—the debased social status of former slaves and their role in producing Creole wealth—disappear beneath these sentimental arguments. Furthermore, Lady Percival stands apart from *Belinda’s* otherwise pervasive critique of novelistic heroines, as does her role as colonial mediator. Taken together, these texts demonstrate the importance of sentimental arguments in
justifying colonialism and in concealing its violence in the late eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries.

“The Grateful Negro” and the Peaceful Plantation

Edgeworth begins “The Grateful Negro” by contrasting her “good” and “bad”
plantation owners, respectively, in Mr. Edwards, a “gentleman” who entrusts his slaves to
an overseer with “a mild but steady temper” (50), and Mr. Jeffries, an indifferent man “of
a thoughtless and extravagant temper” (49) who employs the brutal overseer Durant. Mr.
Edwards purchases from Mr. Jeffries a slave named Caesar and his wife, Clara, in order
to save Caesar from being sold and the couple from being separated. Caesar and Clara
seem to take their cues from Behn’s “royal slave” Oroonoko (re-named Caesar) and his
wife, Imoinda. Like Behn’s Oroonoko, Edgeworth’s Caesar is both sentimental and
brave: he is “frank, fearless, martial, and heroic” (53), and he weeps “[t]ears which no
torture could have extorted” (53) when Mr. Edwards purchases him. As a result of Mr.
Edwards’s kindness, Caesar abandons his role as co-conspirator in the slave uprising,
planned with his friend and fellow slave Hector. Caesar warns Mr. Edwards in time for
him to arm himself and his loyal slaves against the uprising. By contrast, Mr. Jeffries and
Durant are overcome by the slaves they have mistreated: Durant dies in tortures, and Mr.
Jeffries returns, destitute, to England. The differences between Mr. Edwards and Mr.
Jeffries as well as their respective fates suggest that the survival—quite literally—of
planter society depends on the benevolence Mr. Edwards exercises. Implicitly, too,
Edgeworth argues that that there are humane and mild, rather than thoughtless and cruel,
ways that plantations might operate; the contact zone need not be violent.
Scholarship on “The Grateful Negro” is divided as to whether or not this tale supports or critiques the plantation system. Several scholars see it as anti-slavery. For example, Francis R. Botkin argues that Edgeworth questions what is perceived as the “necessary order of things”—specifically, patriarchy and the system of slave ownership. She does so in part through her extensive citation of Bryan Edwards’s *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), which Edgeworth quotes in several lengthy footnotes and which Botkin locates as the suspect voice of patriarchy and amelioration. Botkin argues that Edgeworth appropriates [Bryan Edwards’s] mainstream, patriarchal discourse ... to illuminate to her readers the brutal mistreatment of the slaves by the overseers and the negligence of the planters”; Similarly, Moira Ferguson argues that “The Grateful Negro” supports revolution and that Hector, instigator of the slave uprising, signifies this political stance: “[W]hile Caesar is the sanctified hero, the slave-icon idealized by scared Britons, Hector represents collective self-determination, vindicated politically if not emotionally”; despite the vengeful manner in which Edgeworth portrays Hector, which would have been disturbing to her contemporaries, Ferguson contends that “the text emphatically supports emancipation.”

My argument that “The Grateful Negro” domesticates the violence of plantation culture builds on more skeptical readings of Mr. Edwards’s declaration. Despite his apparent desire that slavery not exist, Edgeworth goes on to state that Mr. Edwards wished that there was no such thing as slavery in the world” (49).

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convinced, that the sudden emancipation of the negroes would rather encrease than diminish their miseries” (49). Because of this admission, scholars such as Boulukos suggest that "The Grateful Negro” supports amelioration rather than abolition—that is, the philosophy that if slaves are treated with compassion, then they will be loyal to their masters and content in their state of servitude. This philosophy also rested on the assumption that slaves were unfit for self-governance: if Africans are presumed to be naturally inferior, then they require “humane” institutions such as slavery to care for them. Elizabeth Kim argues that both Edwards’s *History* and "The Grateful Negro” promote benevolent paternalism in the plantation system. Kim reads this paternalism as an analog to the system of Irish tenantry. She locates "The Grateful Negro” as a rewriting” of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and argues that by muting” the violence of the slave uprising depicted in the tale, Edgeworth sanitizes Ireland of its violent rebellion: [The Grateful Negro”] restores narrative order ... to the disorder and disturbance of real-life rebellion.” Similarly, Murphy argues that Edgeworth presents amelioration as essential to the moral as well as actual health of the Empire—as a crucial means of evincing Britain’s moral and cultural superiority and of preventing slave uprisings.¹ I want to highlight Murphy’s sense that one of "The Grateful Negro”s primary purposes is to support the “civilizing” mission of Britain’s Empire at this time: the good/bad colonial binary on which this tale rests seems intended to support the idea that Empire can be a benevolent institution.

Edgeworth domesticates the violence of plantation culture and presents this system as potentially tame, morally sound, and mutually beneficial via the trope of what George Boulukos terms the "grateful slave," which Edgeworth invokes in the very title of the tale. This trope marks the late eighteenth-century emergence of a raced view of humanity," a movement away from the assumption of shared humanity between Africans and Europeans — based on the Christian orthodoxy of monogenesis (the unity of mankind due to a single act of creation by God) to the serious consideration of meaningful racial difference." In essence, this trope marks the emergence of the belief that Africans are essentially different from Europeans. Boulukos surveys the perhaps surprising phenomenon that Africans' basic humanity—that is, their lack of perceived "natural" difference from Europeans—was frequently acknowledged even by those who sought to maintain the system of slavery in the mid-eighteenth century, such as Edward Trelawny in his Essay Concerning Slavery (1746). Boulukos contends that at mid-century, prior to a number of important slave uprisings, Africans and Europeans were perceived as culturally, but not essentially, different. He argues that the trope of the grateful slave crystallized an emergent discourse of essential racial difference because the "natural" gratitude the slave experiences under the care of his benevolent master was supposed to be impossible for white men and women; the grateful slave's "irrational gratitude" marks him as distinct from the "rationality, desire for independence, and rejection of slavery expected from whites." In other words, this trope supported the idea that Europeans are naturally entitled to rule Africans.

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5 Boulukos, The Grateful Slave, 7.

6 Ibid., 4.
Textual representations of the grateful slave appeared in a variety of novels, stories, poems, and other cultural artifacts throughout the eighteenth century. Boulukos traces the trope’s extensive literary history from Daniel Defoe’s *Colonel Jack* (1722), to mid-century novels such as Sarah Scott’s *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) and Henry MacKenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné* (1777), to later texts such as Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) and Mary Pilkington’s children’s story —“The Faithful Negro” (1798). Though the specific political purposes of this trope evolved across the century, Boulukos demonstrates its persistence in debates about slavery and amelioration and its use to support a variety of positions on these issues. For example, one of the most popular representations of this trope appeared in visual form to support abolition: an engraved Wedgwood Medallion titled, *The Kneeling Slave, “Am I not a Man and a Brother.”* However, while supporting the abolitionist cause, the trope of the grateful slave also —“der[ed] those who would labor for abolition reassurance that ex-slaves would be submissive and grateful to them for their efforts.”

The trope of the grateful slave reminds us that a text’s stance on a political issue is never supported in a transparent or uncomplicated fashion by the devices that that text employs, and that overt skepticism about empire can coexist with deeper forms of consent. Although Edgeworth uses the language of friendship to describe the relationship between Mr. Edwards and the —“Grateful Negro” Caesar, this friendship is ultimately hierarchical and contingent upon Caesar’s submission and gratefulness. For example, after he purchases Caesar and Clara from Mr. Jeffries, Mr. Edwards supplies Caesar with his own —“provision-ground” and declares: —“Now, my good friend ... you may work for yourself, without fear that what you earn may be taken from you; or that you should ever

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7 Ibid., 16.
be sold, to pay your master's debts” (53). This declaration of friendship touches Caesar in his —manly heart”: at hearing the words "my good friend," the tears gushed from his eyes” (53). However, it is important to note that this sense of kinship leads to a feeling of gratitude on Caesar’s behalf: —gratitude swelled in his bosom” (53). The capacity for gratitude is one of the signal qualities of the trope of the grateful slave, which in turn establishes the slave’s essential inferiority. Thus, despite the potentially equalizing move of giving Caesar his own plot of land and declaring that he may now —work for himself,” Edgeworth reinforces his natural capacity for a state of servitude and domesticates the discourse of essential racial difference.

Like Caesar, the rest of the slaves on Mr. Edwards’s plantation are allowed to work for themselves within limited parameters. This scenario, in turn, downplays the work that they perform as human chattel:

[H]is negroes had reasonable and fixed daily tasks; and, when these were finished, they were permitted to employ their time for their own advantage, or amusement. If they chose to employ themselves longer for their master, they were paid regular wages for their extra work. This reward, for as such it was considered, operated most powerfully upon the slaves. Those who are animated by hope can perform what would seem impossibilities to those who are under the depressing influence of fear. (50)

Here Edgeworth suggests that Mr. Edwards’s slaves are justly compensated for their elective work, that their compulsory work is reasonable” rather than brutal or burdensome, and that they may choose to work in order to benignly amuse themselves. This portrayal elides the exploitative realities of plantation life. Mr. Edwards introduces the —hope” that his slaves might work for their own financial benefit, rather than merely their owner’s. Yet he does so in order to perpetuate a system in which he is the primary beneficiary: it is only after they have completed their enforced labor that his slaves may
expect to be compensated. The slaves' primary function continues to be supporting the
plantocracy and they retain their inferior human status. As Boulukos, Comitini, and
Richardson have suggested, ‘‘The Grateful Negro’’ juggles the competing ideologies of
the ‘‘old’’ (the aristocracy, patronage, slavery) and the ‘‘new’’ (the bourgeoisie, middle-
class individualism, and wage labor). Richardson contends, ‘‘Edgeworth’s is an
ambivalent ideology at odds with itself, caught between the nostalgia ... for an earlier
era’s vertical social hierarchies and bonds of patronage and obligation, and the ethos of
self-improvement and rugged individualism which would come to mark the ‘‘popular’’
writing of the Victorian age.’’8 However, the transition from patronage to wage labor did
not necessarily entail the abandonment of ideas about racial difference and African
inferiority that supported slavery. In fact, as Boulukos contends, such racial thinking
remained central to Edgeworth’s portrayal of new economic systems.

The system of nascent wage labor depicted in ‘‘The Grateful Negro’’ rests on the
assumption that some desires are natural, even inevitable, and that the colonial world is
essential for sating these desires. The enslaved and working classes, in turn, are essential
to the colonial world. As Mr. Edwards and Mr. Jeffries debate the ethics of slavery, Mr.
Jeffries declares: ‘‘After all, slaves there must be; for indigo, and rum, and sugar we
must have’’ (51). Mr. Jeffries repeats the idea that some things ‘‘must’’ be—namely,
slaves and the goods that they help to produce. Mr. Edwards, the ‘‘good’’ colonial in this
binary, replies: ‘‘Counting it to be physically impossible that the world should exist,

8 Alan Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-
1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 225. Moreover, Richardson argues that ‘‘The
Grateful Negro’’ is a ‘‘reformist allegory for British laborers which associates ‘violent agitation’ with
African savagery and superstition’’ (227). Comitini describes this process as attempting to ‘‘refashion
paternalism in order to accommodate a nascent capitalism’’ (Vocational Philanthropy 69). Boulukos
contends that ‘‘slavery and free labor had an imaginative interdependence, one reflected in Edgeworth’s
representation of slavery, and one extremely beneficial to members of the capitalist employer class,
whether they were planters, landlords, or industrialists’’ (Maria Edgeworth’s ‘‘Grateful Negro’’ 24).
without rum, sugar, and indigo, why could they not be procured by freemen, as well as by slaves?” (52). Here Mr. Edwards seems to imply that slaves would be equally productive laborers if they were free, and that they are (or should be) treated as equal to members of the white working class. What is curious in this passage is his admission that it would be “physically” impossible to live without the colonial commodities that he names. What is the precise nature of this “physical” impossibility? Both the “good” and the “bad” plantation owner in this exchange accept the assumption that the goods procured through transatlantic trade—luxury goods, to be sure—are somehow vital. In effect, Mr. Edwards and Mr. Jeffries come to the same conclusion: with or without slaves, they “must have” certain goods. Consequently, the colonial world becomes an essential extension of the nation as a supplier of these goods.

The plantation system must appear in a positive light for Edgeworth’s “good” colonial to maintain this status and for his acceptance of the Empire and its potential for brutality to lack moral compromise. Edgeworth achieves this effect in a scene of Mr. Edwards’s slaves celebrating their servitude. On the evening before the planned slave uprising, of which he is still unaware, Mr. Edwards “gave his slaves a holiday”:

Mr. Edwards and his family came out at sunset, when the fresh breeze had sprung up, and seated themselves under a spreading palm-tree, to enjoy the pleasing spectacle of this negro-festival. His negroes were all well clad; their turbans were of the gayest colors, and their merry countenances suited the gaiety of their dress. Whilst some were dancing, and some played on the tambourine, others appeared among the distant trees, bringing baskets of avocado pears, grapes, and pine-apples, the produce of their own provision-grounds; while some of them were employed in spreading their clean trenchers, or the calabashes, which served for plates and dishes. The negroes continued to dance and divert themselves till late in the evening. (61)
This passage is worth quoting at length because it reinforces several important discourses that conceal the actual operations of the plantation. First of all, this “—gro” celebration serves as a pleasing visual spectacle. Mr. Edwards and his family seat themselves as if watching a theatrical production, and they derive pleasure from the slaves’ performance. Edgeworth makes this a colorful scene, abounding in joy as well as produce. The slaves bring food grown on the plots of land Mr. Edwards provides them, as each has “—portion of land, called his provision ground; and one day in the week was allowed for its cultivation” (50). The slaves play musical instruments as part of their larger performance of happiness: to elide the darker realities of the plantation system, Mr. Edwards’s slaves make visible and audible their approval of this system. Somehow, in a tale set in a slave society, slavery itself seems to retreat.

Of course, Edgeworth does acknowledge that not all slaves have the good fortune to live on such a plantation. She acknowledges that some slaves live under the tyrannical hand of overseers like Durant, who subjects Mr. Jeffries’s “wretched” slaves to “—brutality” and “—exertions beyond their strength” (49). Nonetheless, “The Grateful Negro” presents an alternative possibility, a system whereby Britons can be at home with their Empire. This tale suggests that planter society can be reconciled with the British domestic virtues of benevolence, reason, and compassion; it merely has to become something other than what it actually is. “—The Grateful Negro” thus highlights the role played by literature in enabling eighteenth-century Britons to imagine their colonial society in ways that differ greatly from lived experience. No less significantly, Edgeworth’s domestic novel Belinda retreats from the realities of the colonial world. It also imagines a method whereby colonial subjects can become part of the nation-as-
home, and whereby Britons can forget what their colonial society means or entails. Billig reminds us: “[T]he nation, which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency.”

\textit{Belinda} highlights the domestic woman’s role in this process of national forgetting. It does so through the character of Lady Anne Percival and her difference from Lady Delacour, who stands apart from \textit{Belinda}’s otherwise pervasive critique of novelistic heroines.

\textbf{“The life and opinions of a Lady of Quality”: Belinda’s Critique of the Novel}

\textit{Belinda} depicts its title character’s entrance into society and her search for a proper marriage partner. At the novel’s opening, Edgeworth describes Belinda as “handsome, graceful, sprightly, and highly accomplished”; having been educated in the country, she “had early been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures,” was “fond of reading,” and “disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity.” In other words, she begins the novel as a model of feminine virtue rather than needing to be educated toward this goal. By the novel’s end, she has secured a future husband in the Englishman Clarence Hervey after narrowly avoiding a union with a Creole gentleman named Mr. Vincent. At the beginning of the novel, Belinda’s aunt, Mrs. Stanhope, a woman accomplished in “the art of rising in the world” and in securing husbands for her “half dozen nieces” (7), sends Belinda to London to spend the season with Lord and Lady Delacour. The Delacours are pleasure-seeking aristocrats whose marriage is quickly revealed to be dysfunctional: Lord Delacour spends his days drinking and gambling, and

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\begin{itemize}
\item[9] Billig, \textit{Banal Nationalism}, 38.
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Lady Delacour flirts with other men and exhibits obvious disdain for her husband. Even more significantly, she has raised none of her own children and suggests that the one child she attempted to nurse was poisoned by her breast.

The Delacours function as a cautionary tale against which Belinda recognizes the domestic purity of the Percival family. Belinda resides with the Percival family at their estate at Oakley-park following a dispute with Lady Percival; it is at Oakley-park that she meets Mr. Vincent. In a sense, *Belinda* is a bildungsroman about Lady Delacour’s education rather than Belinda’s: through her acquaintance with the already virtuous Belinda, and with the assistance of Lady Percival, Lady Delacour reconciles with her husband, assumes her role as mother to her daughter Helena, and gives up her pursuit of sexual attention from other men. Belinda, in turn, avoids marrying Mr. Vincent when she learns that he has a gambling problem, and the novel ends with the promise of her marriage to Clarence Hervey.

As these details suggest, like the other novels I examine in this dissertation, *Belinda* is concerned with courtship, gender, and domesticity. And like novels such as *The Advantages of Education* and the verse novel *Louisa*, *Belinda* exposes the political significance of the domestic sphere and women’s roles within it, and it is similarly infused with anxiety about the British Empire and about the regulation of female sexuality. *Belinda* overtly attempts to resolve the racial, cultural, and sexual tensions of the colonial contact zone in several characters and plot devices. These characters include: Juba, a former slave who eventually marries a white woman of the lower class and who is fearful of what he believes to be the magic of an African obeah woman; Juba’s master, Mr. Vincent; Virginia St. Pierre, daughter of a West Indian plantation owner, raised in
isolation from society; and Lady Delacour, an aristocratic woman of pleasure addicted to opium (taken in the form of laudanum). The novel alternately integrates these characters into the English domestic sphere, cures them of their colonial contagion, or banishes them from the narrative. In this way, *Belinda* relies on novelistic tropes akin to those employed by Seward and West: the novel’s courtship plots serve as tools for resolving its colonial anxieties.

However, *Belinda* is also different in important ways from the other texts I have examined: it is highly skeptical of the novelistic discourse on which West, Inchbald, and Seward depend. In the advertisement appended to the first publication of *Belinda*, Edgeworth explicitly asserts that she is not writing a novel. She outlines: “The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale—the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel. ... [S]o much folly, error, and vice are disseminated in books classed under this denomination, that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable, and not fastidious” (3). Here Edgeworth points to the anxiety associated with reading fiction at this time, embodied by Marianne Dudley in West’s *A Gossip’s Story*. Marilyn Butler locates Edgeworth in a tradition of what she calls “rational women writers ... whose first novels were so to speak anti-novels”; in this advertisement, Butler contends, Edgeworth declared war on the form.”

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11 Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 307. This is the standard biography of Edgeworth. In many senses, this study is as much a biography of Edgeworth’s father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, with whom Edgeworth collaborated throughout her career, beginning with *Practical Education* (1796). As she outlines in the introduction, Butler’s biography rethinks the relationship between Edgeworth and her father, on which much scholarship has focused. Butler surveys the scholarship on Edgeworth published prior to 1972 and points to an interesting gender bias: “All the biographers were women, and they all seemed bent on making Maria Edgeworth attractively feminine.” Such efforts, Butler contends, arose from the desire to explain how a woman could have written “the immensely serious novel *Patronage*” (6). Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s supposedly domineering presence in her life has been used to explain the thematic concerns of “education, class, and economic relationships” (i.e. supposedly “masculine” subjects) about which Edgeworth wrote. By contrast, Butler casts
to the novel is akin to Seward's, although Edgeworth's sentiments seem to arise from her sense of moral duty rather than the loftier literary and historical project of a text like *Louisa*. Rather than refashion the novel to suit her own purposes or to meet a set of aesthetic standards, Edgeworth reclassifies her work of prose fiction as a "moral tale." This reclassification signals the skepticism with which *Belinda* portrays novels. *Belinda* questions almost everything about the novel and its conventions, perhaps most explicitly in its final scene, a carefully staged tableau of resolutions to its courtship plots. Lady Delacour, the character most vocally averse to fiction, constructs this tableau, remarking: "Now I think of it, let me place you all in proper attitudes for stage effect. What signifies being happy, unless we appear so?" After artfully arranging the scene, she declares, "There! quite pretty and natural!" (478). Deeming this blatantly artificial scene "natural," Edgeworth implies that it is anything but.

Edgeworth's relationship with her father in a more positive and collaborative light, and undermines the gender binary through which her work has been read. Following Butler's biography, more recent scholarship continues to question Edgeworth's relationship to patriarchy. For example, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Kowaleski-Wallace examines the work of Edgeworth and Hannah More (whom she terms "daddies' girls") and argues that they provide "case studies in complicity" with the patriarchal establishment (12, italics in original). This complicity is presumably paradoxical because it is supposed to work against their larger interests as classless and essential "women" (an idea of which Kowaleski-Wallace is critical). By contrast, in *Reading Daughters' Fictions*, Gonda argues, "The myth of Maria as her father's mouthpiece, puppet, dummy, creature, or as the dupe of utilitarianism or patriarchal values has been a way of denying her agency, power and responsibility, a kind of infantilization" (237).

Michael Gamer makes an interesting argument about the generic classification of *Belinda* in "Maria Edgeworth and the Romance of Real Life," *Novel* 34, no. 2 (2001): 232-266. In a largely formal analysis, Gamer repositions Edgeworth’s fiction in the genre of the "romance of real life" (235), which he argues was a recognizable genre to Edgeworth and her contemporaries. Gamer looks to Charlotte Smith’s *Romance of Real Life* (1787) as a foundational text in this genre. He contends that as Smith’s text exemplifies, writers who wrote romances of real life aimed to elevate a culturally debased genre (the romance) by giving it a didactic purpose: "The self-conscious empiricism of their titles allows them to bestow on their reformed romances the status of lived experience, and therefore to assert their value as vehicles for readerly instruction" (237). In Gamer’s formulation, Edgeworth’s more explicitly didactic fiction, such as *Belinda*, does not represent a split or a shift in direction from her earlier fiction, as some have contended, but a modified version of the same kind of didactic tale. Gamer’s attempt to more accurately historicize *Belinda* serves as an important call for greater awareness of when and how we apply the term "novel" to eighteenth-century texts.
Three important female characters with potentially suspect connections to the British Empire are included in this final tableau, their narratives having come to ostensibly neat conclusions: Lady Delacour, who has been cured of her opium addiction and reconciled with her husband and estranged daughter; Virginia St. Pierre, engaged to the naval officer who saved her father from a slave rebellion; and Belinda herself, now engaged to a proper middle-class Englishman, having narrowly avoided marrying her Creole suitor Mr. Vincent when he departs England for the Continent. A number of scholars have suggested that Belinda is deeply uncertain about empire and that this final staged tableau highlights the artificiality—even impossibility—of reconciling the Empire to the domestic sphere. For example, Beccie Punett Randhawa contends that Belinda reveals the vulnerability of the domestic sphere—the “home,” both locally and nationally—to penetration by dangerous Creole others. What she deems the novel’s “interloping characters,” such as Mr. Vincent and Virginia, serve as “active interrogations of the structure of home itself.” Jessica Richard argues that Belinda reveals the inherent slippages between the different geographies that make up the Empire, and that the novel is skeptical about the degree to which English society can be protected from colonial contagion: “[D]espite the gamester’s [Mr. Vincent’s] exclusion, English society is unable to isolate itself from West Indians, their wealth, or the sources of that wealth ... At the end of Belinda, characters are not consistently returned to their supposedly proper geographic locations.” Susan Greenfield contends that when Lady Delacour claims to “finish the novel,” character and author merge in a play on performance implying that perhaps neither of them trust the final “pretty” picture.”

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However, *Belinda’s* skepticism about the novel genre is significant for those parts of its plot that it fails to interrogate rather than those that it overtly questions. One important character is absent from the novel’s final scene and from the skepticism applied to its other important female characters with colonial associations: Lady Anne Percival. Lady Percival is *Belinda’s* model of domestic virtue, repeatedly idealized for her kindness, compassion, her success as an intellectual companion for her husband, and the superior methods whereby she educates her children. As such, she is a clear foil to Lady Delacour, who must gradually learn the domestic virtues that Lady Percival embodies.\(^\text{14}\) The idealized Percival family also has connections to West Indian wealth that are largely submerged in the narrative, and Lady Percival plays an important role of...

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\(^{14}\) Scholars have identified the emergent middle-class ethos theorized by Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* in the Percival family. Edgeworth presents the Percival family to Belinda—and, by extension, to the reader—as a desirable and "natural" family unit. In *Vocational Philanthropy*, Comitini contends that Belinda, acting as the reader’s surrogate, recognizes Lady Percival as "naturally" good in opposition to Lady Delacour’s courtly artifice, and that she desires the family life embodied by the Percivals. In so doing, *Belinda* is structured so that the character ad exemplum can teach what is a natural desire for the reader/subject to feel" (116). See also Nicholas Mason, "Gloss, Gender, and Domesticity in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, vol. 1, ed. Susan Spencer (New York: AMS Press, 2001), 271-285.
integrating (or attempting to integrate) those characters with colonial associations—such as Juba and Mr. Vincent—into the domestic sphere. As such, it is important that Lady Percival is left out of the novel’s final tableau. This tableau asks us to question the resolutions to every woman’s tale except Lady Percival’s. Her absence from this scene suggests that she requires no scrutiny, and neither do her associations with the Empire. The argument she makes on behalf of Mr. Vincent as a suitor for Belinda, in particular, is sentimental rather than pecuniary: he is a good man, a man of feeling, Lady Percival argues, and his wealth (generated by the plantation economy in the West Indies) is somehow beside the point. The slave society in which he is involved retreats. Belinda thus exemplifies the kind of narrative that came to define the Empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a narrative of moral virtue overtaking more debased mercantile pursuits.

In making this argument, first I will examine Lady Delacour’s connections to empire and her role as sharp critic of the novel genre. I will also examine the character of Virginia St. Pierre. Both characters have recognizable textual referents in novels by Daniel Defoe, Bernardin St. Pierre, and others. Moreover, I will demonstrate that Lady Delacour is strikingly similar to Emira, the heroine in Seward’s Louisa, whom I have earlier linked to Defoe and Richardson. Together, Lady Delacour and Virginia indicate the novel’s attempts to resolve colonial anxieties according to the narrative conventions of Edgeworth’s day, as well as the ambiguity that ultimately surrounds these resolutions. Next I will examine the character of Lady Percival and her role as the novel’s colonial mediator. Importantly, unlike Lady Delacour and Virginia, Lady Percival has no traceable textual history in this novel, by which I mean she is never compared to
novelistic heroines and has no clear lineage in other eighteenth-century novels. I am not suggesting that Lady Percival has no predecessor in the larger body of British fiction. Rather, I contend that in Belinda Edgeworth presents Lady Percival as having no such history—and furthermore, presents her as somehow indescribable, as exceeding textual representation. As such, her apparent “naturalness” extends to the Empire she represents.

Lady Percival’s naturalness stands in stark contrast to the novelistic qualities of Lady Delacour. By “novelistic,” I mean qualities that mark her as the kind of heroine Edgeworth and her contemporaries would recognize as being from a fictional text. One way to access Lady Delacour’s connections to novelistic heroines with dangerous colonial associations is through her similarities to Seward’s Orientalized Emira. In chapter 1 on Seward’s verse novel Louisa, I argued that Emira is a novelistic heroine who seems informed by Defoe’s The Fortunate Mistress [Roxana] and Richardson’s Pamela. The characteristics they share include Emira’s Turkish dress and subsequent association with the Oriental seraglio; her lack of maternal feelings, signified by her unwillingness to breastfeed; and her eventual death and act of bequeathing her daughter to her virtuous marital replacement. I argued that in Emira’s death, Seward resolves the colonial anxieties Emira signifies. Lady Delacour is a very similar character who must be cured of those traits that resulted in Emira’s death. For example, like Emira, Lady Delacour is an aristocrat who is addicted to the pleasures of the town. When Belinda first joins her in London, Edgeworth outlines, “The newspapers were full of lady Delacour’s parties, and lady Delacour’s dresses, and lady Delacour’s bon mots: every thing, that her ladyship said, was repeated as witty; every thing, that her ladyship wore, was imitated as fashionable” (10). Edgeworth makes clear that Lady Delacour’s devotion to public
adoration is partially responsible for the sad state of her marriage, along with her husband's addiction to drink. However, this passage goes on to suggest that Lady Delacour’s public gaiety is a carefully applied mask—that she is two very different women —[a]broad, and at home” (10). The façade Lady Delacour assumes in company gives way, in private, to a “listless, fretful, and melancholy” state (10).¹⁵

The source of Lady Delacour’s private melancholy, which is revealed to Belinda by degrees, forms another important similarity between Lady Delacour and Seward’s Emira: Lady Delacour’s dysfunctional breast, which is in turn associated with the potential contagion of Eastern culture penetrating the domestic sphere. In Louisa, Emira’s unwillingness to nurture her daughter is a key culprit in her ultimate failure. Her husband Ernesto laments that —in the female breast, so form’d to prove / The sweet refinements of maternal love, / Disdain, and guilty pleasure, should controul, / And to its yearnings indurate the soul” (138). Lady Delacour’s breast similarly signifies her transgression of feminine codes of behavior: she believes she has sustained a fatal injury to her breast while dressed as a man and engaged in a duel. After revealing to Belinda the “hideous spectacle” (32) of her breast (it is implied that it is cancerous), Lady Delacour declares: “My mind is eaten away like my body, by incurable disease—inveterate remorse—remorse for a life of folly—of folly which has brought on me all the punishments of guilt” (32).¹⁶ This speech relays the same sentiments as the “self-accusing heart” and

¹⁵ Katherine Montwieler points to this public/private divide as evidence that Belinda presents feminine identity as always performative, in —Reading Disease: The Corrupting Performance of Edgeworth’s Belinda,” Women’s Writing 12, no. 3 (2005): 347-368.

¹⁶ Leah Larson argues that Lady Delacour’s presumed breast cancer serves as a “metaphor of her unnaturalness and a symptom of her psychosomatic illness,” a fact that coincides with the medical thinking of the day.” When Lady Delacour later assumes her duties as wife and mother, Larson points out, her breast cancer is cured. According to Larson, the disappearance of Lady Delacour’s cancer indicates that Edgeworth was familiar with the eighteenth-century notion that breast cancer could be both caused and
―repentant woe‖ Emira declares on her deathbed. Moreover, in telling Belinda her story, Lady Delacour recounts a particularly miserable maternal history: her first child born dead; her second, a ―diminutive, sickly‖ daughter killed by what Lady Delacour believes to be the poisonous milk produced by her breast. She relays, ―If I had put it out to nurse, I should have been thought by my friends an unnatural mother—but I should have saved its life‖ (42). Here Lady Delacour subverts common eighteenth-century wisdom, perpetuated by conduct books, for what constitutes ―natural‖ and ―unnatural‖ motherhood: for Lady Delacour, the idea that natural mothers should breastfeed their own children proves fatal, rather than what was perceived to be the unnatural act of having a wet nurse care for your child.17 In defiance of social expectations, Lady Delacour sends her third child to be raised in the country by ―a stout healthy, broad-faced nurse, under whose care it grew and flourished‖ (42). Here Edgeworth seems to question the eighteenth-century politics of breastfeeding and motherhood.

However, I would argue that the novel ultimately reinforces these domestic politics in its conviction that Lady Delacour must be cured of her Oriental contagion. Much of the scholarship on this novel locates the breast cancer episode in the terms I have thus far outlined: as evidence of the novel’s discourse on gender and domesticity. For example, in a frequently-cited and representative argument, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues that the novel exemplifies the ascendency of a new form of domesticity by insisting ―in the inevitable appeal, indeed, the very ‘naturalness,’ of a particular domestic arrangement in which supreme satisfaction is to be garnered from the intimate

17 See Bowers, The Politics of Motherhood, and Perry, —Colonizing the Breast.”
relationship of a biological mother to her children.” Such an arrangement is predicated on the denial—indeed, the outright repression—of competing desires. Kowaleski-Wallace suggests that Lady Delacour must be taught to appreciate the “natural” maternal state embodied by the Percivals; her diseased breast signifies her initial failure to do so. Furthermore, Kowaleski-Wallace contends that in Belinda, Edgeworth is expressly interested in managing the ways women “spend” their energies. For a woman to breastfeed her child is a proper management of her resources, whereas the pursuit of pleasure outside the home is perceived as wasteful—both symbolically and actually.\(^\text{18}\)

Such discussions omit the significance of Lady Delacour’s method for treating her illness: opium. Though not appearing in Turkish dress like Emira, Lady Delacour nonetheless has an equally toxic association to Eastern culture. She takes her opium in the form of laudanum, administered by her waiting woman Marriott, in a closet that she keeps hidden even from her husband. Laudanum, a red liquid derived from opium (which was a common form for dispensing the drug), subtly introduces into Belinda Romantic-era anxieties about the British Empire and its trading relations with India and China. Lady Delacour’s use of laudanum also points to contemporary debates about the moral character of the Empire and its potential to pollute the domestic sphere. As Nigel Leask outlines, the British East India Company produced opium in India and exported it to China in exchange for tea. In essence, Leask argues, this practice constituted the “biggest narcotics traffic in history.” In the nineteenth century, as the British Empire tightened its economic hold on India and on other parts of the world, British attitudes toward this trade

\(^{18}\) Kowaleski-Wallace, Their Fathers’ Daughters, 110-111. See also Larson, “Breast Cancer and the Unnatural Woman.” In —Aroad and at Home,” Greenfield argues that once the “gender confusion” (218) of Lady Delacour’s injured breast (an injury sustained while cross-dressing) is resolved she is able to assume her position in the heterosexual household.
were at best ambivalent, at worst hypocritical. Although there was opposition to the trafficking of a drug to which ... medical opinion was increasingly dubious, it was generally considered acceptable as a commodity if labelled ‘for external use only.’”

Desire for the intoxication opium afforded was coupled with anxiety about the morally deleterious effects of such intoxication, and about the decadence associated with consuming a drug of Eastern origin. Debates about opium’s medicinal properties implicitly addressed fears about Eastern otherness infiltrating the British body, both literally and metaphorically—a debate about the distinction between what Joel Faflak describes as ‘controlled British habits and Eastern barbarism.’”

One episode toward the middle of the novel illustrates the dangerous effects of opium on Lady Delacour’s mental state. After Marriot administers her nightly dose of the drug, Lady Delacour retires to read what Edgeworth describes as ‘methodistical titles’ such as ‘Wesley’s Admonitions’ (270). Together, the laudanum and her reading material render her weak and credulous, and she begins to hallucinate visions of Colonel Lawless, a man with whom she had an affair and whom her husband subsequently killed in a duel:

[H]er mind, from being prey to remorse, began to sink in these desponding moments under the most dreadful superstitious terrours—terrors the more powerful, as they were secret. Whilst the stimulus of laudanum lasted, the train of her ideas always changed, and she was amazed at the weak fears and strange notions by which she had been disturbed; yet it was not in her power entirely to chase away these visions of the night, and they gained gradually a dominion over her, of which she was heartily ashamed. (270)


20 Joel Faflak, introduction to Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* [1801] (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009), 26. Faflak provides a useful survey of opium debates in the nineteenth-century fields of medicine and psychology, as well as political, historical, and literary imaginings of the drug.
Here Lady Delacour’s intoxicated mind assumes control of her person, gaining dominion over her” with the “weak fears and strange notions” it induces. Faflak points out that opium was perceived as “a dangerous drug ... because of its ability to produce altered states of mind and body beyond society’s control.” This fear of bodies existing beyond social boundaries is significant to the novel’s colonial context: Lady Delacour signifies Romantic-era fears about “the East as an opiated body politic” outside of Western control. Her later resumption of “mild and rational piety” (320) represents the triumph of perceived Western values.

Unlike Seward’s Emira, Lade Delacour is cured of her Orientalized addiction and maternal dysfunction and is saved from death. Crucially, these phenomena are linked: her gradual reconciliation with Helena, the daughter she sent to the country to be raised by a nurse, leads to her desire to treat what she believes to be her cancer-ridden breast. She attributes both of these actions to her acquaintance with the virtuous Lady Anne Percival. Helena has spent a great deal of time with the Percivals at their Oakley-park residence, following her chance acquaintance with Lady Percival on the street in London. Impressed with Helena’s compassion toward a poor beggar, which she witnesses, Lady Percival accompanies her to her boarding school and convinces Lord Delacour’s aunt, Mrs. Margaret Delacour, “to let her little niece spend the holidays, and all her leisure time” (107) with the Percivals. Following Belinda’s acquaintance with this family, which commences when Belinda leaves the Delacour home, Lady Percival gradually assists Lady Delacour in reconciling with Helena. This renewed relationship inspires Lady Delacour to reform and to pursue health, both physical and moral. When faced with surgery to her breast, she declares, “If I survive this business ... it is my firm intention to

21 Ibid., 31, 28.
appear in a new character, or rather to assert my real character. I will break through the
spell of dissipation—I will at once cast off all the acquaintance that are unworthy of me”
(292).

Furthermore, Lady Percival is largely responsible for restoring moral virtue to the
domestic sphere in the face of Lady Delacour's Oriental infiltration. Lady Delacour
admits, “I am willing that the recovery of my moral health should be attributed to the
salubrious air of Oakley-park”—that is, to the Percivals‘ home—and that Lady Percival
has behaved generously” (292) to her. In essence, Edgeworth finds different ways to
resolve the same anxieties put to bed upon Emira's death in Louisa. Lady Delacour
recovers from the moral and mental languor of her opium addiction, discovers that her
breast—and, hence, her maternal identity—is intact, and assumes the appearance of
domestic happiness with her husband. Though differently, both Louisa and Belinda cure
themselves of feminized colonial corruption. In Belinda, the domestic woman assists in
this process—the significance of which I will explore below.

However, these resolutions are called into question in Belinda both by the staged
tableau that ends the novel and through Lady Delacour’s frequent positioning of herself
as a heroine in a novel. Edgeworth repeatedly uses Lady Delacour to lampoon the
conventions of prose fiction. Lady Delacour initially relays her story to Belinda in a
narrative she jokingly deems, “The life and opinions of a Lady of Quality, related by
herself;” although she avers, “My dear, you will be woefully disappointed, if in my story
you expect any thing like a novel” (35-36). She later mocks novelistic heroines as foolish
young women whose foibles provide amusement rather than moral instruction, telling
Belinda (of Clarence Hervey), “If you would only open your eyes, which heroines make
it a principle never to do—or else there would be an end of the novel ... you would see that this man is in love with you” (83). Belinda is peppered with such sentiments. Lady Delacour once chastises Belinda, —You are thinking that you are like Camilla, and I like Mrs. Mitten,” referring to Francis Burney’s novel Camilla (1796). She is interrupted in this speech by Clarence Hervey, whom she implores, —Do, pray Clarence, help me out for the sake of this young lady with a moral sentence against novel reading” (72).

This skepticism, reinforced by Edgeworth’s calling Belinda a “Moral Tale” rather than a novel and by the heightened artificiality of the conclusion, questions the mechanisms by which Edgeworth cures the opium-addicted Lady Delacour of her “Eastern barbarism.” The final image of the Delacour family makes explicit what many critics have read as Lady Delacour’s lack of true reformation: —Enter lord Delacour, with little Helena in his hand. Very well! a good start of surprise, my lord. Stand still, pray, you cannot be better than you are. Helena, my love, do not let go your father’s hand. There! quite pretty and natural!” Lady Delacour, —to show that she is reformed,” comes forward to address the audience with the —moral” of the story—one that proves to be anything but: —Our tale contains a moral, and no doubt, / You all have wit enough to find it out” (478). The moral of the story is never actually stated, and Edgeworth leaves her reader to question what it means for the Delacour family to appear —pretty and natural.”

22 Ibid., 26.

23 Studies of Belinda vary in their interpretations of Lady Delacour’s reformation. For example, in —Reading Disease,” Montwieler argues that Lady Delacour’s reformation from female rake to domestic woman is —a sham that the great character actress—along with her supporting female cast—in fact pulls off” (361). She contends that Lady Delacour’s performance of multiple identities points to the fact that all of the other women in the novel—including Lady Percival, the model domestic woman—perform their femininity; as such, Belinda —anticipates the twentieth-century insight that conventional femininity is always a performance” (361). Similarly, Janet Egleson Dunleavy argues that Lady Delacour’s initial cynicism about her marriage and her dissatisfaction with the domestic sphere to which she is consigned cause Belinda (and, by extension, the reader) to question the means by which women achieve happiness in
Although Lady Delacour performs the part of the domestic woman, her body having been brought within the boundaries of the home, this relocation seems tenuous at best.

The episode involving Virginia St. Pierre constitutes another important narrative through which Edgeworth integrates a woman with potentially dangerous colonial associations into the domestic sphere while questioning that integration. Virginia’s narrative is also distinct from Lady Delacour’s in that Edgeworth draws from a specific fictional heroine familiar to her readers. As Mitzi Myers points out, the Virginia subplot is —parodic recycling of French forefathers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre” in their novels Emile (1762) and Paul et Virginie [Paul and Virginia] (1795), respectively.24 Susan B. Egenolf offers a helpful summary of Paul and Virginia, which —ehronics the lives of two women ostracized by relatives on the Continent and left to fend for themselves and their infant children [Paul and Virginia] on a colonial island.”25 Virginia eventually develops erotic feelings for Paul, causing their

24 Mitzi Myers, —My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of Belinda: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority,” in Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century “Women’s Fiction” and Social Engagement, ed. Paula R. Bacscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 105. Myers investigates Belinda’s relationship to Thomas Day, Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s friend and the man who initially stood in the way of Edgeworth publishing her work. She suggests that in its references to Day, Belinda humorously critiques the patriarchal system. Day was known for a failed attempt to employ the educational methods Rousseau outlines in Emile by educating an orphan whom he named —Sabrina Sidney” in isolation from society. As Butler points out, Edgeworth’s use of Thomas Day’s story points to one of her common techniques for constructing her fiction. In a chapter titled —Sources and Sketches” in her Literary Biography, Butler outlines that each of Edgeworth’s novels began with her identifying the —Object of the Story”—that is, the story’s moral purpose or conclusion. After doing so, Edgeworth would assemble the materials through which she would convey her —Object”: interesting facts, anecdotes, and character sketches from people she knew and stories she had heard. She assembled these materials in notebooks (238-40). Butler also claims that Lady Delacour is modeled on the rakish Sir Francis Deleval, one of her father’s friends in youth (243).

parents to separate them until they are older. To their anguish, Virginia is later sent away to France. Upon Virginia's return to the island she is shipwrecked and dies within sight of Paul. Edgeworth introduces her Virginia as a complication to the courtship of Belinda and Clarence Hervey. Hervey first meets Virginia—then named Rachel Hartley—by accident while riding in the woods; he notices her outside a cottage picking roses and describes her as the very image of "artless sensibility" (363). Indeed, he is so struck by her lack of artifice that he proposes to undertake her education in the hope that she will one day be a suitable marriage partner. Renaming her Virginia St. Pierre because he was struck with the idea that she resembled the description of Virginia in M. de St. Pierre’s celebrated Romance” (370), Hervey secures a woman, Mrs. Ormond, to be her tutor and to educate her in the "state of nature" delineated in Rousseau's *Emile*. Belinda hears rumors of Virginia from Sir Philip Baddely, a rakish young aristocrat who hopes to secure Belinda's affections. She first believes Virginia to be Hervey's mistress, only later learning the truth. By the time Belinda learns of Virginia's existence, Hervey has already realized that her isolated education has left Virginia ignorant and unmarriageable, though he is still willing to marry her for the sake of her honor.

Edgeworth associates the poorly educated Virginia with nature and with the sexual danger of the colonies: in a portrait Hervey commissions, she is painted with cocoa trees in the background. Edgeworth also reinforces Virginia's clear textual lineage in the various ways characters read this portrait. It is first identified by Lady Delacour as the heroine of *Paul and Virginia*, a "fancy piece" belonging to a tradition of paintings

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Reissing Virginia: *Belinda, Indiana, and La Fielle aux yeux d'or,* in Berman, *Creole Crossings*. Berman examines three fictional adaptations of Bernardin’s *Paul and Virginia*. Of the potential unions of Clarence Hervey and Virginia, Belinda and Mr. Vincent, Berman argues, "What is at stake ... is not only the supposedly 'natural' boundary of the nation but also the ideal qualifications of the women who will (re)produce it" (95).
representing generic young women as objects of desire. It is later identified as a portrait of the specific woman whom Hervey has secluded from society—that is, the portrait is read as both truth and fiction. According to Egenolf, these various interpretations draw our attention to the fact that female subjectivity in *Belinda* is contingent upon how (and by whom) a character’s story is told. Egenolf argues, “The generic fluidity of the Virginia St. Pierre portrait has narrative implications, for genre establishes the credibility of the painting’s story and limits the ‘truth’ it can reveal.”26 The portrait’s allusion to different genres of painting draws our attention to the malleability and the artifice of Virginia’s tale—to the textual sources from which she is derived.

Virginia’s artificial status is reinforced in the novel’s final tableau. Ironically, the sexual danger signified by the cocoa trees in her portrait is partially resolved through Virginia’s reunion with two men involved in the management of the Empire: her plantation-owning father, Mr. Hartley, and a young naval officer, Captain Sunderland. Upon Virginia’s reunion with her father (which frees Hervey to marry Belinda), Mr. Hartley tells her, “This gentleman was stationed some years ago at Jamaica, and in a rebellion of the negroes of my plantation he saved my life” (476). In her engagement to Captain Sunderland and restoration to her father, Virginia maintains her colonial connections even while being emptied of their danger; her sexuality is replaced with spousal and filial duty. Randhawa suggests that Edgeworth initially associates Virginia with the indeterminacy of the colonies precisely so that she might later restore her Britishness: the English Rachel Hartley becomes the colonial Virginia St. Pierre, then is re-established as a Hartley and married to an English colonial. Randhawa argues that the novel ultimately settles “on the side of Rachel’s Britishness”—though this Britishness

26 Egenolf, *The Art of Political Fiction*, 81, 86.
remains implicated in the Empire. In the novel’s final tableau, Lady Delacour arranges these three characters thus: —Captain Sunderland—kneeling with Virginia, if you please, sir, at her father’s feet. You in the act of giving them your blessing, Mr. Hartley” (478).

Virginia St. Pierre’s performance of filial piety, and her newly authorized colonial connections, thus allows us to identify those discourses that Edgeworth puts forward for critique at Belinda’s conclusion: to what degree is the “naturalness” of the relationship between domestic and colonial a staged performance? What is the precise nature of the “blessing” signified by Mr. Hartley, whose fortune has been built through slave labor? What does it mean to call this blessing an “act”? In positioning Virginia at her father’s feet in this highly artificial scene, Edgeworth empties of their power scenes such as Louisa Dudley kneeling before a marble bust of her plantation-owning father in West’s A Gossip’s Story. Such endings, the conclusion to Belinda implies, ultimately offer more ambiguities than answers, signaling the fraught relationship between colonial and domestic in the early nineteenth century.

As I will examine below, Lady Anne Percival is a distinctly different character from Virginia and Lady Delacour. Most importantly, her connections to the Empire are never put forward for scrutiny. There is nothing artificial about Lady Percival. Edgeworth does not need to apply labels such as “pretty and natural” to Lady Percival or to her family in order for us to understand them in these terms. She is the only major female character absent from the novel’s final tableau, and she seems to lack textual referents. The courtship plots in which she is involved—between Mr. Vincent and Belinda and between Juba and Lucy—are also absent from the novel’s final tableau. As I will demonstrate, Lady Percival reconciles the Empire to the domestic sphere on sentimental

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terms—terms that will increasingly define colonial discourse in the nineteenth century—and helps to elide its actual operations.

Lady Percival and the Sentimental Empire

As much of the scholarship on *Belinda* attests, Lady Percival signifies the novel’s domestic discourse on a variety of levels: her marriage to Mr. Percival is founded on mutual esteem and affection; she is artlessly virtuous; she is devoted to her domestic duties, which include educating their children. Her sympathy and approbation, and the daily sense of her success in the education of their children, inspired [Mr. Percival] with a degree of happy social energy, unknown to the selfish votaries of avarice and ambition” (216). As this description implies, Lady Percival’s success in the home enables Mr. Percival to perform his social roles. Kowaleski-Wallace thus locates Lady Percival and her family as “the ideal representation of a new-style patriarchal family” in which the mother plays a pivotal role.” Colin B. and Jo Atkinson describe Lady Percival as “a picture of domestic bliss.” Egenolf examines a painted portrait of the Percival family and argues that it reinforces Edgeworth’s emphasis on the domestic ideal and on the naturalness” of Lady Percival’s place in her household.28

I am persuaded by these assessments of Lady Percival’s character; however, a far less frequently acknowledged layer to this domestic ideal is Lady Percival’s role as the novel’s colonial mediator. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick argues that in presenting Lady Percival as the ideal domestic woman, Edgeworth also exposes this figure’s complicity in reconciling the colonial system to the domestic sphere. In making this argument, she first

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points to the moment Edgeworth explains Mr. Vincent’s connection to the Percivals, in whose home Belinda meets him: “Mr. Percival had been a guardian and a father to [Mr. Vincent]. His own father, an opulent creole, on his death bed requested that his son, who was then about eighteen, might be immediately sent to England for the advantages of an European education. Mr. Percival, who had a regard for the father, arising from circumstances which it is not necessary here to explain, accepted the charge of young Vincent” (218). Kirkpatrick contends that by deferring explanation, Edgeworth attempts to elide Mr. Percival’s “connections to colonial wealth” and that the murkiness of Mr. Percival’s connections to empire indicates Edgeworth’s awareness of the moral illegitimacy of the plantation system. Kirkpatrick also contends that Belinda “sees beyond the obviously implicated English patriarch and his dark twin, the enacting colonizer, to the role of the bourgeois wife. ... The woman, [Belinda] demonstrates, is not as politically disinterested as she appears”29 In making this argument, Kirkpatrick locates Lady Percival’s attempts to persuade Belinda to marry Mr. Vincent, despite her initial disinclination to do so, as an attempt to unite the domestic and colonial.

Taking Kirkpatrick’s argument as a starting point, I wish to draw out the ethical terms through which Lady Percival makes the case for Mr. Vincent, which Kirkpatrick and other critics largely leave unexplored. Lady Percival’s promotion of Mr. Vincent constitutes what I would describe as a sentimental defense of empire: the refined character Lady Percival attaches to Mr. Vincent supports the Empire as being perfectly compatible with the novel’s notions of domestic virtue. Rather than the subversive and dangerous Creole that was the common literary trope of this time, Mr. Vincent exhibits a

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heightened degree of sensibility that is "aristocratic in the extreme" (217). Most critical appraisals of Mr. Vincent's character locate him as a dangerous colonial who almost convinces Belinda, to her future detriment, to marry him. These arguments seem to fall in line with eighteenth-century perceptions of Creole culture. For example, Candace Ward contends that by the end of the eighteenth century, white Creoles were most often viewed as the embodiment of arbitrary tyranny and cruelty," and that British writers pathologized" Creole culture. Erin Mackie suggests that the Caribbean Creole embodies a dubious, unstable ethical and ethnic character that concretizes anxieties about colonial society." Berman attributes the qualities of degeneracy and viciousness" to the Creole of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature.30

However, although he is Creole, Mr. Vincent does not fulfill these criteria. Indeed, he is the very figure of refinement: he "talked with fluent enthusiasm of the excellent qualities and beauties of whatever he loved"; this effusion "was the overflowing of an affectionate heart, confident of obtaining sympathy from his fellow-creatures, because conscious of feeling it for all that existed" (218). Edgeworth idealizes Mr. Vincent as a man of heightened emotional sensitivity, capable of eliciting and experiencing sympathy. Even when his gambling problems come to light at the end of the novel, he is decidedly not transformed into a villain. He sends Belinda a letter providing a full account of this whole transaction" and supporting her union with Clarence Hervey: "His letter—his farewell letter—she could not read without great emotion. It was

written with true feeling, but in a manly style, without one word of vain lamentation. His
generosity, in speaking of Clarence Hervey, was not lost upon her” (449).

Thus, at the end of the novel, Mr. Vincent maintains the qualities for which Lady
Percival initially pleads his suit: true feeling, manliness, and generosity. When Mr.
Vincent first proposes marriage to a hesitant Belinda, who expresses “aversion to the idea
of marrying from interest, or convenience, or from any motives but esteem and love”
(241), Lady Percival counsels Belinda not to make her decision based on his financial
status. She assures Belinda: “If you fear undue influence from any of your relations in
favour of Mr. Vincent’s large fortune, &c., let his proposal remain a secret between
ourselves” (241). Lady Percival bases her argument for Mr. Vincent on his character,
which we know to be superior. In fact, she indirectly encourages Belinda to forget Mr.
Vincent’s West Indian wealth and to focus on his virtues. When Belinda insists that she
does not feel affectionately towards him, Lady Percival asks: “Does Mr. Vincent appear
to you to be defective in any of the qualities, which you think essential to happiness? Mr.
Percival has known him from the time he was a man, and can answer for his integrity and
his good temper. ... Of his understanding I shall say nothing, because you have had full
opportunities of judging of it from his conversation” (242). She goes on to describe him
as “generous” and “prudent” (242), assuring Belinda that he is too sensitive to her
feelings to press his suit too strongly. Moreover, given Belinda’s “well regulated” mind
(242), Lady Percival is certain that these qualities must convince her to marry him.

As Sharon Murphy notes, Edgeworth wrote at a time when Britain struggled to
reconcile its imperial aims with its citizens’ increased recognition of the inherent brutality
of the imperial project. Identifying what she terms a “colonizing romance” in
Edgeworth’s fiction, Murphy contends that Edgeworth helped to secure the efficacy and moral justness of empire at a time when such justification was urgently needed:

Britain experienced very real socio-political difficulties during this era [1780-1830], particularly as contemporaries increasingly began to question whether the methods that facilitated [colonial] expansion were consistent with the supposed moral and cultural superiority of the British nation and the British way of life. Inevitably, writers like Edgeworth became crucially implicated in this debate, and their works played a vital role in creating, reflecting, or disguising those ideologies that either facilitated, or interrogated, Britain’s expansionist project.  

As Murphy describes, the “socio-political difficulties” Britons faced and the questions they posed about their Empire were increasingly ethical ones. Koditschek argues that the Empire of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suffered from “an absence of obvious legitimation.” A novel such as Belinda helped Britons to imagine a moral purpose for the Empire, one with which they could be at home. Although Edgeworth does not directly confront the question of imperial legitimation in Belinda, she approaches it obliquely by aligning Mr. Vincent, the character with the most direct connections to colonial networks, with virtue and integrity. Although he has left the colonies, Mr. Vincent continues to be supported by the system of slavery; near the novel’s conclusion, he awaits “fresh remittances from the West-Indies” (445) to relieve him of financial distress. Throughout the above conversation with Belinda, however, Lady Percival consistently emphasizes positive elements of Mr. Vincent’s character: integrity, good

31 Murphy, Maria Edgeworth and Romance, 104.

32 Koditschek, Liberalism, 2. As Koditschek outlines, among the ethical questions Britons posed about their Empire were:

How could political inequality be justified? How was imperial expansion to be rationalized in liberal terms? Why should the Empire be extended to some places, but not to others? How far should the benefits of freedom that were supposed to operate in the metropolis be extended to the periphery, and to which peripheral groups? How far, and how fast, should free labor replace slavery in the surviving plantation colonies? When was coercion justified, and when should it be removed? (2)
temper, generosity, prudence, and sensitivity. The violence of the plantation system, from which his wealth derives, is overwritten—indeed, completely effaced—by his supposed moral virtue. Although Lady Percival fails to make Mr. Vincent a part of the British household via marriage, she nonetheless succeeds in domesticating the plantation system he represents.

Lady Percival succeeds in domesticating the Empire via marriage in the union she helps to effect between Juba, a former slave, and Lucy, a white servant girl. The character of Juba relies on the same racial discourses as "The Grateful Negro": like the slaves on Mr. Edwards's plantation, Juba's "natural" inferiority requires the supervision of his benevolent master Mr. Vincent, and he accepts his inferior position with gratitude. Prior to meeting Belinda, Mr. Vincent, Lady Delacour's mischievous, cross-dressing friend Harriet Freke, and their various servants reside at an estate called Harrowgate.33 Edgeworth prefaces this episode by introducing Juba as follows: "[Mr. Vincent] had a black servant of the name of Juba, who was extremely attached to him; he had known Juba from a boy, and had brought him over with him, when he first came to England.

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33 Much of the scholarship on *Belinda* is interested in the way Edgeworth engages in the "Rights of Woman" debate through the character of Harriet Freke. Scholars are divided as to whether or not we should read Freke as a positive or negative feminist figure. For example, in "Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, and Women's Rights," Colin B. and Jo Atkinson examine Freke's position as a "masculine woman" whose masculine dress and free speech prove a danger to her and to others. They locate these attributes in the eighteenth-century's concern for female propriety and delicacy, both of which Freke eschews. They argue: "Harriet Freke is not a satiric portrait of any particular feminist but, rather, an amalgam of radical views echoing sources that readers would have recognized as representative of social philosophies which undermined the hierarchical social order" (108). By contrast, Audrey Bilger locates Freke as a positively feminist figure. She suggests that women like Freke and Austen's Lydia Bennet "all fly in the face of social convention, breaking conduct rules and challenging society's views about women's nature," and that these women play a positive role in helping their respective novel's heroine(s) laugh at and critically examine her society, in *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 108, 101. Ty argues that we should read Freke's cross-dressing through the lens of the carnivalesque—that is, by wearing men's clothes, Freke highlights gendered social constraints and playfully celebrates her ability to transgress them, in "Freke in Men's Clothes: Transgression and the Carnivalesque in Edgeworth's *Belinda,*” in *The Clothes That Wear Us*, ed. Munns and Richard, 157-173. Perera reads the novel's condemnation of Freke, who openly champions Wollstonecraftian feminism, as analogous to contemporary fear of slave uprisings in the West Indies (*Reaches of Empire* 18-21).
because the poor fellow begged so earnestly to go with young massa” (219). Notably, Edgeworth leaves the source of Juba’s intense attachment to Mr. Vincent—in essence, his begging to remain enslaved—unexplained; according to those qualities associated with the “grateful slave” at this time, such attachment would be perceived as a natural state for Juba, requiring no explanation because his status as a dependent African was supposed to be explanation enough. Edgeworth goes on to describe a dispute between Juba and Harriet Freke regarding the right to the coach-house, which each party claimed as exclusively their own. The master of the house was appealed to by Juba, who sturdily maintained his massa’s right; he established it, and rolled his massa’s curricle into the coachhouse in triumph” (219). Even without quotation marks, it is clear which part of this passage we should attribute to Juba: his use of the term “massa,” and his later statements such as, “Don me will tell all” (220), clearly assign him lesser status while drawing upon the bank of literary tropes for representing the grateful slave. Like Crusoe’s Friday, for example, Juba never uses the pronoun “I” to refer to himself—a linguistic signal of his lesser status.

This episode involving Harriet Freke and the coach-house dispute also introduces Juba’s potentially subversive connections to African obeah, which would have posed an ideological threat to Edgeworth’s contemporaries. At this point in the narrative, Mr. Vincent has relocated from Harrowgate to the Percival family lodging at Oakley-park, where Belinda now resides after leaving Lady Delacour’s residence in London following a dispute. Mr. Vincent notices significant alteration in Juba’s mood and manners, from “gayety and loquacity to melancholy and taciturnity” (219). At first Juba is unwilling to

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34 In this particular passage, the Oxford World’s Classics Edition of Belinda spells it both “coach-house” and “coachhouse.”
explain this change, and his inexplicable fears cause great concern in his master. When Mr. Vincent requests that Juba return to Harrowgate to retrieve his tambourine, Juba exclaims: —Θ, massa, Juba die! If Juba go back, Juba die! ... But me will go if massa bid—me will die!” (220). Again, Juba exhibits the intense—that is, the irrational—loyalty expected of the grateful slave. This exclamation and the fear underpinning it also introduce the discourses surrounding the source of Juba’s fear: an African obeah woman. Juba at last confesses that he has been visited on several occasions by “the figure of an old woman, all in flames,” which appears at the foot of his bed to exercise revenge for his having once “trampled upon an egg shell that contained some of her poisons” (221). Mr. Vincent’s response to this admission typifies contemporary perception of obeah: “the extreme absurdity of this story made Mr. Vincent burst out a laughing: but his humanity the next instant made him serious; for the poor victim of superstitious terror, after having revealed what, according to the belief of his country, it is death to mention, fell senseless on the ground” (221). Mr. Vincent first responds with dismissive laughter, suggesting that he does not take obeah seriously as a threat either to Juba or to himself. His humor is then transformed into sympathy and a sense of responsibility for curing” Juba of his irrational fears.

These dual responses point to what Alan Richardson identifies as common Romantic-era literary representations of obeah. Richardson contends that in literary texts produced during this period, obeah occupies a paradoxical position: it simultaneously represents a dire threat to the social order and an empty show of power which would dissipate when confronted by civilized superiority.”

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representations of obeah throughout the Romantic era and charts the changing degrees and types of danger associated with it. He argues that fear of obeah—stemmed from [its] associations, not only with the supernatural or with (in a double sense) ‘black’ magic, but with political power as well, specifically with slave rebellions and the incursions and revolts of West Indian Maroons.”36 As Srinivas Aravamudan points out in his introduction to William Earle’s *Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (1800), in late eighteenth-century plantation culture obeah (or ‘obi”) was demonized for rendering slaves “redulous.” Aravamudan contends that white slave owners wanted to supplant slaves’ wonder over Obi with awe of Enlightenment and its attendant technologies—that is, with “white Obi.”37 The means by which Juba is “cured” represents the triumph of white Obi—of Enlightenment (the rational) over perceived primitivism (the irrational): Belinda determines that the figure in flames was likely drawn with the chemical phosphorus. She suggests that one of the Percival children “should show [Juba] the phosphorus, and should draw some ludicrous figure with it in his presence” (222). This demonstration is enough to persuade Juba that he has nothing to fear. Juba is further

36 Ibid., 6.

37 Srinivas Aravamudan, introduction to William Earle, *Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 27. Like literary portrayals of the grateful slave, portrayals of obeah evolved throughout the eighteenth century in conjunction with changing attitudes toward slavery. Representations of obeah also evolved along with changing attitudes toward revolution, pointing to provocative similarities between the ways Britons responded to the French Revolution and to contemporary slave insurrections. Richardson suggests that texts produced prior to the Tacky Rebellion of 1760 (a Jamaican slave insurrection led by African-born slaves) portray obeah as comical, unthreatening, and as evidence of slaves’ susceptibility to superstition and their inherent inferiority. Following the Tacky Rebellion and continuing into the decade of the French Revolution, Richardson demonstrates that anti-Jacobin literature often drew direct comparison between revolting slaves and French revolutionaries. For example, in a frequently quoted moment in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke compares Paris revolutionaries to a “gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage.”

Aravamudan offers a very helpful timeline detailing the large number of texts that portray slavery, abolition, and obeah in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, beginning with Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (1596) and ending with R. R. Madden’s *A Twelve Month’s Residence in the West Indies* (1835), in his introduction to *Obi*, 53-62.
assimilated into English culture and cured of his “dark” associations with obeah when he marries Lucy. They take up residence in “a very pretty little farm in the neighborhood” (257) near Oakley-park.

Lady Percival plays a key role in this process of domestication: as the novel’s colonial mediator, she authorizes Juba and Lucy’s potentially troublesome intermarriage. Her role in this scenario signals the more subtle ways her character integrates the British Empire and all of its “dark” discourses into the domestic sphere. While Belinda resides at Oakley-park, Lady Percival takes her to visit the porter’s lodge on her estate in which an old couple and their granddaughter Lucy live as tenants. Lady Percival asks Lucy:

“Have you overcome your fear of Juba’s black face?” to which her grandmother replies, “O, yes, my lady! We are not afraid of Juba’s black face now; we are grown very great friends.” Implicit to Lady Percival’s question is her own lack of fear of Juba’s blackness and its connections to obeah, perhaps because Edgeworth has already cured it of these dangerous associations. This question also contains the tacit suggestion that Lucy (and perhaps the reader) overcome her fear of his blackness, too. Lucy’s grandmother then points out articles in their home which Juba has fashioned, such as a “pretty cane chair” and a “necklace of Angola pease” which is “never off [Lucy’s] neck now” (244). This necklace provides a symbolic link to the African nation of Angola, and Lady Percival tells Lucy, “That’s a pretty necklace, and is very becoming of you” (245). Though subtly, this compliment sanctions the symbolic connection between an African man and a white woman and offers implicit support for their later nuptials. 38

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38 Kathryn Kirkpatrick points out that in the revised 3rd edition of Belinda (1811), Edgeworth changes the “necklace of Angola pease” to “that necklace.” She contends: “The revisions erase Juba and his blackness from the text along with his African gifts to his English wife,” —Gentlemen Have Horrors Upon
On Juba and Lucy’s wedding day, Lady Percival further promotes their union by inviting Belinda (and the rest of the community) to celebrate it: "Lady Anne, who was always eager to promote innocent festivity, sent immediately to have a tent pitched in the park, and all the rural company were invited to a dance that evening: it was a very cheerful spectacle" (258). Here Edgeworth neutralizes the threat of this intermarriage by deeming it "innocent" and reducing it to a visual "spectacle." This scene is markedly similar to the spectacle of the "negroe festival" Mr. Edwards and his family witness in "The Grateful Negro," in which the celebratory slaves diffuse the threat of slave insurrection. Lady Percival later solicits from Juba the lyrics to a song he has composed "in his broken dialect ... in honour of his benefactor [Mr. Vincent], which he sang to his banjore with the most touching expression of joyful gratitude" (258). In other words, Lady Percival presides over the whole occasion and encourages the amusement, rather then the trepidation, of those in attendance.

Scholars have suggested that changes Edgeworth made to Juba in later editions of Belinda were an attempt to assuage eighteenth-century anxiety about the system of primogeniture and that they reflect the desire to maintain racial purity. In the third edition of Belinda, published in 1811, Edgeworth changes Juba into a white man of the lower class named Jackson. Iwanisziw argues that by changing Juba into Jackson, Edgeworth reflects changing public sentiment about intermarriage. Unlike earlier sentimental depictions of intermarriage, such as George Colman the Younger’s comic opera Inkle and Yarico (1787), Iwanisziw suggests that the intermarriage of Juba and Lucy in the first edition of Belinda did not appeal to eighteenth-century literary sensibility or to —the
reader’s appreciation of both poetic excellence and moral values”; Juba’s broken English signifies his lack of these qualities. Moreover, Juba’s exile from the third edition of *Belinda* reveals what Iwanisziw identifies as a “new current in British intolerance” for intermarriage.39 This intolerance accompanied the increased immigration of freed slaves to England following the abolition of the slave trade and attendant anxieties over the maintenance of racial, national, and class boundaries. Butler suggests that Edgeworth made this change “for reasons of propriety.”40 I would argue that Lady Percival’s celebration of Juba and Lucy’s marriage attempts to do what this later revision to Juba more overtly accomplishes: she attempts to domesticate the threats posed by intermarriage by rendering them “innocent,” and to bring the former slave within the boundaries of the British home.

We might say that this instance of domestication is less troublesome than Lady Percival asking Belinda to forget Mr. Vincent’s West Indian wealth. After all, she is opening the boundaries of the home to a member of a disenfranchised population rather than closing them. However, even as he is integrated into the British household, Juba maintains his inferior station. The last time we see Juba, he remains intensely loyal to his “maṣsa” Mr. Vincent, even though Mr. Vincent no longer owns him—that is, Juba remains a grateful slave. When he learns that Mr. Vincent has fled England for the Continent following the exposure of his gambling debts, Juba is devastated. Belinda encourages him to rejoice in the happiness waiting for him in the cottage that he shares

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with Lucy, to which Juba replies: —But massa will not be there—massa is gone! When shall we see massa again? Never—never!‘ He sobbed like an infant” (449). What Lady Percival domesticates in her celebration of Juba and Lucy’s marriage, then, is the racial discourse justifying the increased disenfranchisement of former slaves, who continued to be perceived as a lesser order of human beings.

Lady Percival’s status as what I am calling the novel’s colonial mediator becomes especially important when we consider her difference from Lady Delacour, Belinda’s novelistic heroine. Unlike Lady Delacour, surrounded by allusions to epistolary fiction and deeply skeptical of this fiction, Lady Percival seems to have no extra-textual associations. Edgeworth introduces the Percival family when Clarence Hervey visits their estate at Oakley-park following a chance encounter with Mr. Percival at Hyde Park. This passage is much-quoted in the scholarship on this novel for its idealization of Lady Percival. She is surrounded by her children, in the midst of educating them about goldfish, the very picture of domestic virtue. Edgeworth describes her —unconstrained cheerfulness” (98) and lack of affectation, which signal her opposition to Lady Delacour. For my present purposes, I am particularly interested in Edgeworth’s refusal to describe Lady Percival’s physical person:

Clarence Hervey was so much struck with the expression of happiness in lady Anne’s countenance, that he absolutely forgot to compare her beauty with lady Delacour’s. Whether her eyes were large or small, blue or hazle, he could not tell; nay, he might have been puzzled if he had been asked the colour of her hair. Whether she were handsome by the rules of art, he knew not; but he felt that she had the essential charm of beauty, the power of prepossessing the heart immediately in her favour. The effect of her manners, like that of her beauty, was rather to be felt than described. (98)

As this passage implies, Lady Percival exceeds the power of description; she is to be felt”; she cannot be measured or accounted for by the rules of composition. I would
argue that all of these qualities constitute a resistance to reducing Lady Anne to text. In this she is decidedly different from Lady Delacour, whose body is a key register of her character (as signified by her diseased breast and intoxication with opium) and who is repeatedly framed in terms of her textual possibilities. For example, when Belinda refuses to allow Dr. X—access to the hidden closet in which Lady Delacour takes her laudanum, he tells her, “My dear miss Portman, you will put a stop to a number of charming stories by this prudence of yours—a romance called the Mysterious Boudoir, of nine volumes, might be written on this subject, if you would only condescend to act like almost all other heroines, that is to say, without common sense” (132-133). Here Lady Delacour and the “hideous spectacle” of her breast—and the signification it carries—are reduced to a potentially titillating text. Belinda, too, is clearly positioned as a heroine in a novel.

By contrast, Lady Percival consistently stands outside—or beyond—textual reference or possibility. Indeed, she is the only major female character in Belinda who lacks connections to heroines of eighteenth-century novels. As I have demonstrated, Virginia St. Pierre has explicit connections to two novels. Belinda is frequently reprimanded for behaving—or failing to behave—like the heroine in a novel. In tracing the textual sources for Belinda, Butler notes a clear lineage between it and contemporary works by Frances Burney and Jane Austen. Butler argues:

[Belinda] borrows unashamedly from other novels of the period … The action of Belinda is fundamentally the same as that of [Burney’s] Evelina and Cecilia, namely the adventures of an ingénue making her début in high society … The relationship between Belinda and her fashionable 

41 Butler suggests that Edgeworth and Austen, in particular, transitioned from more —self-conscious literary beginnings” in which they explicitly riffed on the conventions of sentimental fiction, as in Belinda and Austen’s Northanger Abbey, to the “naturalism” that defines their later work (Maria Edgeworth 307).
Butler makes clear that Belinda, Lady Delacour, and Virginia are the female characters with clear relationships to other eighteenth-century novels. The conclusions to these women’s tales are explicitly staged in Belinda’s final scene. Only Lady Percival is absent from the final scene. As such, she escapes our skepticism and scrutiny—as does her role as colonial mediator. When Belinda learns that Mr. Vincent has lost his fortune at the gaming table, Lady Percival acknowledges the potential disservice of having supported his case. Belinda receives “a most kind and sensible letter” from Lady Percival, who expresses “the most polite and sincere hopes, that Belinda would still continue to think of her with affection and esteem; though she had been so rash in her advice, and though her friendship had been apparently so selfish” (450). Kirkpatrick contends, “This is an odd exit for one who is in all other respects presented as the novel’s most exemplary woman. ... Thus, Edgeworth’s heroine cannot entirely rely on the judgment of her ideal domestic woman.” However, Edgeworth gives no indication that we (or Belinda) should question Lady Percival’s sincerity or judgment. Indeed, Belinda is “soothed” (450) by her letter, and defends her to Lady Delacour, asserting, “Lady Anne always judges as well as possible of every body” (451). In other words—Lady Percival remains a source of moral authority. Belinda seems to defend her to the reader as well as to Lady Delacour.

Edgeworth’s declaration in the introduction to Belinda that she does “not wish to acknowledge a Novel” provides entry into the novel’s role in domesticating colonial

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42 Ibid., 308, 309.

43 Kirkpatrick, “The Limits of Liberal Feminism,” 80.
discourse—but not in the ways that we might expect. Indeed, Edgeworth seems explicitly aware of the connections between novelistic heroines and empire, as I have demonstrated in Lady Delacour and Virginia, and she deconstructs these connections in Belinda’s conclusion. However, in Lady Percival we see that these colonial discourses are deeply entrenched in the text and are presented to the reader as natural rather than artificial. The moral grounds on which Lady Percival makes Mr. Vincent’s case and the intermarriage of Juba and Lucy, which she sanctions, become natural to Belinda and her community—mere “cheerful spectacle” in the case of the latter.

Nicholas Mason’s argument about social class and domestic discourse in Belinda is useful for explicating the collusion between the “cheerful spectacle” of Juba’s marriage and the novel’s naturalization of colonial authority. Mason argues that in Belinda Edgeworth promotes the reformation of the corrupt aristocracy and its necessary assumption of middle-class values. He invokes Armstrong’s argument that eighteenth-century novels and conduct books promoted the set of domestic virtues that would come to define the middle class as it rose to dominate the social order. However, Mason takes a slightly different tack: he argues that rather than replacing the aristocracy with the middle class as the novel’s moral center, in Belinda the aristocracy comes to embody middle-class values. Mason notes that the Percival family, the novel’s middle-class domestic ideal, are themselves not middle class: “The prototype of domesticity within the novel is not the family of a merchant or a banker, but the Percivals, an aristocratic family, complete with their titles, their leisure, and their tenantry ... It is the aristocratic Lady Anne who serves as the ultimate model for middle-class Belinda, not vice versa.” This penetration of middle-class domestic values at all levels of society, Mason contends,
points to a growing perception of the universality of these values in the early nineteenth century—a "naturalization of domesticity." In a similar vein, Comitini contends: "Belinda] is structured so that the character ad exemplum can teach what is a natural desire for the reader/subject to feel." Both Mason and Comitini use the term "naturalize" (or "naturally") to describe the process whereby a set of beliefs or practices become a part of the social fabric and of the individual's subjectivity.

As I have argued in this chapter, Belinda and "The Grateful Negro" each teach the reader to accept a particular set of desires and social arrangements as "natural." In each text these "natural" arrangements rewrite social reality. In "The Grateful Negro," the plantation becomes a pleasing and ordered space compatible with British domestic virtues, arranged according to the inherent differences between slaves and their owners. Both the idealized and the villainous plantation owners in this tale suggest that the goods obtained through colonial networks are naturally desired, that they are something their world "must" have—thus the procurement of these goods is not a luxury, but a necessity, or at least a benign activity. Belinda simultaneously veils and integrates the plantation culture depicted in "The Grateful Negro" into the domestic sphere. The Creole whose wealth is produced by the plantation system is naturally virtuous despite his addiction to gambling, and the sources of his wealth retreat beneath his masculine virtue. Furthermore, in this novel the former slave becomes a natural part of the British household while retaining his status as a childlike and irrationally grateful subaltern. What Mason identifies as a "naturalization of domesticity" in Belinda is, in both Belinda and "The Grateful Negro," also a naturalization of imperialism. Or, rather, these texts

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44 Mason, "Class, Gender, and Domesticity," 281, 283.
45 Comitini, Vocational Philanthropy, 116.
expose the collusion between domesticity and imperialism. Furthermore, *Belinda* reminds us of the importance of gender to this equation, as the domestic woman becomes an agent of what Kaplan calls “Manifest Domesticity.” Perera reminds us: “A sense of national mission and the concept of a sacred domesticity were to become the paired consolidations of empire in the Victorian period, the moral superiority of English *domestic* life not only vindicating but warranting and even necessitating its *national* mission abroad.”

Together, *Belinda* and “The Grateful Negro” expose the imagined universality of British domesticity both — “Aroad, and at Home” in the early nineteenth century.

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CONCLUSION

Rethinking Domesticity

In a recent interview conducted by the Royal Geographic Society, Nobel laureate and Trinidadian-British writer V. S. Naipaul (1932-) was asked if any woman writer could be considered his peer. As reported by Amy Fallon in *The Guardian* on 2 June 2011, Naipaul replied: ―I don’t think so.” Of Jane Austen in particular, Naipaul declared that he couldn’t possibly share her sentimental ambitions, her sentimental sense of the world.” Naipaul also suggested that he could tell within one or two sentences whether a piece had been written by a woman because of women’s —sentimentality, the narrow view of the world.” This propensity for sentiment and narrowness, Naipaul contended, derives from the limited scope of women’s experiences and concerns. He argued: “And inevitably for a woman, she is not a complete master of a house, so that comes over in her writing too.”

Naipaul is of Indian descent and is the author of many works, both fictional and non-fictional, that address the colonial and postcolonial situations in Trinidad and in India, such as: *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies* (1962), *An Area of Darkness* (1964), the Booker prize-winning *In a Free State* (1971), and many others. His sense of women’s —narrow view of the world” derives from a long and still persistent tradition of equating domesticity with limitation, political vacuum, and triviality—or what Naipaul calls —feminine tosh.” Furthermore, women are not —master of the house,” Naipaul contends; therefore, even in the domestic sphere that they are supposed to know best, they lack any real power. He implies that the degree to

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which women are in the world and able to access its most urgent political questions is inherently deficient by virtue of their being women.

As this dissertation has shown, arguments like Naipaul’s miss the political significance of domesticity and assume that courtship plots are only about marriage and filial duty, that discourse on female education is only about the proper methods for instructing young women, or that narratives set in the home are confined to what takes place within its walls. Of course, Naipaul also neglects, or perhaps willfully ignores, the large body of scholarship highlighting the political significance of domesticity in multiple centuries and nationalities. This dissertation has shown that in the final decades of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, what David Brion Davis deems the “Age of Revolution,” the domestic sphere is of vital imperial significance in women’s writing. Specifically, the texts I have examined collectively demonstrate that late eighteenth-century women’s literature uses the domestic sphere to negotiate the racial, sexual, and cultural crises of the British Empire. These texts show that the geographically expansive Empire was intimately intertwined with women’s conceptions of the home, and that the “othered” eighteenth-century world was central to the ways that they defined Britishness, femininity, and masculinity. The imperial significance of domesticity thus exposes links between women’s texts that have often been separated using labels such as “conservative” or “progressive.”

More broadly, the domestic narratives I have examined suggest that literature played an important part in allowing eighteenth-century Britons to be “at home” with the Empire,” as Hall and Rose put it, and to be “comfortable with the idea of being

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The texts that I have examined do so by reinforcing what were perceived to be “natural” differences between Great Britain and the territories that it ruled, either directly or indirectly, and in suggesting that these territories might be “improved” by British colonial intervention. I have referred to this process as domesticating the Empire. This dissertation thus contends that we should continue to revisit what we mean when we refer to a text as “domestic” because discourses of domesticity involve a number of political issues that are not always immediately apparent.

Jane Austen’s final incomplete novel *Sanditon* (1817) demonstrates the importance of rethinking domesticity in eighteenth-century women’s literature and in attending to its imperial significance. This novel also indicates the anxiety, excitement, and ambiguity with which Austen and her contemporaries, both male and female, conceived of their Empire. *Sanditon* is set at the budding seaside community for which the novel is titled. The community’s chief investors and proprietors, Mr. Parker and Lady Denham, hope that Sanditon will ultimately rival Bath as a social and therapeutic destination and anxiously recruit new families to fill its lodgings. Midway through the novel, Diana Parker, Mr. Parker’s sister, writes to tell him that she has secured “two large Families” for Sanditon, “one a rich West Indian from Surrey.” The potential arrival of this family causes a great stir among Sanditon’s residents. Lady Denham is initially pleased to hear of their pending appearance, declaring: “A West Indy Family ... That sounds well. That will bring Money.” Mr. Parker confirms this statement: “No people spend more freely, I beleive [sic], than W. Indians” (318). However, despite her sense

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3 Hall and Rose, *At Home With the Empire*, 25.

that this West Indian family will bring much-needed wealth—in their "full Purses"—to Sanditon, Lady Denham is nonetheless anxious about the negative consequences of their supposedly spendthrift ways: "But then, they who scatter their Money so freely, never think of whether they may not be doing mischief by raising the price of Things—And I have heard that’s very much the case with your West-injines—and if they come among us to raise the price of our necessaries of Life, we shall not much thank them’’ (318). As this exchange shows, Austen associates this West Indian family (who never actually materializes) with both promise and menace. Their wealth, produced in the theatre of empire, promises to bolster Sanditon’s residents in their communal investment, yet this wealth also threatens to raise the community’s cost of living. Austen thus seems acutely aware of the domestic consequences, both positive and negative, of the Empire coming home. Set entirely in England, Sanditon demonstrates the closeness of what Sarah Salih calls "he" and "there" in the late eighteenth century.6

Lady Denham’s fear that the West Indian family might do —mischief— by joining the community is a pervasive anxiety in the texts that I have examined in this dissertation. While these texts frequently support the imperial cause, such as Seward’s Elegy on Captain Cook, West’s The Mother, and Edgeworth’s The Grateful Negro,” this support often coincides with their authors’ awareness that the Empire is not without its perils and that it poses a threat to the nation’s moral as well as financial well being. The texts that I

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5 In the explanatory notes to the Oxford edition of Sanditon, Claudia Johnson points out: "West Indians here are not natives of the West Indies, but Britons who settled in the West Indies and made their fortunes on plantations there ... After making their fortunes, West Indian families frequently returned to England in an attempt to reintegrate and rel legitimate themselves as English, and, as the responses of the Sanditon natives indicate, were often regarded with some disdain as foreign, as vulgar, and sometimes as tainted from their association with slaves and slavery” (377).

have examined collectively demonstrate that courtship plots and other domestic narratives can be effective vehicles for addressing (and tenuously resolving) such anxieties. For example, the moral compromise associated with the Empire is frequently linked to father figures and to male characters more generally, such as Mr. Williams and Mr. Dudley of West’s *The Advantages of Education* and *A Gossip’s Story*, respectively, who are physically deteriorated by their associations with the Empire; Ernesto of Seward’s *Louisa*, who is seduced by the Empire’s glittering riches and whose failed financial speculation forces his son to marry a villainous, Orientalized woman; and Mr. Vincent, the Creole gentleman of Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, whose addiction to gambling is linked to the hazard (both moral and financial) of investing in the Empire. These texts thus suggest that there are more complicated ways that we might think about patriarchy and masculinity in eighteenth-century women’s literature. Given our current knowledge of British imperial history, it should come as no surprise that women like Seward, West, and Edgeworth associated patriarchy with the Empire. However, this connection is underexplored in our scholarship on this period. Noticing the imperialist discourses in texts that support patriarchal authority changes what it means to be a good daughter within Revolution-era frameworks: female education becomes an imperial project.

In addition to complicating the ways that we think about patriarchy and masculinity in late eighteenth-century women’s literature, this dissertation also suggests that the imperial significance of maternity deserves more scholarly attention. While the harmful effects of the Empire are often most directly experienced by male characters in the texts that I have examined, it is equally noteworthy that women are often positioned as antidotes to these effects. West’s *The Mother* and *The Advantage of Education* spell
out this significance most clearly, as I argue in chapter 2. However, other texts that I
examine more subtly indicate women’s roles as colonial mediators. For example, as I
argue in chapter 4, Lady Percival in Edgeworth’s *Belinda* devotes much of her time to
promoting the marriages of British women to men with colonial connections, although
Edgeworth does not remark on this aspect of her character; it is merely one part of Lady
Percival’s role as the novel’s exemplary domestic woman and mother. As I point out in
chapter 2, at the conclusion to West’s *A Gossip’s Story* Louisa Dudley, the novel’s
-good” daughter, bows to an image of patriarchal and colonial authority in the marble
bust of her father, a man who explicitly avows his —tory” in having increased the
resources and wealth” (1: 182) of his nation’s empire. What, then, will it mean for
Louisa Dudley to —collect [her] father’s precepts” (2: 214), as her husband indicates
that she must? Given West’s broader interest in women as moral exemplars in colonial
contexts, we might see Louisa as a woman who, like Amelia Williams, will serve the
Empire that her father signifies throughout her domestic life, including her likely future
as a mother. Scholarship on eighteenth-century literature has done much to demonstrate
the ways that female characters signify a variety of colonial anxieties. However, far less

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Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*; Perry, —Manizing the Breast”; Wilson, *The Island Race*. See also Jenny Sharpe,
*Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Anglo-Indian fiction and argues that the figure of woman is a shifting signifier for discourses of
imperialism and native rebellion. This fiction, produced in times of political instability in Anglo-India,
draws on British cultural memory of the so-called —Indian Mutiny” of 1857, after which white women were
portrayed as victims of brutal sexual assault by mutinying Indian men. Sharpe argues:
The image of native men sexually assaulting white women is in keeping with the idea of
the colonial encounter as a Manichaean battle between civilization and barbarism. ... The
stereotype of the dark rapist speaks more strongly to the failure of the civilizing mission,
which is why rape stories tend to emerge at moments of political instability. When
articulated through images of violence against women, a resistance to British rule does
not look like the struggle for emancipation but rather an uncivilized eruption that must be
contained. In turn, the brutalized bodies of defenseless English women serve as a
metonym for a government that sees itself as the violated object of rebellion.
has been said about women as imperial exemplars, particularly in women's domestic literature. This dissertation demonstrates that pursing the connections between maternity and empire in this literature would enable us to more fully describe the political significance of femininity in this period. We might expand Mellor's argument that women are “mothers of the nation” to suggest that women in domestic narratives are “mothers of the Empire.”

The frequency with which colonial settings or characters with colonial associations appear in the texts that I have examined also indicates that the Empire was an unremarkable national backdrop for eighteenth-century Britons. In some texts, these colonial connections are easier to identify, such as the former slave Juba and the Creole gentleman Mr. Vincent in Edgeworth's Belinda, the colonial setting of Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro,” or in the direct reference to the Sierra Leone expedition in Inchbald's Nature and Art. In other texts, it can take concerted effort for us to see these colonial connections, or to see them with historical accuracy. Austen’s Sanditon again serves as a case-in-point. Toward the end of the novel a young woman named Miss Lambe arrives at Sanditon. Austen describes her as “a young W. Indian of large Fortune, in delicate health” (340). Because Miss Lambe is West Indian, like the family whose potential arrival at Sanditon causes such a great stir, she is easily identifiable as a figure of the Empire’s wealth and of attempts made by colonial families to reintegrate themselves in English society. She comes to Sanditon with two other young women in order to finish

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8 On feminism and imperialism, see Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
her education under the care of Mrs. G. Among these three schoolgirls, Austen describes Miss Lambe as “beyond comparison the most important and precious, as she paid in proportion to her fortune.—She was about seventeen, half Mulatto, chilly and tender” (341). Austen’s very brief description of Miss Lambe illustrates both the clarity and the ambiguity with which colonial characters appear in the literature of this period, as well as the necessity of our attempting to see such characters within their historical frameworks. As Salih notes, a twentieth-century editor of Sanditon, Margaret Drabble, finds this particular description puzzling in what she perceives as its abruptness: “It is as though one had entered into another world. Who would ever have thought that Miss Lambe would prove to be half mulatto? And yet Jane Austen states the fact with the utmost calm.”

10 To this astonishment, Salih responds: “How should the author have delivered her description of the wealthy West Indian? ... [I]s the figure of the brown woman in fiction of this time so unusual that it warrants Drabble’s rather overstated expressions of surprise?”

11 This dissertation demonstrates that this —other world is not as alien to Austen as Drabble implies. Miss Lambe is merely one among three school girls, remarkable within the world of the novel primarily because of her fortune, not because of her race. We should not confuse our responses to such characters with Austen’s: the astonishment that Drabble expresses says more about a twentieth-century sense that the Empire was

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9 Elaine Jordan looks at the signification of the West Indian schoolgirl in Sanditon and other eighteenth century texts, such as Amelia Opie’s Adeline Mowbray (1804), in Jane Austen Goes to the Seaside: Sanditon, English Identity and the “West Indian” Schoolgirl,” in The Postcolonial Jane Austen, ed. You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 29-55.

10 Qtd. in Salih, “The Silence of Miss Lambe,” 335-336.

11 Ibid., 336. Drabble’s edition of Sanditon appeared in 1975 and is currently available from Penguin Classics.
“elsewhere” than it does about Austen and her readers' sense of the world. Of course, because such a character might be familiar to Austen and her readers does not mean that she was well understood, or that we should follow Austen in failing to remark on Miss Lambe’s status as a “half mulatto.” The implications of Miss Lambe’s race certainly deserve our attention because they allow us to better historicize our current understanding of what racial markers signified in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In a sense, then, our task as scholars of eighteenth-century literature and empire is a complex one: this dissertation demonstrates that we must retain the sense of ordinariness with which writers such as Austen, Edgeworth, Inchbald, and their contemporaries treat colonial subjects and characters, while also remarking on the unremarkable, making the familiar strange.

As part of this project, we must also rethink what it means for a character or a setting to be “colonial.” The women's domestic narratives that I have examined suggest that texts produced in the late eighteenth century can lack what Salih calls a “brown woman” such as Miss Lambe—that is, a figure of obvious colonial indeterminacy—and yet ask the same questions about the nation, its Empire, and its women. Miss Morton of West's *A Gossip's Story* and Emira of Seward's *Louisa* illustrate this tendency: neither of these women is racially ambiguous, like Miss Lambe, and neither is immediately recognizable as a generically colonial character. However, as I demonstrate in the chapters devoted to these texts, both women have important links to the Empire in several of its valences: the Orient and the British sugar colony. Collectively, the Miss Lambes as well as the less obviously “colonial” women in the literature of this period illustrate that colonial discourse penetrates constructions of femininity at multiple levels. Similarly,
Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* shows the importance of thinking about settings in more expansive ways. As I argue in chapter 3, the Norwynnes’ seaside cottage has much in common with contemporary plans to colonize the coast of West Africa, in that Inchbald imagines this space as a social exterior where new labor and class arrangements are possible. Certainly, this residence is far less firmly established as colonial than the plantation setting of Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro.” Nonetheless, noticing the connections between *Nature and Art* and the Free Community in Africa proposed by Wadstrom gives us a more complete picture of the contemporary discourses that influenced Jacobin fiction, which has often been seen as a strictly domestic genre. I am not suggesting that the Empire is everywhere in the literature of this period, or that every domestic narrative must, necessarily, have colonial connections. But this dissertation shows that connections to the Empire are more pervasive in the literature of this period than current scholarship acknowledges. Attending to these connections, however understated, gives us a more complete sense of what it meant for women to produce political writing in the late eighteenth century.

Noticing the subtle (and not so subtle) presence of the Empire in the literature of this period is important on another register. This dissertation demonstrates that domestic narratives can be vehicles for eliding the Empire’s operations and for reinforcing a narrative of Great Britain’s cultural as well as economic authority. Edward Said reminds us of the historical significance of the period I examine. He asks: “How do writers in the period before the great age of explicit, programmatic colonial expansion—the ‘scramble for Africa,’ say—situate and see themselves and their work in the larger world?” As Said indicates, the period under discussion in this dissertation—roughly the 1780s

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through the first decade of the nineteenth century—precedes the large scale expansion of European (not merely British) empires. This process entailed carving up the African continent in order to exploit its natural resources and native population, as well as equally coercive forms of rule in India, Australia, and Canada. Even in texts such as *Nature and Art* that make direct reference to colonial endeavors, these endeavors are positively represented as opportunities for British men to earn fortunes that will allow them to support their families, as processes whereby Great Britain spreads its civilization to the planet’s “dark” continents, or both. Despite the colonial anxiety that the texts I examine often betray, they maintain the sense that Great Britain is peculiarly favored by Providence; even when lacking explicit support for the Empire, this sentiment reinforces the larger cultural narrative that accompanied colonization efforts. In his study of the connections between imperialism and British missionary activity, Andrew Porter points out that in the 1780s, many British people believed that it was their nation’s responsibility to “[spread] their faith to those without it. This course of action, virtuous in itself, was also felt likely to produce many reciprocal benefits for those who adopted it.”

The lived experience of the Empire, its actual operations, frequently belied the idea that the benefit of spreading British religious and cultural practices was in any way reciprocal. In the texts that I examine, however, the darker realities of the Empire remain submerged. In addition to allowing us to better understand the political layers of women’s domestic fiction, pursuing the kinds of questions that I ask in this dissertation deepens our knowledge of the correspondence between cultural forms and imperial practices. Many of the political functions of the literature produced in this period have been well documented in the scholarship, as I have surveyed in the introduction. Less well

documented are the imperialist functions of their politics. Said answers his question of how writers preceding the scramble for Africa saw themselves and their work in the larger world” by making this trenchant argument:

We shall find them using striking but careful strategies, many of them derived from expected sources—positive ideas of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behavior, moral values. But positive ideas of this sort do more than validate our world. They also tend to devalue other worlds and, perhaps more significantly from a retrospective point of view, they do not prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperialist practices.14

The texts that I have examined in this dissertation collectively advance the positive ideas of home” in contrast to devalued other worlds” that Said identifies, despite their various affiliations with generically conservative or progressive political camps. This dissertation thus demonstrates that late eighteenth-century women writers collaborated, in ways of which the writers themselves might not have been aware, in preparing eighteenth-century Britons to be imperial. Seward’s Poetical Novel” Louisa shares more in common with a novel like Inchbald’s Nature and Art than Seward (who hated novels) might have been willing to admit for precisely the qualities that Said identifies. Said is careful to repeatedly acknowledge that cultural forms such as the novel are not themselves responsible for the spread of empire. However, he does make the convincing case that it is historically inaccurate” to ignore the ways that cultural forms enabled, encouraged, and otherwise assured the West’s readiness to assume and enjoy the experience of empire.”15

This dissertation has shown that late eighteenth-century women’s literature played a key role in this process of domesticating the Empire. Richard Polwhele’s division of

14 Said, Culture and Imperialism, 81.
15 Ibid., 80.
women writers into two distinctly different groups, into “natural” and “unnatural”
women, indicates that Polwhele did not notice these writers’ deeper collaborations—
perhaps because of the perceived naturalness of the cultural hierarchies that women from
both groups portrayed in their work. It is up to us, as modern scholars, to notice these
collaborations. As part of his argument that national unity depends on citizens
collectively forgetting the violence that brought their nation into being, Ernest Renan
argues: “[T]he essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common,
and also that they have forgotten many things.”16 This dissertation demonstrates what it
means for us to remember those national origins that literary texts can help us forget.

16 Renan, “What is a Nation?” 11.
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VITA

Angela Rehbein is from Beckley, WV. She is a graduate of Fairmont State University in WV, where she earned bachelor's degrees in English and in K-12 Art Education, and Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, where she earned a master's degree in English.