

GENRES OF EVIDENCE:
READING FACTS IN ENGLAND FROM ARCHIVES, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE,
1770–1830

BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BLJ *Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand
- G Byron, "The Giaour," *Complete Works*, ed. Jerome McGann
- HM Home Miscellaneous series, India Office Records
- NA Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*
- RR *Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Donald H. Reiman
- RRR Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, rebels, and reactionaries*
- W Byron, *The Works of the Right Honorable Lord Byron*, 1818.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: READING GENRES OF EVIDENCE

This dissertation presents four case studies of readers, writers and texts from the turn of the nineteenth century—what is conventionally called the Romantic period. Only some of these readers and writers have well-established places in the traditional Romantic canon. Scholarly transgressions beyond the lists of “high Romantic” writers—William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron—are nothing new in the study of Romanticism. The past twenty years have seen an enormous expansion of interest in the texts eclipsed by the poetic work of these poets.¹

The readers and writers in each case study are clustered around the formal and stylistic convergences of their texts. The relationships established by these convergences may at first appear surprising: I argue, for instance, that archival documents—a historian’s “primary sources”—bear striking formal similarities to literary texts; what is more, I show that they were shaped by the texts we now read as literature.

The dissertation opens with a discussion of archival documents’ treating of the story of a “beautiful Moor woman” who disappeared in Madras, a colonial town in South India. The story caused quite a stir among its readers, all of them employees of the East

¹ This critical move proved particularly effective in establishing race and gender as categories relevant to the study of Romanticism. It was also interesting in making possible a discussion of the significance of prose texts during the period, as well as a re-assessment of the relationship of poetry to the textual apparatus surrounding the poetic text, exposing the procedures whereby the poetry was separated from its original textual settings (e.g., Keats’s letters, Byron’s revisions and annotations, Coleridge’s notebooks, etc.).

India Company. In a collection of papers submitted to England from India by several Company servants, the elaborate tale alleged that a late eighteenth-century British ally in India had received aid from a Company official in abducting and murdering a beautiful harem woman.

The readers in London—the Company administrators—were expected to assess whether such an event could happen in India, and even whether the “Moor woman” ever existed at all, from the formal qualities of the reports. Those directly involved in the crisis disagreed about how this story should be interpreted. For some, its conventional narrative devices—the eyewitness accounts, the meticulous details of abduction, the repetitive plot—served to authenticate the account. For others, these same devices argued their factitiousness, their strictly literary status. The man accused of abetting the abduction dismissed the narrative as a text written “with the most Studied Attention” which took advantage of its readers’ lack of empirical familiarity with the “Orient.” The claims made in the tale were eventually investigated in court and dismissed.

This project is a history of my own surprise at the crisis of interpretation among those whose professional and political careers depended on the decision about whether such an “oriental tale” could be true—of my surprise at the existence of such close relationships between archival texts and the history of literature. More broadly, it is a history of my surprise at the consequences of these connections between historical texts and literary texts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Curiosities such as the story of the vanishing “beautiful Moor woman,” along with the interpretive adventures I trace in the other three chapters, raise foundational questions about the way the technologies, the skills and the arts of writing and reading contributed in the

Romantic period to the emergence of the category of evidence. Such questions organize my dissertation.

LITERATURE IN HISTORICAL ARCHIVES: THE WRITING PROJECT OF LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Related to other projects seeking to recover the genesis of what Mary Poovey has called “the modern fact,” the concept, particular to an age, in which direct empirical experience has been both indispensable and insufficient for knowledge, my project uses historical materials to study the emergence of the textual forms of fact and evidence.² The dissertation uses four scenes of reading and writing to show how a simultaneous emergence of the habits of reading across genres of historical and literary writing shaped the form, shifted the provenance and changed the legibility of evidence and fact.

As a project about the career of literature against the historical backdrop of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, my project builds on the legacy of interdisciplinary scholarship of the past thirty years. Foregrounding the textuality of historical materials used by both students of history and students of literature, this scholarship has allowed mutual illumination among a range of categories and genres of writing. Motivated in part by the pressure to account for the place of literature in its social and political historical context, “new historicism” in literary studies enabled a

² As a project about readerly and writerly transactions—a series of social interactions, my project is also closely related to Stephen Shapin’s *Social History of Truth*, although the “truths” each is after are of a different order of scientific provability. Similarly social and textual are Barbara J. Shapiro’s *Probability and certainty in seventeenth-century England* and *A Culture of Fact: England 1550–1720*; Lorraine Daston focuses on the history of probability as part of the history of science in *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*; Douglas Lane Patey treats of the “stages in the history of probability” and the relationship between probability and “Augustan literary criticism” and “narrative form” in *Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic theory and literary practice in the Augustan Age*.

wave of scholarship that liberated new kinds of materials for literary reading, but also recharged literary study politically.³

In looking for Britain's "national" historical events beyond the British Isles, my work is particularly indebted to the extensive scholarship initially enabled by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. An intervention in the geo-political range of historical literary scholarship, *Orientalism* established the relevance of imperialism for the study of national literatures, expanding its ambit beyond the arbitrary limits of modern nation states that typically neglected to account in their national histories of literature for the significance of historical changes in the nations' territorial and ideological reach.⁴

A two-way process, the textual illumination between literature and other textual sources also alerted historians to the effect of textuality on the shape of historical documents and historical narratives, as well as to the potential contributions of literary scholarship to the possibilities of historiography.⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis has specifically recognized the significance for historical scholarship of "fiction in the archives," proposing that attention to "fiction," defined as conventions of story-telling permissible

³ Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* may be seen as a political manifesto of such literary scholarship, urging literary critics "always" to historicize. Jameson offers Marxism as a discourse (or narrative model) of preference because it provides an account of history as well as of the emergence of categories in which history makes itself legible. Steven Greenblatt has been recognized as the pioneer of new historicism among literary scholars, setting up the model for the majority of early modernist literary reading. This is a model invested in "field" examinations as such, derived from structuralist paradigms—searching for the "structures of feeling," and inspired by anthropology (e.g., Clifford Geertz) and the work of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. The new historicism among Romanticist literary historians was influenced more by Marx, Althusser and psychoanalysis: it was interested in the political unconscious of texts, in non-representation of one thing as the condition of representation of another.

⁴ An example of such scholarship is Nigel Leask's *British Romantic Writers and the East*. More recently, *Romantic Representations of British India* foregrounds the persistence of India in the cultural imagination, but fails to wonder about what the term "Romantic" means in the context of imperialism.

⁵ Some representative examples of such meta-critical work of historiography are Hayden White's *The Content of the Form* and *Metahistory*; Dominick LaCapra's *Rethinking Intellectual History* (1983) and *History and Criticism* (1985). The work of Carolyn Steedman in *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1987) and *Master and Servant* (2007) has been relevant specifically to the historiography of eighteenth-century Britain and women's history.

in court procedures in early modern France rather than as imaginative invention, provides a method for retrieving historical information about the lives of people whose existence would have otherwise remained unrecorded. Studying sixteenth-century French letters of remission, which were most often a collaborative endeavor between supplicants and various representatives of the legal system, Davis suggests that the supplicant's voice can be assumed to dominate in the process of composition, despite the legalistic formulas in which the letters had to be framed. Since the legal procedure required the supplicant to repeat the written account in his own words, and the witnesses to corroborate the details laid out in the letter, few supplicants would have risked, under the threat of death, the failure to deliver their defense speeches properly or the suspicion of perjury.⁶

We could argue that any story from a colonial archive should interest us in part because such a story was used to confer a measure of reality on otherwise impalpable spaces and people—those of which most Britons in Britain would never have any empirical knowledge, even when such locales became gems in their Queen's crown. Writing for the archive was an occasion to invent those places and people for England's use.⁷ However, this project about British literature introduces a particular set of late eighteenth-century British archival texts in the first two chapters—documents that are both stories from the archive that conferred a measure of reality on India, but also documents of collaboration on writing projects whose goal was to determine the story-telling conventions for this archive.

⁶ See Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 18. The work of Carlo Ginzburg provides comparable models for the use of “fantastical” and “folk” narratives about witches in historical reconstructions relevant to the early modern period.

⁷ Gayatri Spivak would insist that these were also occasions to re-invent England and represent it to itself. See Spivak's “Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (also revised and re-printed as a chapter on “Literature” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*).

Part of the “official” archive of the British Empire—the India Office Records—these negotiations, I was surprised to find out, involved references to genres we conventionally read as literature: literary texts provided models of appropriate ways to produce and preserve historical documentation about the British presence in India. Along with the history of formal and stylistic convergences between archival and literary texts, these papers also document an awareness of the consequences of these convergences among their readers and writers. All of them employees of the British East India Company, they expressed fascinating (and at times hilarious) insecurities about their abilities to provide appropriate representations for their employers in London of the regions that would become British colonies in South Asia; at times, they expressed sheer unwillingness to report anything at all.

Tracing the readerly and writerly transactions involved in the creation of this segment of the historical record, I use archival documents to think about the textual conditions of reporting to Britain about India and colonization at the end of the eighteenth century, and these conditions’ relationship to texts we now read as literature. This is why I introduce archival documents into my project, not for the “information” about events they ostensibly represent, although the events are “interesting” in themselves since available narratives of colonization and domination make it difficult to imagine that such events were possible. Rather, I aim to provide an account of how these documents imposed themselves on me as documents of a relationship between the historical archive and the literary texts from this period that I was never taught to expect.

While I suggest that these possibilities of representation may have been shaped by the forms of “realistic” reportage designed by literary writers, I point out that this is also a strange history of literature they insist they have known.

The accusations leveled against the untruth of the story about the “beautiful Moor woman” are also a record of threatening suspicions that such a story may be true, a possibility that interferes with the conventional histories of literature centered on narratives about the “rise” of “realist” genres in prose, genres emblemized by “the novel.” These are histories in which there is no room for oriental tales, except as a marginal, fantastical genre, occasionally related to “romances,” a genre whose relationship to the novel took a long time in making itself apparent to literary historians.⁸ A by-product of cultural interactions with geographical regions deemed marginal to the national history of British literature, oriental tales remain difficult to incorporate either into narratives of the gradual technical improvement and eventual perfection of literary realism, or into stories about the all-European origins of European literature. The appearance of oriental tales among the possible genres of “realism” in the colonial archive is an awkward reminder that Britain’s late eighteenth-century cultural encounter with non-European regions was both a political and a textual one.

When I provide an account of the “literary” construction and rhetorical address of archival materials, and of the ways such literary devices signified as fact and evidence, I want to show that the emergence of empire in Britain extended its impact on the history of writing in much broader ways than earlier studies of “literature and Empire” have conceived. Although it generated lively interest in the ability of literary texts to document

⁸ See William Warner’s account of the hijacking of women’s romances for re-use in “novels” by Richardson and other canonical writers in *Licensing Entertainment*.

imperial ideologies, *Orientalism* left largely unexamined the complex evolution of the relationships of representation between European literature and European imperialism.⁹ My project, by contrast, is interested precisely in the convoluted textual processes by which literature and imperialism became imbricated. I take British imperialism—and the colonization of India in particular—to be a writing project as much as a political and an economic one. Taking imperialism during the Romantic period to be a particular textual practice, my project initiates an account of the shared histories of texts conventionally understood to be “literature of Romanticism,” and of other kinds of writing from the same period understood to be the writing emblematic of “colonization.” The project therefore suggests some starting points for an investigation of Romanticism and imperialism as two writing practices whose correlations could explain the almost perfect overlap between the end-dates of the Romantic period and those of the British colonial consolidation in South Asia—the transformation of East India Company, which was the primary agent of British imperialism in India at the end of the eighteenth century, from a trading corporation into an instrument of colonial government.

Testimony to the centrality of writing for the existence of late eighteenth-century British Empire is not only the sheer volume of texts exchanged between London and the overseas domains, especially India: the British Library alone boasts “14 kilometres of shelves of volumes, files and boxes of papers, together with 70,000 volumes of official

⁹ For some examples of literary scholarship that emerged from the interest in Romantic writing as a reflection of “historicist concern with explicating the transformations which were visited on the peoples subject to the colonizing process in this period” (Fulford and Kitson 8), see Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*; John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey*; Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*; H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain*; Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, eds., *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834*; Rajani Sudan, *Fair Exotics*.

publications and 105,000 manuscript and printed maps.”¹⁰ It is the uses to which such correspondence was put and the reference it made to its own significance as a medium of communication and a model of representation. As Martin Moir explains, the nature and the structure of the “Kaghazi Raj,” i.e., of the belief that there could be a system of colonial government-at-a-distance based on writing, remain under perpetual discussion within the East India Company. Moir offers 1852 statements by John Stuart Mill and Charles Trevelyan as illustrative of the two attitudes towards “government by paper” (185). The former, a “leading bureaucrat in the Company’s home establishment” philosophically interested in the principles of good government, thought that the ubiquity of recordation was “a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other probably has a system of recordation so complete” (Mill qtd. in Moir Raj 185). The latter, Trevelyan, a local British administrator in India and “the man-on-the-spot who expected to be trusted to make sensible decisions and exercise discretion on what needed to be reported in detail to the London authorities” (Moir Raj 185), reported that

The Home Government is overwhelmed with a mass of correspondence which no physical capacity can master. No sufficient distinction is made between those subjects which are of a perfunctory, and those which are of an important character; and overgrown bodies of clerks and Printers are kept up, at the Indian Presidencies and in London, at a lamentable cost of money and still more of misdirected time and labour, for the purpose of carrying on this monster correspondence. (Trevelyan qtd. in Moir Raj 185)

Perceived to be an exceptionally accurate and reliable method of representation, writing imposed enormous problems: its volume and its laboriousness were seen as potential obstacles to the efficiency of government of an Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century. Arguing for a broader importance of attention to “the ways in which the

¹⁰ The British Library Internet page on “India Office Records: History and Scope,” <http://www.bl.uk/collections/iorgenrl.html>. Additional records are kept in India as well, some of them copies of the British records, some of them only available there.

Company worked, particularly the forms of writing and accounting that it used,” (70) not as “‘mechanisms’ for achieving systemic ends that are understood to be separate from them” (70), Miles Ogborn argues in *Indian Ink* that these forms of writing were integral to and constitutive of these “systemic ends.” These forms of writing were “literary technologies”¹¹ as well as “forms of power and knowledge,” and “the ways in which they were made, deployed and read” helped to “make the world they inhabited” (70).¹²

Sharing little of the mid-nineteenth-century hubris about the centrality of writing in the British management of India shown by John Stuart Mill, who served as an examiner of correspondence for the East India Company as well as a Company historian, the papers I discuss warrant attention to India as an emerging item on the domestic political agenda in England. Their writers and readers wondered how, rather than assumed that, India could be re-made from a commercial outpost into a part of the home country when most of those looking from London could see little of it that was materially tangible.¹³

Marking out the points of contact between Romanticism and imperialism, my project draws upon the work of Saree Makdisi, who suggests that the two “cannot be

¹¹ Ogborn borrows the term “literary technologies” from Shaffer and Shapin’s *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

¹² Ogborn is specifically interested, in this chapter, in the reforms introduced into the Company writing practice in the seventeenth century by Streyntsham Master, and reads them as efforts to “institute writing practices that, in their repeated performance and reinscription, were intended to constitute a distinction between the ‘public’ world of the Company’s business and the ‘private’ actions of its servants.” (71)

¹³ Homi Bhabha cites Mill’s testimony to a Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1852 as a testament to the role of writing in the imperial imagination. Mill declared then that there was “no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record,” as witness to the hypothesis that “if the spirit of the Western nation has been symbolized in epic and anthem, voiced by a ‘unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its speech,’ then the sign of colonial government is cast in a lower key, caught in the irredeemable act of *writing*” (93). Histories of the East India Company, such as that by C. H. Philips, have occasionally dealt with the role of the process of correspondence in the establishment of the Company’s authority; the “subaltern historiography” has intervened in the possibilities of Indian historiography by proposing that the service of the East India Company archive to imperial historiography has been one of the “crimes of colonialism,” suggesting alternative sources of documentation and a view of history closer to the non-elite populations and their roles as agents in political and social change.

understood properly” in separation. Constitutive parts of modernization both, “Romanticism cannot be understood properly without reference to modern imperialism and capitalism,” while “modern imperialism and capitalism [understood as cultural processes] cannot be properly understood without reference to Romanticism understood as a cultural formation” (Makdisi xi).¹⁴ The documents I present provide a suggestive initial look at the relationship between the archival and the literary writing in the Romantic period as one part of the “tightly wrought textual system which brings into being the necessary signposts of political power and renders visible some tools (and mechanics) of domination and resistance” (Makdisi xi).

Chapter Three, in which I examine the *Letterbook of John Bruce*, the East India Company historian between 1793 and the early 1820s, deals specifically with the theoretical and institutional conditions entailed in the changing authority of archival documents. Bruce was the “official Company Historiographer” at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the *Letterbook* is a record of Bruce’s efforts to recruit various Company officials for his project of writing Company history based on the “evidence of experience” of those stationed in India, the kind that could be used to boost the Company’s application for charter renewal in 1793. Discussing the centrality of the epistolary form in the conveyance of “evidence of experience” from India to Britain, I trace some of the institutional, historical and theoretical conditions on which the documents contained in the *Letterbook* were classified as historical documents rather than travelogues or documents of private communication. The chapter shows how Bruce used

¹⁴ Makdisi borrows from Marylin Butler the conceptual framework for Romanticism as a “historical designation of a number of enormously varied engagements with the multitudinous discourses of modernization, which took place in a staggering number of forms, styles, genres, and which can be linked together only in terms of that engagement and in such a way that their individual and unique traits and characteristics are respected and not meaninglessly collapsed into each other” (7).

fictions about the candor and transparency of personal letters to recruit various Company officials for a project of historiography by “commanding correspondence” about the Company’s activities in India. A project designed to garner public support for colonial expansion and normalization, Bruce’s history writing was a novel proposition for his correspondents, who deployed these same conventions of private letter writing to refuse cooperation, to express their unfamiliarity with the role of history as a handmaiden of Empire, or even to comment on the duplicity of the letter form in an environment in which the status of letters’ privacy was difficult to determine.

While most literary scholarship is interested in letters as a genre of women’s writing—a genre that defines the relationship between early models of literary realism and the semblance of historical record of women’s lives it provides—Bruce’s letters suggest that the many lives of the epistolary form in the late eighteenth century have been more complicated than literary scholarship has thus far imagined. Like the heroines of epistolary novels, all modeled on Richardson’s *Pamela*, Bruce and his correspondents pretended to “write to the moment” in order to capture their “evidence of experience.” The literate women represented in epistolary novels were designed to perform this function for the reading public curious about women’s lives—to account for the consequences of the affective transformation under the pressure of employment outside the home, often in domestic service. Unlike these heroines, Bruce and his correspondents invented themselves, while they often knew little about the potential “audience” they would reach. Manipulating fictions about letters’ transparency, they wrote with a different strategy in mind, figuring how their “evidence of experience” might affect their

professional careers, but also how careers in an organization such as the East India Company could sweep individual letter-writers into major national political events.

COLONIZING READERS: A STUDY OF COLLABORATIONS AS A STUDY OF GENRE

Because it relates the formal emergence of textual forms of evidence for imperial historiography during the Romantic period to the emergence of cultural critique designated as “Literature,” my project is not an effort to make Romanticism into a source or an archive of counter-histories;¹⁵ neither is it an attempt to make Romanticism into a literary phenomenon complicit with imperialism. Instead, I focus on writing during the Romantic period, and on Romantic Literature as one of the modes of writing in the period, as a form of representation that was constitutive of knowledge, indispensable for knowledge, and therefore the first order of business for all concerned with comprehending the “totality” of what was to be understood as “England” and “English.”

In the colonial archive and beyond, my project looks at texts which ponder how their readers can be included in larger historical processes, so that the texts under consideration—regardless of their current genre classification—become documents of interactions between individual (private) and national (public) lives. Rather than assume what genres and what readers and writers belong within the parameters of the “public sphere,” I examine how interactions between writers and readers mark out the political valence of texts, and sort out how genre classifications determine what is relevant to

¹⁵ Makdisi’s work shares the ethical claim about Romanticism as a series of progressive interventions in the unstoppable march of modernity and imperialism as one of its essential elements, with other scholars, such as Nigel Leask, whose readings of Romantic texts appear to presume the text’s complicity with imperialism and the necessity of critical restitution of the literature’s ethical (and therefore didactic?) status.

“private” individuals or to some imagined “public,” and what are documents of “personal experience” and what are documents of “national history.”

In the sense that it analyzes the “redefinition of audiences” in the Romantic period, my work benefits from accounts of the “emergence of social classes” and crucial reading audiences at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, Jon Klancher identifies the boom of periodical publication one of the most significant factors in the transformation of English readership and consequent political relevance of writing and literature. Suggesting that “colonialism offered an almost inevitable metaphor for the universalizing of public discourse in the periodicals,” Klancher focuses in the figure of a periodical writer the power to “name and colonize” new groupings of readers (25). These clusters were not defined by social categories, but emerged as groups of readers who would “respond to a specific set of ideas” (Klancher 24).

The writers and readers I study participated self-consciously in such “colonization”—that is, in the active re-distribution of roles among those “colonizing” and those being “colonized.” The four case studies that make up my dissertation show that the readers and writers of these texts registered what now appear to be the strange and unexpected similarities among historical documents, historiography and literary texts. They wondered whether these similarities allowed particular methods of reading to solidify around the texts and whether such interpretive homogeneity constituted clusters of like texts—how it made up genres. This project uses the shifts in the configurations of these clusters—showing that “the making of a class is necessarily the beginning of its unmaking” (Siskin *Historicity* 22)—to structure a historical inquiry into the power of

certain kinds of texts to impose themselves as models of writing “fact” and “evidence.” Attempting to provide a “genre history that seeks to do justice both to the claims of generic identity and to the complexity of historical change” (Starr 2), this project is an attempt to explain how the unorthodox methodology of reading across the genres now can provide new kinds of knowledge about literature of the Romantic period.

My project takes literary texts, historiography and archival texts as partial documentation of what writing could do at the time, or a contribution to the history and epistemology of writing that studies, from a very close distance, the history of beliefs in writing’s transparency (i.e., beliefs in writing as an instrument of recording and sharing), as well as in its capacity to substantiate places, people, and events that could only come into existence from texts.¹⁶ Studying how the clustering of texts (i.e., the standardization of reading) enabled readers and writers to recognize how texts generated forms of facts and evidence, I note the textual conditions of readers’ responses to the writers’ ideas, such that the shape of writers’ “ideas” and the readers’ responsiveness to these forms determined the political relevance of these interactions as they occurred. As Jane Austen explains in her Preface to *Northanger Abbey*, whose political relevance I discuss Chapter Four, in the few years that passed between the time she penned her “little work” in the 1790s and the time she finally had the opportunity to see it published, strange and

¹⁶ Susan Stewart famously relates “the crimes of writing” in the eighteenth-century, and the “distressed genres” (23) in which they were committed, to the recognition of writing’s inability to serve as the perfect system of representation, and explains the many “crimes of writing” in the period by the processes through which writing became both commodity and property (22), but still incapable of “mastering temporality” (5). Kathryn Temple ascribes an identity-defining role to such eighteenth-century crimes and claims that arguments about “transgressive literary acts like book piracy, literary forgery, copyright violations, and libel...fulfilled a public function, forming sites where national identity was negotiated, mediated, and defined” (1). Carolyn Steedman argues in “A Woman writing a Letter” that current preoccupations of literary scholarship with epistolary novels about women as historical documents draw on eighteenth-century obsessions with women’s access to the transparency of writing, often written up by men. Clifford Siskin argues in *The Work of Writing* that the emergence of Literature in the Romantic period was a consequence of the professionalization of the work of writing and the attendant gendering of genres.

unforeseen things had happened. This book about the sway of books over their readers could come out, after some years in abeyance, to find the world transformed beyond recognition. In this new natural habitat for readers, “places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes” (NA 3). The “considerable changes” were such that they made “books” a part of one’s “world,” equal to “places” and “manners,” making it difficult to determine whether “historical circumstances” could still have an existence outside of literary works.

In her Introduction to a recent issue of PMLA devoted to the questions of genre study, Wai Chee Dimock has called scholars to consider the history genres as “a history of kinship” (1381). Such an approach would investigate what literary studies would look like if genres were imagined in a constant condition of “spillover at front and center” and “what kinds of knowledge would be generated” as a result of such imagination (1378). More specifically to the “long Romantic period” (Rajan and Wright 1), Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright announce the relevance of a collection of essays on genre as a way to attempt “reforming literature,” not only because the period is characterized by generic experimentation, but also because the “aesthetics of the period...edges towards what seem ‘modern’ questions about genre, its historicity, the very viability of the category, and the viability of categories by which generic law is maintained” (1). In this project, I wonder how deeply transformed our understanding of Romantic literature would become if we could see literary texts reflected in and formative of the historical documents (of colonization), or if literature itself could become a veritable historical document. This is why my dissertation is not just a historicist literary study: the historical documents in my project do not illuminate the social and cultural conditions of existence of the literary

texts written during the same period. Nor is it a literary reading of historical documents; nor an account of the revisionist interventions in the shape of the colonial archive. It is, rather, an account of the transactions between and across two seemingly distant fields of writing—the writing of literature and the writing of historical documents—and a reading designed to render apparent some of the micro-processes which both formulated the genre categories we recognize now and assigned their relevance to particular academic disciplines and political agendas.

As an examination of conditions on which texts enabled learning at the turn of the nineteenth century, my questions about the relationship of literary texts to other writing from the period are related to the political and interpretive implications of “cocooning of the lyric within the critical” during the Romantic period (Siskin Work 19), and of the distinctiveness of Romantic poetry as that kind of writing which presumed that such an infusion, or such “generic combinations” (Siskin Historicity 22), were possible. It benefits as well from the interest among historians of late eighteenth century Britain in the unacknowledged history of collaboration between the writers of history and the writers of literature during this period. Explaining in *Master and Servant* why it makes sense to use *Wuthering Heights* as a source of historical information on class formation in England at the turn of the nineteenth century (especially that concerning women who did not write), and why the story told by servant Nelly Dean is a trustworthy narrative about the psychology and economics of domestic servitude at the time, Carolyn Steedman argues that history, in the way we understand it today, is only one “form of writing, a particular genre of literary production that came into being in its modern form during the course of the long eighteenth century” (195). Brontë’s novel is “part of a history of

narrative forms, and thus of the ways of thinking and feeling attendant to them” (195). In this sense, the novel is not only a historical document of thinking and feeling about the available forms of recording events, but of the ways those forms materialize certain thematic interests. This is how literature becomes a historical document, and not only because “characters in books, plot structures and literary devices have historical existence,” but “because they are brought into the world, where they were not before.” (Steedman Master 195). For this reason, Steedman sees them as “events” oblivious to their status as “fiction” that continue to shape the world in which they are “read and reimagined” (196).

Similarly, this dissertation asks not only whether historiography could lodge itself within poetry, or whether poetry could lodge itself within project about British literature historiography (and, by implication, whether the historiography could “cocoon” itself within novels and poetry), but attempts to account for instances in which such “collusion” was at work and to explain what the methodological benefits are of recognizing such “encounters,” which may not have been “combinations” at all, but just “the way it is.” The project is therefore partly about the career of Literature as a kind of writing whose political relevance, and whose relationship to the writing project of “colonization,” have been radically redefined. With these changes in mind, my project examines how the formal and stylistic convergences among historical documents, historiography and literary texts now affect the possibilities of reading literary texts against a “historical background.”¹⁷ What appear to be the relevant “historical conditions” in a world that

¹⁷ Sociological interpretations have ascribed this shift to the increased accessibility of print culture, the proliferation of printed reading materials, and an increased number of readers (many of whom were also writers), as well as the explosion of the volume of referential matter. A recent example of the shift towards the study of sweeping trends among readers of the Romantic period, often at the expense of close reading,

could be shaped by reading? How do we account for the “material circumstances” against which literary work is created when identities of people and significance of objects are made by texts? What comes about in this world of biographical information or autobiographical and private writing? What kinds of texts—what genres and what writers—become relevant to a history of literature of a certain period? What is a period of literary historiography in the context of social and political historiography?

WOMEN’S WRITING AS WOMEN’S POLITICS OF GENRE IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

I engage with the history of late eighteenth-century women’s writing as a history of a set of expectations about *how*, and not only what, texts could let readers learn about women’s interests and women’s “agency” as a function of women’s knowledge about “political events.” Wondering at the sympathy Elizabeth Montagu, the famous Bluestocking, appeared to feel for colonization and imperialism, seemingly an all-male project, Kathleen Wilson reminds us in *The Island Race* that much of the narrative about women’s absence from the “public sphere” in the eighteenth century and their distance from political life has been (and will continue to be) dramatically revised by scholars who continue to find women active in a variety of spheres pertinent to politics and public life.¹⁸

My project, for obvious historical reasons, similarly assumes that women’s relationship to “politics” need not be defined by women’s access to the public office.

is *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, in which William St Clair claims to be doing the “real” materialist, empiricist research that demonstrates how literary scholarship may be misguided in its preoccupation with a small group of authors whose work was read by few.

¹⁸ Among the works relevant to this surge in women’s presence in public life are Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning and Patriotism*; Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace*; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England*; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England 1715–1785*.

Although it deals with women's writing before the franchise, it examines women's perspicacity about writing as a means of political intervention and an indication of their political acumen. I demonstrate that women's knowledge of the operations of genre conventions and their ability to represent or create "experience" was a politically relevant intervention in the late eighteenth-century market of writers and readers.

I engage with the history of women's writing as a crucial intervention over the last few decades in the historiography of literature, which has defined the scope of relevant kinds of documentation of women's interests, concerns and possibilities of expression. Since we read only a small fraction of recovered texts as "literature," I examine the relationship between the history of women's writing and the history (i.e., the terms) of literary canonization. A process that establishes hierarchies of women's texts to be recovered, and aligns the recovered texts with disciplinary divisions, the protocol of recovery of women's writing often confines the possibilities of interpretation and precludes potentially productive insights about women's interactions with the collaborative processes central to this dissertation—the negotiations over the classification of texts into genres of evidence and knowledge.

The hierarchy of evidentiary genres currently at work in literary scholarship on eighteenth-century women's writing is a seemingly counterintuitive one insofar as it privileges novels—apparent works of fiction—as the most compelling historical documents of women's political acuity. This kind of scholarship has confidently held novels written by women to be evidence of women's "foresight" about the novels' own supremacy over other genres of writing, or, as one critic put it, the genre that "travels well across centuries" (Looser Legacy 209).

In Chapter Four I offer what might appear an unlikely comparison of an epistolary history by Catharine Macaulay and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. This pairing pits an almost forgotten woman historian, whose history writing has been of less interest to historians of writing than her scandalous biography, against a canonical woman novelist. Such a counterintuitive coupling makes evident the commonly unstated purposes of reading women's writing. Showing that the vastly different critical treatments of the two women writers can be explained by the kinds of texts they are perceived to have written, this chapter examines how interpretations of women's writing as historical documents of women's lives have often interfered with inquiries into the politics of the genre in which the women chose to formulate political action.

Chapter Four shows that inquiry into the substance of one "useful category of analysis," such as gender, need not preclude analysis in terms of another—the genre. In fact, the two may be inextricably connected: my questions about the benefits conventional hierarchies of women's texts engage with the emergent literary historiography that seeks to interrogate the protean qualities of "the novel" in literary histories. Rather than foreclose the possibility of a self-reflective accounting for the status of "the novel" as a central exhibit in a "natural" history of realist Literature, I approach the historiography of women's writing as an occasion to interrogate the historical narrative that has centered on the novel as a major document of women's agency and a "feminine" expression of political views. The chapter demonstrates that a comparison of two women's texts from seemingly different genres can tell us much about their negotiation of the contact points between history writing and what Macaulay called the "works of imagination" as a statement about the collusion about the politics of gender

and genre at the end of the eighteenth century and these two writers' conscious intervention in the possibilities of representing women's political understanding. While it pays close attention to the careful, and long underestimated, work of Catharine Macaulay, this chapter also suggests that the work of Jane Austen has a political valence that exceeds the significance of the distant echoes in her novels of some properly "political" issues relevant to Georgian Britain.¹⁹

INTERPRETIVE TRANSACTIONS AS SHARED EXPERIENCE

Writing in *Metahistory* about the available varieties of historical narratives as modes of historical representation, Hayden White defines his project as a consideration of "the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*" (2). White notes that his discussion of historiography clearly "verge[s] upon consideration of the most vexed problem in modern (Western) literary criticism—the problem of 'realistic' literary representation." While engaging with the literary scholars' conversation, White reverses their basic formulation of the problem: "They ask: what are the 'historical' components of a 'realistic' art? I ask: what are the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' historiography" (2, fn. 4).

Tracing the processes of collaboration between readers and writers who worked to determine the genre classifications of their texts, my project relates concerns about writing after a model during the Romantic period to concerns about the textual shape of facts and evidence—to this shape's documentary permissiveness as well as its power to

¹⁹ See Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*.

enforce restrictions on the possibilities of documentation. If “when naturalized, writing came to seem like *experience*” (Siskin Work 22), the shape of such “experience”—the experience available only as text—could only be recognizable *as* experience from the formal qualities of other texts, that is, from other models of writing fact and evidence. To address the significance of this replicative-generative power, the final chapter turns to Byron’s “The Giaour” as a catalogue of genres or forms of writing believed to be the genres of evidence—the appropriate conduits for representing what happened to someone somewhere, for somebody’s “experience.”

This chapter studies the implications of the relationship between writing and evidence for the shape and the authority of knowledge derived from personal, empirical experience once such experience can be had from reading. Although questions about the conditions of experience have been posed philosophically,²⁰ specific concerns about the shape, origin and representation of experience continue to beset historical and literary scholars because answers to questions about the relationship between experience and writing command the substance and the impact of their disciplines: the subjects and objects their research, their descriptions, their relationships and their amenability to analysis.²¹ Joan Scott famously explained that “experience” in historical scholarship is

²⁰ Kant treats of the conditions of experience in the Third Critique in terms of philosophical idealism; Giorgio Agamben argues in *Infancy and History: the Destruction of Experience* that “the question of experience can be approached nowadays only with an acknowledgement that it is no longer accessible to us” (13). While “the expropriation of experience was implicit in the founding project of modern science” (17), it must be recognized as a “destruction of destruction” (145) of a mode of transmission of tradition. In this situation, Agamben posits a special place for “philology” as “the tool of the ‘destruction of destruction’” in a culture “which lacks specific categories of spiritual transmission and exegesis,” used to “guarantee the authenticity and continuity of the cultural tradition.” (145)

²¹ Carolyn Steedman extends Scott’s critique of E.P. Thompson’s use of the category of experience for historical explanation in *The Making of the English Working Class* by suggesting that its shortcomings arise from being beholden to a larger narrative (invented by twentieth-century social historians)—a genre in which the “experience” described must lodge itself. Recovering a story that seems unlikely and improbably within the framework of current historical narratives about eighteenth-century Britain, Steedman suggests that such narratives allow us “to note the gaps and spaces in any ideological system that allow people to

“not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain.” The explanation should demonstrate that “experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward,” call into question experience’s “originary status in historical explanation” (387), and remain alive to the political investment in the construction of identities of historical subjects in possession of experience, along with those of historians themselves.

Although readers of literature have long been interested in the role of literary texts in the processes of identity construction,²² my interest in this project lies less in the particularities of identities being assembled within individual texts than in the nature of writers’ experiments with the capacity of their medium to substantiate facts and evidence and make them pertinent to people. Invested in the processes by which “people” and “identities” could be established in texts, my project examines how reading and writing in the Romantic period began to provide empirical experience itself, such that relationships between people did not take on the “fantastic form of relationships between texts” (Klancher 50), but became the only possible relationship—the kind we still enter when we read historical documents or literary texts.

In this regard, my inquiry into the relationship between the emergence of the concept of evidence and the transformation of the possibilities of personal experience from reading is similar to Matthew Wickman’s interest in the literary career of the Scottish Highlands in *Ruins of Experience*. Relating the possibilities of personal

find their own thought on the difference between what *is*, and what is asserted *to be*.” (223) While such singular events “cannot explain what happened in this history...except by reference to those happenings, contained within themselves” (228), the heroine of Steedman’s history “tells us that poetry will be made out of the historical process and all our theorising about it” (229)—poetry as the kind of text that makes possible for “objects” to be “lit...*as for the first time*” so that “they transmit a light to their surroundings.” (229)

²² This line of inquiry has been especially prolific among scholars encouraged by Said’s initial demonstration of literary examples that showed how “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it...” (3)

(empirical) experience to the possibilities of non-empirical knowledge, Wickman argues that experience is “one of modernity’s great phantoms,” which has been “both requisite and inadequate to knowledge since the Enlightenment” (ix). Discussing the Romantic invention of the Scottish Highlands as a “quintessential site of modern spectrality” (ix), Wickman examines “the haunting authority that accrued to experience precisely when that authority appeared to be waning” (4). Seeing the “ruins of experience” as the haunting legacies of European Enlightenment, Wickman looks to the Highland romances as the location found for the forms of knowledge displaced by factuality, and focuses on the “modalities in which experience signifies, and more particularly to the aporia obtaining between experience and understanding” (5) under the conditions of modernity—of experience that must be direct and indirect, that must demand and bracket direct perception.

Investigating how literature came to act as a substitute for experience, and why only certain kinds of writing came to “seem like experience,” the last chapter looks at “The Giaour” as Byron’s experiment at constituting “ordinary people” and “historically plausible times and places” (in the formulation of Ian Watt), which can refresh our memory about the consolidation of the genres of evidence premised on a forgetting of the history of education in recognizing the forms of life worth reading about and their writing correlatives. More than a simple catalogue of the available genres of evidence—from “oriental” folk poetry and other oral traditions, to footnotes and historiography—“The Giaour” raises questions about the diversity of genres of personal experience. I argue that Byron fashions in the poem the figure of a poet-ethnographer as an interpretive-critical device. Reporting his “personal experience” and undermining its value at the same time,

Byron issues a provocation to readers to consider how the writing of poetry “became the experience of attempting to be systematically selective, and therefore deeply truthful, about writing” (Siskin Work 22). Using a range of formal devices as models of authenticity, Byron alerts his readers to the process of composition as a process of constituting and conveying his “experience.”

A fractured narrative involving yet another harem woman being punished by death, “The Giaour” is an oriental drama in which Byron was suspected of having participated (his letters are used to implicate him); but it is also an “eastern tale,” of which Byron has written several, and whose conventional motifs, like those deemed dubious in the story about the disappearing Moor woman in Madras, rendered the fragment’s documentary status questionable. Byron’s annotated poetic text and the contemporary critics’ confused responses provide an opportunity to examine how the textual form of experience relates the questions of authenticity and plausibility to the questions of literary originality toward the end of the Romantic period.

Universally recognized as an exceptional figure in the Romantic canon, as well as in the social fabric of Romantic Britain, Byron towered over the vast majority of his readers, a scandalous nobleman with an outlandish political interest in the liberation movements of the “minor nations” of the Orient. It is surprising, then, that Byron was also a poet who seems to have “focused the experience” of his readers, and found a way to articulate their anxieties about modernization, globalization and alienation. These readers responded to his texts vehemently and viscerally—Byron epitomized and transformed the shape of their desires in a way no other poet had done before. I take “The Giaour” to be Byron’s critical study of that process of *transmission*, an eccentric

historical and biographical document of his experiments with poetry writing and reading as a form of empirical knowledge which explored the commensurability of experiences of writers and readers. The poem's fragmented form, its "unoriginality," Byron's annotations, and his (often flippant) instructions for reading them, suggested that there was a possibility that the reading of such poetry was one of a way to share in his experience and empirical knowledge.

The condition of such sharing was the competence at composition and interpretation, which involved a degree of suspicion about the processes of constitution of the genres of evidence, and particularly about the relationship of poetry to a single authorial voice, and the relationship of that voice to any person's "experience." Showing that "The Giaour" was a reading exercise in the genre conventions of "eastern tales" as they pertained to Byron's supposed adventures in the "East," I return to the question about the power of "oriental tales" to command the possibilities of representation for the "exotic" or the "colonial," but also to the relevance of this kind of interpretive competence. By way of bridging discussions about Byron the worldly nobleman-poet (who could afford always and only to write about himself) and Byron the poetical parasite (who plagiarized and recycled others' models of expression), "The Giaour" provides a way to think about the accessibility of incontrovertible "poetic" knowledge, factual or affective, which is proprietary and personally acquired but also demands transferability if its ethical and political missions are to be accomplished.

I argue that Byron invites his readers to consider whether they could share in the benefits of his empirical experience—his worldliness, his political acumen, his (political, social and sexual) liberties—by reading about it, and that he provokes critics to respond

to his ambivalence about ethical and political conventions with bafflement and venom.

This chapter shows that once the ownership of empirical experience is separated from the ownership of the life to which it refers, and from the ownership of texts that represent it, the “evidence of experience” ties personal identities to the identities of genres.

Biographical information can, therefore, be designed out of what one has “lived,” but only to the degree that available forms of writing allow it to be represented and shared. It becomes interesting, then, to look at the degree to which “people” can be written into or out of existence, be they vanishing harem women, evanescent women historians, impossible novel heroines, or self-exiled poets. Does writing about a person or an event undermine or improve their likelihood? How is written “experience” related to narrative and experiment—how much of it can be repeated, and under what conditions? How much of it can be shared with others?²³

This approach to reading transforms the status of authorial biography and personal documents, such as letters, in the reading of literary texts and puts particular stress on the work of a writer such as Byron,²⁴ who fashioned his public image from his perceived private improprieties and transgressions, along with the literary texts he published and epistolary personas for his many private correspondents. It lets historians of literature share the suspicion with historians of history that a considerable portion of

²³ Matthew Wickman explains in *The Ruins of Experience* the relationship of the “Romantick” period to the creation of an “experiment” as a controlled and portable sample of experience. On the consequences of its use in claims about universality, Wickman notes: “While making it possible to move beyond the limitations of experience by converting experience into projective calculation, probabilism also diminished the epistemological authority of experience by creating virtual, normative experiences that technically belonged to no one in particular.” (8) See also Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, for the significance of “virtual witnessing” in the Enlightenment transformation of natural science, 60–65.

²⁴ This argument could be extended as well to Austen’s private letters, to which we have only limited access, but which show that Austen’s epistolary personas shifted regularly and that she crafted her private letters as carefully as she did her published texts.

“historical events” must have been shaped by the “artistic” elements of (writing about) the past: that models of writing have been the models of “past experience.”

DANGEROUS LIAISONS: ROMANTIC LITERATURE IN THE HISTORY OF THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In the attention it pays to the intricate work of writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, my project continues the ongoing examination of the function of Romanticism as a conceptual connection between literary texts and other categories of writing as categories of critical analysis. It suggests how the kinship between literary and historical writing grants us permission to re-assess the relationship of the history of literature to the history of other writing practices, approaching literary history as a search for mutually affecting relationships rather than as an account of “origins”—the triumphs, successes and “natural” fits.

This is a reading that seeks to reconcile the “documentary” and “worklike” functions of texts, on a model similar to that James Chandler proposes for Romantic literary texts in *England in 1819*, which he offers as a corrective for the readings which fail to understand how literary texts “participate in a self-consciously historicist literary culture” (xv). Decisively changed, in Chandler’s account, by Walter Scott’s invention of historical novels, this literary culture set up the possibility of historicist study of literature in which literary texts “share not only a self-consciously historical sense of their constitution as cases and casuistries, but also an uncanny capacity to anticipate late-twentieth century attempts to historicize them” (xvii). Based on a new use for representative cases, case studies and literary specimens, these writings are, “in their historicism, distinctively British” (Chandler xiv). The range of cases—genres and

forms—registering “Britain’s self-conscious literary struggles over how to represent itself” (xvi), still present an insular Britain, somehow protected by its literature, even that self-conscious about its role in history-making, from seeing far beyond its shores.

Specifically focusing on the relationship of self-consciously historical Romantic literary texts to the history of self-consciously historical historical texts of Romantic imperialism, I am relating the concerns of Romantic scholarship to the scholarship on the literary period that precedes Romanticism. A field whose texts are indispensable sources for understanding of the Romanticist project and for the categories in which we currently think of literary scholarship, the “long eighteenth century” has thus far been more amenable to discussions about textual interactions between imperialism and literature. A “period” which has undergone a tremendous transformation over the past twenty years,²⁵ study of the eighteenth century created a model for a broad transformation of an academic field that could transform the century which it studies (so that it now lasts over a hundred years). Once an age of undisturbed tranquility, steady progress, and internally driven consolidation, the eighteenth century now remembers itself differently. It is a period of great social and political upheaval—of unprecedented physical and cultural outreach from Britain into the regions far beyond the shores of Europe.

Transferring some of the liberties from the study of eighteenth-century texts to the study of texts from the Romantic period, my project is an attempt to devise a methodology of reading that recognizes the shared history of a range of historical documents from the end of the “long eighteenth century.” Suggesting that these texts’

²⁵ *The New Eighteenth Century*, an edited collection that was itself indebted to studies in other periods and disciplines for ideas about what else “the eighteenth century” could be about, has since produced a series of aftershocks detectable in the new intensity of attention to eighteenth-century colonialism, women’s writing, “minority” literatures, and literatures in languages other than English.

relationships played a role in the emergence of the concept of “evidence” from the collaborative processes of its construction, I show how our reading practices adjust across the range of texts we use for cultural critique, suggesting a new relationship between literary and historical scholarship. Paying due attention both to the significance of form at certain historical junctures and to the ways of knowing how historiography (literary or social) writes “junctures” into existence, my project shows how forms themselves in the Romantic period did not command the ways of reading. Instead, they engaged readers in understanding the relationship between the shape of the text and the cultural work of interpretation.

In all of these forms, and across a range of “genres,” it made sense explicitly to declare, the way we usually think only literary writers could do, that texts had the power to change readers: to engender transformations that readers would bring upon themselves. To investigate this seemingly paradoxical possibility, I read the conjunctions of these texts, and I believe that they can inform us about the disciplining of writing and the disciplining of disciplines. The texts whose relationships I trace offer up new possibilities for understanding the necessity of disciplinary divisions, but also suggest that the divisions could never be completely enforced: that literary scholarship shares with the writers of historiography a lively interest in considering the relationship of the texts it produces and studies to the invention of their historical subjects and their times.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MOOR WOMAN VANISHES:
 NEGOTIATING THE TEXTUAL FORM OF FACT IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH
 COLONIAL ARCHIVE

If the great King of Delhi no longer exists, and is annihilated by his officers, there is an end of that empire, and of all its pretensions. No power in Hindostan can then claim any title but what is derived from actual possession. By that possession, the English, and not the Mogul, are superiors in India. If force, as the Nabob contends, is the only ground of public law in India, then the King of Tanjore is bound to submit to the greater force; which is not that of the Nabob, but that of Great Britain.²⁶

In answer to some objections, made by a learned writer, whose friendship does me honour, to my account of the antiquity of romance writing; I was led to ask him, why the fictions of the Aegyptians and Arabians, of the Greeks and Romans, were not entitled to the appellation of Romances, as well as those of the middle ages, to which it was generally appropriated?—I was answered by another question. —What did I know of the Romances of those countries? —Had I ever seen an Aegyptian Romance? I replied, yes, and I would shortly give him proof of it. I accordingly compiled and methodised the *History of Charoba Queen of Aegypt*. —My friend was surprized and puzzled and answered me to this effect. “I return your Aegyptian story with thanks; whence you took it, or how far it is your own I know not.”²⁷

This chapter opening my dissertation focuses on a group of late eighteenth-century texts that come from a bound volume of papers of the East India Company. They contain several versions of a narrative about the alleged murder of an unnamed “beautiful Moor woman” in Madras, a colonial town in South India, in 1776. I chanced upon these documents while I was trying to learn how to navigate the India Office Records, and while I still had very little sense of the archive’s layout.

²⁶ *Memorial of the King of Tanjore, to the Directors of the Honorable East India Company*, 1778.

²⁷ Clara Reeve, *The progress of romance, through times, countries and manners; ... in a course of evening conversations*, 1785, xii.

Normally material for historical scholarship—a historian’s “primary sources”—these documents are of interest to literary scholars because they reveal a surprising convergence between the narrative techniques used in writing archival documents and those we expect to find in literary texts from the period. The texts document a controversy over how such a convergence should be interpreted. For some officials of the East India Company, the literary narrative devices served to authenticate the reports of murder. For others, these same devices argued their factitiousness—their strictly literary status. The stories about the alleged disappearance of the “beautiful Moor woman” suggest that their writers recognized that a kinship obtained between the writing of official documents and the writing of literature. Specifically, these writers recognized and manipulated the impact of what we now read as “oriental tales” on the possibilities of writing about India.

I recover the controversy surrounding the interpretation of such strange reports from an emergent colony in order to lay emphasis on the negotiation over the conventions of writing facts at the end of the eighteenth century. These collaborative processes of writing and reading the textual form of truth involved the writers of official documentation as readers of literature. This is how the story about a possible murder of a “beautiful Moor woman” directly implicates the history of literary genres in the history of the emergence of our conceptions of fact and evidence. A peculiar point of convergence between the construction of literary canons and processes of building historical archives, the story of a vanishing woman from the periphery of the British Empire raises fundamental questions about the parameters of the field in which we look for literary texts and about the protocols of genre investigation.

THE MOOR WOMAN VANISHES

The story about the disappearance of the beautiful Moor woman arrived in London in a packet of documents that accompanied the letter of one George Andrew Ram, signed as the “Coroner.”²⁸ Ram announced that his letter was accompanied by a

paper containing a circumstantial Relation of Facts, which gives the greatest Reason to apprehend that a murder has been committed or will shortly be committed on the Body of a Moor woman by Madir-Ul-Mulk, otherwise called Ameer-Ul-Omrah second son of the Nabob Waw-Law-Jaw or by his orders and Directions.²⁹

And what a string of historical pearls this paper was.³⁰

The paper claimed that the Moor Woman had come to live in the Maratta Petta district of Madras, where she was renting a house for one Pagoda and a half per month. She was “very beautiful and had been kept” by the Nawab of Arcot, one of the local British allies, a Muslim native prince residing in Madras.³¹ One day, Amir ul-Omra, the Nawab’s younger son, “saw this woman and longed to enjoy her which after many promises and persuasions he did.”³²

To prevent his father from seeing the woman again, Amir ul-Omra placed two guards at the woman’s door. When the old Nawab asked after the woman, his son

²⁸ Of Ram’s career we have only sporadic information. I haven’t been able to locate his record among the biographical notes of the East India Company personnel (the O series of the India Office Records, hereafter IOR), although his name crops up several times in various letters in this archival volume.

²⁹ IOR, Home Miscellaneous [hereafter HM] 134, 1. I preserve the original transliterations of names from these documents in the quotations. The archival documents, written days apart, share little by way of consensus about the accepted “spelling” of foreign (Indian) names. Transliterations vary widely among contemporary publications about these historical subjects (e.g., Omra, Umra, Omrah). In my commentary I use the modern transliterations (e.g., Nawab rather than Nabob). Ram’s “Nabob Waw-Law-Jaw” is now better known as Mohammed Ali Khan, Nawab Walajah. For a statement on careless transliteration as a symptom of imperial condescension, see Gayatri Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives.” For a longer historical overview of the historiographical, anthropological and linguistic issues involved in the transliteration of Hindu and Muslim names in early colonial India, see Thomas Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*.

³⁰ See Appendix One for a full transcript of the “Information” that accompanied Ram’s letter.

³¹ Recognized by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 as a Company ally, the Nawab of Arcot was one of the two native rulers in South Asia on whom Britain had relied in its wars against the French. In return for his assistance, the Nawab was one of only two local potentates explicitly mentioned in the treaty. See Lucy Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-century Politics*, 93.

³² IOR, HM 134, 7.

requested a servant to report that she was dead. The Nawab not believing this report, Amir ul-Omra became worried that his “unnatural Amour’s” [sic] would be discovered, although he had “concealed from his Father the least desire for Women” and criticized his older brother for his “Debaucheries.” The young prince resolved to send a man to “put the unhappy wretch to death.” The “mode” of murder he ordered was “as exquisitely [sic] cruel as the mandate was barbarous.”³³ He wanted the beautiful Moor woman walled alive in her own house.

The Amir’s servant arrived at the woman’s house on horseback “on Friday night of the 15th Inst [sic],” carrying with him the building materials necessary to “put his horrid orders in execution.” But since this method of murder was “frequently used amongst the Moors when they want to get rid of a dangerous connection,” the woman guessed at the visitor’s “dreadful purpose,” ran into her back yard and “screamed out repeatedly murder, with all the tokens of grief and calamity.”³⁴ Her neighbors ran to her assistance “in great number and heard her dismal tale.” The horseman left and took his building materials with him.³⁵

But he returned the following night, “attended by ten foot Soldiers or Peons with drawn sabers.” They went into the woman’s house with a “dooley to carry her away.” Her “most pitious” [sic] cries “pierced the air” and brought her neighbors to her aid the second time, and with their great numbers they again saved her.³⁶

The distracted woman then implored a neighbor to go to the house of an English official, Mr. Stratton, and demand protection “for the safety of her Person against the

³³ IOR, HM 134, 8.

³⁴ IOR, HM 134, 9.

³⁵ IOR, HM 134, 9.

³⁶ IOR, HM 134, 10.

inhuman purposes of Ameer ul-Omrah.” Alas, the Amir had written to Mr. Stratton first, asking for permission to “carry off this Moorish Woman.” Mr. Stratton immediately ordered two of his personal guards to assist the Amir’s servants. This “conjoined body” entered the woman’s house “on the 17th Instant at Ten o’clock at night forced her into a dooley and carry’d [sic] her away.”³⁷ The unfortunate woman called for help, but the witnesses facing the soldiers of the East India Company were too frightened to act. Seeing that the end of her days was near, the woman “imprecated the most horrid curses on the English nation for this suffering a poor innocent Woman and a helpless infant to be delivered into the hands of murderers.”³⁸ All to no avail: it is “most confidently affirmed” that the woman was murdered by the Amir’s servants since she was never heard from after that night.

One of the East India Company soldiers sent to abet this murder, the paper adds, was called Trevengadam. Mr. Stratton had also told the soldiers “to be careful that the Woman did not kill herself in the road.”³⁹

Ram claimed that his goal was to gain the attention of the “Gentlemen,” who had “in their Hands the whole power of the English nation upon this coast.” These gentlemen had the ability to provide him with the assistance he needed in investigating the truth of the allegations laid out in the “paper.” His letter suggested that “the means of verifying the said Facts are naturally pointed out by the Relation itself. viz. by calling on Trevengadam who can inform the Public of the House of the Owner of the House &c. which it is unnecessary to hint to the Discretion of the Gentlemen beforementioned.”⁴⁰

³⁷ IOR, HM 134, 10.

³⁸ IOR, HM 134, 11.

³⁹ IOR, HM 134, 11.

⁴⁰ IOR, HM 134, 5.

One of those gentlemen, George Stratton, had a particular reason to interest himself in the facts of the matter, Ram emphasized, since his name was mentioned in the “circumstantial relation.”⁴¹

CRISIS OF GENRE, CRISIS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY, CRISIS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

George Stratton was quick to write to London himself—and at length—to deny the allegation that he had abetted the beautiful Moor woman’s murder. The story did nothing “naturally” to “point out” where the truth may lie. In fact, it was evidently untrue, Stratton claimed, and it was untrue because it “bears every mark of having been drawn up with a Most Studied Attention.”⁴² This was to say that there was, in Stratton’s opinion, an undeniable convergence between the narrative technique of Ram’s report and the techniques readers should have known to expect from other texts notorious for exaggeration. In short, the story was fictional because it looked like fiction.

The “circumstantial” story about the alleged murder of the “beautiful Moor woman” in a provincial town in late eighteenth-century colonial India stirred up an epistemological crisis for the readers and writers of these archival documents. Here I read these document not in order to determine whether the story was true or not—to recover the real history of the “beautiful Moor Woman”—but to think about what eighteenth-century interpretations of it can teach us about the contact between texts we now conventionally classify as literary and historical documents from the same period. Ram’s “paper” invited readers of official documents to invoke and deploy as tests of plausibility

⁴¹ IOR, HM 134, 1.

⁴² IOR, HM 134, 367.

the writing and reading conventions they had to have learned elsewhere, and most likely from reading what we would now recognize as “literary” texts.

This is why I re-orient the reading of these archival documents away from their “information” and in the direction of their form and rhetoric. I investigate how writers for the East India Company made explicit the aesthetic standards of writing about India and how these standards may have shaped the textual form of fact in the colonial archive. Since Company papers—now incorporated into the India Office Records—are among the authoritative sources of textual material for the historiography of early British colonialism, it is striking now that the history of their interpretation should bear comparison to the history of literary genres which struggled to establish their reputation as vehicles of “plausibility” and “realism.” The meshing and competing of the discourses that shaped the archive can help us trace the political and historiographical implications of the stylistic and interpretive convergence between historical and literary texts. A reading of this kind can help to articulate interpretations of colonial historiography not only as reconstructions of events in the past, but as an inevitable “flight to fiction”—an intervention by writing narratives in the political realities of Britain and its colonies.

These odd papers are in the archive because the discursive network in which their aesthetic criteria operated was an eminently political one. But the names of the protagonists in this dramatic tale of love, abduction and possible murder—G. A. Ram, George Stratton, the Nawab of Arcot—are obscure to most readers nowadays. The historical setting that frames these historical actors emerged around a political crisis surrounding the 1776 deposition of Lord Pigot, the Governor of Fort St. George, the British compound at Madras. Alternatively called “the Madras revolution” and the

“Tanjore revenue dispute,”⁴³ the usurpation of Pigot’s office has seldom been discussed by historians because this scandal has been eclipsed by the spectacle surrounding the impeachment of Warren Hastings, who came to epitomize late eighteenth-century colonial abuse.⁴⁴

Lord Pigot arrived in Madras in 1775 to reinstate to his throne the Raja of Tanjore, an old British ally and personal friend who had paid Pigot a handsome pension after his earlier term as Governor.⁴⁵ The Raja’s kingdom had been invaded, and the Raja deposed, by the Nawab of Arcot, another British ally, in a desperate attempt to use Tanjore’s crop to improve Arcot’s finances. The Nawab had been persuaded of the wisdom of such an action by his supporters among the employees of the Company and members of the Governing Council in Madras. These British officials—Stratton one of the foremost among them—had also advanced the Nawab enormous sums of money for the military operation and at exorbitant interest rates. These same Company representatives had been lending money to the Nawab for years; the military campaign was their last opportunity to ensure that their long-term investments would yield profit.

⁴³ See Phillips and Ramanujam on the origins of this terminology, which affected the possibilities of interpretation of the revenue dispute and the political implications of the events’ obscurity.

⁴⁴ Frederick Whelan argues that the scandal surrounding the “Arcot interest” provoked in London “the most important single episode in which corrupt dealings in India were linked to organized political influence in England” (108). See Sara Suleri’s chapter on Hastings’s impeachment in *The Rhetoric of English India*, in which she argues that Edmund Burke’s impeachment charges, “whether or not [they] rendered Hastings impeachable...., certainly represent the first exhaustive compilation of colonial guilt to emerge from the colonization of India” (51).

⁴⁵ This was Pigot’s second round of duty in Madras. Upon completing his first term as Governor, in 1763, Pigot received a substantial pension from the Raja for his favors, as well as one from the Nawab. Fanny Emily Penny cites £400, 000 as the amount George Pigot took back to England and used to purchase an Irish peerage, thus becoming Lord Pigot (172). There were speculations, especially among his opponents, that Pigot only returned to India because he had gone through the wealth he had made during his first Indian appointment and wanted to coax the Raja into granting him another generous gift.

Pigot's orders to put the Raja back on the throne—that is, in possession of his land and crop—spelled the end of the lenders' hopes of enrichment.⁴⁶

Predictably, Lord Pigot faced stiff opposition to the Raja's reinstatement from the Council, the political body that was put in place to check the autocratic tendencies of earlier governors. Rather than contend with his opponents, Pigot hastily decided to dismiss from the Council those who refused to agree with his Tanjore policies.⁴⁷ In effect, he succeeded in consolidating a so-called "Majority" of Council members, the group of Nawab's lenders, who deposed him and took over the reigns of government. Those "gentlemen who now held the power" over South India, whose names Ram listed in his letter, usurped Pigot's office, placed the Governor under house arrest, deprived him of contact with friends, and denied him access to paper and writing implements.

The usurpers acted as the Governing Council in Madras and installed George Stratton as acting Governor, in anticipation of executive orders from London. Such orders could take months to arrive. The decision-making process in London was itself extremely slow, and the news of the usurpation could take months to reach the Company offices.⁴⁸

Since private trading (including usury) was an open secret—the only way to make a

⁴⁶ The Raja had every reason to be disinclined to help Stratton's government and reject their attempts to win him over to their side, and his reasons were much more pragmatic than ideological. With Stratton as governor, Tanjore revenues would be lost to the Raja forever, and his at least nominal status as ruler of a nominally autonomous country irrecoverable. The author of *The Defense of Lord Pigot* complains about the dismissive tone of the pamphlets supporting the cause of the Nawab in England that objected to references to the Raja as the "King of Tanjore." Seeing in this title signs of rhetorical opportunism on the part of Pigot's supporters, the author of *Original Papers Relative to Tanjore* called the Raja "the King of his Lordship," referring to Pigot's insistence that the Raja of Tanjore was indeed equivalent to the English King, the ruler of an independent nation.

⁴⁷ Pigot prohibited private visits to the Nawab's court in order to control the private interactions between Company servants and the Nawab. Then he tried to have measures formally adopted by the Council which would limit its members' individual interactions with the Nawab's Court. After Pigot found out that the servant of Paul Benfield, the Nawab's biggest creditor and one-time employee of the Company, had gone to see the Nawab on business without permission, he had the servant flogged—a humiliating public punishment for the servant and for his master.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the impact of correspondence delays on the British government of India, see Mary Poovey, "The Limits of Universal Knowledge Project: British India and the East Indiamen," 183–203.

fortune at a time employees were being paid only nominal salaries—the reaction from London could be expected to legitimate the usurpers, or to vindicate Lord Pigot. Warren Hastings, the Governor-General at Calcutta, decided to endorse the usurpers, even if their actions were illegal, motivated by the desire to “prevent the fatal Consequences of an appearance of Disunion in the Company’s Presidencies.”⁴⁹ To the Bombay office, which refused to recognize the legitimacy of Stratton’s government, they wrote, while they waited for the binding decision from London, that “no ill consequences or inconveniences can result from acknowledging the present Government nor can such an acquiescence make you in any sense responsible for their actions.”⁵⁰ Naming “Lord Pigot and the Gentlemen confederating with him” as “the undoubted authors of the Schism” which happened in Madras, Hastings and his Council decided to legitimize the new government and made it known that legal, political and ethical flexibility would characterize their response to the crisis.⁵¹

Everyone involved in the incident stood a chance, therefore, of affecting the decision in London by providing relevant material to the decision-makers.⁵² Ram, the “coroner” whose status in the Company structure was tied to Pigot’s, was sending to the Company secretary his letter and the “Information” accusing the usurper-Governor of

⁴⁹ IOR, HM 134, 269.

⁵⁰ IOR, HM 134, 278.

⁵¹ IOR, HM 134, 277. Whether this was an aside about undue earnestness or the naivety with which the Bombay Presidency approached the issue of legality of British rule in India may be gleaned from the Council’s expressions of hope that their “fair representation of the Facts” would help those in Bombay to acknowledge “the actual authority of the actual government of Fort St. George not that we think your acquiescence essentially necessary in itself to establish their Right.”

⁵² Warren Hastings faced a similar situation in Bengal in 1775, when he was opposed by a Majority of members of the Governing Council. Hastings was accused of undertaking reckless wars, and made his own accusations against the Majority, accusing them of greed and excessive political ambition. Although the two sides agreed to send to Company directors and administrators only the documents they had shown each other, “everyone concerned wrote voluminously to their friends and relations, who brought their letters to ministers and directors, passed them from hand to hand, and even published them in the Press.” (Sutherland 301)

colluding with a powerful native prince in murdering a local woman. In addition to reporting about an internal problem in the Company's governance, Ram also cast a new line of "native" characters into his report. The significance of the "beautiful Moor woman" to the East India Company was related to undue preferences British representatives were granting to local Indian rulers. A judgment on the truth of a story about such a character amounted to a judgment about the best distribution of political power between the Company and its allies in South India. Such an issue could be adjudicated only in London.

THE ARCHIVE FOR THE STORY: THE HOME MISCELLANEOUS SERIES

Modern historians agree that the crisis in Madras has been particularly difficult to describe.⁵³ At the time of the crisis, the systemic conflict between the Company corporate interests and the personal interests of its representatives precluded the possibility of frank reportage. But any history of the crisis in Tanjore is largely also a story about ambivalence within the East India Company regarding the appropriate treatment of the so-called "country powers" in India at the end of the eighteenth century.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, these local potentates, such as the Raja of Tanjore or the Nawab of Arcot, became figureheads of puppet states designated as

⁵³ Frederick Whelan usefully foregrounds the political and historical context in which the ideas of Edmund Burke, who remains singularly responsible for bringing crises in India to the attention of the British public and continues to shape the tone of responses to stories about late eighteenth-century colonialism. Whelan relates Burke's understanding of the relationship between the governance of India and the governance of Britain to his ideas about the representation of interests and the constitutional balance between landed and monied interests (114). Shifts in representation of group interests through the Parliament were acceptable to Burke. Once the East India Company transformed from a merchant association into an arm of government—effectively, from a private into a public agent—its activities changed from commerce to "oppression and extortion, and wealth and profits gained by such means were not permissible." (117) The mysteries shrouding this transformation and the paucity of language available to describe it continue to pose a challenge to the historiography of colonialism.

British allies in wars against France and various Indian military and political rivals. These rulers epitomized the tension between “liberalism and empire”—what Uday Sing Mehta has described as the test of liberal ideas of toleration in the encounter with the complicated strangeness and recalcitrance of these allies’ “ancient traditions.” The strange and unfamiliar local princes had the misfortune to become gradually economically and politically irrelevant: by the early nineteenth century these political and business partners would be formally dispensed with.⁵⁴ Already in 1813, Robert Grant’s history of the East India Company, whose charter was up for renewal that year, suggests that

in framing alliances with the native princes, the Company and their servants did not at that time perceive [...] that when an unequal union is formed between two nations, the inequality must, at length, inevitably discover itself, and must increase. [...] It was impossible for the activity, enterprise, and conscious superiority of the British, long to associate on terms of equal friendship with Asiatic supineness and imbecility. (368)

But in the late eighteenth century these “petty” kings were still relevant to British policy decisions because their survival in power demonstrated at least nominal respect for their sovereignty. Looking back from the “postcolonial” moment, that is, from any moment following nineteenth-century imperial triumphalism, such a colonial relationship remains difficult to imagine and describe.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The interaction between the British and the local rulers was more collaborative and less extractive because the British government was still not completely in charge of the administration and could not extract the income directly. The British in this phase still appeared interested at the official level in choosing relatively inoffensive and non-incriminating allies, as much as their “cultural difference” would permit. From the moment Robert Clive acquired the so-called *jaghir* (right to collect tax), following his military victories in 1765, it was obvious that permanent settlement and direct government of the territories were being considered as the more lucrative and more reliable mode of interaction with an off-shore territory. However, such centralization and confidence took time to build.

⁵⁵ If we assume that the struggle of individual English writers for attention and retention within Volume 134 of the Home Miscellaneous series of the India Office Records was representative of the struggle between two parties of British patrons of two different native rulers around Madras, and of the struggle between two different visions of British colonial policy, then the appearance of the Raja’s letters in this volume could indicate a degree of interest in the impact of local rulers on the opportunities for the British,

A particular problem in accounting for such scenes of interaction is the elusive archive from which they could be reconstructed. Historians have long recognized that the building of colonial archives was in itself an act of historiography, a textually-mediated process that both compiled and structured authoritative sources of historical information about colonization.⁵⁶ Explaining the complexities historians face in writing about British colonialism of the late eighteenth century, Tony Ballantyne emphasizes how the pressure to write histories which acknowledge that “local aspirations and British policy were in a constant dialogue” (93) is counterbalanced by the knowledge that textual resources for such histories became increasingly limited with the consolidation of the colonial project. More specifically, such resources receded with the fitting up of the colonial archive to represent autonomy from the local powers and confidence about the ultimate positive outcome of the occupation.

Ballantyne’s claim that “material, cultural, and political constraints impinged on the ability of South Asians to shape such dialogic processes” (93) suggests that this deliberate intervention by the colonial state in the ways of record-keeping has been instrumental in erasing the local powers from the tableaux of historical imagination, compounding the effect of their gradual financial ruin and increasingly aggressive British

if not a formal dependence of the British presence in India on their cooperation. Such a view of late eighteenth-century colonialism, as Tony Ballantyne proposes, “chafes against both the Foucauldian emphasis on state power and undercuts Said’s insistence on the hegemonic power of European representations, restoring the voices of at least some of Europe’s ‘Others’” (South India 93). The presence of these letters could help us to imagine a kind of colonialism that had to abide by contending powers in the region, possibly marking the moment of “transformation of the Company in its role from arbiter to protector and from spectator to participant” (Rajayyan 81).

⁵⁶ See Ann Stoler’s “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance” for a suggestive account of what “might be gained from a move from “archive-as-source to archive-as-subject” (93), that is, from attending not only to colonialism’s archival content, but to its particular and sometimes peculiar form” (87). Stoler urges attention to archives as “technologies of rule in themselves” because such an approach to historical study gains from “turning further toward a politics of knowledge that reckons with archival genres, cultures of documentation, fictions of access, and archival conventions” (88).

military campaigns.⁵⁷ For a historiography wishing to reconstitute the impact of such relationships on the eventual consolidation of British colonialism, the study of opacity of the colonial archive and the ways in which it has been “constitutive of the multiple inequalities of that past” (Ballantyne 93), as well as of the present, should be a study of the ways in which the archival regulation of writing about these relationships has facilitated their evanescence from the archival texts and from the reality to which they were meant to refer.

The stories about the vanishing Moor woman may be particularly helpful for this project since they come from a peculiar corner of the archive, the Home Miscellaneous series. Even by the standards of the colonial archive’s own keepers, this series has been considered an “artificial collection of very miscellaneous documents which accumulated at East India House during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was added to and bound during the nineteenth century” (Lancaster 22). A collection of unbound documents whose dates ranged from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, it has been described as the “rag-bag” of the India Office Records (Lancaster 32), a heap of archival refuse, which was to be organized into an archival series for the first time in 1884.⁵⁸ As William Foster explains in the Introduction to S. C. Hill’s *Catalogue of the Home Miscellaneous Series of the India Office Records*, the original intent of Mr.

⁵⁷ Love explains that the Nawab was succeeded by his older son, Umdat ul-Omrah. After only six years in power, the new Nawab was accused of a treasonous conspiracy with Tipu Sultan, one of British arch-enemies in India. The East India Company assumed administration of Arcot, and, upon the death of Umdat ul-Omrah in 1801, occupied his palace. When the Nawab’s son rejected the terms of rule offered to him by the Company, his throne was handed to the son of Amir ul-Omrah and the country annexed (529). Rajayyan comments that, in 1799, “the English gave a strange title, ‘Treaty for cementing the friendship and alliance between the Company and the Rajah of Tanjore’ [...], to the settlement which provided for the extinction of the principality” (109). Dealing with a Raja significantly less powerful than the one in 1776, the Company officers folded Tanjore’s revenues and administration into a larger “forward policy against the Indian powers” (111) which reflected British commercial and military domination in the region.

⁵⁸ Joan Lancaster explains that, though certain papers find themselves in the “rag-bag,” they are, crucially, not “private papers, but possibly came adrift in the nineteenth century, when so much sorting, arranging and binding was done, from the Board’s archives” (32).

Danvers, the first Registrar and Superintendent of Records at the India Office who was to begin arranging the documents, may have been to construct a series of “‘Home Miscellaneous’ (to correspond with the ‘Miscellaneous’ sections of the ‘Factory Records’ and ‘Marine Records’),” so that the series would consist entirely of documents “relative to home affairs” (Foster vi).⁵⁹ While the first 47 volumes “more or less conformed to this plan,” the name of the series had subsequently become “somewhat of a misnomer” because

the scheme widened to include documents dealing with, and even originating in, the settlements in the East, and soon all pretence of confining the series to home matters was dropped and it became the depository of every document for which a suitable place could not be found elsewhere. (Foster vi)⁶⁰

Since they came into the H series from the more regular series as surplus, or as incompatible freak accidents in writing that would have contaminated the regular series’ formal homogeneity or consonance, these documents’ layout was left to the archivists’ judgment, as was the series’ consequent representation in archival catalogues.

Just as “the plan of the catalogue as well as all the details of its execution” were left entirely up to Hill (Foster vi), Mr. Danvers had earlier “broke[n] up and dealt with according to subject” entire batches of documents (Foster vii).⁶¹ This is why an

⁵⁹ Foster wrote the introduction because Hill died in May of 1926 while going over the final proofs of the *Catalogue*, having checked the first 160 pages. Hill had by then “completed the catalogue in manuscript but had also compiled the index; so that it only remained to see that the text was correctly printed, and this duty has been most efficiently performed by his widow.” (Foster v)

⁶⁰ It appears entirely strange today that as late as 1884 an “East India” company—one expressly designed to trade in the East Indies, and whose commercial mandate had been subsumed at this point by the British government and tax-collectors—could be imagined doing *any* business without reference to India. When Foster says that some documents included in the series after Volume 47 included “even” those originating from the colonial settlements, it seems that even in 1927, when he wrote the Introduction, it was an imaginative stretch to conceive of the business of colonization with reference to the colonies.

⁶¹ Foster warns that double pagination is one of the consequences of this procedure—documents that used to be “Fisher’s Papers” can now be recognized by a double page number; most papers from that collection had been lost in the physical move of the archival office in 1860. When the original list of these documents

unidentifiable number of documents that now appear in a sequence may have been collated after the fact, or copied from sources that would have been unknown or inaccessible to the original writers, in order to emphasize the intertextual and political connections among otherwise heterogeneous documents and afford additional interpretive possibilities to researchers.⁶²

In the case of Volume 134 of the Home Miscellaneous series, the arrangement of documents may have been considered reflective of the outcome of the Tanjore dispute well after the fact. The volume now includes anything from letters from possibly dismissed coroners, potentially fictional stories about unidentified Moor women, and excerpts from official governing council minutes, to letters from self-appointed governors acting as legal ones, and translated and re-translated letters from the local Company allies. Historians have pointed out that the remarkable acrimony of the crisis in Madras was closely related to the perceived marginality of this crisis in England and the attendant lack of a clear policy about acceptable relationships between Company administrators and the local powers.⁶³ Consequently, both the legal Company representatives and the so-

was compiled in 1804, they numbered 2,981; by 1876, the collection had shrunk to 378. Danvers handled this reduced number.

⁶² C. A. Bayly's *Information and Empire* adds interesting possibilities of intertextual collaboration to this scene of writing and reading: Bayly shows that it was common for the British to try to intercept their rivals' correspondence; for those rivals to "starve [their] envoys of information" in anticipation of unwelcome scrutiny; and for the British to misinterpret the intelligence they did gather (51). In his open letter (pamphlet) to the Company directors, *Memorial of the King of Tanjore*, published in England, the Raja accuses the Stratton government of abuse by manipulation of language conventions. Stratton's party, out of ignorance or out of insolence, or simply to curb the Raja's access to his lines of communication, persistently sent him official correspondence in Persian, a language he did not understand and in which he could not respond competently. By way of translating what he did receive, the Hindu Raja had to expose all of his correspondence to "Mussulman" translators, who were likely working as spies for a variety of his enemies.

⁶³ Lucy Sutherland points out that the crisis in Madras was not perceived to be as important as the earlier ones in Bengal. At the same time, Pigot was ostensibly representing a minority or "opposition" interest in England, and thus his mission was both unlikely before it began, and difficult to defend once it failed (320). Robert Tavers argues that even events in Bengal—the apparent epicenter of Indian history—were too distant around 1775 for the Directors of the East India Company and their political mentors preoccupied with the American Revolution (22).

called usurpers had an opportunity to claim allegiance to the Company interest as their motivation to act; the archivists may have felt that the positions of both sides in the dispute needed to be reflected in the volume in order to boost its value for researchers.⁶⁴

Appearing less ideologically processed, this fringe of the archive is interesting as a location where it might still be possible to observe the strategies by which archival authority was built around the uniformity of genre conventions. Volume 134 of the Home Miscellaneous series, which holds the mysteries of the beautiful Moor woman's disappearance, bears study as a catalogue of the kinds of writing submitted to the East India Company that was unclassifiable under the normative genres of mercantile correspondence. The clearly identifiable traces of "native" voices in these texts, shipped to England for keeping in the official archive, suggest that the impact of local rulers on the resolution of problems within the East India Company—the only formal agent of colonialism at the time—was perceived to be considerable enough to warrant recording.

As the 1776 crisis is represented in this volume, the "revolution" in Madras made apparent the degree to which the Company representatives in India were relied on to choose, to patronize and to bargain with the most appropriate partners among the local elites. The epistemological struggle over the correct interpretation of the narratives about the beautiful Moor woman's disappearance was a struggle over the supremacy of one kind of historical record over another. It can therefore be read as one dramatic document

⁶⁴ Chidambaram S. Ramanujam argues that the Company had decided to "introduce drastic modifications in their plans for Tanjore" after Pigot arrived in India, and that "he would have found himself ordered to implement measures opposed in principle to the Restoration," but that the news of his deposition arrived in London first (361). Jim Phillips, speaking of the same change of political climate, mentions how "ironic" it was that "at the time of Pigot's arrest the decision-makers on the other side of the world were intending to amend his instructions to allow Muhammad Ali a much greater role in Tanjore" (196).

of the precarious processes whereby Britain consolidated the legitimacy of its colonial project in the late eighteenth century.

THE DISCRETE CHARM OF THE LITERARY

The appearance of the beautiful Moor woman in the papers of the East India Company defies conventional expectations we are taught to have of archives of colonialism. Colonial archives, like most official archives, are generally understood to be environments hostile to women, whose lives they tend to render invisible or irrelevant, unless they are “queens and elite women” (Ballantyne and Burton 4). To chance upon a “beautiful Moor woman” is to make a miraculous discovery, the fantasy of any scholar wishing to recover stories about a historical subject whose gender, race and class could have conspired forever to keep her out of the historical record.⁶⁵

And too good to be true it may be, this story, for we never will determine whether such a “beautiful Moor woman” lived and died in the way described. George Andrew Ram’s “Information” neglected to include the crucial piece of information about the beautiful Moor woman that we could use to trace her in other kinds of historical records:

⁶⁵ Recent historiography has attempted to address the absence of women in the colonial archive and the consequent difficulty of considering questions of gender in most accounts of colonization. Betty Joseph, for instance, suggests that literary texts could be used as supplements to archival texts. It is interesting, in the light of common assumptions about the effect of class on the representation of women in the colonial archive, that Gayatri Spivak finds in *A Critique of the Postcolonial Reason* that even queens’ lives are elusive. “There were no papers, the ostensible reason for my visit, and of course, no trace of the Rani [of Sirmur]” (Spivak Critique 242), of whom Spivak had written several years earlier as an exceptional female figure in the colonial archive, promising to “look a little further, of course” (Spivak Rani 270). Indrani Chatterjee claims, on the contrary, that “it is certainly not true of the colonial English-language archive of South Asia that women are invisible” (215). It is the conventions of reading of those archives that render women invisible and expose the necessity of an “examination of twentieth-century assumptions regarding the mode of reproduction, patterns of kinship and descent, household and family formation in Indian history” (215). Similarly, Anjali Arondekar suggests that a more informative historiography of gender and sexuality under colonialism would result from a more sophisticated reading of the colonial archives, one sensitive to the processes of the archives’ formation and their capacity to render evident “a clash among the multiple colonial epistemes” (25).

her name. But the impossibility of determining whether the woman and her abduction and murder were “real” does not take away from the great significance of looking into how a story such as this initiated disclosure surrounding the conditions of knowledge about a colonial domain under the strictures of writing.

Ram announces in the prefatory letter that the appearance of George Stratton qualifies this narrative for consideration by readers of official Company documents. Without Stratton’s name, Ram implies, the story would remain irrelevant and unrecorded. The Nawab’s family would continue to exert unchecked power over their subjects, their seraglio women would remain victimized and anonymous, and the Company administration would not be particularly concerned about either fact. Since the story implies smooth cooperation between the Nawab and the Company—generally a desirable state of affairs—Stratton’s role in the plot could have been a compliment to the English power to infiltrate the lives of the “natives” and deliver voyeuristic reportage. However, the British character seems to be at the service of the Nawab, who dictates the conditions of their alliance. Stratton incriminates himself by playing a crucial role in the plot, by becoming a willing accomplice in an eminently “Moorish” murder, likening himself to an oriental despot. Ram, meanwhile, has to disavow his own ability to provide a first-hand account of the murder: the paper, he claims, has “fallen accidentally” into his hands.⁶⁶

Ram’s story offered readers a crucial advantage—interpretive competence independent of empirical experience from the colony. Reading guidance is rendered in the voice of an anonymous omniscient narrator. In addition to details of the events—the exact places and dates—this informant supplies the “cultural values” underlying these strange events. Edward Said’s accounts of “orientalism” would have prepared us to

⁶⁶ IOR, HM 134, 1.

expect most of these “assumptions.” For instance: although the information invokes Amir ul Omrah’s mandate as “barbarous,” a murder to be completed in an “exquisitely [sic] cruel” mode, this characterization obtains only among those shielded from the full intensity of life in India. This unusually cruel method of murder was, in fact, “frequently used amongst the Moors” (7), so Ram’s report about it could be judged excessive only by the ignorant. The story’s stylistic features were, therefore, “natural,” just like Ram said: perfectly suited to the occasion, rather than purely ornamental or sensationalist. The thrice-repeating plot, for instance, was not a rehearsal of a familiar tension-building device. Instead, it was a realistic representation of the ability of the “Moor woman” to “guess” at the “Moorish” “dreadful purpose” of her deceptively innocuous-looking tormentors.⁶⁷

In one of the few critical assessments of the importance of oriental tales in British culture of the eighteenth century, *Fabulous Orientals*, Ros Ballaster argues that such tales had a complex influence on eighteenth-century readers (she refers only to Britain and France), who “came to draw their mental maps of oriental territories and distinctions between them from their experience of reading tales ‘from’ the Orient” (8). Across the treatments of a variety of British and French “oriental tales,” Balaster accounts for the commanding power of many readers’ familiarity with the genre conventions of oriental tales. Some of the common tropes Ballaster lists: romantic love tied to loyalty to state (294), female agency (136), obsession with harems, the dangerous sway of “exceeding handsome” harem women over oriental rulers (131), the individuality of allies and friends (135), ruthless murders (183), wayward younger brothers (276), and princes conflicted

⁶⁷ I plan to expand, in future work, on this detail: there is much to be said both about the multitudes of other women being walled alive in houses in folk stories, as well as about the resonance of this kind of story among readers familiar with gothic fiction.

between passion and dynastic responsibilities (341); some of the conventional formal qualities include repeating plots (108), as well as the “pompous diction” of stories believed to originate in some branch of “Islamic” literature (298). Ballaster not only shows that readers were versed in the conventions of such stories; she also usefully includes examples of texts transformed by the expectations of readers knowledgeable about these genre conventions: although the writers had intended to report their empirical experiences from the region, their readers would not be able to recognize these experiences as “the East” unless they corroborated expectations cultivated by earlier texts (336). Whether serendipitously or not, one of the best trusted and most popular personal reports from “the East,” Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s “embassy letters” from Constantinople, published in 1763, contain a story about a beautiful harem woman murdered in punishment for adultery, wrapped in a sheet and left in the street to be found at the break of dawn and serve as a warning.⁶⁸

It is important to note here that Stratton chose the story about the “beautiful Moor Woman” from a range of other outlandish tales circulating around Madras at the time. One of these spoke to an elaborate conspiracy designed to murder Lord Pigot. The purveyor of this tale of (attempted) murder was the same “sashiered Officer” William Randall mentioned in Stratton’s letter. According to reports by Philip Stanhope, who wrote about his service in the Company and the Nawab’s armies in *Memoirs of Asiaticus* (a manly epistolary novel worthy of an investigation of its own),

Randall had “solicited a private interview with the friends of the deposed Governor, and declared to them that Ameer ul Omrah had repeatedly offered him considerable sums of

⁶⁸ Kate Teltscher writes about the seventeenth-century trope of harem women as a source of fantasy for travel writers about India. She points out that their exclusion from the lives of Muslim women fanned speculations about the meaning of their confinement: a guarantee of chastity or an attempt of preventing promiscuity? (38)

money, if he would assassinate Lord Pigot, and that he had particularly pointed out a tame tyger [sic] as the most effectual instrument of destruction, as his Lordship might be induced to alleviate the horrors of his confinement by familiarly playing with this animal, which might be easily exchanged in the night for one of a more ferocious disposition, and would be devouring his unsuspecting prey at once relieve the Nabob from his apprehensions, and deprive the unfortunate governor of his life.” (130)

Stanhope comments that “strange and inconsistent as this story must appear, yet it was greedily listened to,” when under more regular circumstances it would have been treated (like its “inventor”) contemptuously, and as entirely improbable (131). The fact that authorship of the fantastical tiger story from Stanhope’s book has been associated with Randall can also be glimpsed from an archival document, a sworn court deposition, copied in Love’s *Vestiges of Old Madras* as one of the documents that were sent to England to justify special measures requested for the physical protection of Lord Pigot’s life. In the deposition, Randall declared that it was Ameer ul Omrah who, out of his “weakness,” suggested this method of assassination, and that Randall was only repeating what he had been told. Love argues from archival evidence that this affidavit “caused great annoyance” to the Nawab, and that the government, predictably, “entirely discredited his statements” (101).

That Stratton makes not the least reference to the tiger story in his letter could suggest that entertaining such a narrative at all, even in derision, could have made his entire appeal as ridiculous as the story itself. The length at which Stratton does entertain the story about the Moor woman, along with the zeal of his effort to disprove the “truth” of Ram’s report, suggests that there was something peculiar about the story about the “beautiful Moor woman.” So, Stratton was probably right that Ram’s was a story “drawn up with the most studied attention.” But, more importantly, it appears that he knew then what we do not always remember now. This story was not an isolated and entirely

outlandish archival accident. Rather, it was one in a range of formally and substantively related narratives about India whose truth-values were not related either to their forms or to their bases in empirically verifiable fact.

This is why Stratton's response had to engage not just with the facts laid out in the "paper," but with the meaning of the narrative richness that Ram had so carefully cultivated.⁶⁹ Rather than quote Ram's document verbatim, Stratton provided a formal intervention: his letter renders a revised version of the story about the vanishing Moor woman designed to dismantle the spell-binding effect of Ram's information. Even though the apparent facts remain recognizable from Ram's report, their presentation differs significantly, so that

Ameer Ul Omrah saw this Woman __ desired her __ and enjoyed her__ and to prevent his Father have her again stationed seapoys over her __ the Nabob however recollects and enquires for her __ the Ameer prevails on the Servants to say she is dead __ the Nabob does not believe it.⁷⁰

For someone accusing others of writing with a "most studied Attention," Stratton's own composition is delightfully and ironically reminiscent of the work of Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*—the kind of writing that assumes familiarity with the operations of the text being referenced and presumes that skills and protocols of interpretation are shared among its writers and readers.⁷¹

Stratton removes the detail of Ram's story by introducing long dashes at several strategic points, suggesting that the story's opening gambit is entirely too predictable to

⁶⁹ See Appendix Two for an excerpt from Stratton's letter in which he revises the story submitted by G. A. Ram.

⁷⁰ IOR, HM 134, 367.

⁷¹ I am transcribing here from cursive manuscript. What I represent here as " __ " looks like a tilde (~) positioned at the level of the ruling line. In some places this punctuation serves the purpose of a period. Stratton, however, uses both what we nowadays recognize as a period (.) and this sort of tilde, so the tilde here begins to resemble a dash, or an em-dash (—), similar to the kind that appears in *Tristram Shandy*, and paces the readers along without the distraction of repetitive or extraneous detail. Many sentences also run ungrammatically long by today's standards; I am preserving such punctuation, as well as the obsolete forms of spelling.

need elaboration. His intervention formally adjusts the pace of the story, now a far sparser landscape of bland characters and their formulaic relationships. Lost to his readers are the few precious details of the painstaking negotiation between the Amir and the woman, as well as the relationship between the mischievous son and the authoritarian (perhaps even priggish) father.

Formally dismantling the narrative, Stratton interferes with the capacity of Ram's story to command readers' interest, draining the detail—personalities, dates, communal relationships—which tantalized readers for whom the events in India always lacked vividness. Demonstrating that the opening was, in fact, formulaic, Stratton rehearses the plot in order to spell out the premises of reality against which the truth of Ram's story had to be checked and discredited. Since many “cultural presuppositions” were left tacit in Ram's story, Stratton shifts the grounds on which the truth of the story could be judged. Those with an empirical experience of India, Stratton claims, should know better than to believe the strange story about the abduction and possible murder of a “beautiful Moor woman.” That such knowledge is superior must be clear to all whose minds are not “totally obscured by the Spirit of Party.”⁷² The untruth of a story such as Ram's is made evident in the light of an array of other truths. These range from the fact, well known locally, that the Amir is a faithful husband; to the cultural knowledge, widely shared among those in India, about the impropriety of releasing women from harems; to the widespread preconceptions about the diffidence of “Gentoos;” to the general kind of

⁷² IOR, HM 134, 368.

knowledge about the physical impossibility of walling anyone in a house in one night without the help of a professional bricklayer.⁷³

Still, Stratton's eagerness to have the story "juridically enquired into,"⁷⁴ before he could completely dismiss it, shows that he realized that the "beautiful Moor woman," no matter how fictional, had some undeniable charms. Since the court procedures and documents had no way of proving or disproving that the woman in Ram's story was the same one deposing in court, Stratton must have been relieved to realize that Ram's greatest omission—the failure to mention the woman's name—was his great opportunity. A "Moor woman" appeared in court to testify that it was she who was making all the noise on one the nights in question.⁷⁵ The woman was found, Stratton must have been happy to remark, to be "very far from handsome."⁷⁶

The court pulled the thread Ram had left loose in the "Information" and summoned Trevengadam to testify. Under the threat of punishment for perjury and libel, the story unraveled—the responsibility of authorship of the various documents about the Moor woman "shifted from Mr. Ram" to a line of characters comically descending in

⁷³ It is interesting that the Governing Council in Madras had written about the Nawab in 1775 that he is "Sedulous and free of many of the Vices of His Countrymen, but he has the usual Characteristicks [sic] of the Natives of this Country. He is Suspicious, Vain, and Ambitious; and not being of a resolute or active Mind, he has frequently been misled by those who have had the Art to raise his Jealousy of the Company, or who have flattered his Vanity, or raised in his Mind Ideas of Conquest or future greatness" (qtd. in Love 78). Of the Nawab's younger son, they wrote as "a young Lord of Intrigue, Enterprise and Ambition. He is indefatigable in his pursuits and profuse in the Accomplishment of them, but with all he has a great share of vanity which leads him to communicate his Plans for greatness" (qtd. in Love 78). Meanwhile, the older, Umdit Ul Omrah, is a young Lord of Capacity, and the Adversities he has suffered have had the good effect of rendering him Moderate and affable. He is learned, and the favorite of the People. He has the justest Sense of the Connection between the Carnatic and the Company, and that the Lord of this Country ought, in a certain degree, to depend upon the British Nation for the Support and protection of the Country" (qtd. in Love 78).

⁷⁴ IOR, HM 134, 370.

⁷⁵ IOR, HM 134, 15–44.

⁷⁶ This is a curiously redundant and dubious comment for Stratton's purposes, since the exceptional beauty of the woman in Ram's original story was her ticket to the royal harem and later the reason she was noticed by the Nawab's son. If the woman appearing in court never was in the royal harem or the irresistible clandestine mistress to the Amir, why would she be expected to be beautiful if none of the events ever happened as Ram's document described them?

respectability. At the end of that line stood one “found to be drawer of Toddy from the Cocoa Nut Trees and so far from being able to frame a Paper in very correct English and studied Phrases, cou’d [sic] neither write or read any language whatever.”⁷⁷

Even if court documents suggest that something may have happened to some “Moor woman” that year in Madras, the “beautiful Moor woman” disappears from the Black Town, and then from the colonial archive as well.

MATTER WORTHY OF AN ARCHIVE

In his effort to account for the historical erasure of another subaltern woman, Ranajit Guha follows in “Chandra’s Death” Michel Foucault’s injunction to use for historiography the archival knots at which “history intersects with crime” (Foucault qtd. in Guha 34). Guha observes that, of the events surrounding the death of Chandra, “we know nothing [...] except that they must have happened” (34), and relies on the legal discourse to document the events. Still, he laments that the judicial system introduces a series of interruptions and modifications into the narratives of perpetrators, accomplices and witnesses so that we can learn little of the people involved or of their motives. The erasure of the “beautiful Moor Woman” from Madras in 1776 is even more baffling in that it brings into question the ability of any discourse to sanction its facts.⁷⁸

Stratton’s story about “the real truth of events”⁷⁹ in Black Town is unsurprisingly banal. The “woman in question” is the wife of one of the Amir’s servants. For “family reasons” he had sent her to live in Black Town. Heavy rains damaged the house and a

⁷⁷ IOR, HM 134, 371.

⁷⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis proposes in *Fiction in the Archives* that the rhetorical conventions used in sixteenth-century French legal documents can be used to ascertain details of daily life among historical subjects of whom the records are scarce, such as peasants and artisans.

⁷⁹ IOR, HM 134, 370.

bricklayer was called to fix it. Meanwhile, the woman was “taken violently ill and cried with pain.” The servant applied to the Amir to “remove her.” The Black Town being “totally under Company’s authority,” the Amir “sent to tell” Stratton “that some disputes had happened about a man and his wife.” He asked for a Company soldier to bring them over to him so he would “settle any differences between them.”⁸⁰

As Thomas Osborne explains, this kind of “truth” has its own attractions. It supplies the kind of archival matter on which the archive’s evidentiary power can rest more comfortably. Stratton maintains his focus on the singularity of detail, but provides the mundane kind. This detail references the “commonplace dimension of everyday life,” more plausible because more “prosaic” and “human” (Osborne 51).⁸¹ Once the “beautiful Moor woman” is out of his way, Stratton practices an exemplary moderation of tone. He volunteers information about fraternal rivalry within the royal family of Arcot, acknowledging that readers expect excess from stories of antipathy between the two princes: he is aware that, “in England, Ameer ul Omrah bears a Character hardly better than that of a Nero or a Caligula.”⁸² But he immediately dampens all hopes of drama: he can “venture on his conscience that . . . he had hardly ever seen a native in India who could assimilate himself so much to our Customs and Ideas” (385). What is clear to

⁸⁰ IOR, HM 134, 370.

⁸¹ Osborne argues that (speaking from) the archive is a means of generating ethical and epistemological credibility by way of publicity (accessibility to segments of the public), singularity (focus on detail), and mundanity (focus on mundane detail).

⁸² Writing “from experience,” Stanhope reported in his *Memoirs* that “the Nabob has three sons, the eldest of whom, Omdit ul Omrah, is of a mild disposition, totally lost in the pleasures of the seraglio, and is indeed little more than a state prisoner in his own palace. The second, Ameer ul Omrah, who is the favourite of his father, is invested with the superior military command, and to him chiefly the English pay their court. He is enterprising, deceitful and unprincipled, and would have long ago embrued his hands in the blood of his family, had not his father, rendered wise by experience, removed his court from Arcot, and resided under the immediate protection of the governor and council of Madras. The Nabob well knew how little the sacred names of parent and of brother avail to refrain an aspiring tyrant, and he was aware that the crime of the detested parricide is soon lost in the pomp and splendor which surround the successful monarch.” (76)

Stratton is that the strange stories circulating around Madras of late hardly originate in some esoteric, impenetrable orientalism of India—his “natives” are hardly “oriental.” The acrimony is much better explained, he indicates, by Lord Pigot’s resentment of the old Nawab, who refused to pay him a pension. The old-fashioned Western greed fuels extraordinary inventiveness in Britons as much as the fear of death once did in Scheherazade. Although there is splendor to these new oriental tales, “it is difficult to imagine,” Stratton observes, “that any Persons in the Characters of Gentlemen should either countenance the circulation of such reports or even be seen conversing with those who are capable of circulating them.”⁸³

Does Stratton’s insistence on restoring the “oriental” story back to its explicitly British political context suggest that Ram’s report was just a low-brow stab at political intrigue? The vehemence of Stratton’s response invites further thought about why a pedestrian upset of generic conventions should produce such a strong reaction. Stratton’s diligence in discrediting Ram’s report suggests that the “studied attention” to oriental tales was threatening to supersede the might of his empirical experience or the obligation to social status: dismissing Ram’s accusations at the level of style, epistemology, law and social norms, Stratton revealed the insufficiency of any one discourse in sustaining knowledge claims about India. It appears that Stratton suspected that the literary narratives already in circulation, on which Ram had based his tale of intrigue, had

⁸³ IOR, HM 134, 373. Stratton’s argument for gentlemanliness as a defense from falsehood is reminiscent of the “social history of truth” that Steven Shapin recovers in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century community of gentlemen-scientists. Scientific truths, no matter how apparently outlandish, were underpinned by the social status of their proponents, who, being “gentlemen,” had nothing to gain by lying. Stratton also fashions himself as more of a “political scientist” than an ethnographer of India’s wonders—he explains that Lord Pigot deliberately pursued a “strict union” with the Nawab’s older son, the heir apparent, knowing “the natural dread which a prince of this Country must entertain of the Man whom even the publick [sic] suspicion marks out for his successor. —because it places a dagger in the hand of that successor if he is a bad man, but assuredly in the hearts of those who place their reliance on his future Power, always ready to strike at the Life of the Prince of the Throne.” (IOR, HM 134, 383)

sufficient hold on the imaginations of their readers, even those who had committed enormous resources to securing first-hand reports from the ground of the colony.

Stratton's letter can therefore inform us not just about his politics of colonialism, or about the viability of "Orientalism" as an explanatory concept for the encounter between Britain and India. It can tell us, perhaps more interestingly, something about Stratton's awareness of his role as a meticulous writer on a mission to curb the inflation of "reliable" reports from late eighteenth-century India. The flight to fiction in Volume 134 pushes readers to consider how the uniformity of conventional genres of writing we now find in the archive referentialized the encounter between Britain and India. Ram's report issues a challenge to consider how an "oriental tale" could reference "truth" and what tools the readers had at their disposal for reading such documentation.

In another rare assessment of the significance of the oriental tale for the history of literature centered on the concept of the "realist novel," Srinivas Aravamudan argues for a "recuperation" of the oriental tale, a medium that combines various kinds of verisimilitude and "defies any easy generalizations about the presumed lack of reference" (16). The oriental tale, Aravamudan claims, "referentializes inexorably, but in a very different way from the realist novel, through satirical, anthropological and sexual modes, rather than through journalistic, historical or characterological ones" (16). The incident recorded in Volume 134 is then additionally interesting in that it suggests that Ram caused alarm by confusing genre conventions, proffering a tale that was both "true" and "oriental," one that referentialized "journalistically" and "anthropologically," both "characterologically" and "sexually." This is why an oriental tale in the archive should interest us as more than just a long-neglected genre of literature. As an "accident," the

story betrays our expectations about the relationship between genre conventions and archival authority. The confusion over the impact of a seemingly peripheral “literary” genre on the possibilities of documentation instigated crucial political questions: how legible was Indian “reality” in Britain? What models existed for its representation in writing? How did these models inform the meaning of the British presence in India? How and to what degree could the British be co-opted into the practices “common amongst the Moors?”

To answer these questions, readers had to ponder whether an oriental tale such as this could be a genre of fact and evidence. The threatening possibility that it could induced Stratton to be “something particular regarding this transaction,” once he found out that the “Original Paper”⁸⁴ was about to be transmitted to England.⁸⁵ The record of interpretive commotion surrounding the paper reveals that Ram’s report challenged some implicit agreement on the set of stylistic conventions believed to guarantee the reliability of documentation and invited questions about how readers and writers came to share a taste in representations of a distant region few of them would ever know from experience.

And why is the story about a “beautiful Moor woman” so surprising and so appealing now? Perhaps because we hardly know that such a report could be possible: it makes us ask the questions eighteenth-century readers were asking, about the relationship between literary texts and historical documents. Answers to such questions will be difficult to provide until we imagine this relationship as a process of collaboration between writers and readers who operated in one uninterrupted field of texts, oblivious to the distinction between literary and historical documents that we now take for granted. A

⁸⁴ IOR, HM 134, 372.

⁸⁵ IOR, HM 134, 370.

more textured history of this collaboration can teach us about how literary conventions may have been constitutive of the archival evidentiary standards, and how the archive dismissed certain genres from history, permitting some events to be recorded and occluding others.

Perhaps more importantly, such stories can inform us about the way we continue to imagine the possibilities of writing about past and present.⁸⁶ Rather than think it naïve to wish to discern the actual fate of the vanishing Moor woman (even if we shall never know for sure whether she lived or died), we can wonder about the persistence of our desire for her discovery, about the suspicion that her oriental tale might be true, a genre of “realist” literature and of vivid historical imagination.

⁸⁶ Alex Woloch’s study of character construction in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prose, *The One Vs. the Many*, would be an instance of literary scholarship useful for the interpretation of the story about the Moor woman. The unusual “fullness” of the unlikely female heroine, the “flat” character of Stratton, and the role of the “crowd” of neighbors seem to coincide with the narrative strategies used by contemporary writers of canonical literary fiction. Natalie Zemon Davis, in *Fiction in the Archives*, provides a useful understanding of “fiction” not as a contrivance, but as the centrality of the narrative in the preservation and interpretation of some documents preserved in public archives.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMANDING CORRESPONDENCE:
HISTORY AND THE “EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE” IN THE *LETTERBOOK* OF JOHN BRUCE,
THE EAST INDIA COMPANY HISTORIOGRAPHER

We have thus a Corporation ruling over an immense Empire, not formed, as in Venice, by eminent patricians, but by old obstinate clerks, and the like odd fellows. No wonder, then, that there exists no government by which so much is written and so little done, as the Government of India. When the East India Company was only a commercial association, they, of course, requested a most detailed report on every item from the managers of their Indian factories, as is done by every trading concern. When the factories grew into an Empire, the commercial items into ship loads of correspondence and documents, the Leadenhall clerks went on in their system, which made the Directors and the Board their dependents; and they succeeded in transforming the Indian Government into one immense writing-machine. Lord Broughton stated in his evidence before the Official Salaries Committee, that with one single dispatch 45,000 pages of collections were sent.⁸⁷

It has long been evident that “epistolarity”—what Janet Altman has defined as “the use of the letter’s formal properties to create meaning”⁸⁸—is a subject worthy of critical attention. Much of the interest in the letter form has been prompted by literary scholars’ interest in epistolary literature, much of it an idiosyncrasy of the eighteenth century, or, rather, of the conventional historical narratives about novel’s “ascendance.”⁸⁹

The interest in this one formal quality of an entire range of literary texts was further

⁸⁷ Karl Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, 20 July 1853.

⁸⁸ Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, 4.

⁸⁹ Altman’s 1982 study provides a history of earlier scholars’ interest in epistolary novels. Studies similarly focusing on literary texts include Elizabeth Cook, *Epistolary Bodies, Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth Century Republic of Letters*, Elizabeth Goldsmith, *Writing the Female Voice. Essays on Epistolary Fiction*, and Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel*. See Mary Favret’s *Romantic correspondence: women, politics, and the fiction of letters* for an interesting analysis of the “value of the letter not as a literary vehicle...but as a figure from everyday life” (1) following the French Revolution, when “the volatile politics of the moment appropriated the strategies of sentimental tradition” (7). The collection edited by Rebecca Earle, *Epistolary selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945*, brings together the work of historians and literary scholars whose materials range far beyond the conventional literary forms, pointing out a new way of engaging productively with the epistolary form.

animated by the past twenty years of scholarly interest in gender as a useful category of literary analysis. Scholars honed in, and rightly so, on the ubiquity of female characters (i.e., letter-writers) in these works and studied the fascinating relationship between women and the letter form—the complicated and convoluted representation of women’s voices, often at the hands of men with intimate knowledge of such women⁹⁰—and wondered at the significance of the novels’ representations of women’s lives. It should be easy by now to agree that the documentary value of these literary texts was not in their ability to capture actual women’s voices, but in their manner of representation—their *genre*. The epistolary novel is an interpretive code which we have painstakingly deciphered in order to glean something of the novels’ relationships to the worlds in which they operated. Therefore we hardly care whether the events described in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* really happened. We care more about the form in which they were presented—a collection of personal letters—and about the credence this form gave it with readers who clearly reveled in such an unexpected “disclosure.”

Richardson, however, would have been hard-pressed to call his volume a work of “fiction:” he advertised it as a collection of private letters he had acquired from an unidentified person and “edited.” They were probably meant to serve as models of good letter-writing, a highly desirable skill that reflected with unmistakable clarity the relationship between of a woman’s ethical probity and the elegance of epistolary composition. In this case, the letters provided particularly instructive experiences of an upwardly-mobile young woman in domestic service. That Richardson’s professed role in the process of composition was quite different we now know partly because we have in the meantime snatched some of his own private letters, wherein declared that he preferred

⁹⁰ Both Richardson and Fielding married their maid servants.

not to be named as the author of *Pamela*;⁹¹ he had to struggle to come up with additional materials of unassailable verisimilitude and appropriate didactic value for a sequel.⁹² But one can hardly overrate, in the success story of *The History of Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, the value of private correspondence as a model of transparent writing which captured with unrivalled immediacy the moral rectitude of Pamela and conveyed its intensity onto the readers. The book was appealing and instructive precisely because it was a “history” in letters, a narrative strung together by readers willing to grant personal correspondence the benefit of the doubt. Its ethical lessons were binding only insofar as the story it told was true; and it was true because it was in letters.

Pamela’s earnestness did not take long in making itself an object of ridicule, most famously in *Shamela*, Henry Fielding’s first novel, which derived particular pleasure from mocking the coincidence of Pamela’s dubious virtue and its revelation in letter-writing (or letter-reading) as a conduit of unmediated personal experience: the idea that “writing to the moment” could be done, and in the hand of an artless female author.⁹³ A vision of genuinely unselfconscious “writing to the moment,” *Shamela*, Pamela’s conniving other, strove for immediacy even while in bed with her lecherous employer, capturing her (mis)adventures with all possible accuracy. When Fielding mocked the idea that letter-writing could allow Pamela (and Richardson) to conceal the lasciviousness and opportunism of the maid-servant, he claimed that the heroine’s recourse to the transparency of the letter-form recorded everything *but* the integrity of her moral

⁹¹ Eaves, T. C. Duncan and Ben D. Kimpel. *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, 119.

⁹² Eaves and Kimpel, 142.

⁹³ For a modern edition of *Shamela* with another famous spoof, Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela*, see the 2004 volume edited and prefaced by Catherine Ingrassia.

compass.⁹⁴ In the conventional accounts of the development of novels, literary writers worked through letters as tropes of authenticity and immediacy, and mostly abandoned them for omniscient narration. But we have continued to ask what it was about the genre that we now call the epistolary novel that made for such a compelling representation of women's domestic lives and class mobility. How was it that the correspondence between a gender category and a genre came to be naturalized? What were the political implications of this amalgamation—was it possible, for example, for women to write history in letters? Carolyn Steedman has ascribed the success of the first epistolary novels to an insatiable thirst for knowledge about women's lives (first among contemporary readers and then among literary critics)—for the unfathomable details of existence of an enormous emergent (and evanescent) underclass inhabiting a virtual underworld, but also for “a woman writing a letter” as an originary figure in myths about modern histories of self and subjectivity.⁹⁵ Arguing for a more careful historical research into the writing by women presumed not to have left any written records of their lives, Steedman points out that the impulse to devise a new “mythology of origins of women's writing” grounded in epistolary novels leaves unexamined the “privileged” relationship between women and

⁹⁴ Steedman places the story of realism into the historical narrative about the supremacy of spoken language and the suspicions about the power of writing to capture it accurately and reiterates Terry Eagleton's claim that Lovelace (and by extension, Pamela and Clarissa) could not be “funny” to anyone reading about them in the eighteenth century. Richardson's insistence that the veracity of his publications arose from “writing to the moment” quelled eighteenth-century “anxiety and ambivalence” about writing; Lovelace (“On one knee, kneeling with the other, I write!”)—even more so than Pamela in her “eternal scratling with her pen”—stood for “Richardson's ‘ideology of writing’, his ‘faith that writing and reality may be one’, that the representation of reality in writing may somehow be simultaneous with its occurrence.” Carolyn Steedman, “Woman Writing a Letter,” 126.

⁹⁵ Carolyn Steedman, “Woman Writing a Letter,” 126. See also Steedman's work on domestic servants as the largest segment of the British working class in the eighteenth century, largely neglected in the histories of class formation and in the cultural histories of the period, e.g., “Poetic Maids and Cooks who Wrote” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.1 (2005); *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

letters—the feminine bent of both—and claims to produce not histories of representations of women, but about women’s history proper.

The “confusion” of novelistic letters with the real ones is worth examining more closely because it was more than the absence of archives that motivated historical myth-making based on fiction. Literary critics have only recently (and almost reluctantly), along with scholars from several contiguous disciplines, begun to consider how best to tackle the often indeterminable difference between “real” private letters (published and unpublished), written by people we know existed, and novelistic ones, and what to do with private correspondence at all.⁹⁶ Private letters, published and unpublished, resist the methodologies of reading we use for epistolary novels since the acts of their reading are at least in part an admission that we continue to labor under the fictions about private correspondence that Richardson successfully exploited and Fielding loved to mock.⁹⁷ Letters exchanged between actual persons continue to encourage what Patricia Meyer Spacks has called “the fantasy of revelation”⁹⁸ and remain a kind of indisputable historical archive, a source of certainty which permits us to know that Richardson lied in his advertisement. Alternatively, they suffer from deceptive “fictiveness:”⁹⁹ the writers’ refusal to stop performing to the genre of honesty and directness, even in this ostensibly

⁹⁶ See Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Forgotten Genres” in *Modern Language Studies* 18.1 (1988): 47-57; Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*; for a specific look at the letters written about imperialism in the eighteenth century, see Margery Sabin, *Dissenters and Mavericks, Writings about India in English, 1765–2000* and Kate Teltscher, “The sentimental ambassador: the letters of George Bogle from Bengal, Bhutan and Tibet, 1770–1781.”

⁹⁷ It is worth noting that feminist scholarship has made another popular response to Richardson’s work more readily available to modern-day readers: Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* could be understood as an interesting response to Richardson’s use of the epistolary form, but also to the insidiousness of assumptions about corruption at the heart of women’s association with letter-writing, the relationship which Fielding’s parody made its job to “disclose” to the readers. See Catherine Ingrassia’s Introduction to her edition of both spoofs for extensive commentary on gender as a category central to the effectiveness of *Pamela* and of its detractors.

⁹⁸ Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Forgotten Genres,” 56.

⁹⁹ Spacks, 49.

most private and candid of writing realms. The dissolving distinction between private letters and “literature” (grounded in an infinitely more convoluted relationship between texts and verifiable historical facts) causes ambivalence among intrusive outsiders (i.e., the readers) about their competence to choose appropriate interpretation procedures.

This essay is concerned with one of the most astonishing collections of letters from the late eighteenth century—the archive of the East India Company, later renamed the India Office Records—in order to bring attention to a similar ambivalence about interpretation that appears once we pay heed to the its creation through an exchange of information that was also an exchange of letters. To sketch out some preliminary benefits of such a reading, I examine the *Letterbook of John Bruce, Historiographer to the East India Company, 1793–1817*, a collection of letters from the archive which present an interesting problem in eighteenth-century arts and representation. The *Letterbook* makes explicit how the epistolary form was consciously put to use not as a literary device, but as a means of producing the regimes of truth and authenticity in the operations of the East India Company, the trading organization which set up the administrative foundations of what would become the British Empire in south Asia. Most of those running the enterprise from London were never to see the territories in which they were trading and which they would later administer as a part of their Empire. For efficiency in government from an enormous distance, the organization relied entirely, if for reasons constantly under dispute, on its colonial officers’ written reports. Without much choice in the matter, they used letters as their primary mode of communication.¹⁰⁰ Collections of letters in the

¹⁰⁰ See Martin Moir, “The Kaghazi Raj: Notes on the Documentary Basis of Company Rule, 1773–1858” for an account of the competing philosophical foundations of the “Kaghazi Raj,” or colonial rule by paper. See also Homi Bhabha’s argument on “sly civility” and the British “faith in a government of recordation”

Company archive are not uncommon and an entire series of the archive used the genre as its principle of organization. C. H. Philips explains that the letters sent from India to England, before the reforms instituted in the 1820s, were “huge” and included “both trivial and important information”;¹⁰¹ it was not until then that the considerable time it took to prepare the responses from London was perceived to interfere with efficient government and effective control over the colony.

Although this archive remains the authoritative source of information about British expansion into south Asia, with the power to make people and their textual representations materialize and disappear (the power, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, of “the fabrication of representations of historical reality”),¹⁰² we know very little about the way its formal and stylistic qualities, many related to the epistolary form, have taken on the air of “the archive.”¹⁰³ Recognizing that the concept of genre has crucially affected the creation and interpretation of archival texts should allow us better to grasp the conditions on which epistolary representation was understood to be a satisfactory genre for the conveyance of colonial “experience” from India to London in the late eighteenth century, but also of any experience at all once the verisimilitude and candor of letters had been compromised for readers of epistolary literature. Relating the epistolary fictions of candor and authenticity, as they obtained in a late eighteenth-century archive, to those we have associated with the private and novelistic ones, this essay puts pressure on the

as an issue central to the understanding of the relationship between imperialism and good liberal government. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Philips, C. H. *The East India Company, 1784–1834*, 264.

¹⁰² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,” 271.

¹⁰³ Scholars have talked about the substance of letters in the colonial archive, but rarely, if ever, about the letter-form as the crucial lens that permits confident interpretation of the archival material. For examples of engagement with the text of archival documents, see Kate Teltscher, “The sentimental ambassador: the letters of George Bogle from Bengal, Bhutan and Tibet, 1770–1781;” Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: colonial currencies of gender*; Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, “Postcolonialism’s Archive Fever.”

relationship between the commonality of the letter form and its ability to grant a text the status of a historical document.

THE BUSINESS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE “EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE”

Information about John Bruce is difficult to come by in modern historical monographs. Several of his published works are available at libraries, but they do little to illuminate the work he was doing on this project.¹⁰⁴ The few references to his career appear in Scottish nationalist historiographies, where he appears as a grateful “amanuensis” of Henry Dundas,¹⁰⁵ himself a nationalist favorite who almost single-handedly placed an entire class of landless Scotsmen into prominent professional and political positions in late eighteenth-century London, and Scotland on the British political map. Also known as “Henry the Ninth” for the amount of power he wielded in English and Scottish politics, Dundas was the Home Secretary whose ministerial ambit was re-defined in the 1780s so as to include India, and the grey eminence of the Board of Control, the governmental body that oversaw the Company’s activities.¹⁰⁶ Bruce had

¹⁰⁴ Even his *First Principles of Philosophy and their application to the subjects of taste, science, and history* does not deliver the promised insight into Bruce’s understanding of the historiography of empire. The volume promises a “Course of Lectures for more advanced Students, in which are explained, the History of objects in Nature and Art, which address Genius and Taste, with the application of the Laws of these Faculties, as the Rules of the Art of Criticism; the History of Nature, connected with the Sciences, which discover its Laws, and these, with the arts, which they create to improve; and the History of Philosophy, prefaced with a general view of the Governments and Religions of the Nations, who have been distinguished by useful Discoveries, or elegant Speculations” (viii). Nothing, however, is ever said of the last.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, 196.

¹⁰⁶ See Philips on “the ascendancy of Dundas, 1788–94,” 61–79. As a member of the Board of Control (the governmental body in charge of overseeing the work of East India Company’s Court of Directors), Dundas “did not hesitate actively to interfere in all branches of the Company’s government, including commerce.” That Dundas knew what the power of the written record was, is testified by a “striking feature, emphasising the completeness of the control that Dundas had achieved over the Directors,” which was the “comparative paucity of the correspondence exchange between the Board and the Court in these years; between 1789 and 1792, the Court sent the Board only twelve formal letters; in 1792, the Board sent to the Court only four formal letters.” The physical absence of archival matter suggests that Dundas had developed an efficient system of “disposing of most of the India business in private conversation with the Chairmen; the

been a professor of logic at the University of Edinburgh and tutor to Henry Dundas's son, Robert, before Dundas appointed him to the post with the Company.

Dundas was conventionally represented in colonial historiography as a staunch opponent of corruption within Company ranks, a believer in the idea that "India was to be governed in India and not in Downing or Leadenhall Street".¹⁰⁷ More recently, his political skill has been understood in more complicated terms, as scholars refined their sense of his political priorities to account for the fact that during Dundas's tenure, Britain's dealings with India created some of the most memorable political scandals, including the *cause célèbre* involving Warren Hastings (1787–1795), a one-time Governor-General of India (1773–1784), who was impeached for his ostensible abuses of office.¹⁰⁸ The government's willingness to interest themselves in the "Indian affairs" had become a condition of their survival in power,¹⁰⁹ and Dundas's interest in all matters colonial was not, therefore, motivated by the desire to extirpate corruption in India, but rather by his willingness to appoint reputable men to high positions who would create the necessary stability of government in India and in Britain. As Lucy Sutherland has explained, Henry Dundas and William Pitt, the Prime Minister under whom Dundas

preliminary negotiations for the renewal of the Company's charter in 1793, for example, were almost all conducted in this way." Philips, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Holden Furber, *Henry Dundas, first viscount Melville, 1742-1811*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ Part of the scandal of the impeachment was the *de facto* acceptability of Hastings's "business practices" in a phase of Company rule that ended in the 1790s. Edmund Burke's attacks on Hastings managed to disturb some of the complacency about the acceptability of graft and harassment in India, but ultimately the political pressure did not amount to an unequivocal condemnation: Hastings was acquitted after a seven-year trial. Sara Suleri argues that the charges against Hastings "represent the first exhaustive compilation of colonial guilt to emerge from the colonization of India" See Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 51. Uday Singh Mehta suggests that for Burke, "the British Empire, especially in India, was nothing less than a revolution, with all the psychological naïveté and theoretical arrogance that he associated with the [one] in France." See Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 159. Sudipta Sen suggests that this period of colonial rule should be understood in the context of competing ideologies of "British and the Company-state," which pitted the ideas of liberal government against the demands for profit and territorial expansion. See Sen, "Liberal Empire and Illiberal Trade," 136-154.

¹⁰⁹ Lucy Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics*, v.

served, sought and gained through legislation by 1784 “both the sanctions and the machinery for carrying out the methods of government supervision and infiltration” of the East India Company, for which previous governments had unsuccessfully vied.¹¹⁰ Their laws, which put the Company under direct supervision of the crown and separated the Company’s political function from its commercial one, removed the “confusion” that had troubled previous governments and vexed the relationship between the state and the Company. She credits this advantage partly to the fact that Pitt and Dundas were “far better informed” than their predecessors about the situation in India, as well as to their unprecedented “wisdom and foresight in the rule of their vast territories.”¹¹¹

The *Letterbook* preserves documents related to one of Dundas’s special projects. The Company was due to renew its charter in 1793, and Dundas entrusted John Bruce with compiling materials for a new book of history of the East India Company that would motivate the Parliament to renew the charter and appease the public tired of colonial scandals such as the one epitomized by the impeachment of Hastings. The renewal was a form of negotiation between the government and the Company over the amount and the nature of power the Company could command over its possessions in India. It came on the heels of significant reforms undertaken in India by Governor Cornwallis and engineered from London by Henry Dundas. Many of these reforms profoundly changed the Company’s role in the colony and solidified its power as the most powerful land

¹¹⁰ Lucy Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics*, 414.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Robert Travers points out, following P. J. Marshall, that “the most powerful symbol” of the new financial management of the Company’s affairs, enabled by Pitt’s India Act of 1784 and its “rescue package” for the Company, was Dundas’s presentation of the annual India budget to the Parliament: “whereas earlier British ministries dug for evidence for the Company’s financial incompetence to justify statutory intervention, now...the interests of the state and Company appeared to be running in parallel once again, rather than at cross purposes” (212).

revenue collector and government administrator.¹¹² Despite its monopolist position, the Company's losses were substantial and set off only by the lucrative trade with China. Since unchartered merchants could already afford (unlike those in earlier times) to circumvent trade restrictions, to fund independent expeditions to India and to establish their personal business contacts, Dundas sought to strike a realistic political compromise with the Company's opponents by relaxing the Company's monopoly without abolishing its privileges completely. Since formal regulation had clearly failed to account for the near-bankruptcy of the Company where other merchants were thriving, Dundas had Bruce research and write *The Historical view of plans, for the government of British India and regulation of trade to the East Indies* in the year of the renewal, which was to present a more realistic plan of action, "a system of Indian affairs, founded on the evidence of experience."¹¹³ At the same time, Dundas anticipated that his plan's formal terms suffered from an obsolescence that could be perceived as an impediment to the pursuit of joint political and economic ambitions in India based on the Company's monopolistic position. He openly admitted to the Parliament that "no writer upon

¹¹² Sudipta Sen reminds us that Cornwallis's 1790 decision to allow the Company to exercise the "exclusive privileges of government" in the collection of duties had "serious consequences on the limits and nature of patronage, authority, and exchange in Indian society" (148). Another segment of reforms, the "permanent land settlement," had profound consequences on land use, putting pressure on peasants to grow exclusively cash crops and resulting in devastating famines. The terms of the settlement also instituted an English Supreme court and removed Indian justices from the civil courts, as well as many "natives" from Company service on suspicions of venality of the entire "race." Cornwallis himself had never been to India before he was appointed Governor-General; he relied on John Shore for information about the Company's structure and operations. The idea to appoint as governors men like Cornwallis who had never been in Company service was another instance of Dundas's anti-corruption policy. While potentially incompetent, such officials were presumed less connected to the local networks in India, and therefore less likely to learn how to use them to their own (pecuniary) advantage. Dundas was himself impeached for corruption in 1806, an accusation which spelled the end of his political career. Colonial biographers and historians liked to defend his honor, sometimes by pointing out that he had declared in letters his refusal of personal favors to his protégés.

¹¹³ John Bruce, *Historical view of plans, for the government of British India and regulation of trade to the East Indies*, 266. Library catalogues frequently, if dubiously, attribute this volume to Henry Dundas as well as to Bruce. It appears that the work of writing this document was to be done by Bruce, but that the political impact riding on its dissemination required that the authorship (and the "political vision") be attributed to Dundas.

political economy has as yet supposed that an extensive empire can be administered by a commercial association.”¹¹⁴ As John Bruce put it in his letter to Jonathan Duncan, the governor at Bombay newly appointed in 1795, “information is of great importance, to enable [Dundas], to make a system, which shall embrace equally the interests of the Empire and of the East India Company.”¹¹⁵

In order to garner the information required for the project, Dundas authorized Bruce to solicit information in letters from Company servants in India about their activities; John Bruce’s *Letterbook*, volume 456E of the Home Miscellaneous series of the India Office Records, preserves this correspondence. The descriptive note in the only *Catalogue of the Home Miscellaneous Series* in existence, published in 1927, informs readers that volume 456E is the “Letter Book kept by John Bruce in his official capacity as Historiographer” to the East India Company,¹¹⁶ but offers no explicit explanation for the separation of Bruce’s letters in the *Letterbook* from the many others which he must have written in the course of his tenure at the Company.¹¹⁷ The note seems to suggest that Bruce had collected and collated the volume himself, and not that the arrangement in which we find the letters was determined, as was common practice, after the fact, by

¹¹⁴ Henry Dundas quoted in Michael Fry, 198.

¹¹⁵ India Office Records [hereafter IOR], Home Miscellaneous [hereafter HM] 456E, 127. Sudipta Sen explains that the charter on which the Company had been “conceived could not provide for the evolving structure of its polity and economy,” and reminds about the influence on the Company politics of Adam Smith, who opposed the Company monopoly, but never did “advocate that the East India Company relinquish its territorial responsibilities and competitive interests in India;” rather, he called for a “convergence between the benefits of commerce and the interests of the inhabitants of India.” See Sen, “Liberal Empire and Illiberal Trade,” 136-139. For a general overview of the transformation of the East India Company from a trading concern into a governmental body see K. N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company*.

¹¹⁶ IOR, HM 456E, 2.

¹¹⁷ The first letter in the first half of the volume, which comprises copies of letters Bruce wrote and sent, is dated 16th May 1793. In the second part, made up of the responses Bruce received from India, the latest letters date to the late 1790s, and only a few as late as 1802.

archivists in London.¹¹⁸ The insinuation of the *Letterbook's* organic growth into an autonomous collection of letters carries particular resonance in the environment of the East India Company archive. The image of John Bruce keeping his own letters, in the midst of a large institution that routinely gathered and sorted all of its correspondence, is particularly striking in the light of the *Catalogue's* emphasis on the *Letterbook's* constitution by John Bruce “in the official capacity as Historiographer.”¹¹⁹ The discernible circumstances of Bruce's letterbook-keeping intimate that the letters in this volume were a matter he could somehow keep to himself, partly private and gathered out of the Company's sight, albeit written and read on the Company's time.

That the late eighteenth-century official historiographer managed to “keep” his own letters, sort them, and present them to the archive in a pre-arranged form may account in part for the letters' arrival into the Home Miscellaneous series, the “rag-bag” of documents¹²⁰ for which, as the author of the *Catalogue's* introduction explained, “no better place could be found.”¹²¹ The *Letterbook* could have been added to the archive

¹¹⁸ Martin Moir explains that “the collections. . . being made up in India” were actually copied from Indian sources by the clerks at the East India House in London and then “assembled for the use of the Examiners and their colleagues as well as for the directors and the Board [of Control], thus adding more delays to an already very slow-going system.” See Moir, *A general guide to the India Office Records*, 45. The letter-writers at the time of writing overcame the problem of access to information and synthetic view of a situation by enclosing exact copies of letters they had sent to other recipients, referenced in the conversation, or otherwise relevant to it. Such enclosures were also excellent occasions for plagiarism. For a recent discussion of the traffic in letters as an impediment to data collection, see Mary Poovey, “The Limits of the Universal Knowledge Project: British India and the East Indiamen,” 183–202.

¹¹⁹ See C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784–1834*, for details of the “great influence” that Correspondence Examiners exerted “in the determination of replies to the letters from India,” 20. Martin Moir emphasizes the possibility that there was “the way official reporting really worked,” that is, that reforms instituted over the eighty years in which the East India Company attempted to find the most efficient way to rule India from a distance, as well as to choose among competing philosophies of rule by paper and correspondence. See Moir, “Kaghazi Raj,” 186.

¹²⁰ Joan Lancaster, “The Archives in the India Office Records,” 32.

¹²¹ William Foster, author of the Introduction to Charles Hill's *Catalogue of the Home Miscellaneous series*, claims that this series was the originally intended repository of documents that pertained to “Home,” but that the meaning and scope of this category became so vague as to be irrelevant for the sorting of documents or for controlling the miscellany of the series. See Foster, Introduction, vi. Joan Lancaster, the first professional archivist of the IOR, claims that the “rag-bag” of the Home Miscellaneous series does not

when it became available, appended to the series together with the surrounding documents of which it makes sense: volumes 456A through 456E all contain “Materials sent to John Bruce, the Company Historiographer.” The letters in the *Letterbook* therefore become interesting as records both of Bruce’s business transactions and of the status of his work, which was somehow both official and peripheral to the Company’s primary activities. The placement of this collection of official letters, by an officer as important as the “official Historiographer,” on the fringe of the archive suggests that this record of Bruce’s work in his official capacity at the Company offers an indication of the relationship between the historiography he was hired to do and the Company’s principal business, which was both public (trading under the Government charter and subject to scrutiny) and private (transacted among individuals whose activities were familiar to those in Britain only insofar as they were reported).

The *Letterbook* shows that Bruce’s job was to introduce the idea that historiography, based on the evidence of experience in letters, played a crucial role in the future of Company business. Although he was writing in a genre completely common in Company operations, Bruce’s letters reveal that his inquiries were often received with ambivalence. His correspondents suggested that his work was of questionable importance: that Company historiography and letters about it were official and authoritative only to some. Many of his correspondents were unfamiliar with the idea that they were working for an “Empire,” and not just for a “commercial association.” The correspondence suggests that John Bruce was, in fact, put to work of using the process of correspondence to *produce* the “evidence of experience” for the nation’s perusal, and

consist of “private papers;” rather, its consistency is a result of “so much sorting, arranging and binding” done in the nineteenth century. See Lancaster, 32.

only the kind of experience that could substantiate the notion that India was the cornerstone of an Empire yet to be created. The process of historical revision would solidify such positive experience by grafting it onto the letter form, the medium presumed to establish direct and artless communication between the sender and the recipient.

This is how the *Letterbook* also hints at the tension between the genre of “official” letters and the letter form as a vehicle of communication between individuals whom correspondence inevitably puts in personal relationships—it reflects the ambiguity of personal letters as vehicles known *not* to establish the connections of honesty between correspondents. Not only could Bruce embarrass himself by asking for experiences that had never been had. He could provoke confusion and alarm by requesting disclosure about details of Company representatives’ activities in India at a time when the rules of their conduct were becoming closely scrutinized and increasingly stringent. For those writers who did believe that letters were candid and personal, such a disclosure could be incriminating; for those who knew that it was the *letter form* that stood for candor (that could later be used to political ends in London), a reply would indicate that the letter-writer shared in the “foresight” about the bright future of Britain in India and the means of making it present.

LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION

The letters that open the *Letterbook* all refer to “Mr. Dundas’s speech on opening the system of Indian Affairs” or his *Plan for the Government of India* as an enclosure. Bruce described the *Plan* as the text crucial for understanding the project that Dundas had assigned him to complete, but he also emphatically used this reference to provide an

explanation, an excuse even, for the unsolicited and unexpected appearance of a letter from the historiographer, a Company servant whom nobody knew in India, in the large bundle of regular correspondence. In the letter that opens the volume, dated 16th May 1793 and sent to Alex Adamson, the governor at Bombay in west India, Bruce clarified his purpose in enclosing the *Plan* to the initial letter:

[...]Mr. Dundas's object is not only that his system may be generally understood in your settlement, but that these Gentlemen to whom you may present the Book, would in return, furnish Information on the diversified Subjects of the political and commercial history of the Countries within the Company's limits, viz. chronology, political revolutions, the Religions and Manners of the former or present inhabitants, the progressive state of the useful arts, Manufactures and sciences, and of the fine arts, and particularly of internal and foreign trade, as material for a general History of Indian Affairs.

You and the gentlemen who may honor me with communications, may depend on my acknowledgements accompanying my efforts to deserve their confidence and my faithfully mentioning their services to our common superiors.[...] ¹²²

The letter mentions a seemingly obvious fact—that a plan for the government of India may be of interest to those who in fact govern India. However, it also calls attention to a crucial detail involving this plan for government, namely, the plans' interdependence with the historical account Bruce was hoping to write of "Indian Affairs." While Bruce did clarify how his writing of history was contingent upon the communication he was trying to establish with the gentlemen to whom "the Book" about government would be introduced and who would supply him with the necessary information, he did not explain to Adamson how the history itself related to the plan. That Bruce helpfully provided a list of the "diversified Subjects" of history, on which information was expected, suggests that Adamson was assumed to be unfamiliar with the sorts of subjects that were understood to be the "Indian Affairs."

¹²² IOR, HM 456E, 1.

This offer of barter in services indicated that Bruce would do the informants the favor of professional recommendation if they would do him the favor of supplying historical information; the purpose and personal benefit of delivering the historical data to England were not self-evident. Whether “historical” or otherwise, the kinds of information Bruce outlined, exclusively available to those in India, apparently had little clear connection with what Adamson’s contacts or subordinates would have immediately understood to be relevant to “government,” possibly an odd term to use for the activities of employees of a trading company. Rather than expect the information to be willingly shared and distributed, or the significance of “history” to “government” to be presumed, Bruce offered a tangible incentive for cooperation, expressed in the commonly intelligible terms of career advancement.

Although he appears as the letter’s signed author, Bruce maintains throughout the persona of proxy for Dundas, on whose behalf he was interpreting Company policies, and whose political clout he was conveying through the correspondence. He could offer his acquaintance as the collateral in the information exchange. This and the other letters Bruce sent to initiate communication with potential correspondents in India were for him versions of letters of introduction,¹²³ which served not only to familiarize his readers with the historiographical project for which their assistance was being solicited, but also to introduce Bruce himself as the person who would coordinate and implement the project through personal correspondence. The diligence with which Bruce went through the formal motions of justifying his letter-writing via his relationship to Dundas raises suspicion that his letters could be perceived after all as somehow his own: personal and

¹²³ As Michael Fry explains, Bruce’s teaching career made very clear to him the importance of letters of introduction. Fry quotes from a letter Bruce used on the grand tour of his tutee Robert Dundas, which recommended Bruce’s company to a French friend of Dundas. See Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, 106.

therefore either immaterial to anyone's official performance, or intrusive and potentially inappropriate.

Other introductory letters in the *Letterbook* show that this phrasing was far from incidental and that Bruce carefully used the formal features of letter-writing to mark his own position in the correspondence, and the significance of his correspondence in the context of the Company. Although the writing was formally being exchanged just between the two letter-writers, the text of Bruce's letters suggested how that relationship was lodged in the political power structure within which the letters traveled—that his letters could hardly be his own. Bruce's self-awareness of his differential status is strikingly evident in the introductory letters he sent to the highest-ranking Company officials in India. These letters reflect his obligation to account for his presence in the epistolary stratosphere of the East India Company and represent himself merely as Dundas's factotum. Granted by the minister's patronage to address personal letters to Company officials, who were otherwise Dundas's personal contacts and inaccessible to a middling officer, Bruce refers to Dundas in order to overcome the awkwardness of the enormous difference in social status, although in the more transparent language of obsequiousness. The tone of Bruce's first letter to Lord Cornwallis, the outgoing Governor-General in July of 1793, suggests that the historiographer was practically at the mercy of two nobles, Dundas and Cornwallis, who could improve the probability of the correspondence and therefore the likelihood of his project's completion. Only Dundas' recommendation could secure Bruce's access to Cornwallis's influence. By way of asking for Cornwallis's assistance in gathering information, Bruce wrote about his deference to Dundas that

As an individual I must even feel it to have been the highest Honor of my life, to have been elected by the Minister for India, to exercise my humble Literary Powers upon this occasion; and I should deem it to be a most valuable instance of his Goodness and patronage, if he should recommend me to your notice, that I might receive your Lordship's instructions, respecting the General History of Indian Affairs.¹²⁴

Deference to Dundas in this letter becomes equivalent to deference to Cornwallis, who needed no instructions about the project's nature; rather, he was invited to instruct Bruce about the appropriate execution of Company historiography. Cornwallis's response never appears in the *Letterbook*, probably because he was succeeded later in the same year by John Shore. Bruce wrote a letter to Shore as the new Governor-General of India, indicating his plans for compiling and publishing "a plan of government," which was to be "a book printed [by the Company] with the Object of affording to the Company and to the nation the fullest information on the Indian interests of the Empire" and that he expected to receive "historical information."¹²⁵ Unlike Cornwallis, Shore received a short tutorial about the meaning of these particular requests:

Here it is necessary to state to you Mr. Dundas's particular object in wishing for these communications. With that public spirit which distinguishes his character, and with that patronage of letters which must carry down proofs of the liberality of his Administration to future times, he has for some years past, employed me in compiling the History of Indian affairs. To render it a Monument of the Era of the British Empire in India, you will, at once, see, that the fullest information is required, and that this Information can only come through the channel of the Company servants who either administer the Branches of the Government in the different Provinces, or are Resident at the Courts of Native Princes and States.¹²⁶

Although it still instructs, this letter operates on an entirely different order of rhetoric from that to Adamson, elevating the recipient as well as the project. The writing of Company-sponsored history in this letter is not the prosaic business of collecting

¹²⁴ IOR, HM 456E, 29.

¹²⁵ IOR, HM 456E, 5.

¹²⁶ IOR, HM 456E, 6.

information on the “diversified Subjects,” prescribed by the historiographer under the minister’s protection. Rather, the project seems much more poetic, and not only because the vague “liberality” of Dundas is exemplified by his “patronage of letters,” of which historiography was one part. This history clearly aimed to use the “letters” as a way to transcend its immediate political context and remain legible to some “future times.” Its task was poetic creation—a textual “monument” to the “Empire,” a much more formidable subject matter than accounting for the “Indian Affairs.”

The letter to John Shore is the only introductory one in which Bruce used the term “Empire” to refer to the scope of his project, and its weight transformed the historiographer’s burden. For “Indian Affairs” to be monumentalized as an “Empire” by a historical text, the project of history indeed had to be oriented towards some “future times,” rather than towards the conventionally expected past. Although it “compiled” historical material, this history posited (rather than divined) a future, or assumed that its future had already arrived when it anticipated the outcome of its research. It was an unstated compliment to Shore’s political vision to declare that he could “at once, see that the fullest information is required” in order to demonstrate that the future had already arrived. The compliment was a substitute for the list of items requested which was delivered to Adamson, and thus the compliment also signaled Bruce’s deference to Shore’s expertise in the matter of compiling Company history, which required that reliable information be directly collected from the area of its operation in the form of “letters.” In this letter, those well-informed about India appear to be the administrators within the Company branches, or those representing Company interest at the courts of its native allies.

“EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE” AS “HISTORICAL INFORMATION” IN LETTERS

Shore wrote back at the end of October 1794; the response must have reached Bruce nearly two years after his initial inquiry. It conveyed to the historiographer that his elegant compliments had been misdirected, and that they would not be reciprocated because, paradoxically, those in India did in fact know better than anyone what the urgent tasks were, and there were more pressing ones than history writing.¹²⁷ Shore suggested to Bruce that his department was drudgery rather than poetry, exposing the compliment he received as formal, gratuitous and ultimately ineffective in inducing him to provide much assistance, since

No man who has an office can be idle in this country, and scientific Researches are within the abilities and Means of few only, much has been done, and Zeal is not wanting, but the Labor of investigation requires more time than the Generality can give.¹²⁸

By rejecting the compliments, Shore could refuse the entire series of logical leaps the compliment was designed to sustain—namely, that the servants employed by the Company were knowledgeable about India in the way Bruce had assumed; that their knowledge could seamlessly transform into the “historical material” to be delivered to London by letter and that they could afford the time to write more.

Appearing in the official colonial archive, the letters in the *Letterbook* share in the archive’s documentary authority, even if they appear on its fringe. However, since these explicitly personalized letters were kept apart from the regular correspondence, the genre of these documents becomes an inevitable lens through which we interpret the historical information they provide. A record of Bruce’s efforts to explain the significance of

¹²⁷ Even with the unfavorable conditions for delivery, this was an unusually slow response. The initial letter to Shore was dated only a day later than the initial letter to Adamson; Adamson dated his first response January 1794. For a discussion of impact of correspondence delays on the British government of India, see Mary Poovey, “The Limits of Universal Knowledge Project: British India and the East Indiamen,” 183–203.

¹²⁸ IOR, HM 456E, 169.

imperial historiography to his correspondents, the *Letterbook* offers a glimpse into the transformation of ideologies of colonization at the end of the eighteenth century. However, it can also testify to the centrality of the epistolary form in the conveyance of plausible information between India and England and the forging of a hierarchical relationship between the two locales. A book of correspondence about historiography, this collection of letters reads as a sustained examination by the letter-writers of the presumed affinities between the writing of history and the writing of letters as two genres capable of capturing and conveying “the evidence of experience” about a colonial domain.

Bruce’s correspondence with his informants sought to garner “historical” information from India, but also to define the substance and significance of history as it related to the East India Company activities at the time. While letters could be used to gather historiographical materials, they also introduced the potential informants to the idea that the history they contained was malleable—a narrative invention serviceable to a particular political agenda. The *Letterbook* thus exposes as fiction the idea that letters, even in the official archive, have served as writing instruments for recording the immediacy of experience or authenticity of information. Bruce’s letter exchange seems instead to have been an occasion to provide instruction about constituting historical experience by way of writing individual letters. It discloses some of the presumptions about the utility of the genre of letters in effecting disclosure of transparent information about the various “personal experiences” that constituted such history as well as India’s place in it.

The *Letterbook* allows us to note the discrepancies among Bruce's various articulations of the project of historiography in the various letters. The letters that Bruce carefully tailored for each recipient deployed a particular version of historical imagination in order to propose that this unexpected and unusual correspondence identified political allies who shared the vision of the future of colonial politics and historiography's role in it. The discreteness of each piece of correspondence and each address could translate the abstract concerns of the nation and the Company to the level of the personal interest for the individual letter-writers. Bruce's letters indicate, however, that they were presumed capable of inventing history. The opening letters, designed to serve as seemingly easy invitations for the informants to participate in the writing of Company history, introduced recipients like Adamson and Shore to a particular inventory of historical topics to be covered. That these items needed including suggested that the range of history interesting to the Company had changed or had never been known before, and consequently that history's relationship to the ostensible Company business was being transformed as well.

According to the specifications sent to Adamson, the new kind of history for which assistance was solicited projected beyond trade into details about "Religions and Manners of the former and present inhabitants" as well as "progressive state of the useful arts, Manufactures and sciences, and of the fine arts."¹²⁹ The rationale of this unusually "cultural" history is given most explicitly in Bruce's letter to one William Franklin, a "subaltern officer" recommended as a good source of information about the Persian language—especially that used in the legal documents of the Mughal empire onto which the British were going to graft their own legal system. Bruce explained to Franklin that

¹²⁹ IOR, HM 456E, 1.

his language skills, acquired over the many years he spent in India, enabled him to “give Fidelity to history”¹³⁰ written in London by recognizing and bringing to light Hindu judicial documents that had been eclipsed by the years of Mughal government. Bruce confidently surmised that transacting the Company’s daily business had already made available the information he was requesting, and that his project was meant to make it apparent. Bruce wrote:

You are aware that neither the System of Political or Commercial Economy, nor the Religion of any People, can be understood, without correct Accounts of their Manners. It is Manners which form a language, and it is from this Language that the Effects of both can only be read. As Manners too appear in private life, not less decidedly than in Public transactions, it is only from local information, and from the Study of the Language in which they are expressed, that a faithful History of any People can be given.¹³¹

Leaping from the study of history as the study of “Political or Commercial Economy” to the study of “manners and language,” across the divide between conventional topics of political history and the daily lives of the “People,” Bruce’s letter invites collaboration on locating information that had been unknown or irrelevant until that moment, but which, as he explained to Franklin later in the same letter, could become “of substantial Political use to the Directors by leading to such measures, as might consolidate the British Sovereignty in India.” The turn to “social” or “cultural” history could demonstrate that India already was an empire of the “People,” whose “manners,” “languages,” and “fine arts” Bruce wanted to study from letters, suggesting that such “manners” of the “People” could make transparent a concept of India not to the traders or the investors alone, but to the “wider public” that Dundas was interested in reaching. The assertion that Company agents perpetually and exemplarily straddled “Public transactions” and “private life” in

¹³⁰ IOR, HM 456E, 142.

¹³¹ IOR, HM 456E, 142.

India posited the Company as the authoritative political and epistemological presence that permeated all spheres of life in India. At the same time, it insinuated that the “private lives” of the Company’s servants and of its apparent native subjects were tightly entangled, a potentially incriminating inference in the light of accusations of “private trading” and bribery against the Company that had brought public attention to its privileges in the first place.

Itemized lists of topics and definitions of historiography draw attention to themselves within the *Letterbook* because their physical presence in the texts emphasizes the philosophy backing Bruce’s project: they are provided in letters whose form canvasses the project’s self-evidence. While the precepts of the new history are explained, the letters which contain them are rife with rhetoric designed to show that the correspondent to whom Bruce was addressing the request had possessed crucial historical information and its correct interpretation even before the letter was sent. Shore and Adamson could therefore “readily” see that a “more complete” history of India could only be garnered from information supplied through the offices of the East India Company and its servants; Franklin was “aware” that his definition of history was in fact the one that Bruce had just sent him. The direct epistolary action of emphatic insistence on pre-existing agreement was to establish that Bruce and Franklin, or Bruce and Shore, readily shared the opinion that connections between the “System of Political or Commercial Economy” and “Religion” or “Manners” were obvious. Contrary to norm, Bruce’s initial addresses to his private correspondents were not extensions or products of their existing close relationships. They served, instead, for Bruce to postulate writing assignments for the privately recommended informants, and to insinuate the desirable

responses. They demonstrated that the ideological necessity of Bruce's project was clear, and served as a pretext to establish the obligation of the recipient to respond personally. The appropriate responses would supply the requested information and use the form of letter to authenticate the new role of history in the transformation of the Company business.

This is why the letters re-articulate the shared ground of interest for each epistolary relationship recorded in the volume and suggest various motives for exchanging more letters. The understanding of personal correspondence in this volume can be said, therefore, not to assume letters to be vehicles of disclosure, but rather to declare them to be such, for the purpose of announcing that "a letter from India" was tantamount to representative "experience" in India and eligible for inclusion in a more plausible "history." The historiographer's objective was then to solicit letters as much as it was to solicit information—that is to say, to improve the odds of receiving information in the form that guaranteed authenticity and reliability; his vacillations among different definitions of history and historiography in letters served to produce a semblance of privately shared interest between him and each of his letters' recipients. In this light the transformations of Bruce's epistolary persona in the *Letterbook* seem less interesting for their ability to demonstrate the insolent imperialism and ambitions of Bruce, his patrons and collaborators, and more interesting as tests of the power of personalized letters among colonial officials to create the fiction of candid private exchange and the obligation to respond.

Bruce surmised in his formally personal letters that the writers he addressed directly had access to the information he required and were willing to share it. His initial

inquiries instantly designated all Company servants under their supervision as qualified and willing contributors to the project of historiography based on “evidence of experience” that had remained invisible until that moment. Declarative agreement with the letters’ recipients on the transparency of connections between “Private” and “Political” business relevant to Company history presumed the capability of all men posted in India to use correspondence to report on their “experience” in India and avail the Company of a “fuller,” more realistic picture of the colony. The transparency of “private” historical information was therefore equated with a presumed transparency of relationships that letters established between their writers. Suggesting that the substance of this knowledge was shared and circulating within the Company, Bruce implied that ready disclosure and responsiveness defined Company correspondence, and that uninterrupted traffic of letters stood for obligingness and cooperation. The *Letterbook* reveals that Bruce’s and Dundas’s project of compiling a comprehensive historiography was in part a project postulating candor as a defining quality of correspondence. But it was also a project that presumed a functional and earnest system of official correspondence through which reliable personal and historical information could be gathered; a smooth exchange of letters could demonstrate the transparency of Company activities and accountability of all of its agents.

The *Letterbook*, which preserves individual letters exchanged between Bruce and his informants as testaments to their responsiveness, also offers opportunities for examination of letters constitutive of a system of exchange as evidence of shortcomings and abuses of this machinery of authentication for information about the colonies. The shifting terms of exchange of information between Bruce’s initial letters to Adamson and

to Shore (for favors or for glory), Bruce's repeated references to Henry Dundas's patronage and emphatic insistence on a pre-existing agreement between him and the correspondents about the project's purpose and relevance, indicate that the historiographer did not anticipate the official pretext for writing to lighten the burden of additional correspondence or increase the likelihood of disclosure. The personalized letters rather show that the form in itself had limited power to obligate the recipients to indulge the sender with a response, and that the letters' official status in the instance of this correspondence would have had to be established rather than presumed.

The importance of the format of the *Letterbook* is then in its ability to preserve the contradictions implicit in the historical definitions Bruce was offering to his informants, each one designed to propel the individual line of correspondence, and to compromise clarity of evidentiary criteria across the volume. A clear hierarchy of worthy sources or informants never emerges from the *Letterbook*. Instead, Bruce's definitions of valuable contributions range from applications for "literary" materials about legal matters and fine arts to requests for the "evidence of experience" acquired through empirical observation, surveys of Indian geography or interactions with commercial representatives of the "natives." Several correspondents supply their own hierarchies of value for sources of historical material of relevance to the East India Company in 1793.

The role of correspondence was to mitigate the political pressure involved in keeping historiography embedded in elusive empiricism. Bruce explained to Alex Adamson that his work would be divided into the "Commercial and Political Branches," which were "interwoven" to the degree that they could only be explained only by references to "facts on which they both depend," and in which Adamson was

“experimentally instructed.”¹³² Adamson’s experience, the historiographer claimed, would be crucial in distinguishing between the wisdom of “practical merchants” from the schemes of a “speculating commercial economist[s].”¹³³ Bruce articulated similar statements about the value of personal experience as historical evidence in other letters, and then stated the efficacy with which such experience could be retrieved and conveyed to England by way of letters. Writing in January 1794 to “J. Wilford of the Engineers,” an informant recommended by Governor Jonathan Duncan of Bombay as a particularly suitable source of information, Bruce put premium value on Wilford’s local, first-hand experience in India and used it as an excuse for intrusion by letter:

I am fully aware that in breaking in upon you, with my applications, I place you in an awkward predicament of interrupting your valuable researches, but when you consider that it is only from such men as yourself who unite solid Learning, with local information, that I can look for such evidence, as I can rely on as a literary man, I trust, your knowledge of my object will be deemed, by you, my apology.¹³⁴

The letter smuggles into the seemingly social negotiation over data access an implicit hierarchy of contributions to the new volume of history, so that Bruce, as a “literary man” was in the position of “dependence” on the likes of Wilford, who could provide exclusive and indispensable sorts of information and permit Bruce to produce the kind of history that was more valuable than those already available. An imposition on Wilford’s time and an intrusion into his epistolary space, Bruce’s letter was also a declaration of Wilford’s responsibility to avert Bruce from straying in the representation of his “object,” which was somehow Wilford’s own.¹³⁵

¹³² IOR, HM 456E, 75.

¹³³ IOR, HM 456E, 150.

¹³⁴ IOR, HM 456E, 115.

¹³⁵ Bruce’s “discussion” of valuable historical sources maps interestingly onto current debates about the agency of “native informants” in the formation of “colonial knowledge,” i.e., in making possible the transformation of Company business into a form of government and in enabling imperial historiography.

Bruce explained to Eyles Irving, a Company representative in China, that the goal of his project was to winnow away the unreliable histories already on record. Mindful of its destination, the letter could not demand first-hand experience from India, but Bruce used it to illustrate the gap in the evidentiary standards between the historical materials he was after and those already at his disposal. Complaining that he was “possessed only of the imperfect observations of voyages and of missionaries, or of the commercial details to be found in the Company’s records,” Bruce claimed that Irving would “readily feel, that more faithful and full evidence is required”.¹³⁶ The distinction between the reliable and the unreliable sources of information here clearly hinges on a hierarchy of available genres organized around their value as historical evidence (whose “failures” of realistic representation have been the subject of a lively discussion among literary scholars and historians).¹³⁷ Bruce includes “commercial details” reported to the Company as equally

All of Bruce’s potential informants were obviously British, and his position in London implies a level of abstraction in his approach to the writing of history in which the actual native informants (speakers and writers of local languages, accountants, messengers, or other mediators), crucial for the survival of the Company as a trading body, make not even a cursory appearance. Seen in this way, the *Letterbook* may provide an intimation of what Nicholas Dirks called the “crimes of colonialism” in reference to the dissipation of historical materials collected in India by Company’s surveyor Collin Mackenzie. Dirks argues that Mackenzie’s collection was purged, and native contributions and contributors overlooked; such a sanitized archive now limits the possibilities of historical writing. By contrast, Phillip Wagoner suggests that Mackenzie depended entirely on his native assistants for gathering such an extensive collection, which has provided the material basis for later studies published by orientalists in Calcutta, and the inspiration for structurally similar surveys of India. See Dirks, “The Crimes of Colonialism: Anthropology and the Textualization of India,” 170; Wagoner, “Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge.” In this respect, the “orientalists” and the primary researchers like Wilford and Mackenzie could be seen as “dependent” on the native informants to different degrees, but interested in their input nonetheless. The orientalists among Bruce’s correspondents suggest various hierarchies of sources: Shore is willing to procure historical texts, but has no time for the “idleness” of research; Duncan offers to procure some translations of his own, but still recommends Wilford as the kind of informant perfectly suited to supply Bruce’s project with relevant information. IOR, HM 456E, 23.

¹³⁶ IOR, HM 456E, 56.

¹³⁷ For literary interpretations of travel narratives, see Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous orient: fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785*; Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the aesthetics of travel-writing, 1770–1840*; Kate Teltscher, *India inscribed: European and British writing on India, 1600-1800*; Katherine Turner, *British travel writers in Europe, 1750–1800: authorship, gender, and national identity*; Jean Viviès, *English travel narratives in the eighteenth century: exploring genres*, trans. Claire Davison. For a particularly insightful survey of travel narratives as historical sources for students of the eighteenth-century European imperialism, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*.

irrelevant to the history he was writing, a surprising limitation contradicting the list of historical topics in the first letter to Alex Adamson, which specifically requested information on the “commercial history of the Countries within the Company’s limits.”¹³⁸

Bruce complained to Governor Duncan that every day he felt “obstructions in his way” at the East India House because the kind of information usually received and retained at the Company headquarters in London hardly helped his pursuits. In effect, Bruce claimed, “historical information” was routinely disregarded by the Company:

At the India House, the Records have hitherto been preserved, in so far only as they regarded the commercial and political Interests of the Company, while the Historical Documents which have been sent to them, from time to time, have been regarded as unproductive Lumber and taken away by the Director of the Day or lost among the undigested Mass of their Papers, so that ‘till I come into possession of my Office, the difficulties at the India House must remain, nor are these advantages at the India Office by any means what might be supposed.

The Communications on Historical Subjects sent to it are few and coming as detached paragraphs in letters frequently pass unnoticed. Under such circumstances and with my attention directed to the diversified enquiries at the State Papers Office which occur in these troublesome times, I have been able to do little more than to collect few materials from my Literary Friends and to endeavour through the Company’s servants who are at home to obtain information from their friends who are in the East.¹³⁹

Somehow at odds with those of the Company whose history he was hired to record, Bruce’s “historical information” was being treated as “unproductive lumber” and discarded by those privy to the content of the papers arriving from India, a treatment explained (as Bruce indicates) by paper overload in the “immense writing machine” that was the East India Company.

As if to contradict his own philosophy of historiography, Bruce mentions in several letters, including the one to Adamson, that were he not able to gather information from an original or empirically-informed source like Wilson, he would resort to the best

¹³⁸ IOR, HM 456E, 1.

¹³⁹ IOR, HM 456E, 137.

available substitute—the “literary” men and texts. These informants were the acclaimed “orientalists,” renowned for their interest in the land and its “manners” beyond their utility for trade, as well as for their knowledge of local languages.¹⁴⁰ In the letters to the highest ranking officers, many of them prominent “orientalists” in London before entering Company service, Bruce implores to be “forgiven” for the “liberty” of a personal letter to a person with whom he had no formal acquaintance, as an address from one “literary character”¹⁴¹ to another, invoking the shared “literary” interests not as *carte blanche* to barge into strangers’ correspondence, but as an intellectual cause whose importance superseded concerns about busyness and the formality of social norm.¹⁴² When John Shore, an orientalist, finally offers to procure for the historiographer texts on “the State of the Arts and Princes, and of the Manners of the Natives,”¹⁴³ Bruce eagerly responds that he would “most anxiously look forward” to such a contribution “because having such a Standard, I can by it measure the value of the materials on those subjects, which I have been collecting.”¹⁴⁴ To claim otherwise would have been socially unacceptable for Bruce. Predictably, then, to the most prominent orientalist scholar, Sir

¹⁴⁰ The Asiatick Society gathered gentlemen who were both employed by the East India Company and wished to inquire into “the history and antiquities, the arts, sciences and literature of Asia.” The first volume of *Asiatick Researches*, the “publication of the Asiatick Society” (iii), lists as Society members Charles Earl Cornwallis (Governor General), John Shore, and two other members of the Supreme Council, Sir William Jones (justice of the Supreme Court), and a range of other characters from Bruce’s *Letterbook*, including David Anderson, Jonathan Duncan, Alexander Hamilton, Lieutenant Francis Wilford, Charles Wilkins etc.

¹⁴¹ IOR, HM 456E, 40.

¹⁴² Duncan responded that although he recognized the “goodness” of Bruce’s “flattery,” he had “but very few and slender pretensions to be ranked in that List,” mainly because his occupations in India had left him “hardly any opportunity or leisure to indulge that degree of propensity, which I have occasionally felt towards researches into the History and Antiquities of India,” IOR, HM 456E, 195.

¹⁴³ IOR, HM 456E, 88.

¹⁴⁴ IOR, HM 456E, 88. Devoney Looser explains that the increased visibility of women as writers of history in the late eighteenth-century was a result of similar changes in the understanding of historiography as a writing practice that required research into “social history” as well as an interest in “language and manners.” Historiographers no longer needed public experience because history was not for statesmen only—it was more engaging to the public, implying a responsibility for knowledge of history as well as for participation in its composition. See Looser, *British women writers and the writing of history*, 9–16.

William Jones, the chief justice of the Supreme Court at Calcutta, Bruce defers that it would be “perhaps improper” to specify historical subjects “to so able a Judge of what is required in such a work.”¹⁴⁵ Other contacts, such as Adamson, could be used to provide further access to information and contacts by bridging gaps in personal access to valuable correspondents. One such was Sir Charles Vere Mallet, whom Adamson had recommended, and Bruce would have addressed himself, except that, “on reading your letter if I did not think, that your requests, in my behalf, would be more attended to, than my application from myself.”¹⁴⁶

Rather than request information about past or present, in some letters Bruce explicitly desires his informants to speculate on the future (i.e., the expansion) of commercial and political influence of the Company and the British nation.¹⁴⁷ This is why he is occasionally forced to acknowledge that the Company-sponsored project about “Indian affairs” permits a large margin to its definition of “experience.” Writing to Lord Macartney, a former administrator in India who was sent on a mission to Beijing to explore the possibilities of the Company’s expansion into the Chinese market, Bruce has to avert the foreseeable criticism of “considerable forwardness, in so far as regards India, it is to await the Information respecting China etc.”¹⁴⁸ Bruce thus explains away the epistolary intrusion on his part by presuming the shared understanding of the “liberality” of Dundas’s idea (that the Company situation in China would be relevant to the “public plan” he is working on) and invoking Macartney’s “power” to move the information

¹⁴⁵ IOR, HM 456E, 9. Interestingly, the original letter to Jones is not included in the volume, but only as an attachment to the letter to John Shore, which may have been meant to demonstrate both Bruce’s meticulousness about the project and his observance of social norms in addressing his superiors.

¹⁴⁶ IOR, HM 456E, 75.

¹⁴⁷ Amales Tripathi argues that the Indian trade was largely unprofitable, but remained the only channel for returning the investment to England, and of securing the investment and revenues in China. See Tripathi, *Trade and finance in the Bengal Presidency, 1793–1833*.

¹⁴⁸ IOR, HM 456E, 24.

towards London. Similarly, taking advantage of the climate of friendly epistolary cooperation he had established with Duncan, Bruce re-defines the kinds of “historical” information required. As Duncan was already in the west of India, Bruce meditates in his letter, he could check, with the “embracing” interests of the state and the East India Company in mind, whether any of his “Marine or Traders happen to be acquainted” with the “East Coast of Africa from Algora Bay, to the Straits of Babelmandel,” since such information would be “most acceptable to Government.”¹⁴⁹

THE LETTERS SHARED AND THE LETTERS KEPT: PRIVATE LETTERS IN A PUBLIC ARCHIVE

Bruce’s insistence on the impermeability of social relationships to the power of unsolicited letters invites a method of reading which permits letters, aligned into individual strands of correspondence, to elucidate the individual relationships which developed between the historiographer and his most frequent correspondents over the years he worked on the project. Since these letters appear in the official archive, they incite a particular kind of the “fantasy of revelation,” enticing the belief that they could lay bare the actual motives and mentalities of late eighteenth-century professional British imperialists.

That the status of Bruce’s letters could vacillate precariously between “official” and “private” we can read from the surfacing of private matter seemingly irrelevant to the project of historiography. For instance, Alex Adamson apologized to Bruce in 1797 for initiating the two-year hiatus in their previously regular and amicable correspondence, explaining that, after his “best of wives” of only several months had died, he was seized by such deep despondence that he became unable to work or write anything at all for an

¹⁴⁹ IOR, HM 456E, 127.

entire year.¹⁵⁰ Bruce later wrote to Adamson that he was suffering from the same sort of dejection upon receiving the news of the death of his brother.¹⁵¹ Colonel Bruce, in military service in India, had previously appeared with much frequency in Bruce's letters as his carrier of choice for the most important letters. Although claims to Colonel Bruce's reliability appear convincing in the absence of a regular postal service between Britain and India, John Bruce's coincident complaints about his brother's difficulties in advancement through the Company's military service suggest that the personal pickup and delivery may have provided his brother with excellent opportunities to make himself known to the most prominent Company officials. The first response from Governor Duncan, who promised to have the pleasure of sending his materials "either myself, or thro' your Brother the Colonel (with whom I have the pleasure to be acquainted),"¹⁵² indicated both that John Bruce's plans for his brother did not go unnoticed, and that in this particular instance participation in the epistolary traffic would have little impact on the Colonel's career.

The most striking proof-text about the writers' knowingness about opportunities for manipulation of letter-writing conventions in the *Letterbook* emerges from the epistolary relationship between Bruce and Philip Dundas, Henry Dundas's nephew, and a likely beneficiary of Home secretary's rumored ability to find professional assignments for many members of his family and various other Scottish gentry impoverished by loss of land revenue. Always topically relevant to "Indian affairs," the continuance of correspondence between Bruce and Philip Dundas, his most diligent assistant in India,

¹⁵⁰ IOR, HM 456E, 175.

¹⁵¹ IOR, HM 456E, 145.

¹⁵² IOR, HM 456E, 195.

extends the ambit of official correspondence not to the details of personal lives, but, rather, to a self-reflective gaze on the process of letter-writing within the Company.

The basis of continuing correspondence between Philip Dundas and John Bruce was the trouble with commissioning letters about history from experience, or the trouble with procuring them from informants suspicious about the intentions of such inquiries and the letters' ultimate use. At once, this correspondence dramatizes the assumptions about letters as a means for establishing relationships of trust (since it allowed one to develop between Bruce and Dundas) and de-naturalizes the role of correspondence as a self-evident and artless mode of communication between people and distant locations. Bruce and Dundas took the letter to be a means for divulging sensitive information between dependable individuals, but also to be a form of writing whose power to bear out veracity could itself be used to proffer obscure information and transform it into history.

From the very beginning Bruce addressed Dundas as a special confidante whose discretion could be depended on:

Imitating great men, though myself an humble one, I have herewith enclosed my public dispatch. You can use it, by giving it that degree of importance which perhaps is necessary to insure the objects in view; but with me, laugh, when you read it, and consider this private communication as the real measure, in which I take the liberty to address you.¹⁵³

There were therefore two tracks in their correspondence: one was its use as a recruitment tool with the Company servants under the supervision of Philip Dundas; the other, meant for Dundas's eyes only, was its use by Bruce to comment on the progress of the project. Bruce suggested that Dundas "must add" to his inferiors that "the information they afford will be laid before Mr. Dundas, the Board and Directors—Selflove, which guides us all,

¹⁵³ IOR, HM 456E, 51.

may secretly work them up to efforts.¹⁵⁴ In closing, Bruce wished Dundas to “believe me, without silly Compliments or apologies for this address, which we both equally dislike” his “with Esteem.”¹⁵⁵

Dundas’s response to Bruce’s first inquiry discloses information that was unlikely to be the kind that the historiographer could use to build a monument to the British Empire in India. From his station in Bombay, Dundas wrote that his seemingly innocuous inquiries commissioned from London about “historical information” among the Company servants (expected to possess it from “experience”) were not producing the desired results. The tone of Dundas’s explanation for their reticence seems more one of objective observation than one of surprise:

For these four years past the Government of this part of India, appears to have been carried on, in so loose and desultory a manner, that it hardly deserves the name of a system, while among the individuals of the Company’s service, he is most looked up to, who has been most successful in peculation from his Employers, and has, unpunished, approached nearest the line of detection without crossing it. __Among people conscious of this, every enquiry proceeding from a stranger like myself, is listened to with jealousy, and answered with utmost caution, are the more so, after what Mr. Dundas said of the Bombay Government, on the opening of the India Budget, just before I left England; I have not a doubt, but that with new Men, new measure will be pursued, for which reason, I most anxiously look for the arrival of Mr. Duncan, our new Governor, and I believe that most people here look for that event with equal anxiety, altho’ from very different motives; __when it does take place, perhaps I shall be then no longer looked on as a Spy (which I understand is the name I go by) but shall have my enquiries answered, and thus be enabled to give you some information.¹⁵⁶

The letter was an opportunity for Dundas to sketch explicitly for Bruce a picture of the process of information gathering being implemented among those designated in Bruce’s letters as his historiography’s most valuable contributors. Rather than the best informants,

¹⁵⁴ IOR, HM 456E, 52.

¹⁵⁵ IOR, HM 456E, 54.

¹⁵⁶ IOR, HM 456E, 181. Dundas complained repeatedly that he was receiving no information in response to his inquiries, and suggested that it was either “indolence” or reluctance to communicate that prevented his informants from disclosing their information. “I get such answers,” Dundas compared, “as a Tradesman does from his Debtor, when dunning him for payment.” IOR, HM 456E, 216.

the Company servants appear for Dundas to be the greatest impediments to the project's completion. The scene of "desultory government" suggests that these informants could potentially become providers of harmful information, namely, information about their successful and undetected peculation from their employers, exposing the ambiguity of successes to be monumentalized. Such informants would, in fact, be silent at their most desirable. Disclosure about the lack of cooperation among Company servants could have revealed to Bruce the unfeasibility of his project. The revelation about the effects of general disclosure about British activities in India in the past is daring: even if it were practicable, a "fuller" knowledge of the details of British dealings in India could have been counterproductive and even unwelcome in London.

The letter records with equal intensity, however, Dundas's comfort in sharing with Bruce his faith in the power of the new political "measure" devised in London, embodied in the new governor, Jonathan Duncan, and his known predilection for projects like Bruce's, first to allay the problems of government in India, and then to reinvigorate his investigation and flush out information. The letter reveals that Philip Dundas was himself a "stranger" to those who were working alongside him in India and had the information he desired. Their lack of proper acquaintance with him represented an obstacle to Bruce's history writing, imagined as an effort to compile just such contributors' reports. The letter's confident reference to the hope that the new Governor would change the climate of secrecy and suspicion shows that the two correspondents were of one mind about the likelihood of his support for the new colonial policy, of which Bruce's project was one important segment.

Dundas's offer of irony about the "different reasons" for "anxiety" with which Duncan's arrival is expected binds him and Bruce most strikingly into a privately shared understanding of the distance between private and official letters. More than anonymous agents of the new colonial policy, they remain secure in the confidentiality of their exchange within the invasive environment of official letter-writing and surveillance, and ironic about the power of epistolary sincerity to generate evidence of Company's success. Acknowledging Dundas's irony in his response, Bruce indulged the arrogance with which Dundas had invoked the impenetrability of their private communication. To show that he knew how much their privacy depended on their proximity to the sources of power, Bruce shared with his correspondent the knowledge that "The Spy, I trust, will soon become the Councillor."¹⁵⁷ Instances of irony, or even humor, in Bruce's correspondence induce temptation to treat these "flights of fancy" as signs of enjoyment of the process of letter-writing and as proofs of intimacy and honesty between correspondents—qualities we commonly expect from private letters. Alluring as handles on comprehension that readers of the archive could share with the archival correspondents, these writers' awareness of East India Company's criminal practices could be construed as incipient resistance to imperialist politics; the peripheral location in which the *Letterbook* finds itself could corroborate such a reading.¹⁵⁸

It is, however, difficult to apply to these letters the kind of argument that Mary Favret made in *Romantic Correspondence* for the value of personal letters as historical

¹⁵⁷ IOR, HM 456E, 111.

¹⁵⁸ A particularly tempting example in the *Letterbook* is Bruce's exchange with Adamson about a group of Liverpool merchants and their attempt to challenge East India Company's monopoly on trade with India. Adamson asks Bruce to supply him with his writing on the topic because it gives him "Instruction and Amusement" to read about the "deluded men" who believed enrichment in India resulted from "exportation of goods." IOR, HM 456E, 212. See Margery Sabin's *Dissenters and Mavericks: Writings about India in English, 1765–2000* for examples of temptation to treat perspicacity and irony about imperialism expressed in private correspondence as politically relevant or efficacious dissent.

documents in the historical writing of women (and Helen Maria Williams specifically), which reveals “sentimental subjects” rather than “subjects in law” (or, rather, in ideology)—the truthful representations of voices of oppressed figures, who could procure unorthodox, alternative understandings of relevant historical events and narratives.¹⁵⁹ They rather provide clear indications that this epistolary convention was being used to produce evidence of transparent and successful business operations and burgeoning empires.¹⁶⁰

A “literary character” whose help would be indispensable, Governor Duncan was eagerly expected as the ideal kind of informant: knowledgeable about India and powerful enough to enforce information gathering. Still, if the damaging nature of information that servants possessed were no mystery, was he not set to engender systematic opposition and obstruction among those whose experiences he was sent to govern? As he continued to await the new Governor’s arrival in Bombay, Dundas sent another status report to Bruce, insisting on the transparency of his correspondence with the historiographer. The regularity of his letters mirrored the reliability of his efforts to gather information and recruit informants in India:

I have made, and still continue the most anxious enquiries to enable me to fulfil the commission you gave me, in your letter of 27th May 1794; but as yet, without any success; people here are too much taken up in minding their own private Concerns, to attend to any Request, from an individual, unless he possesses the power of *commanding their Correspondence*. — When our new Governor arrives, I will do what I can, to

¹⁵⁹ Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, 47.

¹⁶⁰ Other letters between Bruce and Dundas suggest that they may have enjoyed showing off to each other the ability to write entertaining letters, as if they were writing to actual friends. Upon Duncan’s delayed arrival, Dundas wrote to Bruce that “He arrived here on the 27th of last Month, having been detained on the Malabar Coast much longer than he expected, by the employment which the Roguery of some and the Stupidity of others had cut out for him.” IOR, HM 456E, 214. Bruce’s letters also ventured into potentially dangerous humor for a publicly accessible document, where he reported, for instance, that he had given a copy of a manuscript to “Gen. Frances, who you know, has gone to civilize the Dutch and the Hottentots, and probably may some day move further East, where civilization is not as much wanted...” IOR, HM 456E, 154.

interest him in the different objects of your enquiries, and then something effectual may be done.¹⁶¹ [emphasis mine]

The letter acknowledged that the presumed transparency of the epistolary method constituted the greatest obstacle for the project: letters were its problem as much as they were an enabler of communication. Requests for personal correspondence exposed the letters' conventional relationship to the ideas of transparency and willing cooperation as fiction. This is why Dundas's hopeful outlook relied not just on the Governor's power to extract facts and "objects" from Company servants, but, rather, on his ability to induce Company servants to produce letters as the desirable kind of historical information in the appropriate form of authenticity. The value of information contained in the commanded letters becomes then a function of the letter form, rather than of its content: the kind of history for which empirical data may not exist, except as letters extracted from India—as the official archive.

Lest we should construe the likes of Bruce and Dundas as "dissenters and mavericks" (Sabin 3) of early state colonialism, and explain their letters' marginal position in the archive as an effect of their subversive activity, we should learn more about the way genre conventions organized practices of documentation and later played into the design of categories—letters, biographical notes, dispatches, minutes—around which the archive now structures its power.¹⁶² While the reluctance of Bruce's informants

¹⁶¹ IOR, HM 456E, 178.

¹⁶² Mary Favret explains that the moment of publication is crucial for understanding the difference between private and public letters, those interpellating "sentimental subjects" as different from those addressing "subjects in law." Parallels between the institution of publication with the ostensible accessibility of the archive are worth exploring further. For Favret, "When letters become Letters, potential agents of conflict become convenient posterboard fictions, characters in the political imagination. In short, the function of interception and publication replaces the sentimental subject with. . . 'subject in law,' inscribed in an ideologically 'authentic history,'" 47.

to respond might be explained by the novelty of triumphalist, jingoistic colonialism¹⁶³ and a lack of appreciation for the relevance of imperial historiography to their jobs in India, the *Letterbook* offers novel ways to understand epistolary conventions as the engine of authentication of experience by writing in a genre reputed for candor and capable of institutionalizing evidentiary norms. Even as the *Letterbook* makes clear that Bruce and his historiographic project did not command universal interest or respect in late eighteenth-century Company politics, it speaks to a knowledge shared among the letter-writers that the letter could be historiography's most desirable accomplice, capable of granting texts the status of empirical data; its power of authentication bred suspicion that letters interfered with relationships of trust, and consequently with the creation of trustworthy historical documentation.

It may be the paradoxical tension between the writers' knowingness about the duplicity of letters and the letters' centrality to Bruce's project that accounts for the *Letterbook's* peripheral location in the archive, whose classificatory layout reflects the degree of documents' compliance with evidentiary norms. Or it may be the declining interest in India among Britons at the turn of the nineteenth century:¹⁶⁴ Dundas succeeded in passing the Charter Bill through the Commons "with a quietness unexampled in the annals of Parliament," after discussions almost entirely ignored by the newspapers.¹⁶⁵ The *Letterbook's* status as a collection of official correspondence (that could potentially go through numerous hands before it reached the addressee) defies the possibilities of knowing a sincere, "sentimental" subject as distinct from one subject to the rule of the ideology that instituted and organized the official archive. We could therefore wonder

¹⁶³ P. J. Marshall, "Cornwallis Triumphant," 62.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 3.

¹⁶⁵ Philips, 78.

whether the ironic voice of Philip Dundas could be our most valuable aide in historical interpretation (since his letters could have been private and sincere) as long as we also remember that he was a master practitioner of the conventions of the epistolary form and its ability to produce the semblance of unmediated personal, professional and historical information of the sort that the historiographer desired and described.

In my inquiry into the connection between protocols of writing personal letters and historiography, the letters shared and the letters kept, I take the “official” status of the *Letterbook* to be a matter of evaluation which bears on our understanding of the official archive’s formation as a repository of reliable historical documents. As an invitation to examine the textual criteria used in producing evidence, and especially official evidence, in the eighteenth century, this essay is meant specifically to encourage articulation of a range of critical perspectives on the power of genres to organize practices of documentation and historical interpretation. Engaging in this case with the relevance of archive’s formal qualities for the status of its historical documents and claims, an inquiry of this kind opens up venues for investigation of the power of genres to canonize texts as transparent disclosures about the past and invites more scholarship that would study the emergence of textual forms of knowledge and experience in the eighteenth century across disciplinary divides.

The *Letterbook* calls for a reading of the manipulations of letter-writing conventions in the *Letterbook* and of the power to command correspondence about history as a record of the relationship between coercion by the letter and coercion by history as two analogous processes of constituting eighteenth-century genres of evidence and of the “personal experience” of historical subjects. Unlikely to believe that imperial

historiographers and letter-writers were on their knees, Writing! like Richardson's Lovelace, literary scholars in particular can provide crucial tools of interpretation for documents of eighteenth-century empires, their archives and beliefs about writing that made their consolidation possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S FRIENDS AND BOOKS' LOVERS: THE POLITICS OF GENRE
 IN CATHARINE MACAULAY'S *A HISTORY OF ENGLAND IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND*
 AND JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

We cannot venture to establish an opinion on the state of a country not yet recovered from the convulsive struggles which every important revolution must occasion. We can gain no light from history; for history furnishes no example of any government in a large empire, which, in the strictest sense of the word, has secured to the citizen the full enjoyment of his rights. Some attempts indeed have been made of this kind; but they have hitherto failed, through the treachery of leaders, or by the rash folly of the multitude. But though these circumstances will prevent cautious persons from giving a decided opinion on what may be the event of things, yet they do not so benight the understanding as to deprive the mind of hope. They do not prevent it from seeing that the present complexion of things in France has something of a different aspect from what history, or the state of other countries, presents to our view.¹⁶⁶

St. Hildegard of Mentz, was famous about eight years after, and at the same time flourished St. Elizabeth of Schonua, sister of king Ecbert. The monkish writers celebrate them for their visions, which received the sanction of pope Eugenius III. But we mention them for their historical, didactical and epistolary writings, a collection of which has been published. St. Catherine Senensis also wrote epistles, and various treatises in the dialogue manner, which are now extant, as well as her life, written by Raimund her confessor, a Dominican friar. Whatever was the sanctity of these women, of their learning we have certain monuments.¹⁶⁷

Would it be possible to write a study about Jane Austen as one among several women literary authors? Austen's canonical status is hardly a matter of dispute. One symptom of appreciation of her accomplishment is the abiding interest in her texts among the general public, as well as among literary scholars. About two decades ago, Claudia Johnson explained that Austen's status was a "great anomaly" (xiii). This recognition of a woman's success in the field of great literary art dominated by men constitutes a glaring

¹⁶⁶ Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, on the revolution in France in a letter to the Right Hon. the Earl of Stanhope*. 1791.

¹⁶⁷ Mary Robinson, *Thoughts on the condition of women, and on the injustice of mental subordination*, 1799.

exception in the process of canonization, which studies of Austen's writing have confirmed by continuing to focus almost exclusively on the idiosyncrasy of her work—a system seemingly ruled by an internal logic that is alien to the work of other novelists. Mounted on the themes of domesticity and provincial life, it is also a system formally and stylistically so complicated and outstanding that it forbids comparison to the accomplishments of other women writers.¹⁶⁸ Here I investigate the political and intellectual implications of such hermetic cohesion of Austen's work, whose singularity in the context of other texts enjoying canonical status has been addressed before, but whose relationship with other women's texts competing for canonization (in the league of "great literary art") remains largely understudied.

I read side by side Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a canonical novel of long standing (even if its "authoress" referred to it in the "Advertisement" with some irony as her "little work"), and the *History of England in a Series of Letters to a Friend* written by Catharine Macaulay, the once-famous eighteenth-century woman historian, whose writing (rather than her biography) has begun to receive sustained scholarly attention only in the past decade or so. I bring these works together because they were experiments with the genres to which they ostensibly belong—novel and historiography—which sought to re-think and re-represent the idea that women's reading in particular genres determined women's ability to understand and participate in political life. These two texts specifically engage with the assumption that reading a supposedly domestic and apolitical genre such as the novel rendered the reading irrelevant, or even detrimental, to women's political understanding. Seen in conjunction, Macaulay's and Austen's texts offer us a new way of looking at women's political positions as mediated by their writing and reading,

¹⁶⁸ D. A. Miller's excellent *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* is a recent example of such work.

suggesting interesting new ways of thinking about how productive political activity could be recorded in the late eighteenth century, and how it can be read now.

Emphasizing the significance of what Macaulay has called the “works of imagination” for the possibilities of registering women’s political agency, I show how Macaulay and Austen deliberately and similarly defy the conventional wisdom about the limits of the “public sphere” cultivated by academic discourse.¹⁶⁹ As Carolyn Steedman has noted, the concept has had limited use for historians of women, although the notion of discrete private and public spheres has served as a powerful tool with which to “act effectively upon texts and documents” in order to “produce an account that is evidently much desired by a number of audiences” (Steedman *Lives* 295). The conceptual and historical framework that classified textual materials and genders between such radically separate domains imagined women inevitably tied to the “private” realm, defined as that which resulted from their formal exclusion from places of government, from political relevance, and from history-making. This model has predictably fallen short of explaining the existence of prominent women such as Macaulay, whose lives did not help to reinforce the boundaries of such an “absolutely determining split” (Steedman *Clio* 37). It has remained similarly oblivious or insensitive to the variety of possibilities for representing meaningful life and activity before the advent of political franchise for “women” as a category of historical research.

I couple Macaulay’s historiography and Austen’s novel to demonstrate that women were operating politically “across a wide arena” (Steedman *Clio* 44), contrary to the conventional binary models of private and public genders and genres. Going a step

¹⁶⁹ I am referring here to scholarship across the humanities and social sciences inspired by the historical and conceptual frameworks established by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

further, I show that both texts negotiated the border between the “public” and the “private” genres in women’s writing and reading as political references. The convergence of their politics of genre shows that women’s apparent absence from political life must have been less than a totalizing circumstance. It is also one that requires us to re-think our notions of women’s political action and the relationships among texts with which we document it.¹⁷⁰ We, perhaps too readily, grant novels a particular evidentiary status when we wish to include women in histories of canonical literature. These revisions, however, tend to provide a limited critique of the historical narrative of the “rise of the novel,” in which the “novel” is treated as the genre of privilege to which women spontaneously resorted in order most effectively to represent and intervene in their political concerns (e.g., access to education, property rights etc.).

Austen and Macaulay defy a historical narrative centered on the assumption that there was a genre with distinct political impact such as “the novel,” inviting readers to consider how reading between genres makes them competent to recognize the form and structure of historical and political events. Austen and Macaulay both suggest that women’s reading in “fiction” and “history” occurred in a continuous field of political understanding mediated by text. Since they imagine the borders between the genres by which we usually frame their work to be porous, they grant us license to note that their texts defy the conventional practices of reading in two separate fields. This is to say that I believe, of Jane Austen’s writing, not only that “all subjects lead to” some location of politics proper (Johnson xxiv): I take her writing in a genre at the end of the eighteenth century to be political action in itself. I therefore show how a work by Austen and that of

¹⁷⁰ Carolyn Steedman has characterized such thinking as a necessity to imagine “a wide variety of political thought” and “various theories of femininity” (Clio 44).

another woman writer took the fluidity and contiguity of their genres to be of substantive political import.

Austen's canonical novel and Macaulay's largely forgotten historiography not only differentiate between political disenfranchisement and comprehensive political alienation, but invite further study of the relationships between women writers, between these writers and their readers, as well as relationships among their texts, as politically charged relationships. Hoping to move the question of women's political agency in the eighteenth century beyond the dilemma between histories and novels as good sorts of reading, or women and men as good readers or writers of historiography, I focus on Austen's and Macaulay's participation in the process of constitution—and differentiation—of the genres of historiography and the novel. I put pressure on the parallels between the pedagogical operations of these two women's works, tracing the practices of reading they required readers to master as ways of understanding the political benefits of negotiating the kinship between the two genres. Focusing on the genres' cross-fertilization as a means of articulating political understanding, I would like to bring about the almost unimaginable—a “Jane Austen” comparable to another writer interested in the impact of reading and interpretation on the perceived quality and breadth of women's political interests and actions.¹⁷¹

The proximity of Macaulay's politics to Austen's should also alert us, then, as well, to the evanescence of certain kinds of relevant texts and ways of reading from our

¹⁷¹ See William Stafford's *English feminists and their opponents in the 1790s: unsex'd and proper females* on how admonitions against women's participation in the higher genres—such as history, natural philosophy, and commentary on public controversies in politics and religion—were belied by the approval that critics bestowed upon writing by women that supported their partisan interests. For a counterpoint to the insistence on women's confinement to the “private sphere,” see *Women, Writing and the Public sphere*, a collection which offers several interesting readings of women's engagement with the political valence of genre (e.g., Cliona O Gallchoir on the work of Maria Edgeworth, or Mary Jacobus on “scandalous memoirs and epistolary indiscretion”).

field of critical vision, revealing the necessity of examining the hierarchy of the textual forms of evidence used to account for women's engagement with the politics of gender and genre in the late eighteenth century. Rather than organize our practices of reading around novels as central exhibits for the history of women's writing, we should investigate how the constitution of our reading practices—and the elevation of the novel—has coupled gender and genre conventions in a way that prevents discussions about the interpretive privilege we grant the novel.

Such a history (of collusion) should be of crucial interest to us because these practices of interpretation constitute the class of “women” in histories of literature (as well as culture and society), assuming women's reading and writing to be vehicles of self-representation. They constitute classes and hierarchies of historical documents about women and women's writing, defining the disciplinary protocols of their interpretation and limiting the possibilities of writing women's histories.

MACAULAY'S EPISTOLARY HISTORY: FRIENDS OF LIBERTY, LOVERS OF LETTERS

Macaulay's *The History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time in a Series of Letters to a Friend* proffers itself from the very beginning to be a seamless continuation of a previously private correspondence:

LETTER I.

When you indulged me with the happiness of your correspondence, my excellent friend, it never crossed your imagination, that the *satisfaction* you gave me the opportunity of enjoying would be mixed with any alloy; yet, my friend, it has subjected me to an anxious desire of rendering my letters worthy your attention, and my correspondence the source of your amusement. (1) [emphasis mine]

When she offers her readers insight into a fragment of this long-standing exchange she had enjoyed with her “excellent friend,” Macaulay distracts them for a moment from the

subject matter of history announced in the title. Drawing attention to the fact that it is letters about history her readers are about to peruse, she posits a history of her epistolary relationship as a rationale for the historical writing. Somewhat surprisingly, it was her friend's success in writing letters, and not his failure, that created in the author the "anxious desire" to write back with matching care and attention. The writing of these letters was a necessity, a cure for the emotional pressure her friend had inadvertently caused. But the letters were only the better for it: a reflection of her obligation to the friend to earn his attention and induce his entertainment.

To the rest of her reading public, however, with whom she was formally unfamiliar and who were potentially unfriendly, she seemed unapologetic about sharing her private letters. Even though this history diverged in form from her earlier productions, and from most other historiography at the time, Macaulay provided no formal introduction to the text, which would have explained why letters to friends would be a form for history superior to the more impersonal kinds of prose she used to write. The back-cover advertisement that appeared in this volume suggests that the publishers may have had some reservations about the oddity of Macaulay's procedure. Informing readers that two different editions of *The History of England, From the Accession of James the First, to the Restoration of Charles the Second*, part of the voluminous history which made Macaulay famous in the 1760s, "may be had" in quarto and octavo editions, they announced that "the Materials during the long and interesting Reign of Charles the Second—and from his Death to the Revolution—are preparing by the Author for the Press—to be written in Historical Detail in the Manner of Five preceding Volumes" (456). The discreet note about the "manner" of presenting historical detail could intimate

to potential customers that the volume they were holding was an anomaly of sorts, and soon to be rectified. The second volume of the *History in Letters* was in fact never published. The abrupt ending of “Volume I,” as the extant text is marked, bears only the author’s full name, printed without any concluding remarks to indicate that perhaps the narrative had come to only a temporary halt.

Macaulay certainly had access to earlier models of epistolary history on the market. Oliver Goldsmith’s historical treatise *An history of England, in a series of letters from a nobleman to his son* went through numerous editions between 1764 and 1800, and was even translated into French with the express purpose of being “used in schools” after it was widely used in England.¹⁷² Goldsmith attributed the authorship of letters to a “Nobleman” writing to his son away in college, claiming they showed a superiority of aristocratic style few could aspire to replicate. Goldsmith claimed, as did Richardson when he described his role in the publication of *Pamela*, that he was only the editor of the volume. Claiming for his text the unassailable authority of the gentry, Goldsmith claimed a didactic intention similar to Richardson’s: to make historical (and, hence, ethical) information more palatable and compelling to young readers. For all editions, Goldsmith provided regular introductions explaining that the epistolary form was an answer to the potential boredom of most young readers facing a march of historical facts that was concerned very little with their entertainment. Cognizant of the importance of presenting history as an “interesting text” for the benefit of learners (Goldsmith 5), Goldsmith appended several letters he authored to the collection in later editions, always with the

¹⁷² Goldsmith authored several other histories, of Greece, Rome and England. Interestingly, unlike the epistolary history, these were proffered to be the histories of the respective nations or empires, or “abridgements” of them, and explicitly authored by Goldsmith. This type of history is believed to be the one Austen was mocking in her “juvenile” *History of England*.

caveat that their style was clearly inferior to that of the Nobleman. These attachments provided historical overviews of British historiography and explained that the invention of print prompted a transformation of the historian's role. While the ancients were satisfied with listing events in annals, historians adjusting to the burgeoning print culture had to produce narratives that would endear them to readers who could now escape into other, more exciting genres. It was the narrative interpretation of relationships between otherwise seemingly disjointed historical events Goldsmith believed could hold his readers' attention.

Macaulay provided no such rationale for her choice of the epistolary form. Instead, she promptly plunged her readers into the middle of the correspondence. Our surprise at Macaulay's unapologetic foray into epistolary historiography is partly an effect of her genre's oddity in the supposedly pacific waters of eighteenth-century historiography, most of which appears to be predictably boring "propagandist" reading about the dominance of Whigs or Tories.¹⁷³ The alien feeling the text prompts in today's readers reveals the scarcity of tools with which we can make sense of a document of historiography that runs against our expectations about the distance of historical writing from other genres in circulation at the time. These are private letters by a woman that engage with the history of public, political issues.

Few literary critics have paid attention to the work of Catherine Macaulay as the work of a writer, not just that of a historian of uncommon gender. The sexual scandal which forced Macaulay into a long absence from the scene of late eighteenth-century

¹⁷³ Macaulay herself has been comfortably listed among historians whose interpretations were consistently and unquestioningly supportive of all Whig policies and decisions. Her personal and political connections, and especially her proximity to her brother, the Whig MP John Sawbridge, make it difficult to deny the charge, although her texts, and especially this history, do level accusations against several important Whig political blunders.

women's writing—her second marriage to the relative of her “quack doctor” (Looser Women 120), who was 27 years her junior—resulted in her withdrawal from public life and a scarcity of documentation that could supply us with knowledge of her whereabouts and personal opinions. The scattering of her personal papers continued until recently, resulting in a general lack of recognition of her very name when it appeared on sales lists for auctions and estate sales. It has been common for scholars to surmise the basic details of Macaulay's biography from her contemporaries' correspondence or impressions expressed in various publications.¹⁷⁴ To this day, the most comprehensive monograph on Macaulay is Bridget Hill's biography, *Republican Virago*, titled after the epithet Edmund Burke coined in Macaulay's honor (Hill 65). Although even her contemporaries recognized that she had seen in her day “more of the extremes of adulation and obloquy than any one of her own sex in the literary world” (qtd. in Davis *Two Bodies* 8), Macaulay's anonymity remains somewhat striking.¹⁷⁵

In response to the centrality of gender transgression in the eerie scenario of her vanishing act, the initial work of recovery reflected some of the excesses of Macaulay's career. Drawing attention to the unusual levels of acrimony and glee that characterized

¹⁷⁴ The remnants of Macaulay's personal archive were acquired by a public institution in New York in the early 1990s, through a private auction that never announced, mostly out of oblivion to the woman's past stature, that these papers belonged to a person of interest to the scholarly community. Bridget Hill bases much of her information in the authoritative biography on the personal letters of people who knew Macaulay or knew of her fame and read her work. The discovery of private correspondence between Macaulay and Wollstonecraft, existence of which was surmised from their public (or published) writings, has been hailed as a particularly valuable contribution to the study of women's writing from this period, in the general dearth of Macaulay's personal papers, whose fate was obviously modeled on that of their author. See Bridget Hill, “The links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay: new evidence,” in *Women's History Review* 4.2 (1995).

¹⁷⁵ For an example, see Capell Loft's *Observations on Mrs. Macaulay's History of England, (lately published) from the Revolution to the Resignation of Sir Robert Walpole. In a Letter Addressed to that Lady* (1778), a glowing review of her publication which emulates Macaulay's style.

the smear campaign against her that continued even after she died,¹⁷⁶ feminist scholarship extolled the “exceptional” female person of Catharine Macaulay who merited saving from oblivion on the same grounds that occasioned her spectacular fall. In the process of painstakingly restoring the elusive biographical details of Macaulay’s life, this scholarship found, in her intrusion into the field of political writing rarely frequented by a woman,¹⁷⁷ the reason her hubris was disparaged with redoubled gusto.¹⁷⁸ Her gender appeared to be a sufficient and unquestionable reason for recovery.¹⁷⁹

But the argument for the decay of Macaulay’s reputation by victimization on the basis of gender has been difficult to extricate from an argument for its decay from genre. Macaulay’s historiography was arguably eclipsed by her “body” or her “womanhood,” which eventually spelled out the limits or the cost of her fame; her politically “liberal” views conveniently translated into auguries of her private and sexual “liberality” (Wiseman 189). However, the fate of Macaulay’s female person, whose esteem

¹⁷⁶ Devoney Looser mentions in “‘Those historical laurels which once graced my brow are now in their wane:’ Catharine Macaulay’s last years and legacy” the claims Disraeli made after Macaulay’s about her propensity to deface the historical documents whose contents she disliked. The claims were apparently refuted and shown to have been based on one instance of gossip. For details on the scandal and the visual and textual representations of Macaulay, see Looser’s *British Women Writers and the Writing of History* and Hill’s *Republican Virago*.

¹⁷⁷ As late as 1983, J. P. Kenyon published a book called *The History Men*, discussing the work of various writers who published texts about the past, including Catharine Macaulay. The title’s gender-specific slant was not meant to draw attention to the gender bias within the profession; rather, the “history men” was simply a phrasal substitute of suspicious poetic value for the word “historians.”

¹⁷⁸ Entire collections of mocking “criticism” were published on the poems of questionable quality recited at a private party on the occasion of Macaulay’s birthday. Published letters impersonate her writing voice in addresses to her various “lovers”—intellectual and sexual. See Bridget Hill’s *Republican Virago* for the list of these publications; see *A Remarkable Moving Letter!* published in 1779, for an example of impersonation still attributed to Macaulay in library catalogs.

¹⁷⁹ The quest to preserve the uniqueness of Macaulay’s excellence against the odds of her gender has been a fascinating engine for the preservation of scholarship produced by some of the first women professional textual scholars in history and literary studies. A priceless source of rare references and information about an obscure woman writer, this work also appears to have been written by women who recognized in the pitfalls Macaulay braved the atavism of their own exception. Some of them praise the work of their women forebears in the same language with which they praise Macaulay. For examples, see Lucy Martin Donnelly, “The Celebrated Mrs. Macaulay,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 6.2 (1949), 173–207; and Claire Gilbride Fox, “Catharine Macaulay, An Eighteenth-Century Clio,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 4 (1968), 129–142; and Natalie Zemon Davis, “Gender and Genre: Women As Historical Writers, 1400–1820,” in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*. Ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York, 1980), 153–182.

founded in consequence of her breach of period-specific gender propriety, remained inseparable from the punishment meted out against the legacy of her work of writing. In the general critical climate of increased curiosity about women's texts and investment in their recovery, which successfully restored from oblivion women like Mary Wollstonecraft (whose personal fortune was no better than Macaulay's), it was the kind of writing that made Macaulay highly recognizable and politicized that has long sheltered her from the sight of literary scholars. Even if she was a victim of gender discrimination, her life of prominence and isolation in the all-male corner of the writing market proved "difficult to romanticize" (Looser Legacy 204). The fact that she engaged with little compunction in writing the nationalist and omniscient sort of history that "even Hume took [...] seriously" (Davis Women 168)¹⁸⁰ occasionally inspired scholars to attempt to assess her work of historiography without regard for her gender, claiming that this was the kind of reception and judgment Macaulay herself would have encouraged. Her short-lived compunction about the oddity of women in the role of historians on the literary landscape of late eighteenth-century England has been noted by various critics, who have sometimes, examining her choice of genres and her authoritative voice, suggested that the absence of express concern in her texts for "women's issues," should discourage present-day readers from "misreading" these matters into her texts after the fact, at the expense of the issues she did see as central to her work.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ In this sense, Macaulay might be seen as even more "conservative" than Hume, who, as Natalie Zemon Davis reminds us in "History's Two Bodies," was refused a teaching position in Edinburgh on the grounds of suspicions regarding his "'Heresy,' 'Skepticism,' and 'Atheism'" (8).

¹⁸¹ See Lynne E. Withey, "Catharine Macaulay and the Uses of History: Ancient Rights, Perfectionism, and Propaganda;" J. G. A. Pocock, "Catharine Macaulay: Patriot Historian" in *Women writers and the early modern British political tradition*; and Cecile Mazzucco-Tham, "As Easy as a Chimney Pot to Blacken: Catharine Macaulay 'the Celebrated Female Historian,'" *Prose Studies* 18.3 (1995): 79–104.

Macaulay's epistolary history has been compared to her more famous epistolary work, *Letters on Education*, which was found to be the one "more successfully executed" (Looser Legacy 208); by comparison, the epistolary history appeared "jarringly disconnected" and "rushed" (Looser Legacy 208). *Letters on Education* also appeared to be a more attractive object of interpretation as it saw Macaulay finally acknowledging her interest in the lot of other women, just a year before she died in 1791. An easier formal task, a series of addresses to her fictional female correspondent, Hortensia, rendered Macaulay's feminist intentions transparent. Opinions of the author, who inserted autobiographical asides into her text, became equivalent to the opinions of her silent correspondent, and to those of an entire female constituency whose gender determined their reading diets; Hortensia could not help but agree that systematic exclusion from learning had dire consequences on women's access to political life.¹⁸²

The scarcity of texts by Macaulay that would demonstrate her active and explicit interest in the lot of historical subjects who shared her sex, and the virtual non-existence of private papers of hers that could be used as proof-texts of her ideological convictions about women, rendered the female historian illegible in the familiar terms used to describe the complicated relationships of gender, politics, and writing in late eighteenth-century Britain. The offensiveness or obsolescence of her many known ideological values certainly could help to explain Macaulay's failure to survive in the canon of women's

¹⁸² Macaulay's female correspondent served as a natural recipient of Macaulay's idea that women were consistently denied a good education, a policy which rested on the "natural" separation of women from certain genres of reading and perpetuated their absence from relevant political conversation. Interpretation of such politics as feminist was made easier by Macaulay's revelations of much-desired autobiographical information, in which she lamented her own discrimination from learning. See Macaulay's *Letters on Education*, 245.

writing from the eighteenth century and attract more present-day readers.¹⁸³ As Lynne Withey explains, Macaulay's "uses of history" have limited hermeneutic value for us. Embedded in complicated connections between her Christian beliefs about human perfectability and the practice of historiography as a political tool of moral improvement (Withey 73), the premises of Macaulay's explanations of historical change (or, rather, of lack thereof; her arguments suggested that little had changed in England between the Norman conquest and her time) are entirely alien to contemporary readers, especially those interested in endowing all historical subjects with agency.¹⁸⁴ The implicit antiquarianism of her history, which knew a period of bliss that ended with the Norman invasion, feels equally alien.

Claiming impartiality to "party spirit," that is, a reluctance to tweak historical information in the service of justifying the rule of either party (Davis *Women* 170), Macaulay looked instead towards "liberty" as the horizon of political struggle and history. Partial to the optimism of historical teleologies that envisioned society's ultimate perfection, Macaulay could hardly afford to let historical events "point to a conclusion of their own" (Withey 75). She instead bent their significance to her preconceived moral conclusions about the persistent encroachment upon "liberty" by and lack of "virtue" among rulers and politicians to explain England's sorry political and ethical state. The recourse to "virtue," which she found in some rulers and politicians and not in others, was an ethical, logical, and rhetorical move towards displacing the common ways of writing historical narratives to naturalize Whig or Tory supremacy. Detectable from the

¹⁸³ Her historical interpretations, for example, took for granted (in concert with the rest of Whig historiography) the permanent disenfranchisement of Catholics.

¹⁸⁴ This fact also explains why the emphasis on the interaction of social "forces" and political agents of Hume's *History* helped bring about the endurance of his text.

first volumes of Macaulay's famous *History of England from the accession of James I to the elevation of the House of Hanover*, it was an effort to reshape the understanding of the English past by ushering in the rule of patriotic virtue as a category in political life with relevance beyond the party lines (Wiseman 186) and explain the persistence of "tyranny" (liberty's opposite) in England.

The coming into being of the French and American republics additionally contributed to the obsolescence of Macaulay's historiography, as the new states mounted actual models of enfranchisement which redefined the meaning of liberalism for England. In light of the new kinds of radicalism and conservatism produced by the bourgeois Revolutions, it appeared that "[t]he mental world of Mary Wollstonecraft [wa]s already very different from that of Catharine Macaulay—less classical, less rhetorical, less theatrical," and that "in Wollstonecraft one finds authentic feminism, born of Rousseau, and her own revolt against Rousseau," which belongs to another world than Macaulay's (Pocock 258). Bespeaking a writer who inhabited an outdated historiographical tradition that busied itself with "reproduction of states and not individual citizens" (Wiseman 191), Macaulay's image faded with the prevalence of political relationships which had limited powers of explanation for systems in which the prospect of franchise for all citizens lent new urgency to the issues of gender (Wiseman 191).

The explanation that linked the ability of genres to negotiate centuries or somehow clearly demarcated "historical ages" (such as those before and after the French Revolution) appears particularly convincing in the face of the preservation and familiarity of texts in more conventional genres also written by women whose work survived despite association with sexual scandal. Macaulay's failure to write novels was specifically

identified as the most serious impediment to her survival or revival alongside other women writers with “feminist” interests (Kirkham 6). Although many novel writers were lesser known, even in their own time, their “feminism” was easier to recognize and retrieve because of their choice of this genre of fiction conventionally celebrated for its appeal to women as their favorite expressive outlet and source of identification (Kirkham 7). Versions of this judgment have been corroborated recently, scholars noting that genres other than the novel “did not travel well across centuries” (Looser Legacy 206), a phenomenon that contributed to the forgetfulness of most readers about most writers who did not write novels.

WRITERS OF NOVEL HISTORIOGRAPHY, WRITERS OF LETTERS

The novel has been the kind of prose that “travels” especially well between eighteenth-century women writers and literary critics as a consequence of its privileged status as the genre to which women resorted with particular ease and regularity to address (i.e., represent) what we now perceive to have been political issues (access to public life, property rights, legal independence, etc.). Always an astute type of fiction, the novel appears to be a matter more pliable under critical pressure than historiography, as if intrinsically designed to rejuvenate its own relevance and proliferate its own meanings. However, the retrofitting of this particularly “feminine” fictional form as a historical document at the expense of historiography has not been the subject of much commentary. In the argument that some genres travel through time with less alacrity than others, historical writing serves as a prime example of a clumsy, undead form whose intractability stems from its references’ irremovable entrenchment in the particularities of

their historical age and decrepit ideologies. A quality that would have been regrettable in a work of fiction here helpfully provides readers with unprecedented levels of transparency.

Looking at critical ambivalence about the status of various genres as usable historical documents, my discussion here assumes that, for literary scholarship, life cycles of historical explanations do not overlap immaculately with the relevance of their forms. In tandem with Macaulay's failure to meet the implicit expectation of cohesive linearity in historical narrative (Looser Laurels 206), criteria for her success or failure remain elusive, pointing rather to the scarcity of categories in which we can currently attempt to understand her work of incoherent epistolary historiography. Clearly a strange kind of history, Macaulay's history in letters provides an opportunity to hear more about the actual anatomy of Macaulay's texts and devise new critical tools of literary interpretation of women's texts by tracing the way personal letters re-occurred and re-created themselves for use in genres before (and beyond) historiography and novels, and the ways women put them to politic ends.

On cue from *Northanger Abbey's* narrator, who takes heroines and other narrators with a grain of salt, the author of epistolary history can part ways with the "Catharine Macaulay" who wrote letters to a friend. When the historian introduces readers to her namesake epistolary persona, her familiarity with the private reader of her letters promises to tie the historical narrative across some potential moments of incoherence. After all, she had promised to earn attention and deliver entertainment. However, we do know that the historian was invoking an actual ally; her readers knew it even better. The

“Rev. Dr. Wilson,” named as the friend in the title, had a double in real life who was no imaginary friend to Catherine Macaulay.

Macaulay and her daughter enjoyed the hospitality of his home for the two years leading up to her second marriage, despite suspicions about the propriety of such living arrangements.¹⁸⁵ Wilson was widely known to be an ardent admirer of her work of historiography and a member of the same Whig circle. Just the previous year, he had been luxuriously ridiculed in print for the attention he lavished on Macaulay on her birthday, when he had a statue erected in her likeness in the yard of his church, and odes composed to honor her as Clio, the muse of history.¹⁸⁶ Once he found out that Macaulay was marrying the young William Graham, within months of epistolary history’s publication, Wilson disinherited her and started spreading rumors about her sexual depravity and financial machinations.¹⁸⁷ He threatened to publish their private letters and helped to foment much of the rancor that ultimately contributed to Macaulay’s social demise.¹⁸⁸

We can only speculate about what Macaulay may have hoped to accomplish by this publication in terms of her private relationship with Dr. Wilson, from whom (it appears from Bridget Hill’s interpretation of biographical information) she was already trying to gain some social and physical distance by traveling to France on the eve of that second marriage. Her critics at the time certainly noted their suspicions about the

¹⁸⁵ Wilson was approximately thirty years older than Macaulay and spoke of her in extremely favorable terms, referring to her as “my historian” (Hill 115).

¹⁸⁶ One contemporary critic provided detailed “literary analysis” of the odes on her birthday mired in sarcasm about Wilson’s and Macaulay’s lack of moral compunction regarding the propriety of such excesses. See Hill, *Republican Virago*, for a bibliography of texts that fomented this scandal.

¹⁸⁷ There is contradictory information about whether Wilson continued to support Macaulay’s daughter and whether Macaulay was in fact sufficiently financially independent (or earning enough from the sale of her histories) that Wilson’s rejection was just a symbolic gesture, and her co-habitation thus not motivated by financial need.

¹⁸⁸ See Hill, *Republican Virago*.

partiality of historians who wrote not for the sake of “truth” but for the pleasure of their friends.¹⁸⁹ The formal declaration of commitment to her one devoted reader requires that we take into consideration how details of the private connections of Catharine Macaulay merged with the public life of the “female historian,” whose historical figure already cuts with particular hubris through the available grids of distribution of women’s lives between public and private spheres. A somewhat reluctant subject of feminist biography and historiography, Macaulay as a writer of national history in private letters nudges us to re-consider how inseparable her gender could be from her career in epistolary historiography.

While it is clear that her private choice to re-marry was brought to bear on her professional reputation, it is also beyond denying that Macaulay deliberately put a version of her private persona into public circulation. Making public her personal relationship with a known friend and doting correspondent, she posited for the general readership a particular model of interaction between the writer of national history and the interested public. Her history in letters to a friend allows us to observe the strange interplay she initiated between private letters and historiography when she used her epistolary persona as the authoritative voice of national history. The use of letters created for Macaulay a formal opportunity to presume trust, the fiction that defines the genre of private correspondence, in her readers. Even if the actual friendship between Macaulay and the correspondent, identified by name and recognizable from gossip, had corroded, Wilson could remain a cipher in the literary model sufficient to sustain the relationship between the writer of letters about history and her trusty reader. In the meantime, Macaulay’s anonymous readers could enjoy a flattering identification with the ideal one:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

The virtues of your character, it must be owned, afford a [sic] ample field for literary eloquence; A detail of filial piety in instances the most trying to human fortitude; the supporting an independent temper and conduct in the midst of the servile depravities of a court; the almost singular instance of warm patriotism united to the clerical character; your moderation in every circumstance of indulgence which regards yourself, whilst you are lavishing thousands on the public cause, and to inlarge [sic] the happiness of individuals; the exemplary regularity of your life; your patience and fortitude, and even chearfulness [sic], under the infirmities of a weak and tender constitution; and, lastly, the munificent favors you have conferred on me, are subjects of sufficient power to animate the dullest writer; but these are subjects, my friend, which I am convinced will please every reader better than yourself: And as the love of your country, and the welfare of the human race, is the only ruling passion I have ever discerned in your character, I shall avail myself of this inclination, and endeavor to fix your attention by the interesting details of those causes and circumstances, which have insensibly led us from the airy height of imaginary security, prosperity, and elevation, to our present state of danger and depravity. (2)

While the one ideal reader was identifiable by his individual “clerical character” and “munificence,” this was a volume prepared for him and those who could recognize themselves as the “readers better than [himself].” They shared his “warm patriotism,” “welfare of the human race” and other “ruling passions.” Humoring her readers to think they were as important as her intimate friend, Macaulay took on the obligation to “fix” their attention as if she were only indulging her friend’s. However, the foil of friendship in private letters about history also helped Macaulay to extend the assumption that the letters were solicited and appreciated, rather than foisted upon their recipients. To remind readers of the desirability of her form of historiography—that is, of her letters—Macaulay opens her second one with an expression of gratitude to her friend, who had “paid her many elegant compliments on the unaffected stile of [her] narrative” (30), and grants herself permission to continue undaunted by possible puzzlement about the appropriateness of her “stile.”

Self-congratulating on one level, Macaulay’s reference to her success in “fixing attention” to history by way of letters introduces into the text a formal means of self-reflection on the role of historians as writers, and on historiography as a kind of textual

performance whose “unaffected stile,” in the midst of a glaring affectation of intimacy, was a form of narrative with particular political implications. Much of the context of Macaulay’s writing project eludes us today in the general unfamiliarity of the genre conventions of eighteenth-century historiography. Susan Wiseman has suggested that Macaulay’s work of writing should become a more interesting object of study to us as a textual corpus which occupied a particular place within the politics of late eighteenth-century English republican historiography and debates on women’s relationship to politics (181). Wiseman explains that, when Macaulay came to write it, English republican history was already being caricatured as a self-perpetuating “lineage of tracts” (183) in which the parentage of the self-proclaimed “Critical Historian” of her day could be traced “without Bastardy or Interruption” through a pedigree of authors that reached back to the time of regicide and the failure of the English republic.¹⁹⁰ Aside from the commitment to a political party (the Whigs) that knitted these works together, their lineage resuscitated the vitality of genres believed most appropriately to convey the significance of regicide, the republic, and the restoration (Wiseman 183). While these genres, most notably the memoir and the secret history, privileged texts containing “forensic or eyewitness information” over printed and manuscript evidence, they were the kind of sources that could easily be copied and imitated. Accusations of forgery were common (Wiseman 184), and, if we are to believe Austen’s characters in *Northanger Abbey*, so were the charges of predictability and deadly tedium.

Even Macaulay’s seemingly conventional *History of England*, whose six volumes appeared over a long period that spanned from her days in the limelight to her social and

¹⁹⁰ Wiseman quotes from Grey’s satire in which each writer was “begotten” by his predecessor or model, making the existence of a “critical historian” paradoxical under the circumstances (148).

ideological eclipse, was therefore unconventional in that it shifted the grounds on which English republican historiography and republicanism rested, from uncritical and derivative reproduction of alleged empirical evidence to “sustained and methodologically reinforced” (Wiseman 184) textual interpretation. The results of Macaulay’s detailed readings of a variety of historical documents were, according to some critics, an “intellectual breakthrough for eighteenth-century radicalism” (Smyth 698).¹⁹¹ Foregrounding the relationship of historical textual interpretation to political change, Macaulay created an opportunity for historians to re-read old dictums and historical texts,¹⁹² a decision that enlarged her distance from the legible political alternatives and opened up novel ways of thinking about the horizons of social transformation.¹⁹³ Her differentiation among various modalities of republican order and her recognition that no English party had ever stood for the political ideals of “liberty” helped to “refurbish the language of republicanism” and allow for a “more searching analysis of political structures and imaginative political reform” (Smyth 699). It seems in retrospect that she would inevitably reach her iconoclastic conclusion that the Glorious Revolution was an opportunity missed, rather than the conventionally touted final blow to the absolutist

¹⁹¹ See Bridget Hill, *Republican Virago*; Jim Smyth, “Republicans and Conservatives: British Politics and Ideology, c.1750–1832,” in *The Historical Journal* 37.3 (1994): 697–704; Susan Wiseman, “History, Republicanism, and the Public Sphere,” in *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830*; and J. G. A. Pocock, “Catharine Macaulay: Patriot Historian,” in *Women writers and the early modern British political tradition*, for assessments of Macaulay’s work as a conceptual innovation in the context of eighteenth-century historiography.

¹⁹² Bridget Hill and Christopher Hill published in 1993 “Catharine Macaulay’s *History* and her Catalogue of Tracts,” pointing out how significant the existence of such a document (and such a *kind of document*) is for understanding Macaulay’s philosophy of history writing and the breadth of reference she incorporated into her interpretations.

¹⁹³ Macaulay provided a “comparative” model, using ancient Greece and Rome as republican ideals, whose attraction she discovered while reading about them as a young woman deprived of formal instruction. It was her infatuation through reading that convinced her that exposure to appropriate historical texts from an early age creates unflinching dedication to the ideals of “liberty” she thought these two represented.

monarchy, through an unpopular divergence from the political doctrines and narrative forms through which such a conclusion was perpetuated.

The idiosyncrasy of Macaulay's historiography, even if Hume did find a lot of "whiggishness" in it (qtd. in Davis *Two Bodies* 15), revealed her to be no mere conformist Whig. Her departure from the party line, and especially her insistence on the failure of the Glorious Revolution to meet the ideals of liberty, helped to undermine the ethical basis of Whig supremacy¹⁹⁴ and to alienate her personally from many of her political allies among prominent Whigs.¹⁹⁵ Bridget Hill even claims that the scandal over Macaulay's alleged sexual misconduct was particularly welcomed and fanned by Whigs, many of them Macaulay's former friends, who stood to benefit from destroying the political clout of her historical interpretation along with her personal reputation (104).

Attention to the context for Macaulay's writing among other genres of party-sponsored historiography is thus inseparable from a discussion of her improbable fame and eventual disappearance, which could never be explained away either by particularly egregious biographical detail or by entirely bad historical explanations. The fact that Macaulay's history retained the "causality and argumentation from the seventeenth century" (Wiseman 187), in which the "virtue" of historical agents could form the basis of a historical explanation, contributes to our sense that she found her texts in a line of fire whose source we understand only superficially;¹⁹⁶ we certainly cannot explain it by a

¹⁹⁴ Whigs imagined themselves as the lone bulwark against the radicalism of war, having engineered the Glorious (supposedly bloodless) Revolution, and against absolutist monarchy, having using the revolution to ensure the devolution of the crown's powers onto the Parliament.

¹⁹⁵ John Wilkes, once a great friend to Macaulay and to her brother John Sawbridge (a Whig MP), began to support Wilson in 1778 and produced information about Macaulay's sexual escapades even as his own reputation diminished.

¹⁹⁶ See Carolyn Steedman, "'Public' and 'Private' in Women's Lives" for a critique of historical explanations of women's presence in the public sphere that overlook all motivation, especially religious, not rooted in the assumption that the women fully subscribed to the present-day distribution of social

simple desire to support or denounce a political party, or by a decision to overcome an imagined separation between the private and the public spheres.

The epistolary history thus appears as a particularly fruitful text with which to think about experiments with genre as one outlet for what Susan Wiseman termed the “theoretical bent” (187) of late eighteenth-century republican historiography, i.e., the desire to account for the principles of historical writing as a function of tools available for representing the relationship between the past of individual readers and the “national history” of which they were becoming a part. Engaging with other texts that experimented with “the transportation of visions of republicanism through time” (Wiseman 187), Macaulay used history in a series of letters to a friend as a formal opportunity to air history writers’ concerns in the process of composition. Our distance from Macaulay’s contemporaries’ earnestness about historians’ commission as truth-tellers permits us to focus not only on Macaulay’s politics, but also on her choice of the epistolary form as a vehicle with a particular set of political implications and consequences. A close reading of the text prompts speculation about possible payoffs for Macaulay in establishing for her text a different lineage or literary tradition through positing a relation of commensurability between personal letters and national historiography.

A HISTORY OF FRIENDSHIP AND A HISTORY OF TEDIUM

History in private letters allowed Macaulay to treat historical writing as a staged exchange, “killing off,” to borrow Susan Stewart’s term (6), the conventions of the two

activities between public and private according to standards of professionalism and literacy. See Bridget and Christopher Hill, “Catharine Macaulay and the Seventeenth Century,” *The Welsh History Review* 3 (1967): 381–401, for Macaulay’s ideological and textual connections to the century preceding hers.

genres she was appropriating: private letter-writing and republican historiography. The way Macaulay “exploited” the epistolary form stands in contrast to the “inventive” model Dena Goodman attributed to the French “Republic of Letters,” where “the copied and circulated letter, the open letter, the published letter, and the letter to the editor were uniting a vast web of readers into networks of intellectual exchange that began often in the salons of Paris, but spread outward from them into the four corners of Europe and the New World” (Goodman *Republic* 340).¹⁹⁷ Nor were Macaulay’s letters like the “polyphonic” reports from various unnamed “persons” in Paris that Helen Maria Williams used to provide her English readers with an alternative to British reactionary responses to the French Revolution (Favret 55). These voices left it to the reader of the volume to work out the relationships between events described, but also to conjecture about the relationship between Williams’s “poetic brand of revolutionary sympathy” and her personal reputation for being “intemperate” and “licentious” (Favret 56).¹⁹⁸

Macaulay’s history in letters hinges, in contrast, on the singular narrator, the recognizable figure of the female historian who remains the privileged purveyor of historical information, occupying front and center of the epistolary exchange without ever explicitly acknowledging the “equation between letters and women” (Favret 56), i.e., the particular choice of the epistolary form as a reflection of the author’s female gender. An admitted beneficiary of her “clerical” friend’s pointed “munificence,” Macaulay’s narrator-historian never claims herself to be particularly motivated by her gender, nor does special focus on women in the English past distinguish gender as a factor in her

¹⁹⁷ Goodman also cites Montesquieu as an example of this model.

¹⁹⁸ Favret likens the synthetic effect of these letters to the entries in Diderot’s *Encyclopedie*, which aimed to let “ideas oppose each other,” “shake” the readers’ strongly held beliefs and challenge their habitual ways of seeing (57).

historical interpretation. At the same time, the peculiar composition of these letters raises questions about the possibility of isolating Macaulay's gender from her political relationship to "history" as an oddly politicized *métier* for a woman.¹⁹⁹ Macaulay's invention of an idiosyncratic epistolary style as a reprieve from conventional history does not signal recourse to the "sentimental" or the "feminine."²⁰⁰ Instead, the narrator—or, the namesake of the notorious female historian—parades relentlessly in front of her historical letters and her readers. To see these ubiquitous references to gender in the text opens up alternative ways to read historiography and letters beyond the usual pairings of gender and genre. If we can ask of this text the questions that we would ask of another "authoress" whose invention of narrators and characters we can understand to be in an oblique relationship to her private existence, we can find Catharine Macaulay contemplating, through epistolary history, the stipulations of writing as a political instrument and the constrictions of gender from a distance she gained by deliberately constructing an epistolary public persona.

This text of Macaulay's was a discussion of historiography surrounded by a spectacle of the irrelevance of Macaulay's womanhood; the letters provided her an opportunity not to indulge in alternative criteria for "feminine" historiography, but to sustain a presumably impossible relationship between two oxymorons, a female historian and an obliging male correspondent, whose relationship created an opportunity to observe and comment on the exchange and reception of texts in an atmosphere of trust.

¹⁹⁹ Wiseman does claim that Macaulay was a writer whose reputation was ultimately tied to the change in "meaning of gender and its relationship to the writing of history," and that the "public sphere" transformed after she entered it (182).

²⁰⁰ See Greg Kucich, "Women's Historiography and the dis(Embodiment) of Law: Ann Yearsley, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Benger," in *Wordsworth Circle* 33 (2002): 3–7; and Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence* for interpretations of letters and historiography as women's recourse to formal tools of release from ideological binds.

Disturbingly elitist and righteous on one level, the idea that Macaulay's and Wilson's private political concerns were representative of national ones also offered to the anonymous reader-correspondents a flatteringly inclusive model of involvement in historical reading and the politics to which it referred. Macaulay put up for public consumption the already sullied political and personal reputations of the two named correspondents, in the shape of private correspondence that started *in medias res*, inviting readers to consider the existence of earlier (and inaccessible) private letters as historical documents of a long-standing relationship bolstered by a shared political interest. The readers' ability to read the published letters and understand their smooth transition into the public eye as proof of their historical relevance gestured towards the existence of an outlying "market" of thinkers, political activists and writers whose parameters of thought and action were not entirely circumscribed by the genres dominating the "public sphere." The historian suggested to her "friend" that extensive reading in history was not all that counted as political wisdom:

You have lived too many years in the world, my friend, to be surprized [sic] at instances of royal ingratitude, and undoubtedly have long learned to put no confidence in princes; not do I pretend to tell you novelties, or to have any other end in this narration, but to revive your memory on the facts necessary to connect that train of events which have compleated [sic] the overthrow of the whig [sic] principles, and bids fair to render the government of this country as intolerable a despotism as the Romans endured after the ruin of their commonwealth. (10)

The unconventional format of letters acknowledged the existing competence of readers to draw on their "many years in the world" as sufficient grounds of knowledge about political crises and intolerable governments.²⁰¹ It appears from several of her works that Macaulay saw herself as the readers' self-appointed advocate, announcing in the

²⁰¹ Macaulay's own "personal experience" also played a role in the history (although not as much as in the *Letters on Education*), and she preempted questions about her family's role in the bankruptcy calamities that affected investors in the South Sea "bubble" by mentioning her grandfather's role in it.

introduction to the last volume of her *History of England* of 1783 that her historical texts' consistent and close adherence "to the purest principles of civil and religious freedom" stood in distinction from the "ill-founded rage and resentment" fomented by other historians, an ethical and rhetorical counterpoint evident in her way of writing (Macaulay *History* 339).

For Macaulay, letters about history introduced the history of a relationship—between two letter-writers and also two readers of historical texts—as a way to think about the central role of historians in defining the limits of imagination for political change. The letters' admitting they could not pretend to tell her friend any "novelties" prompted the question of the role of a historian who had little information to share. The agreeing reader could have been used tacitly to define the range of acceptable political opinion; but such use would have put letters to him at cross-purposes with history, since Macaulay would have been sharing with him the news he had already known. What was left for the historian to do?

Wilson's agreeable presence provides critical excuses for the formal transgressions of Macaulay's letters, potentially indecorous whenever they failed to entertain. The two correspondents' pre-existing agreement about the origins of "tyranny" in a predictable historical plot virtually guaranteed that little entertainment would be had. This is how Macaulay remains the "historian" in the epistolary role-play, and one who purports to represent never just the history of historical events, but the history of events' *becoming* historical. Her job as the historian among "friends" is to jog their memory of the origin of current events in the critical moments in the English past, and to acknowledge and explain how their readerly presence combines the "many years in the

world” and “extensive reading in history,” and supplies them with some “rules” that explain the manner in which historical events were made to relate to one another and to make themselves explicable by causality (Macaulay Letters 6). Better reader of historical texts than the common “friends of liberty,” Macaulay becomes the self-designated analyzer and refurbisher of language in which history could be produced.

Calling attention to the historian as a creator of tropes through which knowledge of history becomes accessible, Macaulay turns this text into an account of British history, but also into an account of that history’s coming into being: a discussion about what constitutes “interesting events” and how historiography turns them into history proper. Reducing the historical presentation to an examination of the limits of knowledge about the past through writing, Macaulay makes evident the process by which historiography acquired narrative cohesion and the authority to command engagement from readers imagined in the role of respectable, discerning consumers of historical information. Some historical events, Macaulay suggests at the beginning of her fourth letter, defy all attempts at capture:

I am obliged to you, my dear friend, for telling me that you did not think my last letter, though necessarily long, either prolix or tedious; but, however, as you agree with me in the opinion that descriptions of battles are in general the duller and the least interesting part of an historical narrative, I shall in future be as short on this subject as the matter will permit; and in particular, as I observe, since military science has become more generally diffused, the brilliancy of military action has been in common to more and less civilized societies.

I know of no real advantages, my friend, which can accrue to any people from success in arms, but that of political security, or the attainment of such a proportion of riches as, rendered nationally beneficial by the honest oeconomy [sic] of a wise and just government, may in part or in whole exonerate the public from the burthen of taxes.
(181)

A formal apology, on the one hand, for the glaring long-windedness of some of her letters (which often forgot to invoke the “friend” for dozens of pages), this passage suggests

readers' participation in the process of selection of historical information that could be communicated. This is a historiography of writing about "battles," and not of battles alone, defying at once the possibility of writing about some events without "experiencing" them, as well as about the central and unexamined role of "battle-writing" in conventional historiography. A staunch opponent of standing armies, which she saw as an insidious institution invented to justify constant dissipation and reckless war-mongering, and suspicious of the effects of military achievements, Macaulay declared she could not "dwell with pleasure on the unpleasing subject" (182), making explicit the relationship between history's political mission and the form of writing in which it made itself understandable. Allowing her historical text to intervene in a history of events by commenting on the history of writing about them, Macaulay could insert an aside about the evanescence of "brilliancy of military action" as a source of distinction between "more and less civilized societies," introducing an unexpected distribution of hallmarks of civilization among societies, and one in which Britain fares unfavorably for its partiality to battles, in historiography and in governmental policy.

This passage also relates the epistolary form to the persistent question of tedium of Macaulay's historiography, the one to which she repeatedly turns in this text and one, her readers have claimed, that plagued her other histories; just recently, Macaulay was described as a "tedious autodidact."²⁰² Vera Nünning declares that Macaulay was concerned with expanding her readership (134), and anecdotal evidence scattered throughout other scholars' work suggests that Macaulay may have been alerted to the

²⁰² See P. G. M. Dickenson's review of Vera Nünning's "A Revolution in Sentiments, Manners and Moral Opinions." *Catharine Macaulay und die politische Kultur des englischen Radikalismus, 1760–1790* in *The English Historical Review*, 115.460 (2000): 216–217.

general readership's boredom caused by the form of her texts.²⁰³ Supposedly oppressed by the texts' layout, the readers were said to be distracted and annoyed by the number of sources Macaulay diligently cited in her footnotes (Hay 310). Use of epistolary form dramatically transformed Macaulay's ability to address the issues of documentation within the text, whose kinship with private letters made the use of a formal authentication apparatus seemingly ridiculous.²⁰⁴ A crucial choice for someone perpetually concerned to use the "tension in the text" that her footnotes provided as a sign of historiographical competence and rigor (Zemon Davis *Two Bodies* 22), epistolary writing changed the status of evidence within Macaulay's historical text and altered the criteria of its claims to authenticity.²⁰⁵

The absence of footnotes, which once expressed how access to repositories of relevant documents sanctioned her authority to innovate models of historical interpretation, could have revealed the private letter-writers as unburdened of responsibility for documenting their viewpoints to the national public. Undermining assumptions about the discontinuity between the private and the public spheres, Macaulay's readers found themselves on the inside and on the outside of historical events

²⁰³ See Carla H. Hay, "Catharine Macaulay and the American Revolution," for information about Macaulay's reception in America and a model of writing about Macaulay that accounts for the importance of circumstantial evidence for a historical account that relates Macaulay's biography to her work of historiography.

²⁰⁴ It would be interesting to compare the basis of this opinion to Walter Scott's rationale for using footnotes in his historical fiction to legitimize his novels and add to their credibility and authenticity. Also see Srinivas Aravamudan's comment on footnoting in Eliza Haywood's oriental tales in "In the Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as National Allegory," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 33.1 (1999) 5-31; and Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, 1997), for details on the role of footnotes in establishing similarities between orientalist fictions and scholarly ethnography.

²⁰⁵ See Anthony Grafton for a history of the footnote as a historians' tool of authentication and a proof of competence. Grafton also shows how the punctilious use of footnotes became a subject of ridicule for literary writers of the eighteenth century. Already by 1729, "not only Pope and his collaborators but their intended readers knew the procedures and paraphernalia of scholarly annotation well enough to savor detailed, technically adept parodies of them" (118). For particular implications of proper employment of the formal apparatus of historiography for women's competence about women's history, see Carolyn Steedman, "La Theorie Qui N'est Pas Une, or Why Clio Doesn't Care."

at the same time, sharing in the “private” knowledge of the correspondents about history’s power to explain political events, and receiving accounts of the composition process that yielded the letters they were reading. Letters gave Macaulay the space to explain the provenance of historical data through the transformation of instruments of historiography, acknowledging the stupor of historical reading as an aesthetic and an ethical issue. Macaulay frequently transferred the bulky form of legal documents straight into the epistolary history, as if to preserve the imposing rigor of their block form and their commanding language, and certainly not to adjust their form to the private exchange. At the same time, forms of evidence were as much worthy of comment as was its substance. On the level ground between historical text and footnotes, next to what “I’m told” (10), what “is said” (11), or “the sentimental and observations of a contemporary,” readers could note how “reasons Davenant” or what “says Macpherson” (36).²⁰⁶ Evaluating the qualities of others’ political writing (although “strongly drawn,” Davenant’s humorous description of Whigs was only “too just” (74)), Macaulay also justified her own method of being “very particular” in providing “the complete extract” of certain documents for readers’ perusal as the only proper way to give readers an “adequate idea” of a historical situation (297).

Macaulay’s repeated insistence on the question of tedium and “adequacy” of texts to represent history reminds us that the methodological concession to readers’ competence also gave shape and outlet to their boredom, whose significance it could then address. This study of historiographical writing was in a way then a study of the readers’

²⁰⁶ Davenant was, at the time, a famous economic “theorist” whose studies and judgments were closely followed, in particular because he was concerned with economic justifications of colonial wars. See Andrea Finkelstein, *Harmony and the balance: an intellectual history of seventeenth-century English economic thought* (Ann Arbor, 2000).

tedium, and Macaulay acknowledged that the boredom of her history was related to the boredom of the letters, but that she had no control over her powers of entertainment: the letters could only be as interesting and satisfying as the historical facts available. She admitted that

[t]he remaining part of the history of George the Fifth, my friend, is barren of all events which can give any scope to the genius of an historical writer, and entirely deprives an author of the superlative pleasure of striking the imagination of his readers either with pleasure or admiration: in short, it contains a tedious repetition of intricate and contradictory treaties, all formed with the view of securing the King's dominions on the Continent, and to deprive the subjects at home of any hope of a change of ruinous measures by a change of persons at the helm of government; and it contains a tedious repetition of the prostitute conduct of parliaments, who lavishly granted the people's money for no other end by the purposes mentioned above, and for the corruption of people at large, in a manner as should render them the willing instruments of the destruction of the national welfare abroad, and the undermining their own privileges at home. (334) [emphasis mine]

Seemingly basking in her own ability to reproduce the “tedious repetition” of history in her text, Macaulay compounds sentences around the bland conjunction “and” (“and to deprive the subjects [. . .] and it contains a tedious repetition of the prostitute conduct [. . .] *and* for the corruption [. . .] and the undermining”), favoring mindless recurrence over causality as an explanation for both the irritation of historical information and for the tedium of reading. But this is also how Macaulay reveals to her correspondent that she has information for him, and it is the form of her historical narration that shadows the repetitiveness of historical data about the remaining part of the history of George the Fifth. Although the account of the history of this king is predictable, immediately felt in the unhappy present the correspondents inhabit, Macaulay uses the boredom of the king's depravity to reflect on the obligation of the historian to “his” craft and “his readers’ imagination.”

While the epistolary context for the correspondence between friends provides an excuse for the failure to provide entertainment, it also allows the historian to give attention to the ultimate incompatibility of the missions of “authors” and “historians.” Macaulay’s epistolary history lets us notice that it was not the failure of her literary imagination that stopped her from striking her readers’ fancy by writing novels. An aspiring “author” (and it is “his” readers she is addressing—an author clearly distinct from Austen’s “authoress” in the Advertisement to *Northanger Abbey*), Macaulay represents herself as first and foremost a “servant of archive material” (Steedman Clio 48) who has no choice but to be boring, since the facts are such. But her recourse to personal letters as the forum for discussion about the effects of historiography helps to expose the limits of historical writing as a source of boredom and readers’ dissatisfaction. Boredom resulting from confinement within the exigencies of the genre stems partly from an obligation to the historical material. However, it is the echoes of this material in the present that make for less than delightful reading: readers should let their tedium in reading point to larger or more explicitly political problems. The remedy for the grim state of reading entertainment from history, Macaulay suggests, can already be found in a contiguous domain of writing, declaring:

I do not know, my friend, whether you are disposed to be entertained by my narration, but, for my part, I am tired of the subject of public abuses, therefore shall lay down my pen, and endeavor to refresh my spirit with some work of imagination, where government answers its just end, where the princes are all wise and good, and the subjects happy and content. (29)

Lest we should think that the reading situation was hopeless, Macaulay suggests that respite from boredom is to be found in other types of texts. Works of historical writing gain an afterlife in unnamed “works of imagination,” well known to be more likely to

avail readers of entertainment and relief. More importantly, their entertainment advertises the powers of less oppressive plot structures and outcomes to intimate how reading can inculcate in consumers a desire for more satisfying political vistas than those available from history. In the evaluation of the performance of letters about history against other genres that recognized the significance of “princes,” “subjects,” and “governments,” the persistence of boredom caused by the reading of history serves as an otherwise unacknowledged index of political dissatisfaction, as if the real princes and governments—who should have known how to provide better writing material—were the culprits of Macaulay’s failures in writing, and the ones who ultimately stood to lose as a result of readers’ enjoyment of “escapist” fiction.

“WHAT IDEAS HAVE YOU BEEN ADMITTING?” THE LOVERS OF BOOKS IN *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

Historian Macaulay, who declared that history never did *represent* models of ideal societies, but rather sought to point the way towards them (Macaulay Observations 36), appears to have shared the sense of *Northanger Abbey*’s Catherine Morland that “fiction” was akin to history when its stories taught readers how to recognize, from their enjoyment of reading, the distance between the events represented and the desired ideals. The work of epistolary history as a way to test the power of facts to limit writers’ obligation or ability to “entertain” seems to expand the community of writers to whom Macaulay’s career is usually related, beyond the historians to whom she could be “linked horizontally” (Wiseman 188) through political affiliation or gender, and beyond her singularity and isolation. As it apportions responsibility for the way history is received, understood and perpetuated among private and public writers, friends and politicians,

epistolary writers and historiographers, Macaulay's text weighs the political capital inherent in factual knowledge of historical data against the benefits of command of historical, or just textual, representation. The narrator of Macaulay's history sees in the compelling splendor of "works of imagination" a respite from the tedium of historiography, but not from the factual oppression of historical facts and the persistence of their effect on the present. "Imagination," the limit between the two genres that serves to establish a kinship between them, offers material fulfillment and an articulation of the intensity of fantasies, against whose clarity Macaulay could prop up her historiographical interpretations of discontent in the present.

It also posits at the same critical latitude two kinds of writing we continue to remember with different degrees of enthusiasm. The vacillation between critical and aesthetic explanations for Macaulay's disappearance makes clear that her inscrutability has been a "deserved" consequence of the quality of her work, whose deliberate failure to please as successfully as "works of imagination" gave attention and kindness to women who chose to write the more enduring kinds of texts. Her anomalous text permits us to see that the enigma of her existence—as a woman and as a writer—may be related to the elevation of novels to the status of historical documents about the era believed to have cemented their prestige as the superior form of "realist" prose. To know that Macaulay's writing is not worthy of study, we are first supposed to know that the novel, and not history, has alone trained its readers to know their place in the world represented in the text.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*; Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing*; William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: Elevation of Novel-Reading in Britain, 1684–1750*; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, for some of the most informative discussions of eighteenth-century politics of the success of novels. A book reviewer recently

The marvel of a woman's presence in the compartment of eighteenth-century historiography depends on a canon of women's writing that was grafted onto existing hierarchies of narrative forms of historical evidence, hierarchies whose order it reversed but whose logic it did not always question. Macaulay's work therefore appears exceptional and praiseworthy against the definition of historiography as writing that demonstrates women's access to the "public sphere" or the sphere of governance; recovering her writing records how women have—however rarely and obliquely—gained admission to the realm of relevant events and genres deemed appropriate for recording from their exceptional position.²⁰⁸ Macaulay's exception then directly relates to the idea that women's license to write in a genre with political impact was inherent in their proximity to politics proper and their opportunities to "witness" history in the making.

However, such a project does little to consider how the criteria of qualification for the league of politically relevant authors has grounded the idea of political clout in the texts' reputation for unmistakable accuracy and reliability in marshalling their material. It rarely mentions historiography as a form of realism which competed for readers' attention with narrative genres such as the novel, and not only with "better" histories. This is why it appears useful to consider Macaulay's work of epistolary historiography in conjunction with *Northanger Abbey*, for which the common wisdom (and various scholarly arguments) hold that it was at least a defiant, and at best a feminist, defense of the novel as a genre and its pleasures for women. The book is also often recognized as an

criticized a monograph about Macaulay as a book in which "too much time was spent defining categories," indicating perhaps that the occlusion of her work is necessary for the stabilization of criticism to which she remains obscure.

²⁰⁸ See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Gender and Genre: Women As Historical Writers, 1400–1820," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, edited by Patricia H. Labalme (New York, 1980), 153–182.

early, clunky novel, a quality which provides an explanation for Austen's reluctance to publish it even once she knew she could. These steady dictums about Austen's prominence and the place of an early novel in her opus rely on a backward glance at the early work, a glance away from the blinding glitter of the likes of *Pride and Prejudice*, and the assumptions about the inevitable inferiority of an early Austen novel in the career of a writer who always tried her hand at something new and more complex. What such conventional readings of the text neglect to mention is the relationship between the "awkwardness" of this fiction and the persistence of the text in investigating its own failure to cohere as a "novel." The lack of cohesion emerges from what I propose to consider as Austen's project of investigating how the reading of novels relates to reading in other genres, and especially how knowledge about genre distinctions could be attributed to women and used by women to political ends.

William Galperin has already outlined some benefits of divergence from the conventional understanding of *Northanger Abbey* as the novelist's manifesto that defined and defended the readers and writers of novels, observing that the narrator's famous speech in defense of the novel is "paean to the novel that has little bearing on the specific reading habits of which it is ostensibly a defense" (144). The reading habits in which it does seem interested are the ones shaped by a recognition that the genre in which *Northanger Abbey* ostensibly partakes—the novel—has been permeable and shaped (as well as interpreted) against the conventions of other, formally similar genres, most notably history. This kind of reading requires that we engage closely with the text of *Northanger Abbey*, rather than with its place in the Austen chronology, accounting for the way this novel takes to task assumptions about individual genres' suitability as vehicles

of women's education in political perspicacity and agency. The text questions the easy conflation of "women's genres" (such as the novel) with the private realm, and the equation of reading in the private realm with a lack of authenticity, bad interpretive judgment, and political imprudence.

I take *Northanger Abbey* to be not a novel, but a provocative demonstration of the process of the construction of a novel and a sustained examination of the props on which novels' pedagogical and political benefits could be mounted. The importance of legibility as an index of political power arises before the work ever formally begins, in the Advertisement Austen wrote in 1816 for the book she thought she was going to publish thirteen years earlier. In the Advertisement, Austen declares:

THIS little work was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication. It was disposed of to a bookseller, it was even advertised, and why the business proceeded no farther, the author has never been able to learn. That any bookseller should think it worth-while to purchase what he did not think it worth-while to publish seems extraordinary. But with this, neither the author nor the public have any other concern than as some observation is necessary upon those parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete. The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.

The signed "authoress" here famously addresses the "public," observing that it was "extraordinary" that a bookseller would purchase a work he did not deem worth his while to publish.²⁰⁹ The booksellers' business practices, Austen's "public" was "entreated" to observe, were in themselves not particularly interesting. They were noteworthy in this instance only for intervening in the number of years they permitted to transpire between the work's completion in 1803 and its publication. In addition to the "many more since it was begun," this gap of years made some parts of the book "comparatively obsolete."

²⁰⁹ Austen changed her mind about publishing *Northanger Abbey* after writing the note; it only was published only posthumously, in the same volume with *Persuasion*.

Specifically, the “public” was to note that, during the period of text’s hibernation at the printer’s, “places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes” (NA 3).

Sustained critical interest in the publication history of *Northanger Abbey* rightly focuses on Austen’s decision not to introduce any significant revisions into the work which “thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete” (NA 11)—a telling inaction on the part of a novelist celebrated for her unique accomplishment as the designer of narrative practice which set the stage for novel’s preeminence as a realist tool in the nineteenth century. Extolled as the beacon of competence at “direct narrative” (Southam 23), which was much preferred to the increasingly suspect and unsatisfying epistolary form, Austen introduced significant emendations to the works she wrote around the same time. *Northanger Abbey*, on the other hand, she fashioned into a work that has been critically recognized, as William Galperin summed it up, as the “clumsiest and least controlled” of her novels (138). Austen’s reluctance to revise the novel in the aftermath of her major works’ success leaves little doubt that the “unevenness of tone” (Galperin 138) that plagues the composition of the “little work” was no “accident of Austen’s immaturity at the time” (Levine 69).

Austen’s prefatory material warns about the compromising effect of the book’s years in abeyance and suggests that this book actively concerned itself with the stability of criteria for success in composition. Naming “places, manners” on the one end, and “books and opinions” on the other end of the referential spectrum by which this success may be judged, the preamble to the novel stretches the nodes of reality to which readers might compare their books to books themselves. Suggesting that all these referential

points underwent transformation at once, the Advertisement denies privilege to either “books” or “places” as the authoritative and unchangeable markers on which one may rely for comfortable and competent reading and interpretation. *Northanger Abbey* is a text that thematizes the centrality of books in shaping their readers’ reality, and it advertises itself as reading material which participates wholeheartedly in the negotiation over the role of textual transparency in producing the legibility of “places” and “manners” and even other “books.” Rather than present itself as a “novel,” the book exposes what it *takes* for a seemingly “successful” one to come into being. It stages a negotiation over authority between the governing genre category of “the novel” and the narrator, and reveals how the laborious process of constructing legibility in a piece of literature gets complicated by tacit assumptions about the genre category’s ability to produce, address and please discerning readers.

Austen conspicuously performs double duty as narrator. In the conventional role, now emulated by any competent novel writer demonstrating omniscience, she narrates the life and adventures of Catherine Morland, the alleged “heroine” of this text. The story in which Catherine is emplotted is indistinguishable from many others in novels from the period: Catherine is born in a small town; her youth is uneventful; family friends take her away (to Bath) so she can be closer to adventure. In Bath she makes friends with the Thorpes—Isabella Thorpe is her confidante and reading partner who eventually betrays her trust; her brother is an insufferable fop. Catherine is saved from their company by the Tilneys, the wealthy, sophisticated children of General Tilney, an ornery snob on the make. Catherine is invited to visit their home, called Northanger Abbey, once a real abbey, but now converted into a home. Having long subsisted on a diet of gothic novels,

Catherine lets herself imagine that the Northanger Abbey is full of dark family secrets and women's suffering. At the hands of Henry Tilney, Catherine undergoes a psychological and intellectual transformation as he disabuses her of her outlandish ideas about the relationship between the gothic and the real: Catherine learns that the fantastical ideas she has about his home cannot possibly remain true once she considers the "country they live in" and the facts that they are English and they are Christians (NA 172). Henry Tilney then becomes her husband, but not before General Tilney turns Catherine out of his house, once he finds out that she is not the rich heiress he had imagined her to be.

The crux of Catherine's transformation hinges on the transformation of her relationship to her favorite kind of reading, which, if *Northanger Abbey* were a novel, should be of the same kind as the book in which Catherine finds herself. However, in the process of seeing Catherine to the happy outcome, readers are made to suffer through seemingly endless meditations on the obstacles to the novel's composition by the obstreperous narrator who shows her hand with the most conspicuous regularity and hubris. Deliberately obstructing any clear view of her characters and the narratives they inhabit, the narrator claims Catherine to be the largest obstacle to the novel. In fact, Catherine Morland seems to be an impostor in her heroic role. For instance, she has no infancy to speak of, outside the book. The obtrusive (some would say irritating) narrator declares that same Catherine Morland, on the second page, a "strange, unaccountable character." What is more, "[n]o one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (NA 13). The detailing of the supposed uneventfulness of Catherine's life before the narrative of the book serves to estrange her

from the readers, and to estrange the readers from the writing project they were invited to recognize as somehow familiar, thus forcing readers to own up to their knowledge about the provenance of the seamless pleasures novels commonly provide.

A rare subject of critical discussion, the seemingly “incompetent” narrator fails, as William Galperin explains, to engage “certain possibilities that it was the manifest aim of fictions of probability, along with free indirect discourse, to discountenance and erase” (Galperin 142). The narrator punctuates, or even punctures, the novel by alerts regarding its progress, or its failure, as the case may be. Doubling as a biography of Catherine Morland in her unlikely life, the novel instead becomes a history of its making, against the odds of a heroine recognized even by her mother to have always been “a sad little shatter-brained creature” (NA 205). Once a placid reader of novels, made to serve as a novel’s protagonist, Catherine barely survives in the narrow space assigned to heroines by other books, and it is only at the insistence of the willful narrator that she is heroized.

Northanger Abbey is then a literary conundrum—set up to test conventional notions about the relationship between women novel readers and their world—which checks the improbability of the existence of “some body” like Catherine in a novel, as well as the improbability of a novel organized around someone with Catherine’s disqualifying “extraordinary abilities” (NA 13). Known not to “much like any other” kind of reading (NA 97), Catherine is made to suffer the narrative incompetence of Austen’s narrator in order to show what a profound and little-understood transformation belied her apparent “imbecility” (NA 99). Exploring the possibilities for a novel once its trappings have been revealed, *Northanger Abbey* is specifically concerned with its potential to make the “real world” legible (to women) once it has been transformed by reading into

deluding fiction. Catherine is central to the novel because she tests the equation of novels with improbability. *Northanger Abbey* suggests, by its ironic distance from Catherine's "imbecility," that the responsiveness of female readers of the gothic novel gave these readers an unprecedented set of criteria for detecting probability and realism in a text. The "real world" began to offer "proof positive" that "characters, which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn," did, in fact, operate outside novels (NA 157). Novels, more than genres that never had to account for their struggle with factuality, enabled women, their most dedicated readers, to notice that the kind of knowledge they gained from the discrepancies between their reality and the novels' was substantively different from the kind of gain accrued from reading less escapist, more earnestly didactic genres. Gothic fiction, especially the Radcliffean variety, proves in *Northanger Abbey* to be "probabilistic in an altogether different register" (Galperin 148). Reading appears to be a practice by which "the world" can be re-indexed and its salient features re-coded to register the kind of reality that other genres could not permit. For instance, even if Catherine's suspicions about General Tilney's commission of heinous crimes are shown to be factually wrong, she is granted full credit for an accurate assessment of another sort—namely, that, "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his *character*, or magnified his *cruelty*" (NA 215).

On the individual transformation of Catherine Morland into a more sophisticated reader of possibilities, the "authoress" (who was once, significantly, the "author" of "juvenilia") mounts questions about the political implications of women's association with novel-reading. Austen is a writer whose legacy is believed to have been redacted so that we have little evidence, unlike in the cases of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary

Shelley, of her understanding of women's position in the world for which she was writing.²¹⁰ The literary text of *Northanger Abbey* allows us to consider how Austen engaged in the critical work of examining associations between gender and genre and the usefulness of predictions about the detriment arising from not reading "better books" that men are said to prefer (NA 95) to women's "active" engagement with "real" or political life.

Even if literature is, as Mary Poovey suggests, a "symbolic response" by women to their objective social and economic circumstances (Poovey xvii), so that the notion of the family "served Jane Austen as a model for a proper coexistence of the individual and society" and marriage "embodied for Austen the ideal union of individual desire and social responsibility" (Poovey 203),²¹¹ we can consider, for instance, how the "marriage plot" in *Northanger Abbey* serves as a formal concession to generic requirements of novelistic prose. Afflicted by the desirability of marriage, like most other female novel readers, Catherine's existence in the world of the novel provides her *and* the readers with the well-deserved opportunity to assess the plausibility of her marriage to Henry Tilney. As an interloper from the world "outside" the novel, Catherine's dependence on the narrator and her distance from the world of the novel put a steep price on her success. The unlikely heroine ultimately, and somehow unsurprisingly, finds herself in a "new

²¹⁰ See Mary Poovey, *Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* for an assessment of the relationships among the various feminist ideologies as they are mediated by the genres in which they were articulated.

²¹¹ Poovey claims that although "peripheral marriages" in Austen recognized the same "social liabilities that Wollstonecraft identifies" and "psychological complexities that Shelley intuited," Austen remains an ardent advocate of marriage. Poovey finds that in *Pride and Prejudice*, "the most idealistic" of Austen's novels, marriage remains for Austen "the ideal paradigm of the most perfect fusion between the individual and society" (203). Poovey seems to conflate the voice of Austen's narrator with the moral and political compass of the readers, who find in the statement about the desirability of marriage a sign of Austen's way to contain criticism of the logic of marriage, in which Elizabeth Bennett participates with elegance and skill, while Lydia Bennett can simply "retain claims to reputation which her marriage had given her" (206). Why do we assume a perfect unanimity between readers and the narrator, or the readers' and narrator's statement as a sign of complacency and not a reminder of criticism?

circumstance in romance [...] and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity," as she is united with a man whose affection for her "originated in nothing better than gratitude" (NA 212). The narrator leaves it up to the readers to see whether the confessedly undignified "new circumstance in romance" is "as new in common life" and attribute proper credit to the author whose "wild imagination" must have otherwise produced it (NA 212).²¹²

Northanger Abbey writes the question of plausibility as an indication of pedagogical—and therefore political—value across the distinction between recognizable genres and their relationship to fact, offering a glimpse at the possibility that the "specimens" (NA 36) from which Austen's narrator claimed the novel was built defied certification of origin or significance. When Catherine "almost" says, upon first meeting Henry Tilney, "How can you be so [...] strange?" (NA 26), after he has expressed his tedium with the social capital of Bath and competently discussed new varieties of muslins, the "strangeness" of his snobbish disaffection and effeminacy is inseparable from Catherine's own "extraordinary abilities" not to be in a novel. Only possible where the repetitive script of Bath's pump-room conversations appears spontaneous and interesting, or where men are defined by their incompetence at discerning different kinds of new textiles, the strangeness of Henry Tilney in the opinion of the also strange (but more explicitly fictional) Catherine Morland insinuates to readers that their world may be

²¹² Austen also considers a different kind of criterion of success at composition. The narrator announces that, "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday have now passed in review before the reader; the events of each day, its hopes and fears, mortifications and pleasures have been separately stated, and the pangs of Sunday only now remain to be described, and close the week (87). We could read this passage as a record of the "natural schedule" of events in the novel, or as an attempt to discipline a purposeless plot.

have been transformed beyond recognition by novels, and that novels may be setting that world's standards of probability.

Quite predictably, since it contains none of her life in it, Catherine Morland reads no history. She confesses that “history tells [her] nothing that does not either vex or weary” her (NA 97). She resorts to novels because “real solemn history [she] cannot be interested in,” declaring famously that history contains only

the quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention.” (NA 97)

Catherine learns through conversation that Eleanor Tilney, the less superior reader of the two Tilneys who “seem to *swallow* everything else” (NA 88), is “fond of” history. In her reading preference Eleanor is, Catherine points out, “like Mr. Allen and my father” (NA 97). If the absence of women from history is one important reason of Catherine's repulsion from the genre, Eleanor preference somehow goes against her gender. Eleanor explains that invention in history never bothers her. She is “very well contented to take the false with the true,” especially since the “principal facts” histories present

have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as any thing that does not actually pass under one's own observation; and as for the little embellishments you speak of, they are embellishments, and I like them as such. If a speech be well drawn up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made—and probably with much greater, if the production of Mr. Hume or Mr. Robertson, than if the genuine words of Caractacus, Agricola, or Alfred the Great.” (NA 97)

The reconciliation of “history” with “invention” for the pleasure of readers, while “principal facts” are equated with their origin in “former histories and records,” suggests that Austen appears in *Northanger Abbey* to be a theorist of the novel as well as a theorist

of historiography, much like Catharine Macaulay was in her epistolary history.²¹³ She lays out a new map of political writing which relates reading what is nominally presented as “history” to a range of other texts that equip readers to understand their power to know or invent reality, and shows that the process of learning how to discern “principal facts” from “embellishments” is related to the readers’ competence, which is contingent on their gender and (just as egregiously) class, in an oblique way worth investigating further.

For Catherine’s dread of “torment” by historical instruction from historical texts (NA 98) Henry Tilney, the book’s leading authority on interpretation and the guide for Catherine’s developing reading taste, finds historians not accountable. Historians being “perfectly well qualified to torment readers of the most advanced reason and mature time of life” (NA 98), a few years of reading instruction are, according to him, well worth the benefit of being able to read and understand the value of texts for the rest of one’s life. But in the end it is “Mrs. Radcliffe,” the author of novels that shaped Catherine’s wild expectations from the physical world around her, who benefits from the ubiquity of reading instruction, and not “Mr. Hume” or “Mr. Robertson,” the two authoritative historians. Henry Tilney claims that “if reading had not been taught, Mrs. Radcliffe would have written in vain—or perhaps might not have written at all” (NA 98), as if the reading of novels served as the ultimate test and the reward for advanced skills of reading and interpretation and engagement with the world that history writing could only begin to hone.

²¹³ We should remember that we meet Austen’s historian in other works. She is practicing irreverent national history in the juvenilia. She is running the stage of *Emma* and showing that novels’ plots and characterization are restricted archives from which readers should never expect full access to historical knowledge. The novelist in the latter colludes with the deceptively reliable narrator to hand out unreliable interpretation keys to unsuspecting readers who like to bask in the reflection of narrator’s omniscience.

THE LARGER PICTURE: THE WORKS OF HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

The convergence of the “little” and “failed” works of Macaulay and Austen on the overlapping edges of their ostensibly separate genres allows us to pay more attention to the remembering and forgetting of certain clusters of texts as a function of their political relevance. Largely self-inflicted disasters, these ostensible failures recognized and animated the traffic in competence between the readers of “histories” and “novels” as a process by which the political salience of texts and ways of reading could be negotiated, and not simply granted or denied by nominal association with a particular genre.

Tracing Austen’s examination of the limits of novelistic prose to concerns of women historians such as Macaulay permits us to think about Austen as a political writer. Not only did her texts echo the long-acknowledged “real” politics of Regency Britain: she was a writer who took very seriously—throughout her career, and in every piece, even the most private kind of writing—the ability of texts to produce responsive readers. She took seriously her power to reconfigure readers’ understanding of her texts’ contiguities with the world they inhabited. Macaulay’s textual relationship to Austen as a writer who operated in a contiguous genre opens up possibilities for us to refine the conversation about the political valence of Austen’s work and its role in the history of women’s writing that actively interrogated questions of gender.

This kind of reading lets us see beyond the understanding of *Northanger Abbey* as a celebration of its novelistic kin or a manifesto of permissible pleasures for female novel readers. Accepting Austen’s argument to be “feminist” because she seems to defend novels would imply that there was something fundamentally “feminine” about the kind of novel she clearly never chose to write. The awkward “heroine,” a likable, ingenuous

representation of a mind formed by the novel, must learn that there are other ways of reading she could equally enjoy. There is talk to be had about appreciating “history” in one’s reading diet and what it takes to develop a taste for it.²¹⁴ In a novel in which Austen offers a manifesto of novels and a defense of joys of novel-reading, gullible readers’ “learning from novels” becomes an object of humor. But so does the professed immunity of righteous male critics to the charms of fiction, and their fantasies about the transparency of non-fiction and about their gender’s power to inoculate them against a desire for novels’ transporting effects.

If Macaulay’s and Austen’s interest in the design and maintenance of genre distinctions can constitute an explicit interest in politics, then we can refine the conversation about their works’ position in the history of writing, mediated by issues of gender, without having to pre-suppose the nature or intensity of either writer’s feminism. We can instead look at their texts and notice how the texts examined the conditions and limitations of writing and reading for women, and the potential of the genres these women chose to occupy to be understood as politically viable. As with the politics of Catharine Macaulay, the “female historian,” the politics of “Jane Austen,” the singular “authoress,” are always bound to her uses for writing, rather than expressed in declarations of stances on women’s lot in the world somehow outside their texts.

These texts suggest that we should re-assess critically the ways in which we receive, understand and critique the relationship between women and writing, as well as

²¹⁴ Galperin points out that this argument is also historically inaccurate, suggesting that the novels had made their position stable in the 1770 so that Austen did not do the brunt of the work of legitimization for which she gets credit. *Northanger Abbey* clearly demonstrates Austen’s awareness of hostility towards *some* novels, and invokes the dubious association that William Warner discussed in *Licensing Entertainment* between the pedagogical value of the label and the use the “new novelists” like Richardson and Fielding applied to their “new species” of reading matter, in an effort to disavow their own debt to the tropes and iconography of the old novels.

the power of writing to create and preserve models of feminism. In investigating how the issues of gender and genre became inseparable, I am suggesting that these texts can supply us with a sense of how writing was used to put pressure on received notions of women's reading, authorship, anticipations of influence or possibilities of writing. Some of these presuppositions, including the one about the confinement of women to the private and the apolitical, we are still struggling to overcome.

Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, especially when seen in a relationship to works from the ostensibly segregated genre of historiography, allows us to note how writing and reading across and between our conventional genre distinctions and common canonical lists can equip women to be perceived as active in the late eighteenth century, and how their appearances in these unlikely spaces can help them be picked up on the radar of critical inquiry—to earn their keep. The exchange of echoes between the kinds of writing that we do not read concurrently might get us to consider the power of texts to build political clout through cross-fertilization with other fields of writing and to acquire lives beyond the categories in which we commonly look for them.

Trying to re-imagine the late eighteenth-century landscape of reading and writing beyond the limitations of a clear distinction between the private and the public, and beyond genres of history and literature properly regimented, we can open the way for questions about what kind of women's activity we detect as a relevant presence in the public sphere: is it the physical, literary, visual, or activist, or some other sort?²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Marilyn Morris's discussion of Pamela Cheek's argument in *Sexual Antipodes* (2003) points out that prostitution should be understood as one of women's activities in the "public sphere," with particular consequences for literary scholarship. Morris emphasizes Cheek's observation that the series of pornographic texts from the 1760s on the theme of the "ideal brothel," when "Parisian prostitution was becoming subject to repression and institutionalization" (Morris 203), can be read as "aggressive attacks on women's participation in public life concerned with the control of unruly female sexuality" (Cheek qtd. in Morris 203). This argument assumes that the "public sphere" is not necessarily the realm of literacy,

Consequently, we can ask, even if within the confines of a public sphere that still knows only literate subjects, how much we know about the specific relationship of women's writing in the late eighteenth century to the ambivalence about this relatively new technology's relationship to transparency and dependence—the two crucial issues that were then only beginning to be addressed together, and always in highly gendered terms.²¹⁶ Recognizing that we already take works of literature to be a kind of historical document for women's history, we can examine how their convergence with women's texts of historiography has affected the ability of both kinds of texts to serve as evidence about literature and culture of the late eighteenth century.

Present-day critics stand to gain from a “public sphere” re-populated by a variety of women's writerly presences occluded by current separation of genres, and from a conceptual framework that would move into interpretive limelight the crowds of women writers and the competent readers with whom they shared the terms in which political engagement could be represented. Such a shift of scholarly focus would require that the literary canon be understood anew, or at least that we make clearer how works, and women's texts in particular, get “recovered” and categorized for reading by various disciplines—thus, how literary scholarship engages with other kinds of textual interpretation.

Studying the works of Austen and Macaulay together can help us consider how women's access to the writing market made it possible to re-think their relationship to political agency in terms of genre, by taking the category not as a tool of classification

decorous employment or exalted influence, but rather a sort of physical presence in the daily (and often unseemly) struggle for survival without the necessary ability to reflect on its larger implications or leave written records about it.

²¹⁶ See Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing*.

but as an acutely politicized model of interaction with political reality—an index of women’s ability to engage actively with the politics of the day and cut across many of our analytical partitions. Recovery of women’s texts then inevitably requires close reading, a historicist and a formalist reading of the emergence of genre categories. The relationship between Macaulay and Austen as two writers who contemplated outlines of the fields in which they could produce perceptible change focuses the question of whether “literature” is one such area, and, ultimately, what constitutes “literature:” whether it is “history” or “novels,” truth or fiction. To what degree is literature’s political impact foreseeable, measurable, or possible, if we retain the conventional genre codification? Answers to this question can provide both a better understanding of women who grasped, desired, and produced the effects of fiction and a better insight into the kinds of personal impact we expect from writing, and the kinds of political effects we expect from literary study.

CHAPTER FIVE

BYRON'S "THE GIAOUR" AND THE GENRES OF EXPERIENCE

The wrangling about this epithet "the broad Hellespont" or the "boundless Hellespont," whether it means one or the other, or what it means at all, has been beyond all possibility of details. I have even heard it disputed on the spot; and not foreseeing a speedy conclusion to the controversy, amused myself with swimming across it in the mean time, and probably may again before the point is settled. Indeed, the question as to the truth of "the talk of Troy divine" still continues, much of it resting upon the talismanic word "απειρος:" probably Homer had the same notion of distance that a Coquette has of time, and when he talks of boundless, means half a mile; as the latter by a like figure, when she says eternal attachment, simply specifies three week.²¹⁷

The supplies of the Committee are some useful—and all excellent in their kind—but occasionally hardly practical enough—in the present state of Greece—for instance the Mathematical instruments are thrown away—none of the Greeks know a problem from a poker—we must conquer first—and plan afterwards. —The use of the trumpets too may be doubted—unless Constantinople were Jericho—for the Hellenists have no ear for Bugles—and you must send us somebody to listen to them.²¹⁸

The final chapter of this dissertation turns to a piece of canonical literature to investigate what role literary texts play among other genres of evidence. Byron's "The Giaour" is another story from the Romantic period about a vanishing woman. A harem

²¹⁷ Byron's footnote to the "Bride of Abydos" in the 1818 edition of *The Works of Right Honorable Lord Byron*, 196. A personal letter of May 3rd 1810 from Byron to Henry Drury (from "Salsette Frigate in the Dardanelles off Abydos") anchors the grievance about the persistent problem of literary interpretation (regarding the breadth of the Hellespont) in empirical terms: "This morning I swam from Sestos to Abydos, the immediate distance is not above a mile but the current renders it hazardous, so much so, that I doubt whether Leander's conjugal powers must not have been exhausted in his passage to Paradise. —I attempted it a week ago and failed owing to the North wind and the wonderful rapidity of the tide, though I have been from my childhood a strong swimmer, but this morning being calmer I succeeded and crossed the "broad Hellespont" in an hour and ten minutes." (BLJ 1: 237) Byron later wrote to his friend John Hobhouse on the ability of this his personal experience to become exceptional and then to become the experience of others: "A Bolognese physician is to be presented to me tomorrow at his own petition having heard that I am the celebrated aquatic genius who swam across the Hellespont when he was at Abydos. I believe the fellow wants to make experiments with me in diving." (BLJ 2: 30)

²¹⁸ Byron's letter to John Bowring, Secretary of the London Greek Committee, October 10, 1823.

woman as well, Leila is punished by death for a sexual transgression—her affair with the “Giaour.” In the Advertisement, Byron explains that “the story, when entire, contained the adventures of a female slave, who was thrown, in the Mussulman manner, into the sea for infidelity, and avenged by a young Venetian, her lover....” (39) And Byron’s story is not “entire:” it is a series of fragments, told by a variety of narrators; the crime itself is never described. To adumbrate the possibly obscure information about the “manner” of people he writes about, Byron provides numerous footnotes.

While Byron explains in the Advertisement that the story “is founded upon circumstances now less common in the East than formerly” (39),²¹⁹ he suggests in a footnote tucked in at the end of the printed text that

The circumstance to which the above story relates was not very uncommon in Turkey. A few years ago the wife of Muchtar Pacha complained to his father of his son’s supposed infidelity; he asked with whom, and she had the barbarity to give in a list of the twelve handsomest women in Yanina. They were seized, fastened up in sacks, and drowned in the lake the same night! (G 419)

The footnotes in “The Giaour” were an apparent offer of cultural and aesthetic “explication” Byron made to all those who were not in the position to go and swim the “broad Hellespont” to resolve the nagging curiosity about some writers’ claims about its breadth. Along with the Advertisement, the footnotes have been integral to the interpretation of the poem because they have instructed readers about the relationship of the verse as its textual kin. A well-known “apparatus of exposure” (Stewart 116), originally designed to prevent forgery in a world swarming with it, the footnotes suggested that the poetry would remain impenetrable without the poet’s mediation between the readers and the region which produced it.

²¹⁹ Byron “explains” that this change may have occurred “because the ladies are more circumspect than in the ‘olden time’; or because the Christians have better fortune or less enterprise.” (39)

The footnotes to “The Giaour” could have been genuinely necessary in a text whose “events” are set in the Levant, a geographical region, as Saree Makdisi has explained, with which very few readers were personally familiar. This kind of “East” never represented a proper colonial domain for England; and the interest that Byron or his readers expressed in it could not be captured in terms of a relationship of governance. Nor was it a location recognizable for its commodities: “the Ottoman Levant was in Byron’s time still largely a ‘neutral zone’ lying outside the circuits of industrial capitalism’s unequal exchange” (Makdisi 210).

But for Byron, the footnotes served to provide a mode of acknowledgement for the poet’s empirical knowledge about this part of the world and its customs and textual traditions. The manifest advantage of Byron’s exceptional social privilege consisted in the opportunity to develop an idiosyncratic personal political agenda through empirical exposure to the regions few Englishmen had seen before. By the moment “The Giaour” was published, Byron had already built for himself a public persona of a well-traveled nobleman supposed to know his “orient.” His awakening to the sudden fame of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* was an awakening to his identification with the “Childe” who had traveled where few had gone before.²²⁰ Self-discovered and self-invented for the purpose of demonstrating an exemplary personal engagement with the World shaken up by the new historical circumstances and revised political geography, Byron was, by his own admission and by the recognition of many others, a rare representative of his home

²²⁰ In a letter to his friend Robert Charles Dallas, who mediated between Byron and his publisher Murray, the poet asked for his name to be removed from the title page of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. The anonymity was partly to mitigate the acrimony caused by his “plaguy Satire” that would “bring the North & South Grub Streets” on the *Pilgrimage*. At best, Byron was willing to be “the Author of E[n]glish Bards & Scotch R[ev]iewers.” But another foreseeable problem Byron thought he could prevent by remaining relatively anonymous: “I much wish to avoid identifying Childe Harold’s character with mine, & that in sooth is my second objection to my name of the T[itle] page.” (BLJ 2:75) Byron’s good fortune in having his wish denied is now a matter of literary history.

country on this unorthodox version of a grand tour.²²¹ Since he was in fact one of the few “Romantic” poets or other writers of the period who made his life into an object of engagement with global political transformations, Byron’s was, as Jerome McGann has put it, “in every sense” an explicit and unique “poetry of experience” (*Byron* xi).²²²

While “The Giaour” could be an excerpt from Byron’s biography, the empirical experience to which it referred was a textual one too. Byron claimed he had heard the tragic tale of Leila and her “young Venetian” lover “by accident recited by one of the coffee-house story-tellers who abound in the Levant, and sing or recite their narratives.” Having heard it once, he regretted that his “memory retained so few fragments of the original” (G 422). Equivocating about his position towards authorship embedded in empirical experience, Byron drew attention to his relationship to the authenticity of his text, but then also to the readers’ relationship to his poem as an authentic emanation of his “experience.” I turn to “The Giaour” in the last chapter because it foregrounds the strange relationship between authors and readers in a Romantic text. It examines how “authenticity” and “facts” could be produced, reproduced, and circulated among competent readers and registers how this traffic transforms the possibilities of having an experience. If reading about another’s experience could become a venue of empirical knowledge, and if access to texts and motifs shaped the possibilities of having experience, then Byron’s “poetry of experience” could become the “poetry of

²²¹ As Byron bragged of his travels through Albania, “circumstances, of little consequence to mention, led Mr Hobhouse and myself into that country before we visited any other part of the Ottoman dominions; and with the exception of Major Leake, then officially resident at Joannina, no other Englishmen have ever advanced beyond the capital into the interior, as that gentleman very lately assured me” (qtd. in Leslie Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*, 1: 208).

²²² The insistence of Byron and of his readers on the importance of empirical knowledge for the understanding of the world and of the poetry in it disqualifies a reading such as that by Joseph Lew, that the work of writing “The Giaour” could be done by a writer “even if he never leaves home.” (179)

experience” of Byron’s readers—a poetry of the experience of reading, possible only in an entire “life changed by reading” (St Clair 398).²²³

I would like to consider the poem a critical study of that process of transmission, an eccentric historical and biographical document of Byron’s experiments with poetry reading as a form of empirical knowledge which explored the commensurability of experiences of writers and readers. When he fashions for himself the role of a poet–ethnographer, Byron issues a formal provocation to readers to consider the implications of their competence at reading the poem in relationship to other genres of evidence against which the text’s relevance had to be judged. Vouching for authenticity by his biography, but unable to make confident claims about how customary the customs were in the place he visited, or to say how reliable his text was in representing them well, Byron mobilizes his readers’ interpretive ambivalence in order to demonstrate how genres of writing (“eastern” tales, footnotes, advertisements) became the genres of his “personal experience,” and how they now structure his readers’ ability to understand his poem’s critical and political relevance.

I read “The Giaour” in the final chapter in order to explore the consequences of thinking, experiencing and understanding in poetic terms or textual forms, and to consider how these ways of thinking affect the accessibility of “poetic” knowledge, factual or affective—what happens when the notion of empirical experience is separated from the idea of ownership of the life or of the texts which could represent it.²²⁴ The text

²²³ Lady Melbourne, a close friend of Byron’s, declared that upon reading “The Giaour” that “the description of Love almost makes me in love. Certainly he excels in the language of Passion, whilst the power of delineating inanimate nature appears more copiously bestowed on other poets.” (Mabell qtd. in St Clair 398)

²²⁴ Matthew Wickman’s explains in *The Ruins of Experience* the relationship of the “Romantick” period to the creation of an “experiment” as a controlled and portable sample of experience. On the consequences of its use in claims about universality, Wickman notes: “While making it possible to move beyond the

claims to be of interest because it is derivative: Byron uses a “fragment of a Turkish tale” to bring into focus the status and effect of repetition. He examines what it means and what it costs to repeat the words of others, their phrases and similes, or even to repeat others—their truths and their lives and deaths—as one’s own, by re-creating languages, texts, people, places, and events as if they were translatable and familiar. Byron implies that such knowledge from experience is proprietary and personally acquired, but also demands transferability if its ethical and political missions are to be accomplished. “The Giaour” extends the author’s relationship to the seemingly alien characters onto the readers, showing the degree to which the concepts of “originality” and of the “autobiographical” have been integral to the “received” (legible, popular, populist, fashionable, plagiarized). In the process, the text outlines new boundaries of a community to which the “authenticity” of the “events” described and their poetic form could be relevant. Struggling to understand why anyone should care about a “Giaour” and a “Leila” in a broken oriental tale, the text ponders what the readers are to understand by means of reading a “Turkish tale.” Where was this “Greece” that could host a “Turkish tale?” How long ago was the time “slightly in the past”?

THAT “SLAY OR SHUN,” IS TOO WALTER-SCOTTISH; WE WISH IT WERE OUT.²²⁵

Recent scholarship has spent much time on Byron’s involvement in “distressing” “traditional” literary models, which were accessible and interesting to readers regardless

limitations of experience by converting experience into projective calculation, probabilism also diminished the epistemological authority of experience by creating virtual, normative experiences that technically belonged to no one in particular.” (8) See also Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, for the significance of “virtual witnessing” in the Enlightenment transformation of natural science, 60–65.

²²⁵ *Champion* RR 520

of their experience with international travel. Barbara Ravelhofer has specifically pointed out the “debts” Byron accrued to “oral poetry and the printing press” in “The Giaour,” “the first of his Eastern tales [in which] Byron postures as an editor and translator of oral poetry in the worthy tradition of Fortis, Herder, Goethe, and the less reputable Macpherson” and whose effects he “mischievously imitates” (23). Tilar Mazzeo has explained that Byron was more obviously, and perhaps even less respectably, participating in the recycling of “oriental tales.” The use of the well-worn genre immediately opened Byron to charges of plagiarism; a sustained suspicion that his work could have suffered from imitation continues to hold critics’ attention.²²⁶ It is now in the scholarly explorations of Byron’s relationship to other writers, which takes on a tone charged with the necessity to acknowledge the ethical implications of his potentially suspect literary behavior, that we most often meet the poet in his less glamorous role of the borrower and refurbisher of other writers’ work, confused about the difference between original authorship and plagiarism when his work became seemingly—or manifestly—derivative of other men’s, even when the work of others had already been shaped by more “traditional” texts.

Mazzeo explains that oriental tales were, along with the Gothic tales, a particular kind of cultural material, the “consciously literary genres” (Mazzeo 90). Perceived to

²²⁶ Although Tilar Mazzeo claims that attacks on Byron’s “authenticity” became more frequent in 1816 as vehicles for attacks on his person, reviewers of “The Giaour” were already very keen in 1813 to note that “His lordship’s imitation, if it be an imitation, is very inferior to the original” (*British Review* RR 412). What the “original” was remained a matter of discussion, since “The Giaour” was comparable both to some irretrievable “traditional” work and to the work of other writers in English. The most frequent comparison was to the work of Walter Scott, sometimes as a compliment to Scott (because “the noble Lord” was “condescending to imitate Mr. Walter Scott (as most imitators do imitate their original) in his defects” (*Satirist* RR 2126)), and sometimes as a way to disparage both in one stroke (because their poetry suffered from the same “glittering expressions” (*Eclectic Review* RR 715)). *Gentleman’s Magazine* was more convoluted about who benefited from the comparison: “Lord Byron is no mercenary writer. From the rich exuberance of these massy fragments, many a builder of ‘moated battlements and keeps’ may yet extract ample materials for another *Marmion* or *Rokeby*. We intend no disrespect to the Author of these two popular and expensive publications” (RR 1089).

come from a trove of “common cultural materials,” they readily lent themselves to borrowing and appropriation because they were considered to be “authorless vehicles of information” (110), and their use was “subject to different standards of evaluation” (Mazzeo 90). They could find a new “freshness” in being put to a reputable use (i.e., not to pandering to the already questionable aesthetic tastes) and, consequently, a new authorship could be attached to them if the literary loan was acknowledged and “improved” upon (Mazzeo 2).²²⁷ Byron himself seems to have been somewhat interested in the significance of certain kinds of “originality” for his reputation. He managed, for instance, through a “remarkable coincidence,” to “anticipate” one of the poems by John Galt (qtd. in Mazzeo 90). He also declared it to be a “mortifying thing” for him to be accused of “imitation” of a passage of Crabbe’s that he “never saw” (BLJ 3: 141). By contrast, when middle-class magazines went after his straightforward copying of classical authors’ epigraphs in the *Bride of Abydos*, Byron’s “unconscious plagiarism” could be seen as an eminently “bourgeois concern” (Reiman 1743).

The crucial questions about the ways in which Byron’s work was really “his own”—that is to say, to what degree his “success” could be couched in a singular “empirical experience” or also be legible to others—has hinged on the relationship between his exceptional person and his individual pursuit of literary originality in the context of the textual tradition he had joined. Especially important, then, has it been to use Byron’s documents of autobiographical self-disclosure—his private writing—to relate the biographical information about Byron to his uses for poetry and interpretation. But Byron’s letters have been capable of confirming diametrically opposed “Byron’s

²²⁷ The language of ethical economy and economics (debt, obligation) is worth looking into further. It may seem paradoxical that the most derivative and alien of genres, the oriental tale, had a role to play in “reinventing and reinvigorating the English verse” (Mazzeo 9).

opinions” about originality and revision. So his letters revealed that he was the kind of writer who never revised, whose revisions were “so few...at least in comparison with those of Wordsworth” (Leader 78), and who demanded, “Don’t ask me to alter for I can’t” (qtd. in Leader 78). He was also “like the tyger [sic] (in poesy) if I miss my first spring—I go growling back to my jungle.—There is no second.—I can’t correct” (qtd. in Leader 78). It would appear from such letters either that Byron was too lazy to revise, or that there was something about the difference between “original composition” and the menial “work” of proofreading and revision that would have interfered, if he had agreed to indulge the publisher’s requests, with the core of his authorial identity (Leader 83).²²⁸ Byron’s letters have provided material to support the thesis that, predictably, the poet had always known that the “oriental tales” were merely the kind of stuff “to interest the women” (BLJ 9:125 qtd. in Watkins 873), a reflection of the public’s bad taste rather than a compliment to his poetic skills, and that “The Giaour” was no more than a string of “foolish fragments.”²²⁹ With equal ease, letters have testified to Byron’s regret that he ever called the “Eastern tales” mere “tales” once he learned to appreciate that they were “something better,” his early but serious attempts at mastering poetic form, or his “method for arranging thoughts” (Gleckner 96; Seed 131).

Especially in the case of the publication history of “The Giaour,” it would be difficult to discern a distinction between the “work of composition” and some entirely different labor of “proofreading and revision” that was beneath Byron’s artistic or social

²²⁸ See Zachary Leader for the opinion that Byron was “lazy over some activities—proofreading or revision, for example—and not others” because “proofreading and revision were for Byron ‘work,’ in a way original composition was not, though for many writers, Wordsworth among them, the reverse is true. There is a class element involved here.” (83) Byron wrote to Murray daily, for months, and sent new emendations to the poem, which grew from 344 to 1237 lines over seven editions.

²²⁹ Daniel Watkins cites Byron’s letters and journals as a source for this information. See Daniel P. Watkins, “Social Relations in Byron's the Giaour.” *ELH* 52.4 (1985), 873.

dignity, when his demands for corrections and proofs were relentless, uncompromising and often uncivil. From the torrent of letters Byron sent to his publisher John Murray it becomes clear that he was not as lazy about revision as he claimed himself to be. The contradictions of Byron's statements show that private letters were among the poet's favorite performance venues; thus he could declare to Murray that he would never revise, but also that he would "cut his own throat" if the revisions he had requested were not heeded immediately (BLJ 3:182), and wish for Murray's less than faultless printer to be "saddled with a vampyre [sic]" (BLJ 3:192).

Mazzeo points out that definitions of plagiarism in the Romantic period were contingent on the "far broader commercial print-culture context" (5) and it is in this context that the circulation of genres and their availability should be understood, in conjunction with the changing standards of authenticity as it became embodied in authors as individuals capable of producing incomparable texts. It is even more important to remember, as William St Clair suggests, that the "originality" of Byron's authorship never rested entirely with his "person," since printers and publishers—Murray a foremost entrepreneur and risk-taker among them in London—were at this time acting as crucial engines and engineers of readers' demand for "originality." They supported authors' often nominal "revision" of individual works as a means to ensure the "freshness" of their commodities in the atmosphere of stiff competition and constant demand for novelty; they certainly did not object to publishing the work of a writer who knew how to foster the readers' taste in existing (i.e., recognizable) literary forms guaranteed to sell well.²³⁰

²³⁰ See *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* for St Clair's comments on the discrepancies between archival records on the printing output and the publishers' avowed production. For instance, although the title pages of Byron's "Lara" indicate that there have been four editions of the text, "nobody has found a copy of the second or the third" (181). Byron wrote in a letter to his publisher in 1813 about the review of

NOTHING CAN MORE HAPPILY ENCOURAGE AND ENRICH A POETIC GENIUS THAN THE EXAMINATION OF VARIOUS COUNTRIES, WITH THAT DISTINGUISHING AND COMPARING EYE WHICH BELONGS TO THE REAL POET.²³¹

Since it was clear that no “other but Lord Byron himself could have imparted the force and the character which are conspicuous in the fragments that are now before us” (*Edinburgh Review* RR 843), Byron’s claims to authenticity, which took advantage of his well-advertised experiences in the region, had the power to mitigate the wear of the tropes, even in a “grade C movie” like “The Giaour” (Marchand Poetry 63). If Byron’s physical presence at locations in which unprecedented upheaval was underway represented for the poet the cornerstone of critical knowledge about the world, his readers seemed quite willing to accept the primacy of his experience and to rely on Byron’s expertise, believing that there was a “peculiar colour of originality” to “The Giaour” that the author had “gained in his travels” (RR 238). His poetry was “evidently the result of personal observation, and of deep and even cherished reflection” (RR 626), a narrative “in *character*, proceeding from some person who has had opportunities of seeing what he describes” (RR 1740). The *Edinburgh Review* hoped that Byron would “go on and give us more fragments from his Oriental collections” because, in “The Giaour,”

[t]he Oriental *costume* is preserved, as might be expected, with admirable fidelity through the whole of this poem; and the Turkish original of the tale is attested, to all but the bolder skeptics of literature, by the great variety of untranslated words which perplex the unlearned reader in the course of these fragments. *Kiosks*, *Caiques* and *Muezzins*, indeed, are articles with which readers of modern travels are forced to be pretty familiar; but *Chaius*, *palampore*, and *ataghan*, are rather more puzzling: They are well sounding

“The Giaour” that appeared in the *Satirist*, which had qualified praise for the poem and an accusation of predatory pricing for Murray. Byron found the review to have been “fairly written and though vituperative—very fair in judgment.—One part belongs to you viz—the 4s. & 6d. charge—it is unconscionable—but you have no conscience.—” (BLJ 3: 70) The review to which Byron referred had the responsibility apportioned differently: “The noble lord appears to have an aristocratical solicitude to be read only by the opulent. Four shillings and sixpence for forty-one octavo pages of poetry! and those pages very happily answer to Mr. Sharidan’s image of a rivulet of text flowing through a meadow of margin.” (RR 2134)

²³¹ *British Critic*, RR 238

words, however; and as they probably express things for which we have no appropriate words of our own, we shall not now object to their introduction. (RR 847)²³²

Jerome McGann has long argued that Byron's poetry always was eminently egocentric and self-conscious and that his readers would be well-advised to consider all of his writing to be relentlessly autobiographical: to remember that Byron wrote about himself even when he seemed to be writing about others. More importantly, Byron's was a gift for replication: he could represent as well as he could see, or, more to the point, he could "see" in the way in which the thing had been represented. As a result, "the poet sees every thing himself, and so rouses the feelings and enthusiasm of the reader, that he seems to see it too." (RR 711) And it is precisely this quality of Byron's poetry that becomes interesting when the poet simultaneously writes autobiographically in verse and designates himself as a conduit of experience for readers, who are expected to understand from the text the import of physical, empirical experience they had never had. Even as Byronic biography and biographical mythology insist that empirical experience was for the poet the cornerstone of all knowledge, it is important to remember that Byron's was "poetry of reading" as much as it was "poetry of experience."²³³ He was addressing the readers whose "experience" of the "East" had already been structured by reading, as was his own.²³⁴ When Byron defines his work of "translation" in "The Giaour" as work that

²³² There was a limit to originality, however: "But we cannot extend the same indulgence to *Phingari*, which signifies merely the moon; which, though an humble monosyllable, we maintain to be a very good word either for verse or prose, and can, on no account, allow to be supplanted, at this time of day, but any such new and unchristian appellation" (RR 847)

²³³ Byron gained more prominence than most of his competitors in the genre for writing in the popular rubric of the "oriental tale," whose authors were more likely to garner their material from travel writing than they were to travel. (St Clair 215) Harold L. Wiener makes an argument that "the original impetus to [Byron's] journey through Turkey. . . and consequently, to the writing of the Turkish tales is to be found in his early reading." (90)

²³⁴ Byron wrote two letters to Murray, possibly on the same day (December 3, 1813), demanding a reference about the location of Prophet Mohammed's grave that he would use in "The Bride of Abydos." In the first one, Byron requested that Murray "look out in the Encyclopedia article Mecca whether it is there or at Medina the Prophet is entombed." (BLJ 3:190) When he received no reply the same day, thus

includes “additions and interpolations,” which readers are presumed able to distinguish from the rest by the “want” of a particular kind of imagery, he invokes his readers’ part in an agreement about the transparency of a particular kind of textual representation. This is why “few poets ever put their readers in more complete possession of a country they have never seen, than his Lordship of the coasts, country, and population of Greece” (RR 571).²³⁵

“The Giaour” insists on being a seamless extension of autobiography—the empirically acquired knowledge of the original text and its background in the appropriate “cultural milieu” (the literal evidence of experience), amalgamated with information acquired and shared through reading of the “sources” readers could verify.²³⁶ At the same time, it plays out the tension inherent in original literary authorship indebted to a “self” as much as it is to other texts, and it relates the authenticity of “historical events” described to Byron’s ability to provide for them the most appropriate representation.²³⁷ Rather than a reflection or recollection of those events, Byron offers a provocation, a formal prompt, for readers to consider the text’s complexity as a way to assess the power of habitual

suffering a delay to his revisions, he wrote again: “Did you look out? is [sic] it Medina or Mecca that contains the holy sepulcher? —don’t make me blaspheme by your negligence—I have no book of reference or I would have save you the trouble I blush as a good Mussulman to have confused the point.” (BLJ 3:191)²³⁵ See the argument Mary Carruthers makes in *The Book of Memory* on the medieval “ethics of reading” which involved incorporation by reading, that is, the internalization of another’s experience, or “making it one’s own,” by repetition (19). Somehow related: what would it mean to recite “The Giaour”? What would be the point of delivery? Is that the kind of ownership (by declamation or by “felt reading”) Byron ever had in mind for his poems?

²³⁶ The footnote to line 1077 on “the superstition of second-hearing” is explicitly confirmed to be a part of Byron’s “own observation,” suggesting that it is no superstition, having been confirmed by the experience of the informant.

²³⁷ As much as he has learned from traveling, Byron is “indebted” for his explanatory notes to several texts he lists. One of these, *Caliph Vathek*, “far surpasses all European imitations; and bears such marks of originality, that those who have visited the East will find some difficulty in believing it to be more than a translation” (G 423). Byron’s praise could imply that Beckford’s novel was an imitation that surpassed all others, but that it was also an oxymoron—an original imitation—unlike any other seen to date. This was not a joke at Beckford’s expense: Byron is known to have greatly respected Beckford’s work, and desired to keep a copy of *Caliph Vathek* even when all his other possessions were being sold (BLJ 114).

reading practices (among clearly demarcated genres) to reveal the role of authors in shaping the empirical experience and memory of their readers.²³⁸ Even if the authorial intention for the poem could not be confidently imputed to one who had somehow “disowned” it, the readers could look for what it was that allowed this poem to “belong” to anyone in particular.

As if to undermine his own credibility and his text’s claims to authenticity, Byron suggests to the readers of “The Giaour” that footnoting was an apparatus of dubious use in sharing ethnographic information. Since notes in “The Giaour” shifted in form and position in various editions of the poem, it is questionable in what way they have been an integral part of the text and how many of them were ever “necessary” for understanding.²³⁹ But their presence suggests a tension between the poetry and the “explanatory devices” that relate the questions of form to the questions of interpretive competence.²⁴⁰ Annotation was one of the instruments by which Byron could articulate the role of writing in the shaping and the relevance of his experience. In the hands of an

²³⁸ In the case of a text that transformed with each edition, was it to be re-read and re-understood as a more complete memory of the event?

²³⁹ McGann turns footnotes into endnotes in *The Complete Poetical Works* and intersperses Byron’s notes with his own editorial notes and comments; the footnotes reappear on the same page with the verse in McGann’s *The New Oxford book of romantic period verse*, as they do in Frank McConnell’s *Norton’s Critical Edition of Byron’s Poetry*. Byron and his publisher John Murray used endnotes in the joint edition of “The Giaour” and “The Bride of Abydos” in the joint edition of 1818. Although William St Clair claims that the “omission of notes deprives us of understanding the original experience” of Romantic-period readers (214), it would be interesting to speculate on the removal of footnotes from the text while the “Romantic period” was still underway as a way to give more weight to the “poetry” as a self-standing form that required no “clarification” or “cultural interpretation” to be placed in its “original” context, but became a kind of text whose status and interpretation could be sundered from its “oriental” reference, fully authorial and owned by Byron, its characters, plots and ethics understood to operate entirely independently of their apparent referents in the “East.”

²⁴⁰ Despite Byron’s facetiousness in the footnotes, some reviewers thought them useful and “explanatory” of the obscure plot in view of the difficult formal challenge its shape of a “fragment” posed to the readers (RR 1740). Even when Byron explained that “not so long ago” women were being thrown into the Mediterranean, and “sundered ‘from all we know, all we love’” (G 423), reviewers in the *Champion* took very seriously his “authentic information.” For them it was proof of the “cinical [sic] feeling” that the “Turks” in his poetry were showing towards women (RR 521), even if the footnote had more of Byron’s own cynicism about what it was about the seraglio that *we* could “know” or “love,” and how the women subjected to such humiliations could suddenly become “our own.”

informant who could supply the most appropriate backdrop for the poetry—its original discursive context and most accurate meaning—the tone and substance of some of Byron’s footnotes made them sound like jokes.²⁴¹ In his gloss for line 593, for instance, which describes how “stern Hassan” (who had ordered the murder of Leila) on the battle field “curl’d his very beard with ire,” Byron explained that this was

A phenomenon not uncommon with an angry Mussulman. In 1809, the Captain Pasha’s whiskers at a diplomatic audience were no less lively with indignation than a tiger cat’s, to the horror of all the dragomans; the portentous mustachios twisted, they stood erect of their own accord, and were expected every moment to change their colour, but at last condescended to subside, which, probably, saved more heads than they contained hairs. (G 419)

The early reviewers were the first to notice publicly that the flippancy of Byron’s footnotes stood at odds with the seeming earnestness of the verse and threatened to spoil the effects of the profoundly articulated statements about the “human condition” (Gleckner 97) that have long interested serious literary criticism. While some noticed their “very amusing slyness” (RR 2133), others found in them that “style of sprightliness which ill accords with the narrative and which is not in itself peculiarly commendable;” they wished that “the noble author had omitted all the notes, as we have done, except those which are absolutely necessary to render the text intelligible” (RR 1743). For the *Monthly Review*, the notes were the only thing “positively bad in this volume,” a proof of

²⁴¹ Byron was also glad to explain, with reference to line 483, that “Al-Sirat” was “the bridge the breadth less than the thread of a famished spider, over which the Mussulmans must *skate* into Paradise” (G 418); or, with reference to line 748, that “Monkir and Nekir are the inquisitors of the dead, before whom the corpse undergoes a slight noviciate and preparatory training for damnation....The office of these angels is no sinecure; there are but two; and the number of orthodox deceased being in a small proportion to the remainder, their hands are always full” (G 420). Susan Stewart explains how footnotes as background information are designed to bridge the gap between the contact of production and a context of reception, but that they also reveal the paradox involved in attempting to cover up that slippage: “How, then, was the writer to authenticate the grounds of his or her authorial subjectivity outside the worlds of patronage and literary community? The most obvious method was the generation of more discursiveness: the author must incorporate these grounds by writing them. Here we find the problem of the constantly self-inventing grounds of nostalgia, the already fallen status of a desire for a point of origin that is ‘merely’ the product of that desire and not its originating cause....Thus we find the basis for, on the one hand, a “realistic” fiction, based on the commonly held assumptions regarding the immediacy of firsthand experience, and, on the other, a grandiose lie—that is, an often unattributed literature of imitation, conjecture, and fantasy.” (37)

studied frivolity and “careless indifference,” able to “interrupt completely that tone of deep solemnity which reigns unbroken through the poetry” (RR 2149). The *British Review* was eager to note that “the inimitable satyrist [sic] of the Scottish [sic] bards and reviewers” is not without “the talent of humour,”

but we must say that the attempts at humour in these notes are very far below the standard of his lordship’s undoubted taste and spirit. The note upon the phenomenon of the captain pasha’s whiskers is a specimen of this ill-placed drollery. Indeed the curling of the angry Mussulman’s beard when beset with foes which threaten him with instant death, was a circumstance very ill suited to the horror of the scene which it was the poet’s purpose and duty to describe with that dignity which the most obvious of poetical proprieties demanded. (RR 413)

As Anthony Grafton has observed, eighteenth century literature, and not just the period’s historiography, made a fashion out of the requirement for earnest footnotes as proofs of a text’s authenticity. Already by 1729, “not only Pope and his collaborators but their intended readers knew the procedures and paraphernalia of scholarly annotation well enough to savor detailed, technically adept parodies of them” (118). Srinivas Aravamudan points out that impertinence about scholastic models of authentication was equally common to “oriental tales,” which may have been particularly ripe for that sort of derision. Chronically suspected of dubious provenance and inauthenticity, the tales were most accommodating to the use of footnotes as a means for the “ridicule of pedantry” (Aravamudan *Oriental* 20), particularly as they courted readers who understood that seemingly outlandish tropes and characters were often fairly transparent references to England’s own politics and public figures.²⁴²

“The Giaour” provides an interesting opportunity to examine what it meant for Byron to use the credentials of personal experience to write about them using borrowed,

²⁴² Aravamudan specifically elucidates Eliza Haywood’s use of footnotes in her 1736 oriental tale *Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo*, used as a satirical vehicle to expose the political tensions in England.

well-rehearsed originals.²⁴³ The poem crucially interacts with readers over Byron's insistence that the possibility of writing and understanding the poem had been entirely contingent on his having left England, but also on learning what one should do to find out how broad the "broad Hellespont" was if one could not check by simply swimming across it. Byron's experience (i.e., the claim to empirical familiarity with the regions represented), as well as his claims to willingness to take the "East" on its "own terms," buttressed the idea that an unadulterated representation retained familiarity even without domestication. Because Byron knew what the "things" were for which we had no "appropriate words of our own," he never was (and probably never could be) accused of being a *forged*, and he wrote in the only genre that appeared apposite to his experience. Already a shabby genre by the time Byron had finished his idiosyncratic grand tour and burst onto the literary scene, the "oriental tale" has been known more for its immense popularity and availability in the eighteenth-century reading market than for its influence on the histories of conventional genres like the novel and lyric poetry.²⁴⁴ The authenticity of his experience was therefore impossible to ascribe to the singularity of Byron's adventures, or to an "authentic" textual source when the textual environment into which it emerged proliferated other "Turkish" or "Persian" tales.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ In a letter of praise for the work that is so compelling, the author seems to have visited the spot (BLJ 3:192).

²⁴⁴ Notable exceptions to this belief about the relevance of oriental tales are Srinivas Aravamudan's 1999 article, "In the Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as National Allegory," in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 33 (1999): 5–31; and Ros Ballaster's *Fabulous Orient*.

²⁴⁵ It appears from the letters that Byron was Murray's trusted consultant on all tales "oriental," and that the highest praise he could give was the compliment that, even with faults of "costume," a good story appeared to have been "written by some one—who has been on the spot." (BLJ 3:192) Jerome McGann explains that it was unclear from the lavish presentation of the first edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* whether it was an "allegory" of an actual journey or a novel version of popular guides to exotic regions to which poetry served as a kind of supplement. See Jerome McGann, "The Book of Byron and the Book of a World."

AS TO WHAT HIS CONNECTION IS WITH DRAMATIS PERSONA, OR THE EVENTS, MOST READERS WILL PROBABLY REMAIN AS IGNORANT AS OURSELVES.²⁴⁶

When conservative critics bewailed Byron's failure to express explicit disapprobation of any of the "events" or characters he depicted in "The Giaour," they complained that he had left readers to their own devices in making out whether they should continue to be "charmed with the excursive allegories of the Eastern tales, particularly with the Arabian and Turkish" (RR 2298), exposing them to the risk of corruption by reading.²⁴⁷ For this the loss interpretive rudder and readers' reckless exposure to contamination fragmentation was to blame.²⁴⁸

Although he was perceived to bear a particular moral obligation to show in his poetry that "indissoluble connection between morals and prosperity" (RR 574) because he had "seen all this" (RR 577), Byron chose not to exercise his social obligation as a poet, or at least not declaratively.²⁴⁹ Byron's private letters suggest that he did discuss

²⁴⁶ *Monthly Review*, RR 1740.

²⁴⁷ See Marilyn Butler's argument in "The Orientalism in Byron's *Giaour*" that the poem was an allegory of Byron's relationship to the emergence of evangelical zeal as the new excuse and impetus for imperialism. Interestingly, most "ethical" criticisms of Byron's "irresponsible" poetry were directed at him by the critics from the evangelical magazines.

²⁴⁸ Byron's contemporary critics positively complained that "[t]he fame of genius is little to be envied, when it is not employed in efforts to improve and enoble [sic] human nature" (RR 2150); that "his fable is unfortunately without moral or improvement of any kind" (RR 1840); "that his Lordship possesses the true charms of poesy, would he drive his Pegasus in the path of philanthropy, instead of his boasted but dangerous philosophy" (RR 2088);

²⁴⁹ *Christian Observer*, the organ of Evangelicals of the Clapham Sect of William Wilberforce, praised Byron for the quality of his poetry that was ultimately to become the greatest proof of its and the poet's turpitude: the readers were lucky that, at least, he "never represents the profligate as happy" (RR 576). The significance of fragments remains crucial to modern literary critics, much as it was to Byron's contemporaries. Robert Gleckner introduced a distinction between the "vertical" and the merely "accretive" vision in the poem, in which agglomeration of ideas leads to a synthesis—a new value, a new kind of understanding that not only permits the characters in the narrative an opportunity to testify to their version of the truth of events, but permits readers to observe the process of creating it (Gleckner 116). Marjorie Levinson proposes that the discourse of "The Giaour" approximates the model of "early Greek history in the manner of Herodotus" consisting of a historical account compiled from eyewitness reports delivered orally to the "historian" who conveys the account "in such a way as to bring out the causes and conditions underlying the event" as well as the event's "original meaning" and "its more immediate and practical dimension" (118); such a method allows Byron to address "the decline of forces of chance in England and Europe...during and...after the Napoleonic Wars" (121). Daniel Watkins suggests that the fragments "reveal" the "social reality" (890) in which they were created, namely the effect of Byron's tumultuous

with John Murray the business risk involved in favoring the “fractured aesthetic” as they prepared to publish “The Bride of Abydos” later that year. He wondered whether it would not have been

as well to have said in 2 Cantos in the Advertisement? they [sic] will else think of *fragments* a species of composition very well for *once* like *one ruin* in a *view*—but one would not build a town of them—The Bride such as it is is my first *entire* composition of any length—(except Satire & be d---d to it) for the G[iaour] is but a string of passages—& and C[hil]d Ha[rol]d is & I rather think always will be uncompleted. (BLJ 3: 182)

Byron’s circumspection about producing more deliberate fragments may have been his response to the critical reception of “The Giaour.” Its critics seem to have felt obligated to express their opinion on the meaning of fragmentation, as if to indicate that the form of the poem had crucial implications for its interpretation and for the status of its writer. “The Giaour” was, the *British Critic* declared, “the most singular tale that was ever told” because it was “a Fragment of a tale;” upon closer inspection, there were no fewer than “several fragments;” from these a reader would “combine a regular story” (RR 239). The critics’ contest to show proper understanding of the use and effects of fragments in “The Giaour” brings into focus the legacy of earlier criticisms of Byron, whose “innovations” were the source of the poet’s popularity; his access to print granted him the power to retaliate promptly against those who publicly interfered with his poetic project. The pressure was especially strong on those who had already been burnt by

liaison with Lady Oxford; that relationship manifests in the formal “move toward structural analysis” which materialized the poet’s “need and attempt to reassess the multidimensional character of all human action” (874). Barbara Ravelhofer has recently offered an explanation in terms of Byron’s resistance to nationalism (36) that draws on an earlier argument by Marilyn Butler, who saw “The Giaour” as an allegorical response to British imperial expansion fuelled by religious zeal (Butler *Empire* 74).

Byron's responses to express condescension to readers "liable to be perplexed by an *ellipsis*" (*Edinburgh Review* RR 843).²⁵⁰

Although Byron left readers without any instructions for the interpretation of the fragmentation, or for the meaning of the asterisks that barred one fragment from another, the fragments did not only raise the issue of the elementary comprehension of the narrative line.²⁵¹ Although the asterisks readily signaled breaks in the line of narrative, they were ambiguous. They could signal an interruption in the speech of one character (as in the Giaour's final speech), but also interruptions in the narrative's chronology (e.g., the description of Leila's beauty in life, lines 473–517, is followed by an account Hassan's journey to meet a new bride, but preceded by what would later appear to be an account of Leila's death); some shifts of narrative perspective are simultaneous with a chronological cleft (e.g., the switch from the "bard" who opens the poem's narrative to the narrator who conveys the situation of the fisher, lines 168–179; the voice of the fisherman we hear once again, in a later fragment, lines 374–387, where he offers a testimony of what appears to be Leila's drowning). It is clear from Byron's correspondence with Murray that the frequency and placement of the asterisks were paramount in his mind as an aide in interpretation in the layout of the text.²⁵² At the same time, they created a formal possibility for Byron to force readers to contend with the challenges posed by an unhelpfully annotated fragmented poem.

²⁵⁰ The *Christian Observer* warns about Byron's power to steer the opinion of his critics by the threat of ruthless revenge: "He has let his rash assailants off, we conceive, only on the pledge, that like hired clappers, they shall in the future praise whatever he may choose to write; reserving the loudest applause for the most manifest faults. Nothing but this can explain their laborious defence of 'fragments.'" (RR 573)

²⁵¹ See Seed, "Disjointed Fragments" about the "normative" fragmentation of "authentic" materials which always implied a continuing action narrated by a single voice (20).

²⁵² In his torrent of letters about corrections and emendations, Byron did not always ask for the favor of correction, either. In a letter of 29th November 1813, Byron rails at Murray, "Dear Sir, '*You have looked at it!*' to much purpose to allow so stupid a blunder to stand—it is not '*courage*' but '*Carnage*' & if you don't want me [to] cut my own throat—see it altered.—I am sorry to hear of the fall of Dresden." (BLJ 3:181)

“But attention is required,” the *British Critic* warned after expressing exhilaration at the poem’s unique approach to form, and readers at the *Satirist* were ready to admit that the fragments demanded more work from readers than did other poems or narratives. They were “obliged to read ‘The Giaour’ several times” before they could “acquire a tolerably clear notion of the story which it relates” (RR 2125). Others complained about the persistence and seeming arbitrariness of disjunctions—what the *Quarterly* reviewer thought were “abrupt and capricious transitions” bound to “embarrass his readers” (RR 2006). The “obscurity” and “distraction” of the fragments, and the “absence of form” (*Edinburgh Review* RR 843) Byron had chosen to present, produced an “unpleasant effect” (*Scots Magazine* RR 2147); “nothing can be more fatal to the effect of any composition...than such repeated interruptions as those in ‘the Giaour;’ and which extinguish interest almost as soon as it is excited” (*Satirist* RR 2133).

Whether fragmentation was tolerable or not depended on whether “The Giaour” was entirely “authentic.” Reviewers at the *British Review* “at first...really thought it to have been the translation of a genuine portion of a Turkish poem;” for the fragmentation of such ancient materials, “necessity is the apology.” Once they realized the poem may not be what they had first thought it, Byron had no excuse, because

deliberately and with premeditation to compose a poem consisting of disjointed parts; to write a narrative without the connecting facts of the story; to plan imperfection; and to prearrange confusion; was a new kind of daring in the field of originality, left open to the genius of Lord Byron. (RR 409)

If it were not authentic, the reviewers implied, they could declare the poem an aesthetic failure and lay the blame at Byron’s feet. For a poem written by one writing to the English audience, there were still conventions and ideals to be followed. “Imperfection is no part of the sublime or beautiful,” pronounced the *Christian Observer* (RR 572). The

British Review concluded in irritation that they “should as soon think of contracting with a builder to construct us a house in a finished state of dilapidation, as to accept at the hand of an author a heap of fragments as a poem” (RR 409).²⁵³

Responses to the form of Byron’s poem reveal that its fragmentation hardly presented an impenetrable riddle, and that its likes had been seen before.²⁵⁴ But it is interesting that the reviews all understood that there was a “story” to be had from Byron’s fragments, that the fragmentation interfered with the presentation of that story, and that the expectations of unity had been cultivated by Byron himself while he was promoting his fragment’s authenticity. Those who refused to understand why fragmentation was necessary exposed the problem created by a “new kind of daring in the field of originality,” that is, they found that Byron’s “accomplishment” required a new set of criteria for aesthetic judgment.

Although it claimed for itself the status of a “translation” of an authentic “Turkish” tale, provided by one familiar with the region in which it was set, “The Giaour” was also a function of the author’s “originality,” of his personal experience as well as of other “authentic” texts. This is why it is important to observe that the poetic procedure in the “fragment of a tale” directed readers to consider the payoff of fumbling through a poem that was built by “accretion” and grew (this much even Byron admitted) like a “snake.” Readers were to face not only the question about what the story *was*, but also the decision about whether this was a story at all. Was it one fragment or many of a single story, various reviewers wanted to know, or was it “but a string of passages,” as

²⁵³ It would be interesting to consider, in conjunction with the taste for “oriental fragments,” the way Byron cultivated the “gothic” dilapidation of his home at Newstead as a part of the “lifestyle” he was creating as a literary figure.

²⁵⁴ Byron’s dedication to Rogers made it clear that the influences were not only empirical but literary as well. Charges of imitation (mostly of Scott) pick up on the significance of “literary” influences.

Byron nonchalantly declared? Some of the images in the poem were “strained” and “unnatural” (RR 843), and the entire passage, according to the *Quarterly*, “which closes a long conversation between the fisherman and the monk is, in truth, a scene in a drama, not a portion of a narrative” (Quarterly RR 2006). The *Edinburgh* concluded that the payoff for reading the poem had little to do with grasping a unified narrative. Instead, the dissolution of the narrative amounted into a lyric synthesis, that is, to

an exposition of the doctrine, that the enjoyment of high minds is only to be found in the unbounded vehemence and strong tumult of the feelings....It is the force and feeling with which this sentiment is expressed and illustrated, which gives the piece before us its chief excellence and effect; and has enabled Lord Byron to turn the elements of an ordinary tale of murder into a strain of noble and impassioned poetry. (RR 843)

The state of disarray of the narrative and Byron’s flights of lyricism prompted the question of the reviewer in the *Scots Magazine* of whether, for Byron, “it might not have been more expedient, to drop narrative altogether, and to assume a subject, which might have afforded legitimate scope to the flights of his fancy” (RR 2147).

BUT IT CONSISTS, IN FACT, OF SEVERAL FRAGMENTS, UNCONNECTED IN THEMSELVES, AND YET SO MANAGED ALTOGETHER, THAT THE ATTENTIVE READER MAY COMBINE FROM THEM A REGULAR STORY.²⁵⁵

The tension between “originality” and “imitation” that could tear a story into individual poems (which all amounted to one solid “doctrine” about the significance of “unbounded vehemence and strong tumult of the feelings”) makes apparent the critics’ assumptions about some seemingly discrete aesthetic and ethical purposes of poetry, historical narratives, and drama that could be deduced from the formal qualities of texts, along with Byron’s apparent lack of awareness that such rules were in place. Byron’s “fragments” interfered with the idea that objective completeness of a poetic text could

²⁵⁵ *British Catalogue*, RR 239.

promise objective independence of readers and texts (an independence that results from the homogeneity of texts regimented into clearly defined genres), and that it could guarantee textual transparency as well as readers' safety. Whether this was a text centered on the plot or on the drama of the protagonist would then be less important than the challenge to readers (embodied in the poem) to decide what it meant to have a story like this, a fractured oriental tale, centered on a character whose physique may have concealed "a noble soul and lineage high,"²⁵⁶ but from whose apparent qualities and actions one could not make out a narrative sequence or an ethical imperative.

Instead of declaring his position within the poem, Byron formulated the answer to the question about how to read "The Giaour"—that is, the answer to the question of whether this text was one fragment or many, or whether there was a narrative to it at all—as an issue of responsibility for reading. By using fragments, Byron worked out structurally, rather than at the level of solemn authorial declaration, the problem of the relationship between the narrative and the poetry by putting fragments in the way of understanding how anyone's "memory" of an event could be recorded, or how a record of a memory could be re-recorded, or even how a "memory" could be built through the process of recording and repetition by those concerned in the preservation of the narrative in which it was encased. Readers' understanding of the narrative would amount to an admission of responsibility for comfort with fragmentation. If all of the poem's pieces were in fact of one narrative, readers were to take responsibility for recognizing the characters and narrators involved in telling the tale, to acknowledge their relationships to

²⁵⁶ Compare Byron's letter to his mother from Albania about the suggestive compliments he had received from Ali Pasha when they met in Albania in 1809. In the letter, Byron reported that Ali Pasha was "certain that I was a man of birth because I had small ears, curling hair, & little white hands, and expressed himself pleased with my appearance & garb" (BLJ 1: 227). Ali's ideas of "judging of a man's birth from ears, hands & c.," Byron thought, "were curious enough" (BLJ 1:228).

each of the viewpoints from which the story was told, and to reconstruct the correct chronology of the narrative line. The poem simultaneously invited suspicion about conflicting guidance for the readers of footnotes, somehow less susceptible to treachery and intended for taking at face value, and that for the readers of poetic texts, advised to use restraint and believe in authenticity.²⁵⁷ It also invited examination of the relationship between the purposes of lyrical, timeless “doctrines” and those of the historically located narrative of which they were a part. The form of the poem obliged readers to observe the formal properties of the poem—the way it literally broke down—by way of understanding how it “passed its time,” in snapshots or fits of attention, and to use their reading to gain procedural knowledge about relevant interpretations and relationships of past events.²⁵⁸

Since consequences in “The Giaour” often precede the causes, the readers are promised no certainty about the most satisfying explanation for the course of the tragic events. They are to note that the perspectives of various agents and narrators in the tale are interspersed and overlapping, and that even the narrators of “authentic tales” occasionally relinquished responsibility for the accuracy of their reports. Some fragments could be attributed to more than one narrator; even at the level of an individual fragment it was advisable to note that “Strange rumors” (l. 447) circulate about Leila’s disappearance from the harem, in the (somewhat unlikely?) guise “of a Georgian page” (l. 456); the tale of Hassan’s “Nubians” (l. 465) supplies details about her master’s

²⁵⁷ Saree Makdisi explains that the “scholarly apparatus” of Oriental tales creates the sense that the Orient always requires the mediation of an Orientalist because the “overall effect of the notes is not to clarify things, but rather to make them more obscure—and hence to reinforce the need for the intervention of the knowledgeable or informed authority figure” (Makdisi 205 n. 39). In Byron’s case, it is necessary to add that the poet brings into question his own status as an authority figure.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Robert Gleckner’s argument that the “poet’s generalizations, interpretations, and analogies is what gives the poem its peculiar effect and interest.” (117)

reaction to Leila's stealth on the night of the disappearance; "others say" (l. 467), on the other hand, that the Giaour was seen on the same night. The story of Hassan's murder by the Giaour was also to be taken with a grain of salt: few from Hassan's entourage "returned to tell the tale" (l. 528) of his death at the hand of the Giaour. Even the purpose of Hassan's fateful trip remains uncertain: "'Tis said" that he was on his way to "woo a bride" that would replace Leila (l. 534).

The reviewer for the *Quarterly* may have been onto something when he observed, upon reading "The Giaour," that

what is read with ease is generally read with rapidity, and that many beauties of style which escape observation in a simple and connected narrative, would be forced on the reader's attention by abrupt and perplexing transitions. It is only when a traveller is obliged to stop on his journey that he is disposed to examine and admire his prospect. (RR 2012)

This statement granted "The Giaour" credit for retarding the reading of the poem as a means to retard its understanding, and, perhaps, to make that understanding and remembering more self-conscious. But so it was within the poem that monumentalized a "true" tale of questionable value. It was not that Byron's verse complicated readers' access to the poem's meaning; it was the Giaour himself who had wished his "confessor"—to whom he had told "such" a story—to lay him to rest "with the humblest dead"

And save the cross above my head,
Be neither name nor emblem spread
By prying stranger to be read,
Or stay the passing pilgrim's tread.' (1325–8)

When it offers fragments or episodes of a narrative in place of a single one, "The Giaour" establishes an "invisible" center in the episode of Leila's murder that could never be reported directly. Even for the Giaour, who put the tragedy into motion, the

scene of origin remains unspeakable—he will say that she died, but he “dare not tell thee how” (l.1056); just as well, since he only knows what

They told me—’twas a hideous tale!
I’d tell it—but my tongue would fail— (l. 1308-9)

In addition to the confusion about the relationship of Leila’s death to customs that appear both permanent and fleeting (engendered by the disparity between the explanatory footnote and the Advertisement), the story of Leila’s death requires revisiting, re-viewing and re-interpreting. The drama is repeated rather than resolved, and Leila lives and dies over and over again, a sublime existence.

The poem deals in repetition of entire narrative forms as models of plausibility, “everyone’s stories” whose mechanics may not need repeating, but in a transformed poetical and historical context which demanded that the conditions under which one could recognize a narrative as familiar, acceptable, as “one’s own,” be re-evaluated. This was different a kind of “Romanticism” from Wordsworth’s, in which the readers required little re-education of taste, and this is how Byron’s labored “authenticity” met with critics’ limits of tolerance for innovation. Byron seemed to worry the legibility of his own language. Reviewers in the *Edinburgh Review* suggested they could not “extend the same indulgence” they had offered to the justified loans to words like

Phingari, which signifies merely the moon; which, though an humble monosyllable, we maintain to be a very good word either for verse or prose, and can, on no account, allow to be supplanted, at this time of day, by any such new and unchristian appellation” (RR 847).

The *British* complained that “most things” are with Byron, “whether meant to be represented as beautiful or sublime, black and dark;” their “ears [were] somewhat tired by the repetition” which ran the danger of becoming in the end “fatiguing” (RR 413). The poet, more importantly, was not to “mingle” those words in the same poem “which point

to nations, times, climates, and customs very wide-apart” (RR 413). Byron was further accused of “inaccuracy of language,” for which “his industry is more at fault than his powers of composition” (*Christian Observer* RR 574), of “harsh and imperfect expression” and “false grammatical construction” (*Critical Review* RR 622), of “an ungrammatical mixture of the past and present tenses” (*Satirist* RR 2129), and of “splashes of diction” that may have been borrowed from Scott (*Eclectic Review* RR 715). *Edinburgh Review* went so far as to correct his “grammatical mistake” in a case when Byron’s chosen word had “no meaning” (RR 845).²⁵⁹ Not only did some of his images seem “strained and unnatural” to the critics, but, even within the poem itself, “traditional” epithets, such as “stern Hassan,” were found to be difficult by the “authentic” tellers of the tale (l. 517-8).

The status of repetition in the valuation of the poem also establishes the status of the Giaour as the “hero” of his tale. The repetition of the hero’s actions was the feared effect of reading the poem that could focalize the readers’ attention and settle the question of the poem’s moral effect. The Giaour could have been crucial, but for the fact that even his name—which titles the poem—required some labor to decipher. The “Giaour” was an “odd, outlandish epithet” (*New Review* RR 1933) with which readers were virtually guaranteed not to be familiar. The riddle of its proper pronunciation, as the reviewer for the *British Review* was ready to point out, “might have been too much for Oedipus himself” (*British* RR 409). The writer for this journal, the singular favorite of

²⁵⁹ The *Satirist* warned Byron that “when a man starts from the crowd, jumps on the literary pedestal, and puts himself in the attitude of Apollo, he has no right to complain if his proportions are examined with rigour.” (RR 2133)

Byron's proverbial "grandmother" (as the poet declared in *Don Juan*),²⁶⁰ was not alone in his suspicion towards linguistic innovation of this sort.²⁶¹ The problem with the word was not only that it was a seemingly gratuitous import into a language already brimming with loans, but that Byron's double-twist on its usage strangely overdetermined the interpretation of the tale. Routinely glossed as the equivalent of the English "infidel," and proffered by Byron to mean as much in the footnote that accompanied the line in which the word first appeared, the word turns out to name an infidel to Islam, a Christian.²⁶²

He is a Christian of questionable piety at that, and one with whose predicament readers were unlikely to sympathize. Byron wrote to Murray that "[t]he Giaour is certainly a bad character—but not dangerous—& I think his fate & his feelings will meet with few proselytes" (BLJ 3:141).²⁶³ The additional trouble with the "heroism" of the

²⁶⁰ Donald Reiman opines in *Romantics Reviewed* that William Roberts, who wrote the reviews of Byron's works for this quarterly, "appears to have been a self-satisfied, humorless pedant, who ultimately allowed his journalistic career to be destroyed by his reaction" to the lines from Canto I of *Don Juan* in which Byron famously sneered at the conservative earnestness (or evangelical zeal) of the *British*:

For fear some prudish
readers should grow
skittish,
I've bribed my grand-
mother's review – the
British. (1671–80)

²⁶¹ Instructions for pronunciation appear not only in the *British Review*, but also in the *Monthly Review*, which backed up its advice by orientalist scholarship of one Dr. Clarke, "who spells the word *Djour*, from which it would appear that he understood the pronunciation differently." (RR 1744)

²⁶² The reviewer in the *New Review* averred that Byron had done something unprecedented: "In this case his Lordship may probably have really done some service to those, who afterwards write about the Turks, particularly to the fabricators of melo-dramas; for certainly it is a very shocking thing to hear a raging turbaned-turk in a play calling a Christian infidel" (RR 1933). The *British* decided not to "attempt to make our readers wiser than ourselves by endeavouring to explain the word: it seems to imply an infidel in the Turkish language, and is consequently a term of reproach. It is not appropriated, we presume, to the Christian, since the Giaour, who is the hero of Lord Byron's poem, appears to hold equally cheap 'Idol, saint, virgin, prophet, crescent, cross.'" (RR 409)

²⁶³ Some reviewers still found in the Giaour undeniable resemblance to the Childe, "the most shameless offender against all the laws and better feelings and rights of man (*Christian Observer* RR 573), and, by implication, to Byron himself. The *Critical Review* claimed that "The Giaour" "affords a direct contradiction to the calumny of those who have asserted that the satiated, gloomy, and apathetic hero of his former poem, is but the portrait of the noble author drawn by himself; for the direct reverse must be he who has a heart to conceive such thoughts as these." (RR 622) The *Eclectic*, however, found that in a "fearful passage" spoken by the Giaour the "readers cannot but recognize the portrait of Childe Harold. Lord B. has

Giaour as the binding tissue of the poem and its poetic effect is complicated by the possibility that “his” story could have been as much “about her he loved and him he slew.” To “know” the Giaour in the poem at all means to accept his evanescence from plain sight, as well as to become involved in an intensive examination of vision as a source of ambivalence about empirical knowledge, always both direct and mediated.

When the Giaour is first introduced to the readers, it is by ominous description of his “start on the eye” of our narrator (“Who thundering comes on the blackest steed?” l. 180), akin to the “start on the fisher’s eye” (l. 168) in the lines that immediately precede the Giaour’s appearance. We should recognize the Giaour’s powers as soon as the narrator does:

“I know thee not, I loathe thy race,
but in thy lineaments I trace
What time shall strengthen, not efface; (191–194)

But the recognition of the omen depends on familiarity with the “lineaments” that are never made available for scrutiny. What seems certain about this past event is only the momentary, passing sight of the Giaour:

On—on he hastened—and he drew
My gaze of wonder as he flew:
Though like a demon of the night
He passed and vanished from my sight;
His aspect and his air impressed
A troubled memory on my breast; (200–205)

As he “drew the gaze” of the knowing as he “hastened” and “flew,” the Giaour “passed and vanished” from their sight. But his “aspect” and his “air” impress a “troubled

disclaimed the character; but that he possesses the power of assuming it, during the hour of inspiration, no one can well doubt.” (RR 712) The *Christian Observer* wished “heartily...that his Lordship had not endeavoured to create any spark of interest for such a wretch.” (RR 576) Byron was later “found out” as an actual participant in the event, most likely as the man who paid for a Muslim girl to be saved in Greece, and, much more enigmatically, as the one who may have been implicated in the affair as her lover. See Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*, 257–258.

memory” on the witnesses of his passing (now the witness and the readers), and the Giaour can continue to “draw the gaze” from the sight preserved in the memory. Thus preserved, the Giaour seems to be more in the present than as he was passing:

He spurs his steed—he nears the steep,
That jutting shadows o’er the deep—
He winds around—he hurries by—
The rock relieves him from mine eye—
For well I ween unwelcome he
Whose glance is fixed on those that flee; (208–213)

As soon as he is “relieved from the eye,” he easily returns to the past, in which

He wound along—but ere he passed
One glance he snatched—as if his last—
A moment checked his wheeling steed—
A moment breathed him from his speed—
A moment on his stirrup stood—
Why looks he o’er the olive wood?— (216–221)

Gazes not only gather information and oppress with their power to apprise of unbearable knowledge; they also betray one’s interests and vulnerabilities.²⁶⁴ The Giaour reveals himself to be subject to the same regime of vision to which the narrators and the readers are subject. In it, relationships are established through a ricochet of gazes: recognition is embodied in the knowing gaze of others, in the binding power of their interests and passions, and in the swiftness with which their interest is aroused and their familiarity established.

As knowledge by direct vision is revealed to be a trap for the Giaour and those who wish to know him (so as to limit his impact), so are readers of the poem tempted and encouraged to look to the Giaour for guidance and identification. This self-recognition is invited not only with the one who appears to be a Christian and a savior of incarcerated women in the name of love, but with the Giaour as the character whose mission the

²⁶⁴ Byron provides an interesting footnote on the significance of the “evil eye,” i.e., the belief that one could be “cursed” to suffer from a specific malady, but also revealing the fear of being known too well (G 419).

readers are given to understand to be their own by working out the binding connection between themselves, the poem's narrators, the Giaour, and the poet. The Giaour confesses into the monk's "secret ear" (l. 1320), sharing his "secrets" with the readers. The monk is the Giaour's trusty confessor, as the translator-poet is the monk's, so the readers benefit from access to the closest available record of the tale from the protagonist's perspective. Yet they suffer from physical exposure to the undigested tale of such extremes. The monk warns that the Giaour's "eye and bitter smile" transfer onto others "his fear and guile" (l. 848), so that the readers become burdened with the "cherished madness" (l. 1180) (that was the pursuit of Leila and her murderer Hassan) as if it were their own, if they should agree that he is "their" hero. Despite the monk's wariness about the effect the Giaour can have on others, when the time comes for the atonement of his transgressions and excesses, Byron allows none to be heard. Instead, he explains in a footnote that the dark hero's monologue could have been interrupted by "the monk's sermon," starting at line 1207, but it was "omitted" because "it seems to have had so little effect upon the patient, that it could have no hopes from the reader" (G 422).²⁶⁵

The poem's fragmentation serves to show that knowledge by vision is a questionable kind of empirical knowledge, in part because it comes too late: the narrator-observer can exclaim "I know him now" (l. 610) only after all the grievous crimes had been committed. At the same time, The Giaour is a "stranger in his native land," a curious qualification for anyone in a place that, as the bard claimed at the beginning of the poem, had "fallen from itself" (l. 139). Even if a "close observer can espy" the

²⁶⁵ The readers are further assured that they already know what such a sermon would look like in the text; they could even infer its nature from the extant verses: "[i]t may be sufficient to say that it was of customary length (as may be perceived from the interruptions and uneasiness of the penitent), and was delivered in the nasal tone of all orthodox preachers" (G 422).

Giaour's "lineage," the story and the doctrines in which the Giaour is here entangled reveal that memory provides direct sight (and not the other way around), that identities get confused and that all clear signs are unreliable.

The Giaour's relationship to "others"—his identification or sameness—is brought into question because he is something of a self-referential entity: he makes his own laws and relativizes the ones he knows to be binding to others. He declares that "her treachery was truth to me" (l. 1067), referring to Leila's adultery against Hassan in the name of her love for the Giaour, and appears to be an agent of his own undoing, who ruined what had brought on his own meaning, his own principle.

My days, though few, have pass'd below
 In much of joy, but more of woe;
 Yet still in hours of love or strife,
 I've scap'd the weariness of life;
 Now leagu'd with friends, now girt by foes,
 I loath'd the languor of repose;
 Now nothing left to love or hate,
 No more with hope or pride elate (982–989)

The Giaour's monologue reveals a kind of circularity to the guiding passions that shaped his singular fate. He appears to be a leading character who fulfills his "doom," as it was "prophesied" by a friend (l. 1228), and in which he found himself unable to decline his role. But he also testifies that his fate had followed a somewhat formulaic script, asserting that, should he find himself among the same props again, they would trigger the same "singularity:"

But place again before my eyes
 Aught that I deem a worthy prize;—
 The maid I love—the man I hate—
 And I will hunt the steps of fate,
 (To save or slay—as these require)
 Through rending steel, and rolling fire;
 Nor need'st thou doubt this speech from one
 Who would but do—what he *hath* done. (1016–1023)

Acting on his prompts, as they require him “to save or slay” (line 1018), the Giaour finds himself quixotically driven by too much uncritical identification with the script of his romance, so that his sensibilities and ethics become suspect precisely because they are not his own, because he strives to avoid “the waste of feelings unemploy’d” (960). In this scenario, the “seen became a part of sight” (l. 1128)—that is, Leila becomes for the Giaour a part of the scripted pursuit, a totalizing preoccupation, a part of his story in which she may be replaced, and surely then not in a story by which many would stand uncritically.

THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION PUTS THE READER QUITE IN THE EAST.²⁶⁶

So “The Giaour” is a “grievous tale.” But whose is the grievance? Why and what are we to mourn? The death of Leila? The death of Hassan? The tragic fate of the Giaour? Because it was a provocation for readers to consider the process of poetic transmission—between empirical experience and experience acquired from reading—“The Giaour” worked out the question of its own relevance to readers who could afford neither to be physically unmoored from their national context, nor to indulge in a worldly disaffection about its ideological myopia. The poem tested the ability of poetry to interrogate the nature of empirical experience—the claim that literature was to become, as Marilyn Butler put it, “a part of and a product of social experience,” a “text of historiography at every turn” (RRR 10). It examined the ability of poetry to convey truth and possibility, and tested the ability of readers to discern the competing ways of

²⁶⁶ *British Critic* RR 239.

understanding “the poem”—what it was capable of containing, re-framing, or even transforming.

Competence at understanding “The Giaour” made it known that readers were already accustomed to forging seamless narratives out of fragments for whose combination limited instructions were provided. The “aesthetic pressure” that was involved in compiling voices in the poem (of which none prevailed), and in the texts that framed it, assigned a doable, familiar task. It was not just this poem that was “fragmented:” so was most experience. As Matthew Wickman explains in *The Ruins of Experience*, “experience has been both requisite and inadequate to knowledge since the Enlightenment” (ix), distrusted for its subjectivity and indispensable for making claims about patterns and exceptions.²⁶⁷ To meet the new requirements for knowledge, we have had to learn (as we now seamlessly do) to experience directly and indirectly at the same time (Wickman 7): from ourselves and from others, from our own text and from another’s. This is how, as Marilyn Butler has observed, Byron’s writing was (and remains) a kind of “materialism” (rather than solipsism) that “relates not only to the flesh, especially to the sins of, but also to the physical worlds of time and space; Caesar’s sphere rather than God’s; the matters of the world as well as of worldliness” (Butler *Empire* 80).

This was especially true for a worldly nation shaped by increasing unknown quantities and qualities most Britons would never get to see in person. Rather than just “vulnerable to influences” (Watkins 874), Byron was courting vulnerability in a poem

²⁶⁷ See Wickman’s explanation of the “blunting force exerted by probability on experience” as an “axiom of modernity,” a double-edged sword. While “the systemic features of probability conjure images of oppressive totalities” on the one hand, “probability enables human agents to convert experience into capital by yoking contingency to a calculus of expectation” and “rationalize their engagements of the world into occasions for profit” on the other (8).

that examined the suitability of poetic texts to take on the task of history writing at a crucial time of England's political and geographical transformation.²⁶⁸ It tested the incongruity of poetry as a form of testimony (that is, the poetic voice as a witness of memory) and as a form of experience, its power to pry open the "secret covenant" between the poetic "confessors" and "the Giaour" to let the readers in. "The Giaour" brought to sharp relief the processes by which histories of individuals (in the shape of a personal memory, an autobiographical footnote, a remembered "tale," or a textual reference) were re-created, related and amalgamated with the histories of relevant others and unknowns.

If the accretion and multiplication of material points of view can deliver us into the "speculative" or "philosophic" regions of interpretation of the poem (following Watkins and McGann),²⁶⁹ the question becomes whose multiplicity it is, or how one acquires a multiplicity of viewpoints from only one life (of reading)—one unified empirical experience and one autobiographical and historical narrative—and whether the ones "in excess" can be properly owned. "The Giaour" pointed to the question of the range of relevant experiences, that is, to the outlines of textual (and ethical) communities whose "stories" and "doctrines" could constitute a recognizable history of an individual. It insinuated that the "social experience" was not only that acquired in England, or that of men as token citizens, and perhaps not even the experience of any "citizens" at all.

²⁶⁸ I have meant to say something here on the relationship of narrative to poetry: the issue of "prosaic" history—of the power of writing to preserve the record or to repeat it for better understanding. Why would such writing have to be in prose? In other words, why is the realism-as-prose the originary point of experience—is thought in prose? What are the mnemonic devices for the narrators or for the readers of poetry? Perhaps the "normality" of prose is a way in which one remembers; conversely, verse would be a condition of being authorless and transferable.

²⁶⁹ See McGann, *Fiery Dust*.

Byron's use of fragments therefore served to mobilize the question of the ethical implications of understanding the aesthetic problem that was a fragmented oriental tale.

Touted as at least a partial transcript translated by a man with empirical experience of the region in which it was set, "The Giaour" demanded valuation and judgment as a mimetic project related to Byron's biography as well as to the genres of writing with which they (the biography and the poem) claimed to share a history. Its placement in the "original context" was to give credence to its ethnographic and poetic authenticity, and its footnotes were to convey supplementary information. Only this information was to be not only about the "Levant," but about the "levantinization" of British literature (Aravamudan *Tropicopolitans* 159). This "levantinization" did not signal a "contamination of European values by supposedly degenerate Levantines" (Aravamudan *Tropicopolitans* 159), but rather openly suggested that the corpus of "national literature" was marked and shaped (even in its most "authentic" ethical and aesthetic realms) by interactions with the "orient." Finding "inspiration" in original uses for the borrowed tropes, Byron alerted readers to the processes of textual domestication of "oriental" narratives on the literary scene, and drew attention to the conditions of their understandability and transfer in an eerie, and often humorous, investigation of the rules of self-recognition in the images of an alien place.²⁷⁰

The poem maintained that experience could not be shaped by texts alone, and instead considered to what degree interaction of literature and "social experience"

²⁷⁰ The critical commonplace about the oriental tale as a factor in an alternative history of the novel is that it served to displace reference, most often to enable satire of England when direct criticism of the Government would have been dangerous. If there is satire in "The Giaour" as an "oriental tale," it may be of the readers' and reviewers' naivety about the operation of "Turkish tales" on the English market, more than explicit satire of any prominent political figures. The *Antijacobin Review* did admit that they were reading from it a more literal kind of allegory, and "almost deluded into a persuasion that the noble bard meant to describe an island nearer home; in which bigotry and priestcraft have produced nearly similar effects." (RR 31).

remained an “open process” (Butler RRR 9). As much as it was open, such that the text of literature was a kind of historiography “at every turn,” it was a process that was closed insofar as the “structures” from which it drew its textual possibilities restricted the range of legible engagements and suggested the shape of provocative ones. Byron’s proffering of the kitsch of “ruins”—their deliberate manufacture in the state of dilapidation suitable for immediate consumption—invited readers to confess to the appeal of the vision of historiography in which aestheticized ruination was admired as long as it provided an opportunity to pity the sublimity of somebody else’s irreparable loss.²⁷¹ Fragments as “deliberate ruins” were an organic form when they came from Greece, which had “fallen from itself” (l. 139); they marked a poem “fallen from itself,” somehow revolting and suspicious, when they were produced in England.

Byron insinuated by the form of his poem that there was a taste already in place for imperialist, metropolitan self-pity inherent in the enjoyment of ruination recognized as one’s own because it was displaced onto a distant locale. In the self-pity slyly hid the gloriousness of history to be recovered from ruins—the kind of historiography that was glad to disregard the process of the history (of the ruin) coming into being and the triumph of disengagement from the responsibility for their enjoyment. This was then also a political challenge posed in aesthetic terms, for readers to imagine how and why they knew what enabled them to understand a “Turkish tale,” and how their understanding had been structured by knowledge they could only acquire through reading a range of

²⁷¹ Susan Stewart finds “distressed genres” to be “as newly minted souvenirs of periodization, ‘everybody’s souvenirs,’ ...close to kitsch objects, artifacts of exaggerated and collective experience” (92). A reviewer in the *Christian Observer* explained that “a man who erects ruins” wholly mistakes the idea of their effect: “It is not simply the ‘marble waste’ of ancient Athens we admire.... It is not the dumb ruins which charm us; it is the spirits which appear to walk among them.... It is the admiration they awaken in us of men shut out from the glorious light of revelation, who struggled in many instances so hard and so successfully to discover truth amidst the falsehoods and absurdities of their superstition” (RR 572).

competing, politicized genres (romances, travel narratives, other oriental tales, or even “novels”).²⁷²

The auxiliary materials, such as the Advertisement or the footnotes, become crucial for the poem’s interpretation because they reveal themselves to be unreliable only in conjunction with the poem-text, and call attention to the relationship between the form of the narrative (the “poem,” the “story”) and the formal pressures that shaped the conditions of its legibility and value. In its form, the poem enacts demands that readers face this new “social” reality—to encounter it in person, with the form of the text. Simultaneously, it stages the demand to face the impossibility of such a task, to recognize the fact that “if experience is implicitly opposed to discourse, or if discourse reanimates experience, then how is one to grasp experience when one is obliged to proceed by means of discourse?” (Wickman xiv) In his experiment demanding that the readers engage with seemingly unfamiliar matter, Byron’s refines the formulation of the crisis in question, to wit: that the “oriental tale” has never been a representation of an object statically or physically available at any time. It was rather an announcement of a profound shift of perspective on knowledge in which there is no empirical experience unmediated by reading; one had better be ready to know what that meant empirically.

Byron “materialism” about the text, then, simultaneously demands readers’ introspection²⁷³—an insight into excursion, repetition and derivativeness as a way of talking about “interiority” and “individuality,” of the consequences of looking out into

²⁷² Frederick Shilstone relates Byron’s formal procedures to “Romantic theory,” that is to say, to Byron’s aesthetics and formal procedures as related to his ideas about “the perceiver’s bond with the material world,” which, in turn, establishes his relationship to the “‘introspective’ Romantic writers” (95). It was an “experiment in perception” performed at the level of form (Shilstone 95). Compare this reading to Butler’s views about whether there was any “theory” to Byron’s writing, or to McGann’s idea that this was “rhetorical” poetry.

²⁷³ See Marilyn Butler’s interpretation in *Romantics, rebels, and reactionaries* of “Romantic” self-conscious individualism as a response to the demands for public jingoism (236).

the world for a relationship to the self. In a knowable world that stands seemingly outside themselves, readers could somehow more comfortably identify with the conventional “infidels” than with Byron’s versions of them.²⁷⁴ Byron exposes in “The Giaour” the tension between the “orientalism” and the self-sameness of the reproducible “orient.” A fragmented oriental tale invited acknowledgement of the transparency of “oriental tales” as a genre of familiarity—of understanding what one was not supposed to understand—and an argument in form that a story about others can somehow be a story of our own, that other places were “like” England, a part of its history and perhaps even images of its future. To this fact nothing testified more than readers’ obvious literacy and fastidiousness about Byron’s approach to the domestication of “oriental” text, and a critical knowledge of inconsistency in mediation of writing and reading in the political interactions between two allegedly distant and incommensurable regions.

Byron’s “orientalism” is then crucial, although less for our judgments of whether it was “good” or not, but rather as an instrument—laid out in the shape of an “oriental tale”—that allowed him to set up a problem which exceeds the questions of simple “ethics of representation.” Byron’s interest in the Levant or in its “orientalism” was not simply “excessively melodramatic and overtly escapist” (Watkins 874), and his work was never “fugitive poetry,” as it was called in one review from the period (RR 87).²⁷⁵ “The

²⁷⁴ Byron makes this kind of comparison even more complicit in *The Bride of Abydos*, where a Miltonic echo illustrates an “oriental” phenomenon (“Into Zuleika’s name. And airy tongues that syllable men’s names. Milton” note 43 to line 8). Byron explains: “For a belief that the souls of the dead inhabit the form of birds, we need not travel to the East. Lord Lyttleton’s ghost story, the belief of the Duchess of Kendal, that George I. flew into her window in the shape of a raven (see Orford’s *Reminiscences*), and many other instances, bring the superstition nearer home. The most singular was the whim of a Worcester lady, who believing her daughter to exist in the shape of a singing bird, literally furnished her pew in the Cathedral with cages-full of the kind; and as she was rich, and a benefactress in beautifying the church, no objection was made to her harmless folly. —For this anecdote, see Orford’s letters.” (W 202)

²⁷⁵ The review appeared in *Belle Assemblée*, a “magazine without intellectual pretensions,” which usually directed little challenge at its fashionable readers to consider much more than the plot of the literature under

Giaour” is more interesting in that it examined the knowability of a world empirically unfamiliar except through access to “culture,” along with the status and role of “literature,” “fiction,” or “broken tales” in the process of transferring knowledge about it. Byron was motivated to “[s]tick to the east,” and advise his friend Moore in 1813 to do the same, not only because he had received the suggestion from “that oracle Stael,” who professed to Byron that “the North, South, and West, have all been exhausted” (BLJ 5:101). The “orient” was not relevant to Byron and his readers as a literary fad, but because the claims of a mass readership to an understanding of its narratives and to sympathies with their characters suggested a kind of familiarity with the region already in place. Byron’s recourse to oriental tales was then not just an unquestioning importation of “oriental detail,” but a challenge to understanding what can constitute knowledge from empirical experience about the unfamiliar, and what role reading could play in teaching the critical skills of understanding others’ experience as one’s own. As the *Edinburgh Review* observed, it was a tale with a “simple outline...which Turk or Christian might have conceived as we have given it, without any great waste of invention” (RR 843).

What, then, if the “oriental” were the new common poetic language? What if, as the reviewers seemed to suggest, there was no distinction between the “loan” and the “original composition?” “The Giaour” posed the question about the nature of knowledge about the “East” and its relevance to readers of “Arabian” or “Turkish” tales as a question about what it meant to learn about relationships to others as a matter of shared historical knowledge that established individuals’ ties to the world. Byron’s poem made explicit the

consideration (Reiman 81). Interestingly, and not surprisingly, it was also a magazine directed at “fashionable ladies,” who seem to be the only ones in the large sample of readerships in Reiman’s *Romantics Reviewed* who could be satisfied to think Byron’s poetry “fugitive;” all others at least suspected that “Turkish tales” were somehow about them.

suspicion Catharine Macaulay had harbored forty years earlier: that the “new information” may not be that new; that the “alien” experience had been had before; that repetition across time and space was its dominant quality.²⁷⁶

This kind of literary historiography should have more impact on the status of the “oriental tale” as a genre irrelevant to the history of national literature, and not just a string of repetitious, derivative poetic declamations that stand apart from the history of self-consciously responsive and inventive narrative forms consumed in the West. As long as they have no relevance to the formative genres of national literature, “oriental tales” can continue to prove entirely apolitical points, akin to that made by the nineteenth-century critic, namely, that “The Giaour” could only be about “love” and “strong feelings.” The sophistication of Byron’s “sharing” of his “experience” of the “Orient” suggests a history of confusion about clear distribution between the texts and readers of the “East” and of the “West” that anticipates the onset of “orientalism,” a term that seems of little use for relating Byron’s work to that of most other “Western” writers who somehow interacted and profited from “being in the East.” The contamination of “Byron’s experience” by other texts, and the contamination of “texts” by Byron’s experience, disarms even the critical assessments finding that Byron was practicing a “good orientalism,” defined largely by his “willingness” to allow the arbitrarily designated “Orient” to present itself on its own terms, and requires a more sophisticated understanding of the possibilities of a “prehistory” of the “postcolonial” discourse.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ In such an interpretation, Byron occupies a place in the tradition of nineteenth-century literature and of British Romanticism of writers who set up, in the words of Srinivas Aravamudan, as a “cultural conduits and translators, rather than as jealous guardians of cultural boundaries” (Aravamudan *Oriental* 16).

²⁷⁷ See Daryl Ogden’s argument that even Venice, which appeared in “The Giaour” to be the place of origin for the “western” Christian character, could be an “Oriental Venice” (118). I’m here borrowing the relevance of the work of István Rév on the “prehistory of post-communism” that informs demands for

HE HAS SO EXTRAVAGANTLY ACCOMMODATED HIMSELF TO THE PERPETUAL HURRY OF THE DAYS WE LIVE IN, AS UTTERLY TO OMIT ALL THOSE PARTS OF THE POEM WHICH HE CONCEIVES WOULD BE LEAST INTERESTING; TO BUILD A FABRIC OF PICTURESQUE FRAGMENTS; TO PRESENT US, IN IMITATION WE SUPPOSE OF ONE OF THE ROMAN EPICURES, WITH A DISH EXCLUSIVELY OF SINGING BIRDS.²⁷⁸

Protesting Byron's use of fragments, conservative critics seized on the opportunity to impugn the poem's form as a release from the poet's *obligation* explicitly to represent himself in the poem, a statement about the morals of the poet who "exhibits many unpleasing marks of a willingness to sacrifice the prospect of lasting fame, to the desire of immediate notoriety" (RR 2241). William St Clair has suggested that historical study of the "mainstream horizons" in which the writings of the Romantic period were first received would be helpful in answering questions that interest students of the Romantic period; specifically, this kind of understanding would permit us better to understand the distrust accorded to Byron's romantic tales (St Clair 288). A common charge against Byron held that the poet had "made crime exciting" (St Clair 288), undermining the mainstream view of the very nature of literature when he damaged the old nexus between poetry and piety:

Childe Harold looks upon some of the most poetic sights in the world, but he remains—not so much misanthropic, the word used at the time—as unimpressed. For readers the secret was out. Looking at the wonders of nature and art did not always lift the spirits, induce a sense of the sublime, or instill religious feelings. If even Lord Byron with all his wealth and opportunities had difficulty mustering the right responses, who could blame a bored English lady.... (289)

Published in the aftermath of the instantaneous fame of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and its author, "The Giaour" was an opportunity to engage with the "Byronic" effect as a constitutive element not only of poetry, but of the world in which poetry operated. But

"retroactive justice" in the aftermath of the Cold War for the discussion about the very possibility of a "post-colonial" discourse or its ability to contend with "colonial" history without tendentious revision.
²⁷⁸ *Christian Observer* RR 572.

simply assuming that “Byron” was “Byronic” would conceal the complexity of Byron’s poetic work in “The Giaour,” whose idiosyncrasy exceeds mere deployment of stock terms loaned from texts of his period or a veiled but straightforward reference to the poet’s biography. Rather than just being unimpressed, the poem wonders why it is, and offers a glimpse into an experiment with the potency of poetry to demand of its readers to acknowledge the intensity and the quality of their relationship to “oriental tales.” Rather than looking for “Byronic” mannerisms, the instantly recognizable “Byronic motifs—leaps, strong supporting arms, and ‘lifeless forms’” (Knox-Shaw 59), or for an easy typology of characters and their predictable postures of “alienation” or “disaffection,” we can consider Byron’s role in enabling poetry (and “literature” more generally) to emerge as the discourse that focalized an unlikely familiarity and sympathy, and even an alliance, between the disaffected aristocratic poet, his massive, provincial readership, and “infidels” of the “East.”

“Byronic” with respect to “The Giaour” then stands as a term for alertness to textual mediation and for the possibility that alien poetry about others could be poetry about oneself. Byron adopts existing models, but also conjures up a world for his readers in which it matters what happens to another, and demonstrates how it is that a relationship of understanding can be established, what its conditions are (text), and what are its limitations (physical immediacy). A study of the commensurability of experience under the conditions in which it can be disclosed to others, the poem studies whether everyone can be like—and understand like—the hero-poet, so that art becomes intrinsic to the understanding of experience. “The Giaour” sets out to explain the processes by which seeming unfamiliarity gives way to knowledge about what happens to a “Giaour”

and a “Leila” in a badly remembered fragment of a “Turkish tale.”²⁷⁹ Byron is then a “Romantic” in that he draws attention to the textual mediation that involves his readers in their changing environment. But he is very different from Wordsworth, the hopeful educator of a future readership and creator of a radically new taste in poetry. Byron proposes a vision of political action through literature that foregrounds the centrality of the poet’s personal privilege in gaining access to a historical vision, but that also looks to examine the relevance of that difference for the sharing of the vision. “The Giaour” is then a “gateway project” that refrained from systematic mockery of the Romantic dictums about experience in the manner that *Don Juan* later would engage in. It is not a virtual poem conceived as a graft on the “experience” of other poems, or on the picaresque social text that thoroughly suffused all of Western Europe with some version of “Byron.” “The Giaour” rather documents a different version of understanding of the relationship between “art” and “society”—between the “inside” of the personal experience of the poem and the “outside” of the society of readers through the medium of poetry. It openly suggests that the reading of poetry is a reading of poets, a hint that the confusion between the “inside” of the poet—the evidence of experience—and the “outside” of his world was still far from being resolved.

²⁷⁹ The self-evidence of “Byronic” qualities is usefully shadowed by D. A. Miller’s argument about the price of intimate acquaintance with the “hidden” work of Jane Austen—the eternal shame it brings upon “the boy Austen reader,” the “incurable queen” (5): “No doubt, this trick anecdote [of unmistakable recognition] is as far from a marriage plot as the language in which it is related is free of the lexical and grammatical archaisms that signify Jane Austen in, for example, those misguided modern continuations of the novels where someone ‘is come’ and something ‘put by.’ Precisely in the absence of these conventional signs of her, however, she is allowed to determine virtually everything else in the joke, from the confident ironic presentation of a universally acknowledged truth, to the wit that hones this truth into trenchant epigrammatic point, to the even more terrible sophistication that, while leaving its ostensible victim unaware of how he is being judged, keeps the dark cloud of shame that fails to descend on him hanging ominously over us, as our own prospective downfall if we should fail, or fail to pretend, to ‘know the rest.’” (Miller 5)

In their concern about Byron's use of the poetic fragments and the footnotes, the critics exposed poetry as a potent (and potentially dangerous) field of innovation in political relations and in the revision of ethical and ideological commonplaces. This is how this "work of Byron" exemplifies an insistence on the confusion about the "documentary" and "fictional" texts, or the "historical" and "literary" ones relevant to literary interpretation. It puts pressure on the distinction between art as an outlet of social pressure and art as a modifier of the social imaginary—as the mirror or the lamp—to note the necessity of finding a way to think it both at once. It gives credence to a Romanticism understood to be a peculiar articulation of problems encountered in the attempt to engage with others under the constraints of individualism, against demands for impossibly complex identity politics, or, to use Uday Singh Mehta's terms, to consider the limits of liberalism at the moment of its encounter with difference. "The Giaour," as a literary project that aligned itself against other texts, other fields of writing, and other geographies, gives license to students of Romanticism to share their interests with those of the eighteenth-century prose in discussion of the role of the "autonomy of art" in historical accounts of the development of stable genres, literary movements and their audiences. The dilemma about Romantic poetry as an unselfconscious reflection of the "outside" or an outbound projection of the "inside" is akin to the pseudo-dilemma between the "one or the other" in the exclusion of "irrelevant" materials from the histories of realist prose, which dominate the study of eighteenth-century literature, designed to exclude the details that interfere with watertight accounts of the endogenous self-fashioning of a national literature with its claim to independence from all factors foreign and inassimilable (Aravamudan *Oriental* 21). To answer the question of why

Byron was unimpressed by “Romantic literature” and why it did not provide the formal or ideological panacea he could rely on permits discussion about Romanticism as more of a “poetic economy” (McGann *Rethinking* 240) than a body of texts or a group of people; it is to suggest a dynamic system of relationships among texts that interrogated each other’s sources of knowledge, modes of existence and vehicles of transfer. The languishing “broken” texts in the vicinity of “literary” ones put a dent in the vision of late eighteenth-century literature as a solidified national corpus that only refers to “itself,” and lets us begin to wonder to whom these texts spoke in the process of defining the boundaries of a “literature,” and what the geographical regions and realms of imagination were to which they were relevant.

APPENDIX ONE

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT FROM THE INDIA OFFICE RECORDS, THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON
HOME MISCELLANEOUS SERIES, VOLUME 134, PAGES 7–11

Information delivered to the Coroner relative to a Supposed Murder [No.27]²⁸⁰

About six weeks ago, a Moor Woman came to dwell in the Maratta petta in Padu Taroo renting a house there at one Pagoda and a half p month.

This woman was very beautiful and had been kept by the Nabob. One day Ameer ul Omrah saw this Woman and longed to enjoy her which after many promises and persuasions he did.

To prevent his Father from having any further connection with this woman —Ameer-UI-Omrah placed two of his sepoy's at her door, some days ago, the Nabob having called her to his remembrance, ordered her to be sent for. Ameer UI-Omrah being informed of this persuaded the Servant that had been sent to bring this Woman to report to his father that she was dead.

The Nabob was not satisfied with the report and made further enquiries about her.

The Ameer thinking that the business would become serious to prevent a discovery, resolved to murder this woman as he had until this time artfully concealed from his father even the least desire for Women, and had condemned his eldest brother for his Debaucheries he was so terrified to that Degree at the thought of this unnatural Amour's

²⁸⁰ In both appendices, I retain without any corrections the spelling and the syntax of the archival texts.

being discovered. He therefore dispatched a man in whom he put great confidence to put the unhappy wretch to death.

The mode Ameer-al-Omrah proposed was an exquisitely [sic] cruel as the mandate was barbarous. He ordered his Creature to carry with him Bricks and Chunam²⁸¹ and in her own House intomb [sic] this miserable woman alive.

The Ameers Servant repaired to the Woman's house on Friday night the 15th Inst on horse back. He brought with him two carts of bricks and one of chunam to put his horrid orders in execution.

The poor creature observing these materials and guessing the dreadful purpose, as it is frequently used amongst the Moors when they want to get rid of a dangerous connection, ran into the back yard of her house, before she could be seiz'd and screamed out repeatedly, murder, with all the tokens of grief and calamity. These shrieks being heard by the neighbours, they ran in great number to her assistance and heard her dismal tale.

The Horseman departed and took with him the Bricks and the Chunam.

In the middle of the ensuing night the same horseman attended by ten foot Soldiers or Peons with drawn sabers, came into the Moorish Woman's house and brought with them a dooley to carry her away. The ill-fated Woman, seeing them enter pierced the air with most pitious [sic] cries which brought her neighbours a second time to her assistance and by their great numbers they saved her.

²⁸¹ Cement or plaster made from shell-lime and sea-sand

The woman distracted with fears, intreated [sic] the owner of the house to go to Mr. Stratton and implore his protection for the safety of her Person against the inhuman purposes of Ameer-ul-Omrah.

The owner of the house accordingly intended to have gone to Mr. Stratton, but in the meantime the Ameer had wrote to Mr. Stratton requesting that he would permit him to carry off this Moorish Woman. Mr. Stratton immediately ordered two of the Company's Peons that attend his person to accompany and assist the Ameers [sic] servants. Accordingly this conjoined body entered the Woman's house on the 17th Instant at Ten o'clock at night forced her into a dooley and carry'd her away.

The unfortunate woman called out in the name of God and her Prophet for mercy, but the People assembled, seeing Peons of the Honble [sic] Company were afraid to assist her.

The Devoted wretch seeing all hopes of relief at an End in despair imprecated the most horrid curses on the English Nation for this suffering a poor innocent Woman and a helpless infant to be delivered into the hands of Murderers.

It is most confidently affirmed that the Ameer's servants murdered this woman near to Chepauck for she has not been heard of since.

One of the Company's Peons name was Trevengadum.

Mr. Stratton told the peons to be careful that the Woman did not kill herself in the road.

/a true copy/

Cha/s Oakeley, Secretary

APPENDIX TWO

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT FROM THE INDIA OFFICE RECORDS, THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON
HOME MISCELLANEOUS SERIES, VOLUME 134, PAGES 365–375

Excerpt from the Consultation Letter from George Stratton to Secretary John Roberts at
the London office of the East India Company, 15th December 1776

There are certain transactions which have passed lately that would appear wholly
incredible if we did not know from experience in England that there is nothing so wicked
or absurd but what Individuals misguided by party are ready to do and believe. I cannot
believe that any of the Transactions I mean to allude to passed with the Privity or consent
of his Lordship, because they are wholly unbecoming the name of Gentleman, but still
they mark very characteristically the present divided state of this settlement, the
confusions it must ever be liable to with a double claim to its Government, and above all
what I am very sorry to see a former design to traduce the Nabob and his family and to
render them odious in the Eyes of the British nation.

You will have learnt Sir by the Greenwich the particulars of the infamous
aspersion of one Randall a sashiered officer from the service of the Nabob he had the
insolence to report that Ameer Ul Amrah had attempted to persuade him to Pistol Lord
Pigot. The story was carried to the Mount without examining the character of the Man it
was published chiefly, by the persuasions of Mr. Monckton, who when it was privately

told him hinted (it is reported) to Randall that it wanted authenticity. Randall immediately made affidavit to the Truth of it. He got 600 pagodas from Mr. Monckton and recommendations home from Lord Pigot and it has since proved that he is a notorious imposter and raised this Story only with a view to force Money from the Ameer. Among other falsities it is proved that he pretended to receive letters from Lord North and other of the first and most respectable Character amongst his Majesty's ministers and from Sir Elijah Impey to give himself a consequence at the Durbar with a view of enforcing a sum of Money.

A late report of a similar nature is still more infamous and more improbable. It is briefly this. —

Mr. George Andrew Ram, late Coroner, sends the Secretary a Paper, said to have accidentally fallen into his hands and pretending to be still Coroner requires aid to bring the Truth of the Contents to light, and the Criminals to Justice.

The contents of this Paper, which bears every mark of having been drawn with a most studied attention sets forth__ That a very beautiful Moor woman who had been kept by the Nabob came about Six weeks ago to dwell in the Black Town, that Ameer Ul Omrah saw this Woman __ desired her __ and enjoyed her __ and to prevent his Father have her again stationed seapoys over her __ the Nabob however recollects and enquires for her __ the Ameer prevails on the Servants to say she is dead __ the Nabob does not believe it. The Ameer anxious to conceal his crime resolves to murder this Woman, and for this purpose sends two Cart loads of Brick and Chunam to bury her alive in the Black Town. The Woman however __ not chusing to be buried alive shrieks out and allows the

Neighbours and the Horseman who was to execute this Barbarious murder departs and takes the Bricks and the Chunam along with him.

Next night finding that burying her was impracticable, ten foot soldiers, with drawn Sabres come to the House with a dooly to carry off in __ The woman dreading her destiny again alarms the Neighbours who a second time save her (notwithstanding the Ten soldiers with their drawn Sabres).

She then the next morning desires the Owner of the House to apply to me for Protection and the owner intended it but in the meantime Ameer ul Omrah writes to me to request permission to carry off this Woman. I grant it and send two of my body peons to accompany and assist the Ameer's Servants. This conjoined body enter the House. The Woman calls on God and her Prophet for mercy. The people assembled dared not to assist her because of the Companys Peons she is hurried off in a dooley imprecating curses on the English Nation. That it is confidently affirmed that the Ameers Servants murdered this Woman near Chepauk, (the old Nabob's House) because she has not been heard of since. It concludes with saying that I told the Peons to be careful that the Woman did not murder herself.

None but minds totally obscured by the Spirit of Party would venture to expose to the world such detail of the most improbable barefaced scandalous falsehoods -- a most beautiful Woman is discharged from the Haram of the Old Nabob, from whence it is utterly repugnant to every feeling of delicacy and honour ever to discharge any Woman __ she goes to dwell in the Black Town in a house of a Pagoda and a half per Month, the Ameer, who is noted for his singular attachment to one wife and his constancy to her sees this Woman in the Black Town where it could be proved he has never been within the

time mentioned he enjoys her, and to secrete her from His Father's knowledge ___ takes the very best method to render the connection publick -- by placing two of his seapoys at her house the Father enquires for her ___ and the Ameer to conceal his crimes — resolves to murder her by sending cart loads of bricks and chunam without Bricklayers, in the mist of a populous town, to entomb her in one night, and the person to execute this design is a single Horseman this wont do and next night ten Seapoys go with drawn Swords ___ they forget to stop her cries and she allows the Neighbours, poor Gentoos, who would fly at the sight of a seapoy still wont do it is therefore thought necessary to make me willfully accessory at least to the Rape of this Woman, and what ten seapoys could not effect in the night, is performed by two Peons in the daytime.

The real truth of this story is that one of the servants of the Ameer had been married to the Woman in question for three years for some family reasons he had sent her and her child to live in the Black Town during the heavy Rains the Wall of his House had tumbled down and he engaged with a Bricklayer to mend it. Whilst they were about this work the Woman was violently ill and cried with pain. Some of his idle or malicious neighbours said that he wanted to bury her alive and prevented him from going on with the work. He applied to the Ameer to remove her to Triplicane and the Black Town being totally under Companys authority the Ameer sent to tell me that some disputes had happened about a man and his wife and requested I would order a Peon to carry them to him, the man being his servant and he would settle any differences between them. I sent a peon to advise the people to go to the Ameer they went very quietly ___ and the Ameer gave them a House in Triplicane. I never heard more of this matter till the forgoing

infamous falsities, wickedly framed on the ground of it, were made publick by Mr. Rams address to the Secretary.

The whole affair was juridically enquired into. The fact as I have related it, proved by witnesses the woman found to be living at Triplicane and her Person secure from harm. She was found to be very far from handsome. It being the time of the session the Grand Jury enquired into the matter the original paper of accusation was shifted from Mr. Ram to Mr. Foster ___ from Mr. Foster to one Choliapah the Son of Mooda Kistnah Head Dubash to Lord Pigot and from him to I have heard to a man who was produced well dressed but on examination he was found to be drawer of Toddy from the Cocoa Nut Trees and so far from being able to frame a Paper in very correct English and studied Phrases, cou'd neither write or read any Language whatever. The Grand Jury presented Mr. George Foster a Civil Servant of the Company and Choliapa the Son of Moodu Kistnah as guilty of writing and publishing a false Scandalous and malicious Libel against Ameer ul Omrah accusing him of a premeditation Intention to commit murder on the Body of a Moor Woman and intimating a violent suspicion that the said Moor Woman was actually murdered by the orders and directions of Ameer ul Omrah. They also presented that in the aforesaid libel I was charged with aiding and abetting by causing her to be forcibly seized and delivered to the Ameer. One Vencaitachillum with other unknown Persons were charged with publishing a like libel in the Malabar language as was Chittumballum the Comptroller for another Libel charging the Ameer with committing a Rape on this Moor Woman and it appeared also in this last mentioned libel that I was maliciously charged with a criminal neglect of Duty in being informed of the Murder intended to be committed and not taking measures to bring the supposed

offenders to Justice. The Grand Jury therefore recommended that an enquiry be made after the said offenders to bring them to Justice. It was found that the Paper did not fall quite accidentally into the hands of Mr. Ram. Choliapah the Son of Moodu Kistnah, head Dubash to Lord Pigot, absconded to the Mount the very night of the presentment where he had a long conference with his Lordship kept at the mount and remained there two days.

I thought it to be requisite to be something particular regarding this transaction because I learn that the Original Paper of accusation has been sent down some days ago to Anjengo in order to be transmitted to England by the Latham. I trust it will at once be seen in the wicked light it was meant, of depreciating Character for Party Purposes and I think no credit can be given to it — all the original papers shall be sent by the first direct conveyance.

It is difficult to imagine any Persons in the Characters of Gentlemen should either countenance the circulation of such reports or even be seen conversing with those who are capable of circulating them. But it is certain that all such persons are particularly well received at the Mount. Randall who by Mr. Moncktons own confession was almost unknown to him till he invented that infamous accusation against Ameer Ul Omrah of an attempt to suborn him, Randall, to assassinate Lord Pigot, was after that accusation being publicly sworn to by him, received at the Mount, Lord Pigot gave him a particular Recommendation to Capt Abercrombie of the Grenville, who tho' extremely obliged to me, persisted in giving a passage to this person, against my advice and against the Orders both of the Board and the Company: it is also said he furnished him with Introductory letters to England. he obtained 600 Pagodas from Mr. Monckton. Mr. Ram who first

produced the foregoing Scandalous Falsehoods degrading the respectable Character of the Old Nabob, and charging his son Ameer ul Omrah with a Rape and Murder and myself as an accomplice in the Fact and neglecting my Duty as a Justice of the Peace by omitting to pursue the proper methods for bringing the criminals to Justice, this Ram, is one of the most forward Partizants of his Lordship. Foster who some time before Mr. Stone would hardly have spoke to was brought into Town in his Chariot and openly countenanced at the Mount both before and since, his presentment, for publishing this Scandalous Libel, the source is to be observed by Choliapath the son of Moody Kistnah the Dubash²⁸² of Lord Pigot.

²⁸² A dubash was an Indian interpreter or commissioned representative, employed, according to the OED, to “transact business with the natives.” The word, originating from Hindustani, literally translates as “man of two languages.” *Hobson-Jobson, the Anglo-Indian Dictionary* attributes a particular meaning to the word in the Madras region, where it referred to “a usual servant in every household; and there is still one attached to each mercantile house, as the broker transacting business with natives, and corresponding to the Calcutta bunyan.” (328)

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