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RENDERING EMPIRE:

RENT AND THE WRITING OF LIBERAL IMPERIALISM, 1776-1833

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Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British political economists invented the "doctrine of rent" to explain how the limited powers of the soil are turned into the returns of property ownership. "Rendering Empire" is a literary history of this political economic concept.
It shows how writers of the British romantic period both contributed and responded to a new conception of nature and value that arose from a series of crises in Britain's domestic and colonial territories. Whereas eighteenth-century sciences of wealth had conceived value to be rooted in nature's providential gifts, the classical political economists of the nineteenth century saw rent as a product of nature's declining capacity to sustain human communities. Reading across the archives of romantic literature and the political economy of imperialism, I argue that Britain's transition from an empire of "improvement" to a global rent-collector coincided with this broad shift in the relationship between nature and value.

My title "Rendering Empire" points to the representational and poetic implications imbedded in the word "rent," which derives from the Latin "*reditus*" to signify both a profitable

"return" and a tributary "rendering." As a category of economic surplus that is not simply *made*, but *rendered* from a tenant to an owner of land, rent both activates and re-inscribes a relationship of power across a hierarchy of property and possession. As such, it reveals how the creation of value depends on the impositions of law over the natural powers of the land. "Rendering Empire" shows how romantic-era writings in and about Britain's agrarian peripheries trace the complex dynamics of natural and imperial power that give rise to rent. In doing so, these texts reimagine the political, ecological, and epistemological forms embedded in landed property. I argue that the global-regional literatures of British romanticism innovated received literary genres—especially romance—in order to demonstrate the contradictions of liberal political economy when applied to Britain's colonial territories.

Literary scholars have demonstrated the role of commerce and labor in the development of novelistic and poetic form, but they have neglected the force of landed property on the literary imagination. In focusing on the third term of classical political economy's tripartite conception of wealth (stock, wages, and rent), "Rendering Empire" shows how the writing of imperial rent demanded a radical reinterpretation of the genre of romance. Romance had been theorized during the enlightenment as a genre rooted in the landed economies of ancient feudalism. Whereas the popular appeal of eighteenth-century gothic romance novels derived from the window they were supposed to provide into ancient manners, I show how the key tropes of romance were redeployed after the 1790s in narratives of the colonial periphery, in ways that disordered progressivist notions of civilizational development rooted in the improvement of the land. If romance is the preeminent genre of the ruin, I argue that its "romantic" displacement throughout the spaces of imperial rent reveal empire as a system that turns ruination into value.

The four chapters of "Rendering "Empire" are arranged geographically, each focusing on a distinct region of liberal-imperial transformation (Ireland, America, the West Indies, and India). Chapter One, "Development, Romance, and the Fiction of Feudalism," looks at how Maria Edgeworth's treatment of absentee landlordism in her Irish Tales upsets the distinction put forward in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* between "natural" and "unnatural" development. Chapter Two, "The Geography of Atlantic Capital and the Romance of Accumulation," reads William Wordsworth's *Excursion* (1814) with John Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption* (1801) to show how the figurative ideal of America as natural ground of Republican virtue was challenged by a theoretical and poetic linkage between European enclosure and frontier slavery. In Chapter Three, "Annihilated Property: Slavery and Reproduction After Abolition," James Montgomery's *The West Indies* (1809), Matthew Lewis' *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1815-19/1834), and Cynric Williams *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827) reveal the decline of West Indian property following the Slave-Trade Abolition Act (1807) as the result of an incompatibility between tropical fecundity (of land and of slaves) and liberal political economy. Chapter Four, "Bare Possession: Property and History in a Liberal Empire," pairs James Mill's *History of British India* (1817) with Walter Scott's *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827) to explore how a liberal-imperial conception of sovereignty (premised not on the "romance of property" but on the global management of scarcity and subsistence) demands the invention of new genres of historical fiction.

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Introduction

Imperial Improvement and the Rent Chronotope

> The discovery of the *net product,* by the venerable Confucius of Europe, will one day change the face of the world… The whole moral and physical advantage of societies is summed up in one point, *an increase in the net product*; all damage done to society is determined by this fact, *a reduction of the net product*. It is on the two scales of this balance that you can place and weigh laws, manners, customs, vices, and virtues.
>
> Victor de Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau,
> Letter to J. J. Rousseau, July 30, 1767

> To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about.
>
> Edward Said,
> *Culture and Imperialism*

In *Mansfield Park* improvement is a measure of decline. When Mr. Rushworth rambles on about his planned improvements to Sotherton Court while rolling past the "disgrace[ful]" "cottages" on his land; when Mary Crawford demands that Edmund tear up his farmyard and garden, buy up a

nearby commons, and rotate his house ninety degrees to improve its "approach"; when the horrible Mrs. Norris claims she too would take "prodigious delight in improving and planting" if she only had the space, Jane Austen shows how the botan-economic practice of "improvement" that had turned so massive a profit in Britain's global territories (including Sir Thomas' Antigua estate) had been transformed into a fashionable mode of frivolous spending for England's gentry.[1] Austen's use of the term, of course, draws on the long eighteenth-century's sciences of improvement, essentially a set of techniques for turning the natural powers of the soil into abstract value—through technological reforms, through new regimes of labor management, and through improved integration with markets. Philosophically, the root idea of improvement was that all value originates in nature, in the spontaneous powers of the soil: this was the metaphysics of improvement behind John Locke's theory that property arises from the mixture of human labor with nature's gifts, memorably embodied in the "works and improvements" of Robinson Crusoe's island.[2] Political economy, meanwhile, developed a new theory of government in which the power of the state would be subordinated to the value-generating capacity of the environment. The task of the legislator is to direct capital according to the "natural progress of opulence": first feeding the people with agriculture, then directing the surplus into domestic manufacturing, and finally using the extra stock to supply foreign trade.[3] What the French

[1] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. June Sturrock (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001), 107, 253, 81.

[2] John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1960), 327-343; Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152.

[3] The concept of the "natural progress of opulence" is the topic of Book III of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannon (Toronto: Modern Library, 1994), especially 407-412.

political economists called *physiocracie* or "government by nature" provided both a policy for the management of the grain market and a normative theory of development, ordering the stages of civilizational development by the progressive repurposing of nature's surplus. Improvement, on this view, was not only a means of enrichment, but a philosophy of history.

By Austen's time, however, the metaphysics of improvement had begun to unravel. It was no longer clear that nature's bounty is the key to economic wealth. On the contrary, value came to be seen as a product, not of the fertility of nature, but of its scarcity: the harder it became for the poor to feed themselves, the cheaper the labor necessary to the production of wealth. Observers noticed, not only that the richest nations were often those with the poorest citizens, but also that landed property seemed to be more expensive in places where over-cultivation had led to declining powers of the soil. Thus David Ricardo: "when land is most abundant, when most productive, and most fertile, it yields no rent; and it is only when its powers decay, and less is yielded in return for labour, that a share of the original produce of the more fertile portions is set apart for rent."[4] The blithe economic irresponsibility of the *Mansfield Park* improvers correlates with the rent they receive as income, which seems to depend very little on the quality of their land or the livelihoods of the men and women who work it. Only Fanny, the novel's quiet moral center, exhibits any real care for the land, ignoring her companions chatter on the way to Sotherton while "observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children."[5] While Fanny's Ricardian way of appreciating the landscape represents the possibility of both moral and

[4] *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation. The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo.* Ed. Piero Sfraffa. Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 75.

[5] Austen, *Mansfield Park,* 106.

economic reform of England's gentry, these reforms are set against the background of a nation and an empire that had turned the decay of nature into a means of enrichment.

This dissertation is about the contradictions of improvement and their implications for the ecology of the British empire circa 1776-1834. As a work of literary history, it seeks to uncover the work of imagination and form underpinning the material and economic manifestations of improvement and decline. While it is not a new idea that literature plays a role in the making of empire, I pursue a more entangled account of literary poetics and the processes of imperial wealth extraction than is typically recognized by literary scholars. Few novels have so influenced the way critics read the literature of empire as *Mansfield Park*. Edward Said's infamous appraisal of the novel powerfully demonstrated how the hardly spoken references to Europe's global dominions (even in the most seemingly domestic of novels) could be used to reconstruct the cultural logic of imperialism.[6] For Said, this logic is motivated overwhelmingly to affirm imperial dominance: thus Austen "sees the legitimacy of Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas properties as the a natural extension of the calm, the order, the beauties of Mansfield Park, one central estate validating the economically supportive role of the peripheral other."[7] But as my brief reconstruction of the novel's troubled political economy of improvement demonstrates, what counts as "economically supportive" is very much in question in *Mansfield Park*. Rather than assuming British writers' confidence in the economic and political validity of the empire, I try to understand the ways British romantic literature understood and interrogated the processes through which empire abstracted value from the powers of the soil. By doing so I hope to more

[6] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

[7] Said, 79.

rigorously read the literary history of empire in terms of what Said rightly views as Empire's foundational preoccupation: the "actual geographical possession of the land" (78).

The logic by which possession creates value is by no means self-evident: it required the invention of new narrative and conceptual forms as much as the conquest and improvement of new territories. Yet literary criticism has largely left such issues to economic historians. It will be helpful to recall a crucial citation in Said's reading of Austen, Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*. No one is more attentive to the relation between literary writing and land possession than Williams; yet, like Said, he tends to view the economic justification of landed property as given. When Williams alerts us to the dual ambiguity of two eighteenth-century keywords – "improvement" and "cultivation" – his emphasis is on the side of cultural rather than economic meaning:

> There is the improvement of soil, stock, yields, in a working agriculture. And there is the improvement of houses, parks, artificial landscapes, which absorbed so much of the actually increasing wealth…Cultivation has the same ambiguity as improvement: there is increased growth, and this is converted into rents; and then the rents are converted into what is seen as a cultivated society. [8]

Literary scholars of empire have taken the cue of Williams and Said to focus on the second side of this ambiguity—the cultural dimension of improvement and cultivation. It has been assumed that the role of literature to empire has been one of legitimation, justification, and normalization; or, conversely, one of critique. In contrast, the material motivations and techniques of both domestic and colonial improvement – enclosure, plantation management, trade, and so on – have

[8] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 116.

been viewed as matters of fact. The question of just how an estate, plantation, colony, nation, or empire "improves," in the banal sense of turning a profit, has been viewed as beyond the purview of the literary scholar. "There is increased growth, and this is converted into rents": Williams' declarative assurance belies the deep controversies among gentleman farmers, political economists, colonial administrators, other savants about what economic "growth" was, what its origins where, and whom it benefitted. If Said sees the ordered universe of Mansfield Park (and *Mansfield Park)* "validating the economically supportive role" or Sir Thomas' Antigua estates, it was not clear to Austen's contemporaries that Britain's colonial holdings offered much support at all: Adam Smith was not alone in arguing that West Indian plantations drained British capital from more productive agricultural investments. Nor was it clear just how "growth" turned into "rents", or how the spending of rents by Bertrams and Crawfords contributed to the economy as a whole.

"Rendering Empire" argues that literature and literary criticism might indeed have something to say about just how and why "there is increased growth,"—about how, why, and whether it ought to be that this growth is "converted into rents." Looking beyond Mansfield to the literatures of the British colonial periphery, it reconstructs the ways in which novelists, poets, and other writers interested in the shaping of empire raised and challenged the project of improvement – of turning nature into value – at the level of literary form. To do so, I focus on the concept of rent, a topic of significant controversy for the fledgling science of political economy during just the years Austen was writing. Rent, quite simply, is a revenue collected by an owner of property in exchange for its use by someone else. In the context of eighteenth-century British agricultural capitalism, it denoted the share of annual produce paid to a landlord by a farmer, who in turn hired poor laborers to work the land he leased. These three figures – the

landlord, the capitalist farmer, and the worker – in turn represent the three forms of interest (what Marx calls "the trinitarian formula") that together make up the entirety of national wealth: the rents of land, the profits of stock, and the wages of labor.[9] Only the latter two terms have attracted much attention from scholars in the humanities: while we have excellent literary histories from the perspectives of labor and commerce, rent has been viewed as a straightforward and somewhat antiquated economic category of little relevance to modern culture. But for writers in the romantic period, the concept of rent crystalized a host of environmental, political, and epistemological issues. Beyond its pat definition as "the price paid for the use of land,"[10] rent names the economic surplus derived from the conjunction of two forms of power: on the one hand, the powers of soil and organic matter invested with the energy of the sun; on the other, the legal-political power of property. For political economists, novelists, poets, and others, rent was the concept through which the politics and culture of a globalizing world confronted their condition and limit in the natural powers of the soil.

As the joint produce of ecology and empire, rent offers a salient conceptual apparatus for ongoing scholarly interest in the intersections of literary culture, environmentalism, political economy, and transnational history. In tracking the intellectual history of rent through the literature of the romantic period, my aim is to demonstrate how emergent theories and practices of value extraction influenced the forms of narrative, figure, and genre among writers seeking to describe the imperial world. The debates over the theory of rent concerned the extent to which economic wealth depended on natural fertility, and the way the proceeds of this fertility were

[9] *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, Vol. 3 of 3 (London: Penguin, 1991), 953-970.

[10] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 166.

apportioned between society and state. As a category that toggles the axes of production and distribution, rent condensed a whole host of questions relating to how the surplus of nature is converted into economic value, who gets it, and the social forms that facilitate or hinder this process. By what right was this surplus appropriated by the owners of the soil, rather than those who worked it? How did these surpluses circulate through the channels of manufacture, and commerce? Did rent arise from the improvement of the soil, or on the contrary from its gradual decline with the intensification of agricultural capitalism? To what extent did the expansion of colonial agriculture help to balance the decline? It was with these questions in mind that Thomas De Quincey would describe rent as the category through which the abstractions of political economy "inosculates with politics and the philosophy of social life."[11]

But my argument is not just that the development of a rentier empire provides a necessary background for the textual innovations of romanticism. The relationship between these two foci of the dissertation is not one of "text" and "context": rather, what the literary works discussed in this dissertation reveal is the ways in which the extraction of rent was itself a complex process of signification. One of the peculiarities of rent as a distinct category of surplus that is not simply *made*, but *rendered*: it is an economic product that also represents a relationship of power between the tenant and the sovereign possessor of the soil. As William Blackstone put it in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-9), "The word rent or render, *reditus*, signifies a compensation or return, it being in the nature of an acknowledgement given for the possession of

[11] *The Logic of Political Economy. The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. Vol 14. Ed. Whale (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001) 283.

some corporeal inheritance."[12] As Blackstone's etymological definition demonstrates, rent is foundationally a practice of tribute, an "acknowledgement" or representation ("rendering") of established distinctions between landlords and tenants, owners and makers. Mediating between the economic categories of labor (making, *poeisis*) and commerce (exchange, *mimesis*), rent's extraction and distribution simultaneously establishes and makes visible the channels of power and property that make an empire recognizable as such. If the payment of rent turns nature into value, it simultaneously reveals and activates hierarchies of imperial power.

The poetic and representational implications of rent were not lost on romantic-era writers. The challenges of tracking the movement of natural surplus from farm to farmer, from land agent to landlord, and from colony to metropole provoked innovation in the realm of literature as much as in the sciences of wealth, if simply because the disciplinary boundaries we now take for granted between literature and political economy were only just being erected. It was once good literary-historical common sense that the writings of first-generation romantics like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey were motivated to elevate literature as a discipline apart from the crassness of political economy: in locating their writings in settings of rural and pre-commercial nature, they sought to preserving a purely aesthetic domain of value free of the abstracting forces of industry and commerce.[13] But the romantic-era literary

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[12] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. 2 of 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765), 41.

[13] More recent studies have told a more interpenetrating history of the disciplines of literature and economics. See Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 285-335; Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Economics in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7-34; Alexander Dick, *Romanticism and the Gold Standard: Money Literature, and the Economic Debate in Britain 1790-1830* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), and Phillip Connell,

fascination with agrarian life cannot be wholly understood as a search for a non-commodified scene of aesthetic reflection. Writers interested in the cultural and political ties of Britain's empire could not help but attend to the ways in which the scenes of rural life in Britain and in the colonies were defined by property's mediation of nature and society. Their writings reveal an imperial romanticism adjacent to, but not entirely separate from, the anti-economics of "high" romanticism: here, narrating the dynamics of nature and property becomes a way of representing empire itself.

Consider the well-known conversation between fool Wamba and the swineherd Gurth early in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. As Wamba explains, when a swineherd transfers pigs as rent-in-kind to his landlord, they are ontologically and linguistically converted from objects of pastoral care into consumable luxuries: "when the brute lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name [swine]; but becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried to the castle hall of the nobles."[14] In using Gurth's rent to symbolize the inequalities of Norman imperialism, Scott conceptualizes rent not simply as a derivation of value from natural systems (soil, plants, pigs) but as a transactional practice of signification, a "rendering" in the double sense of representation and tributary payment. Scott's use of rent as a figure of empire is thus simultaneously material and allegorical: the metamorphosis of swine into pork symbolizes a feudal mode of empire just as feudalism itself (according to enlightenment historiography) really was a political hierarchy of rental tributes.

Romanticism, Economics, and the Question of "Culture" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[14] Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe,* ed. Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 21.

While *Ivanhoe*'s medieval setting may seem far flung from the moment of colonial economic transformation this dissertation deals with, this was in fact a crucial scene for imagining romantic imperial sovereignty. Blackstone and other historians of feudalism saw the circuits of rent (connecting those who work the land, to their lords or "possessors", to the King) as organizing a structure of sovereignty based on a fiction of feudal possession. For Blackstone, it was ironically the Norman conquest that first introduced to Britain (and to modernity) a justification of sovereignty on the basis of original territorial possession: "it became a fundamental maxim and necessary principle (though in reality a mere fiction) of our English tenures, 'that the King is the universal lord and original proprietor of all the lands in his kingdom.'"[15] Blackstone's account of Norman feudalism shows how the Lockean synthesis of original possession and territorial sovereignty was not a precept of natural law but a fiction manufactured in an era of territorial conquest and absentee rule. Kathleen Davis has argued in *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* that the Enlightenment invention of the "feudal system" provided modern Europe with the governmental and ideological apparatus necessary to legitimate its growing colonial dominions. Scott's *Ivanhoe*, in returning to the post-Norman moment of Saxon oppression and Middle Eastern crusades, reanimates the primal scene in which enlightenment historiography developed the techniques of modern imperial rendering.

The material and figural poetics of rent that feature in *Ivanhoe* were central to the ways romantic-era writers represented the complex cultural and economic circuits that enabled Britain to abstract value from the occupants of its global "possessions." When Edmund Burke wrote in

[15] Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. 2, 51.

opposition to a proposed "absentee tax" on Irish landowners residing in England, his argument was that absentee rents provide the affective and symbolic ties that unite the empire. Writing to Charles Bingham, Burke suggested that without the transfer of rents across the Irish Sea,

> We shall be barbarised on both sides of the water. *We* shall sink into surly, brutish Johns, and *you* will degenerate into wild Irish. It is impossible that we should be the wiser, or the more agreeable; certainly we shall not love one another the better for this forced separation, which our ministers, who have already done so much for the dissolution of every other sort of good connexion, are now mediating for the further improvement of this too well united empire.[16]

Parodying the fashionable language of improvement, Burke sees the siphoning of rents from Irish tenants to Anglo-Irish owners as the sustaining infrastructure of imperial sympathy. And so he worries that the improvers' "next step will be to encourage all the colonies, about thirty separate governments, to keep their people from all intercourse with each other, and with the mother country." Another Anglo-Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth, presents a memorable emblem of this form of intercourse in her novel *The Absentee,* where a party of "superlative fashionables" thrown by the would-be fashionable absentee Lady Clonbrony turns Irish rents into a pastiche of intercolonial luxury, fitting her London home with Turkish tent fabrics", "seraglio ottomans", "Alhambra hangings," and a miniature Chinese pagoda. While colonial rent is what makes this party possible, the visibility of its source also disorders its fashionable appeal: and so Lady Dareville mocks the faux-authenticity of the pagoda by recognizing "the very vase in which B—

[16] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, with a Biographical and Critical Introduction, and Portrait after Sir Joshua Reynolds.* Vol. 2 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1834) 385-6. Michael Griffin describes the context of the quotation in *Enlightenment in Ruins: The Geographies of Oliver Goldsmith* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013): 123.

—, the nabob's father, who was, you know, a China captain, smuggled his dear little Chinese wife and all her fortune out of Canton –positively, actually put the lid on, packed her up, and sent her off on shipboard!" (35). The humor of Lady Clonbrony's party comes from its collapse of one global imaginary into another, as the assembled exotic marvels are revealed not as authentic artifacts of distant worlds but as an accumulation of too-proximate nabob wealth; the making visible of colonial rents thus disrupts the political and sentimental ties they are supposed to represent.

LITERATURE, ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE

"Rendering Empire" divides its attention between the political economic theories of rent that influenced the "liberalization" of Empire in the early nineteenth century, and literary works by writers such as Edgeworth, John Thelwall, William Wordsworth, Walter Scott, James Montgomery, Matthew Gregory Lewis, and others who endeavored both to describe and interrogate the process of liberal empire-making. Before describing this process and the literary history surrounding it in more detail, however, I would first like to clarify some of the methodological issues raised by a literary history of rent. In treating rent as a mode of imperial rendering my work is clearly indebted to the "new economic criticism," which (particularly in eighteenth-century scholarship) has shown how the rise of modern economic phenomena and the rise of the novel traversed overlapping discursive territory and relied upon similar concepts and forms (realism, character, probability, credit, sentiment). But I would also like to mark a differing point of emphasis. Like new historicism more broadly, key works of new economic criticism set themselves apart from an "old", predominantly Marxist mode of economic criticism

which had read literature as a superstructural effect of changes in economic base: in contrast, this scholarship looked to the ways economic phenomena shares literature's discursive terrain rather than rigidly determining it.[17] It seems to me that the much of the scholarly reaction against Marxist "productivism" has missed the dialectical spin of Marx's critique of political economy, whereby the labor theory of value is revealed as a historical fiction rather than an immutable philosophical truth. But it is not my goal to reinstate an orthodox differentiation between base and superstructure. On the contrary, I hope to show how literature both participated in and interrogated the erection of the very epistemological frames through which something like "productivism" or economic determinism became possible.

"Rendering Empire" looks to the ways literature comprehends and participates in the creation of the infrastructural as a mode of cultural cognition. It thus finds a place alongside recent anthropological scholarship interested in the cultural form of infrastructures, from energy grids to transportation technologies to the supply chains of natural resource extraction.[18]

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[17] In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies, these key works include Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Great Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of British Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), *Nobody's Stories: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), *The Body Economic*; Deirdre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Science of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and *Genres of the Credit Economy.*

[18] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43.3 (1999): 377-91; Paul Dourish and Genevieve Bell, "The Infrastructure of Experience and the Experience of Infrastructure: Meaning and Structure in Everyday Encounters with Space," *Environment and Planning B Planning and Design* 34.3 (2007): 414-430; Dominic Boyer and

Enlightenment sciences of wealth tended to posit agriculture as the base of all economic and cultural activity.[19] The belief that all social and political forms originate in the way surplus is derived from the improvement of land was key, not only to the reforms that transformed Britain's colonial empire at the end of the nineteenth century, but also to the literary works that sought to narrate these national and imperial developments. Rent was thus one of the central categories through which writers discussed the looping circuitry of natural fertility and property value—nowhere more thoroughly imagined than in the *Tableau Économique* (1758) of François Quesnay (Mirabeau's "venerable Confucius of Europe" in the epigraph), where the landowner's surplus is charted through its countless metamorphoses as the vital force of trade, manufacture, art, and state. It was because all economic activity ultimately requires land, and because land is limited, that rent achieves its special infrastructural role: the landed classes so-called "natural monopoly"—an exclusive possession of land undergirding all other forms of economic possession and exchange.

But the infrastructural status of rent was not as neatly deterministic as the forms of productivism posed by the "vulgar economists" of the nineteenth century; a fact that matters to the interpretive and poetic practices that developed alongside the theory of rent. Recall again Smith's account of the "natural progress of opulence" in the *Wealth of Nations,* in which the stages of civilization are arranged according to the progressive re-instrumentalization of nature's

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Cymene Howe, "Aeolian extractivism and community wind in Southern Mexico." *Public Culture*, 2016; and *Infrastructure* (2011), a curated collection of articles put together by Jessica Lockrem and Adonia Lugo for the journal *Cultural Anthropology* (https://culanth.org/curated_collections/11-infrastructure)

[19] This was also the age, of course, in which the accelerating use of fossil fuels was shaping a newly dominant culture of energy that is still with us today. Virtually all political economists felt obliged to remark on the relation between agricultural rents and mining rents.

bounty from agriculture to manufacturing to trade. For Smith, history itself has its origins in the surplus of agricultural industry, which provide the groundwork of laissez-faire economic activity. Historians of the novel have long insisted on the importance of Smith's theory of development (along with his influential theory of moral sentiments and his related conception of the market as a natural self-regulating system) to such late eighteenth-century genres as the sentimental novel, the historical romance, and the regional tale. But critics have paid less attention to the way this abstract model of natural exchange was articulated in opposition to a very real and present history of European wealth through the conjunction of sovereign military power and corporate monopoly rights to the exploitation of the colonial world (what the radical poet, novelist, and pamphleteer John Thelwall called the "war system," which for him was an equivalent to the "commercial system"). For this reason alone, the literary history of commerce needs a fuller account of the role of imperialism in the shaping of economic doctrine and its cultural analogues. The third book of *The Wealth of Nations* famously bemoans the "perverse" upside-down history of European wealth, which had run exactly counter to the "natural progress of opulence": rather than prioritizing agriculture and reinvesting its surpluses in manufacturing and foreign trade, European development, from its feudal to its mercantile empires, had prioritized the pursuit of foreign luxuries, wasting the surpluses of land in military exploit and colonial expansion. Smith thus posits two models of commercial development, one premised in the gradual improvement of agricultural surplus, the other in the competition of imperial powers to subject new global territories to the exploitation of the corporate state.

The question of whether commercial society grows organically from the natural environment or feeds parasitically upon it was not a strictly empirical one: the epistemologies required to settle the matter were as much the product of figurative and conceptual innovation as

material observation. The writings of global romanticism allow us to see the way literary form grappled with the doctrines of improvement and its associated philosophy of nature, at the very moment the British empire was reforming itself according to the emergent science of political economy. While the turn from the "first" to the "second" British Empire has long been a preoccupation of historians, it is only recently that literary critics have begun to write about romantic-era literature in light of this evolution from a set of colonies managed by chartered monopoly corporations to a centralized Empire whose governmental logic was derived, in large part, from political economy.[20] One of the theses of this project is that the development of the "second British empire" corresponded with a shift in the theoretical conception of nature's relation to value. Whereas the enlightenment project of improvement (following the natural law tradition of Locke) viewed valuable property as the product of man's labor mixed with the free gifts of nature, post-Malthusian economics increasingly viewed value as a product of the attrition of nature (of both soil and human bodies).

A Brief History of Rent

The conceptual burden of the political economy's disillusionment with improvement is nowhere more visible than in the changing conception of rent. It will be useful to give a schematic overview of this intellectual history. We have already seen that Smith adopted Quesnay's notion

[20] See Rebecca Cole Heinowitz, *Spanish America and British Romanticism 1777–1826: Rewriting Conquest* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2010), and Ayse Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-faire, and the Global Nineteenth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

that agriculture alone of economic activities participated in the creation of value: whereas manufacture and trade constituted a zero-sum exchange of materials, agriculture alone made economic growth possible by integrating something originally external to the traffic of values. Rent was the economic equivalent of an original gift of natural providence: on this point Smith disagreed with his friend David Hume, who had argued that landowners were a fundamentally wasteful class, who by their "prodigality and expense make a continual demand for borrowing" and thus, if unchecked by a responsible merchant class, cause the reckless increase of interest rates.[21] Smith accepted Hume's psychology of rent while nevertheless arguing that the landed interests (unlike the "money'd interest" celebrated by Hume) were intrinsically aligned with the interests of the nation as a whole.

It would be a mistake to narrowly construe the disagreement between Smith and Hume over the virtues of land as part of a national debate concerning the competing passions and interests of various British social classes. Rather, as I discuss in Chapter One, the horizons of Smith's theory of rent were set in the colonies: his argument for the fundamental priority of agriculture over colonial trade fit with the *Wealth of Nations* attack on the East India Company and other organs of mercantile imperialism. The anti-colonial bent of Smith's thought coincided with a broad turn in liberal thought against the utility of colonies; but Smith's faith in the landed interest would not be persuasive for long. By the end of the eighteenth century – in the context of the French Revolution and its attack on the feudal rights of idle landowners, followed by the dearth years of the Napoleanic Wars and the heated debates over the Corn Laws – rent came to

[21] David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987), 301-2.

be understood as a monopolistic revenue which effectively stole bread from the mouths of the laboring poor. While the political economists of the early nineteenth century were no enthusiasts of the Revolution, they too came to see rent as an unproductive monopoly revenue. In 1803, Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi charged the rent, far from "being the only fruit of labor that adds something to the national wealth," was in fact the only product "whose value is purely nominal, and is in reality nothing: it is a result of the price increase that a vendor gets by virtue of his privilege, without the thing actually sold being worth more"[22]. David Buchanan agreed: "the landlord was … enriched by the high price, at the expense of the community."[23]

But it was the writings of Thomas Robert Malthus and David Ricardo that systematically overthrew the physiocratic view of rent. While Malthus – ever a faithful (if controversial) servant of the landed interest – defended the landlord's "natural monopoly" against Sismondi and Buchanan, his pamphlet *On the Nature and Progress of Rent* (1815) introduced a conceptual framework that would establish a lasting divide between liberal political economy and with landed property. Malthus' pamphlet demonstrated that rent was the result of a difference in soil quality between a given parcel and the surrounding neighborhood. Since the price of foodstuffs was always relative to the costs of production on the least fertile cultivated lands, the owners of

[22] "Cette partie de la rente foncière est celle que les Economistes ont décorée du nom du produit net, comme étant le seul fruit du travail qui ajoutât quelque chose á la richesse nationale. On pourroit, au contraire, soutenir contre eux, que c'est la seule partie du produit du travail, dont la valeur soit purement nominale, et l'ait rien de réelle: c'est en effet résultant de l'augmentation de prix qu'obtient un vendeur en vertu de son privilège sans que la chose vendue en vaille réellement davantage." Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, *De la richesse commerciale; ou, Principes d'économic politique, appliqués à la Législation du Commerce*, Vol. 1 (Geneva: J. J. Paschoud, 1803), 49.

[23] David Buchanan, *Observations on the Subjects Treated of in Dr. Smith's Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh & Innes, 1814), 135

more fertile lands could command the extra produce in the form of money-rent. This is the theory of "differential rent" that would be so influentially elaborated in Ricardo's *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. For both Ricardo and Malthus, the theory disproved the charge levied by both radicals and reformers that high costs of food for the poor were caused by the high rents of the rich. On the contrary, the doctrine of rent explained high rents as the *effect*, not the cause, of high food prices, making the case by proposing an abstract, universal narrative of agricultural development: whereas agriculture in a given region always begins on the most fertile available land, a rising population would always require more and poorer lands to be taken into cultivation; the extra expense of farming these lands would result in higher food prices, and thus higher rents for the owners of the better fields. Malthus and Ricardo thus reconstruct the landscape of agricultural capitalism as an algebraic map, distributed according to the return on investment in land across continents and between "new" countries and "old" ones:

> Thus suppose land – No. 1, 2, 3 – to yield, with an equal employment of capital and labour, a net produce of 100, 90, and 80 quarters of corn. In a new country, where there is an abundance of fertile land compared with the population, and where therefore it is only necessary to cultivate No. 1, the whole net produce will belong to the cultivator, and will be the profits of the stock which he advances. As soon as population had so far increased as to make it necessary to cultivate No.2, from which ninety quarters only can be obtained after supporting the labourers, rent would commence on No. 1… In the same manner it might be shown that when No. 3 is brought into cultivation, the rent of No 2 must be ten quarters, or the value of ten quarters, whilst the rent of No. 2 would rise to twenty quarters.[24]

[24] David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation,* 70.

And yet while Ricardo and Malthus agreed on the principles of the doctrine, their interpretations of its ramifications diverged sharply.[25] Malthus retained the physiocratic view of rent as a providential "gift of nature," but gave this doctrine a bizarre twist. It was not that rent provided the original bounty that animated all economic production and exchange; rather, as an unproductive expenditure of the idle rich, rent prevented *too much* capital being reinvested into the economy, functioning as a limit to over-production and overpopulation. As Donald Winch notes, Malthus was troubled by the post-Waterloo decline of Britain's wartime expenditures, which might lead to a rise in population; he saw landlords' spending on servants, fashion, luxuries, and the kinds of perverse "improvements" ridiculed by Austen as a way to pick up the slack of wasteful spending.[26] He thus turned the radical charge against landlords' essential parasitism into a holy mandate of "a beneficent Creator" to "place some limit to the production of food" through their conspicuous consumption: rent remains a gift of nature, not because it arises from the free powers of the soil, but because the extravagance of the idle rich maintains a necessary level of poverty among the working poor.[27]

Malthus' writings represent the final gasp of physiocracy's conception of rent as a "gift of Providence." For Ricardo, this idea was just as absurd as the defense of the landed interest it buttressed: for while he agreed with Malthus that high rents were "the effect, not the cause" of high food prices, he drew the implication that landlords were the sole beneficiaries of the

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[25] For a more detailed account of the Malthus-Ricardo debate, see Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 349-388.

[26] Winch, *Riches and Poverty,* 363.

[27] Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy. Variorum Edition*. Ed. John Pullen. Vol 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 227-8.

diminishing returns of both profits and labor wages as national industry advanced: "the interest of the landlord is always opposed to the interest of every other class of society."[28] But if Ricardo thus splits Smith's original alignment of the landed interest and the general good, the intellectual history of rent from Smith to Ricardo involves more than a shift in political economy's class affiliation. Rather, Ricardo's formulation of the modern rent doctrine involved a new way of conceiving the movement of value through space (or the "application of capital to land"): the mechanism of its movement is the deterioration of the powers of the soil.

Implied in this new topography of capital is a radical reconception of nature's relation to value. Ricardo's theory of rent entirely inverts the premise of improvement, by which land offers the most lucrative capital investment on account of the rent borne from its fertility. On the contrary, Ricardo pointed out, natural fertility was anathema to rent extraction: in "new countries" no landed interest could exist. "The labour of nature is paid, not because she does much, but because she does little. In proportion as she becomes niggardly in her gifts, she exacts a greater price for her work. Where she is munificently beneficent, she always works gratis" (209n). On this model, the landowner only gets a revenue from his land where the powers of nature have been pushed beyond their carrying capacity. The capitalist farmer, in contrast, wants to establish himself "in those countries where the disposable land is most fertile," even as the gradual decline of the soil's fertility inevitably turns the productive returns of capital into the unproductive returns of the landlord. As Michel Foucault puts it in his summary of Ricardo in *The Order of Things*, the theory of rent reveals value, not as a "sign of nature's fruitfulness," but

[28] David Ricardo, *An Essay on Profits, Works of David Ricardo*, Ed. Pierro Sraffa, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 21. As Donald Winch notes, Ricardo here reverses "one of Smith's most confident assertions." *Riches and Poverty,* 353.

as "that which indicates, in an ever more insistent manner, [nature's] essential avarice"; "Ground rent is the effect, not of a prolific nature, but of the avarice of land."[29]

What this brief intellectual history reveals is that the theory of rent was more than an algebraic formula for calculating the returns of land ownership. This calculation itself involved a specific way of conceiving both the space of landed property (a topography of land-plots of various quality, interlinked by market mechanisms, equally subject to possible capital investment) and its temporality (the gradual decay of the productivity of land in relation to population, matched by the diminishing returns of capital and labor). The invention of the modern theory of rent is the invention of a new conceptual topography of value – a "chronotope" in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense – in which capital's movement to lands that maximize returns is counterbalanced by the downward pressures of soil degradation and the absorption of profits in the rent of land. Foucault points to the historical dimension of the theory of rent when he places Ricardo at the transition between a classical regime of "representation" (equivalence and exchange) to a modern regime of "history" (production). For Foucault, Ricardo's theory of rent simultaneously inserts history into political economy and brings it to a halt, charting a trajectory of slowing profits and rising rents that terminates in a situation of economic stasis: "ground rent will reach a ceiling and will cease to exert its customary pressure upon industrial profits, which will then become stabilized. The tide of History will at last become slack."[30] But it would be

[29] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1989), 281.

[30] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 259. It should be noted that this passage seriously misconstrues Ricardo's position, which always allows for improvements in productivity through technological innovation (machines, fertilizers) as well as through the expansion of colonies. It is on this basis that Fredrik Albritton Jonsson has recently placed Ricardo's thought at the head

more accurate to say that the chronotope of rent displaces the historicity of economic production from the stagnating global "center" to the colonial periphery. The shape of British imperial expansion after losing of its American colonies in 1776 is driven by the combined pressures of overpopulation at home and the desire to establish new zones for capital beyond the strangle-hold of the rentier—in those zones where "land is most abundant, … most productive, and most fertile … yielding no rent."[31]

It was also on the basis of the rent chronotope that political economy shifted, in the early nineteenth century, from the anti-colonial philosophy of Smith to an applied imperial science. It is notable that Malthus first outlined his theory of rent as chair of political economy at the East India Company College at Haileybury; James Mill, examiner of correspondence for the East India Company and would-be popularizer of his friend Ricardo (Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* is only barely more readable than Ricardo's *Principles*) made the theory of rent the cornerstone of a series of reforms in the lead-up to the Government of India Act in 1833. Ricardo's theory of rent prompted the rise of a whole field of colonial political economy:

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of the tradition of "limitless growth" economics. "The Origins of Cornucopianism: A Preliminary Genealogy," *Critical Historical Studies*, 1.1 (2015), 1–18.

[31] Ricardo, *Principles,* 75. Samir Amin explains global dynamics of capital during this period as following this Ricardian logic: "How, in fact, did the English bourgeoisie succeed in reducing the rent charged by the landlords? By abolishing the Corn Laws and substituting for English wheat American wheat, which paid no rent (since there were no landlords on the other side of the Atlantic). It was thus by establishing a new alliance of classes, between English capitalists and American farmers, that the English bourgeoisie freed itself from its local adversary. In its turn, this redistribution of forces modified the division of labor. In England it made possible accelerated industrialization, and in America accelerated development of agriculture." *The Law of Worldwide Value.* Trans. Brian Pearce and Shane Mage (London: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 79-80. A similar logic oversees France's colonization of Algeria later in the nineteenth century: "Settlement in Algeria benefited from the availability of 'lands without owners' (owing to the laws expropriating the Algerians) and Algerian wine, which paid no rent, made it possible to lower the income of French winegrowers." (81)

reformers like Robert Wilmot-Horton and Edward Gibbon Wakefield accepted Ricardo's premise that "new countries" resist the extraction of rent but denying that capital grows fastest in the absence of a landed interest. They argued that the abundance of cheap fertile land, rather than the cause of colonial prosperity, made capital accumulation impossible without the use of slave labor, as without a landed interest to monopolize the soil, settlers would inevitably find their own subsistence rather than sell their labor to capitalists. These notions were developed by Wakefield into his influential "art of colonization," whereby colonial plots would be sold by government-chartered land corporations at a "sufficient price" to disbar laborers from owning their own land, using the proceeds to encourage emigration from an overpopulated mother-country England.[32] Versions of the "Wakefield principle" were applied throughout the colonial world in the Victorian era, from Canada to New Zealand and Australia to South Africa. Wakefield's art of colonization is thus the clearest example of the way Britain's global territories were remade

[32] Bernard Semmel summarizes Wakefield's theory of systematic colonization as follows: "The 'Wakefield principle' … was this: the selling of colonial lands at a ' sufficient price', instead of either granting them free or at a nominal price, as had been the custom, using the proceeds of sales to promote emigration to the colony concerned. The seller would be, in Wakefield's view, a private colonizing company to whom a tract of lands would be granted by the government, in exchange for their organizing such a program of colonization. The consequence of cheap or free land in the colonies had been the virtual absence of a laboring class, without which capital could not profitably emigrate or colonial economies be properly developed; it meant the scattering of the population, and the consequent failure to establish a genuine division of employments, upon which economic progress depended. If a sufficiently high price were set upon colonial lands, emigrants without sufficient capital would be obliged to sell their labor until they had accumulated enough money to purchase land, and become, in turn, employers of more recent emigrants. It was only in this way, Wakefield argued, that bond slavery would be unnecessary and that agriculture might be placed upon its most productive footing." *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism 1750-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 81-2.

according to the philosophy that the powers of nature inhibit the accumulation of capital, which only the energies of an imperial state could correct.

Romance and the Rent Chronotope

One way of describing this dissertation is as a history of the rent chronotope as it emerged in the literature of the romantic period. The four chapters of "Rendering Empire" are organized geographically, each focusing on a specific colonial (or postcolonial) region to highlight the ways in which the turn to liberal empire hinged upon the extraction and distribution of rent: in Ireland, where the 1800 Act of Union did nothing to slow the rackrenting of Irish estates by absentee landlords and their agents; in America, where the Jeffersonian promise of a yeoman republic (where rent does not exist) was increasingly revealed as a Wakefieldian geography of cheap land and slave labor; in the depressed post-abolition West Indies, where the 1834 Emancipation Act amounted to a government buy-out of defaulted plantation mortgages; and in India, where the end of the East India Company's charter in 1834 necessitated its transition from a trading organization to a sovereign collector of peasant rents, crushing local landowning zemindaris (a class virtually invented by earlier British reforms) in order to turn agricultural districts over to peasant proprietors. Each of these regional transformations show how the liberal remaking of the British Empire demanded new concepts and practices for turning territorial ownership into abstract value. These were not the products of economic thought alone, but of a messy assemblage of genres and discourses brought to the task of describing and directing the extraction of wealth from property in land.

I focus in particular in the deployment of "romance" as a genre of colonial rent, showing how novelists, poets, and other literary observers used romantic motifs and strategies to reflect the affective and cultural effects of free trade imperialism's extraction of value from the land. Enlightenment literary history gave the title romance to both the manners and favorite stories of ancient feudalism, a world characterized (as moralist-poet James Beattie put it) both by a landed economy with "very little, or no commerce," and by a literary culture of excessive narrative credulity: "the world was then ignorant and credulous, and passionately fond of wonderful adventures, and deeds of valor."[33] Romance is the genre of David Hume's excessively interested landlord, ignorant, rapacious, and in debt, who consumes silly tales of knights and goblins the way he consumes his rent. Ian Duncan has argued that the novel's rise (from the gothic through Scott to Dickens) was buoyed by its successive incorporation and containment of romance tropes, allowing readerly enjoyment of a fabulous national past within a secular narrative frame.[34] In looking to the function of romance in a colonial rather than a national setting, however, I show how romance tropes challenged the theories of national development imagined by the administrators of liberal Empire. The texts discussed in the following chapters demonstrate the way the fiction of romance (like the fiction of "feudalism" itself) was reproduced through the expansions of a rent-seeking empire. Romance is revealed, not as the re-emergence of a suppressed ancient manners and customs, but as a form of "underdevelopment" reproduced through capital's territorial expansions.

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[33] James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1783), 519, 559.

[34] Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel*, *1760-1850: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Chapter One, "Development, Romance, and the Fiction of Feudalism," shows how Maria Edgeworth's Irish Tales rework the narrative form of romance to mount a sentimental solution to the problem of absentee rent. By reading Edgeworth's through the conceptions of free trade and landlord paternalism developed by one of her favorite authors, Adam Smith, I show how *Castle Rackrent* (1801)*, Ennui* (1809), and *The Absentee* (1812) narrate the breakdown of Smith's "natural progress of opulence" in a world of liberal-colonial ownership; at the same time, these novels seek to restore Smith's grounding of free trade in the virtues of landed property by turning sentimental attachment between landlords and tenants into a means of political economic repair.

Whereas Chapter One looks to Ireland to show how material processes of colonial rent extraction disordered liberal theories of national development, the following chapter "The Geography of Atlantic Capital and the Romance of Accumulation" reads the politics of romance in the 1790s against the long-established function of America as a grounding mythological terrain of enlightenment political thought. The abstract space of the settler colony, as posited in the political theory of John Locke and later by political economy, posited an "empty world" of fertile unappropriated land which provided property with a foundation in natural law. This mythic space was in contrast to property's other famous origin story, the emergence of "feudal law" in the conquest economy that succeeded the breakdown of the Roman empire. Chapter Two looks at two romances of transatlantic migration—Wordsworth's *The Excursion* and Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption*—to show how these two founding myths of property came into conflict with one another. Wordsworth and Thelwall offer alternative approaches to the chronotope of colonial rent, which we can call "speculative" and "material." As Wordsworth narrates the solitary's Jacobin disappointment and subsequent flight to America, the romance of natural law is revealed as a speculative motor of political breakdown, responsible both for the

excesses of the French Revolution and the broken promise of American liberty. Whereas Wordsworth narrates the creation of transatlantic space as the ill-advised pursuit of a romantic ideal, Thelwall instead shows how the experience of romance emerges from the material processes of accumulation and exploitation:

Together chapters one and two suggest that early political economy's "cornucopianism" (to borrow the term Fredrik Albritton Jonsson has recently used to describe this tendency of enlightenment thought) provoked writers to revise standard understandings of romance and its underlying theory of development. For Edgeworth, Wordsworth, and Thelwall, the liberal project to "improve" the colonial world reproduced the pseudo-feudal affects and narrative forms of romance rather than pulling these spaces into the current of commercial society. In contrast, chapters three and four look at how writers responded to a post-Malthusian view of rent, in which the land's creation value is proportional to the difficulty of feeding its population. The sugar islands of the West Indies were the most dramatic setting in which this question was tested. Parliament's decision to abolish the slave trade in 1807 was not solely motivated by humanitarian ideals. Legislators were also making a bet in favor of the liberal economic argument (repeated continually in abolitionist papers and speeches) that the continual influx of slaves from Africa was both preventing the improvement of West Indian soil and labor, and adding an immense cost to the production of sugar; by this logic, neither colonial planters nor British consumers could afford *not* to abolish the slave trade.

Chapter Three, "Annihilated Property: Slavery and Reproduction After Abolition" reads across abolitionist poetry, slave songs, pro-slavery pamphlets, plantation literature, and parliamentary writing in order to evaluate the fate of this liberal faith in natural improvement as it played out in the post-abolition West Indies. Focusing in particular on James Montgomery's

abolitionist epic *The West Indies* (1809), Matthew Gregory Lewis'*Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1815-18/1834), and the anonymous planter novel *Hamel the Obeah Man* (1827), I suggest that pro-slavery colonists and their sympathetic interests in Britain exposed the liberal fallacy that natural fecundity (of both soil and human beings) is the source of economic wealth. To the contrary, as the West India Committee Chairperson Alexander M'Donnell put it, "spontaneous bountifulness of nature" in the tropical colonies made accumulation impossible without the use of slavery, as the abundance of fertile and food made it unnecessary for the poor to sell their labor in order to survive: "in a country where the abundance of food puts the [dread of starvation] out of the question, the ground, if cultivated at all, must be cultivated by the system of slavery."[35] The liberal reform of the sugar islands coincided with metropolitan banks' takeover of increasingly insolvent plantations. In *Hamel the Obeah Man*, the genre of colonial romance is retooled in order to make a curious case for planters' sovereign control of land and slaves despite their worthless condition as property. More broadly, the argument of this chapter is that our understanding of the history of abolition is vastly impoverished if we fail to consider the way political discussions of slavery and free labor were situated within the wider ecology of colonial production. As the recent writings of modern-day antislavery crusader Kevin Bales show, slavery is always coincident with the devastation of the local environment.[36] The post-abolition Caribbean an important locus for understanding the way the profitability of slavery has been historically articulated with the ecological stability of land: the argument of pro-slavery

[35] Alexander McDonnell, *Considerations on Negro Slavery* (London: Longman, Hurst,Rees, Ormes, Brown, and Green, 1824), 59, 71.

[36] Kevin Bales, *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016)

advocates was essentially that the tropical landscape was not yet sufficiently degraded to afford the employment of free labor. As plantations strove to reform to the conditions of a liberal empire, slaves bore the burden of liberalism's attempt to reorganize their bodies in accordance with political economic norms of labor, physical sustenance, and sexual reproduction.

The turn to liberal empire is generally recognized to have involved a shift in territorial emphasis from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Chapter Four "Bare Possession: Property and History in a Liberal Empire" considers how the East India Company's change in identity from merchant corporation to governing body (a metamorphosis completed with the expiration of its trading charter in 1834) accorded with a shifting conception of the relation between sovereign power and property. I argue that the theory of rent authorized a movement away from a conception of empire as a "rule of property," in which private land ownership is the basis of sovereign order, toward an administration of "bare possession," where possession is reduced to an entitlement to minimal conditions of existence. Reading the logic of bare possession as it is elaborated in two cases—James Mill's monumental *History of British India* (1817) and Walter Scott's only novel to include a setting in India, *The Chronicles of Canongate* (1827)—I show how an imperial-economic turn away from physiocracy and its metaphysics of nature's bounty reversed the political affections of property that emerged in both earlier versions liberal political economy and in the genre of historical romance epitomized in Scott's novels. In *The Chronicles of the Canongate*—the first of the Novels of Waverly to be published under his own name—Scott allegorizes the East India Company's liberal transition through a reconception of his own literary persona: whereas Scott had frequently staged the "Author of Waverley" in the character of improving planter, joint-stock company, and sovereign, Scott imagines the author of *The Chronicles* as a subsistence worker, the proceeds of whose labor are transformed into the rents of

finance. Scott conspicuously abandons the romantic Waverleyian topos of the hero restored to his property in order to allegorize a liberal world where the abstraction of value depends on the administration of bare possession.

Mirabeau's forecast that the discovery of the laws of rent "will one day change the face of the world" has proved true in ways he could not have anticipated; and not only in the making of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism. We continue to inhabit a world in which all levels of social and political organization ("laws, manners, customs, vices, and virtues") hang on the prospect of endless economic growth abstracted from the finite materiality of the earth. While "Rendering Empire" refrains from speculating on the historical, cultural, or philosophical parameters that define "the Anthropocene," it joins recent postcolonial historians and literary critics in claiming that empire is both a crucial element in its history and a conceptual resource for its analysis. The literary history of rent offers a perspective that focuses less on the particular energy resources responsible for the release of carbon into the atmosphere than on the conceptual and political apparatuses through which the powers of nature were thought to contribute to economic growth. It is important to keep in mind that although land was, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the theory of rent's privileged resource, this was due not to the ontological particularity of agriculture but because no one had then (as we have now) been able to restrict the use of other free gifts of nature necessary to economic life. As Jean-Baptiste Say put it:

> The earth … is not the only agent of nature which has a productive power; but it is the only one, or nearly so, that one set of men take to themselves, to the exclusion of others; and of which, consequently, they can appropriate the benefits. The waters of rivers, and of the sea, by the power which they have of giving movement to our machines, carrying our boats, nourishing our fish, have also a productive power; the wind which turns our mills, and even the heat of the sun, work for us; but happily no one has

> yet been able to say, 'the wind and the sun are mine, and the service which they render must be paid for.'[37]

From the perspective of this dissertation, empire *is* the condition and organ for the utterance of such unhappy declarations; rent is the currency of their substantiation. Empire establishes and legitimates the appropriation of what is common; what is rendered in return is not so much the price of a shared-resource-turned-commodity as a tribute in recognition of dominion.

A brief Coda, "Romantic Poetry and Immaterial Labor," projects this conception of rent and empire forward in order to consider how poetic techniques of romantic-imperial cognition might interface with more recent material infrastructures. Experimenting with a reading of Wordsworth's reflections on poetry, nature, and common land as anticipating recent debates about information capitalism, "immaterial labor," and "cognitive rent," I suggest that his poetry might help to clarify the ecological ramifications of our own (only apparently) immaterial modes of accumulation. If by leaping from the romantic age to the present I risk passing by more proximate transformations of the rent chronotope in the nineteenth-century evolution of liberal empire, I hope doing so provokes a sense of the broader interpretive possibilities and challenges posed by the imperial logic of rent.

[37] Quoted in Ricardo, *Principles,* 69n.

Chapter One

Development, Romance, and the Fiction of Feudalism

> And first we will remark that in this country any talk of feudalism is a comparatively new thing: I should say that we do not hear of a feudal system until long after feudalism has ceased to exist … If my examiner went on with his questions and asked me, when did the feudal system attain its most perfect development? I should answer, about the middle of the last century.
>
> - F. W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England* (1888)

> "You have spoken well, good squire," said the Disinherited Knight, "well and boldly, as it beseemeth him to speak who answers for an absent master."
>
> - Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (1818)

For historians of feudalism, Adam Smith represents something of a constitutive obstacle. In 1776, Smith popularized the phrase "feudal system" to describe the early phases of post-Roman European development. In doing so, he confounds future generations of scholars who find very little systematic about the era of the "feudal law." When Ferdinand Maitland complains in his 1888 lectures that "feudalism" is an eighteenth-century invention, he foreshadows what would

become a major crux of twentieth-century historiography.[1] As scholars learned more about the radically heterogeneous culture and politics of medieval Europe, the question could be asked: what was feudalism, anyway? A set of legal institutions, or an economic mode of production? If the former, did it consist in the relatively narrow set of tenure laws, or could it be generalized to cover different medieval social forms—serfdom, fiefdom, vassalage, manorialism? If the latter, could Marx's broad definition, "the domination of landed property," offer a useful distinction from (or rubric for) more modern regimes of colonial production, sharecropping, or slavery?

This chapter explores Smith's "fiction" of feudalism in a double sense, suggesting that his invention of the feudal system enabled the literary invention of a new kind of narrative: the historical romance. Looking to Maria Edgeworth's ironic uses of both feudalism and romance in her Irish Tales, my argument is that both of these terms were inextricable from the dynamics of British imperialism, which (Smith recognized) exported something like the feudal system throughout the Britain's global dominions.[2] Before coming to Edgeworth, however, I would first like to situate Smith's fiction of feudalism in "a long twentieth century" view by tracing its influence on two lines of thought, one medievalist-historicist and the other Marxist-theoretical.[3]

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[1] F. W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England: A Course of Lectures Delivered by F. W. Maitland, LL.D* (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2001), 141-142.

[2] Kathleen Davis offers a provocative account of feudalism's imbrication with empire in *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). I discuss Davis' argument in more detail in Chapter Two.

[3] By "long twentieth century" I refer to the historical perspective outlined in Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994), which retells the history of capitalism as a succession of cyclical crises, each displacing the "center" of global power to a new geographical unit. Smith's history of the rise of mercantile system from the feudalism of Genoese city states anticipates this historical

The medievalist line is best represented by Elizabeth A. R. Brown's 1974 essay "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," which vigorously called on historians to abandon feudalism altogether. Brown mounts an impressive survey of scholarly attempts from Maitland onward to jettison facile definitions of feudalism in the service of more sound ones—all of which are rejected by Brown as equally facile in their turn (students of romanticism might recognize the form of argument from Arthur O. Lovejoy's "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas").[4] The scholarship traced by Brown has its origin in the definition of feudal law as it was first established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by French constitutional historians like François Baudouin and François Hotman, and in their wake by the Scottish and English writers Thomas Craig and Henry Spelman. It was in their hands (as J. G. A. Pocock has claimed) that the attempt to codify ancient feudal law gave rise to the practice of modern of historiography, with its guiding assumption that historical institutions explain historical actions.[5] But it is not until the eighteenth century that feudalism appears in a

framework, as Arrighi himself recognizes in his more recent *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (Verso: New York, 2007).

[4] Elizabeth A. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and the Historians of Medieval Europe. *The American Historical Review* 79.4 (1974): 1063-88; Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2.3 (1941): 257-78. Susan Reynold's *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) takes the form of argument one step further, claiming that even Brown's limited acceptance of the term in application to fief law is "too optimistic": "Fiefs and vassalage, as they are generally defined by medieval historians today, are post-medieval constructs, though rather earlier than the construct of feudalism" (2). Somewhat counterintuitively, in dismissing Brown's very limited and specific preservation of the use of "fuedalism," Reynold's argues for the acceptance of the broader Marxian category of a feudal "mode of production."

[5] J. G. A Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.)

significant way outside the discourse of constitutional theory; with the broad sweep of Montesquieu's and the Scottish Enlightenment historians' models of national progress, feudalism came to be defined as a stage of historical development *in general*. In accounts of this enlightenment transformation of the concept, Adam Smith's name looms large. *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) re-imagined "feudal government" "the feudal system" not simply as a relatively narrow class of land-tenure laws but as a systematic socio-historical form.[6] For the scholars surveyed by Brown, the problem of finding a useful definition of feudalism is largely a problem of disentangling the detailed methods of medievalist research from the generalizing legacy of Smith.

In the contemporaneous twentieth-century debates among Marxists about the nature of (and transition from) feudalism, Smith's name again makes an appearance. One concern in this debate was the applicability of 'feudalism' to national economies at different levels of pre-capitalist development.[7] When Andre Gunder Frank argued in 1966 that feudalism in Latin America and elsewhere was a symptom, not of a failure to transition to a capitalist economy, but of the "development of underdevelopment" essential to global capitalism itself, Robert Brenner charged that Frank's dependency theory was an example of "Neo-Smithian Marxism."[8]

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[6] In Susan Reynolds' words, "When Adam Smith and others in the Scottish Enlightenment developed the idea of different stages of history marked by differences in political economy, the agricultural stage … was represented primarily by the middle ages, the age of feudal government." Reynolds, 7-8.

[7] *Feudalism and Non-European Societies*, Ed. T. J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia (Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass & Co, 1985).

[8] Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* 1.104 (1977) http://newleftreview.org/I/104/robert-brenner-the-origins-of-capitalist-development-a-critique-of-neo-smithian-marxism

According to Brenner and Ernesto Laclau, Frank's notion that uneven development resulted from commercial imbalances grievously "dispensed with *relations of production* in his definitions of capitalism and feudalism," and thus dispensed with a Marxist conception of history altogether.[9] Coming to Frank's defense, Immanuel Wallerstein threw Brenner and Laclau's charge of Smithism back at them: they, like Smith, saw the transition from feudalism to capitalism as a "natural process," and so failed to see how both modes of production were dialectically entwined in the asymmetries of global power. [10] On all sides of the argument, "Smith" was the metonym of bad Marxism, one that fails to take account of the nature of feudalism and its place in the capitalist world system.

From the perspective of both Marxist and medievalist scholars, Smith gives us the concept of feudalism and takes it away, blocking its modern historical understanding by conceiving it as a recognizable stage in a universal model of natural development. In contrast, I argue that this twentieth-century conception of Smith's feudal fiction blocks our ability to understand why feudalism emerged when and where it did as an analytic rubric of development during an era of commercial imperialism. Rather than a stage of the "natural progress of opulence," feudalism represents a profoundly unnatural order or things for Smith—a view which has everything to do with *The Wealth of Nations*' attack on modern imperialism. Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing* proposes a rehabilitated Neo-Smithian Marxism, suggesting that when the full force of Smith's critique of merchant hegemony and his defense of agriculture as

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[9] Ernesto Laclau, "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America." *New Left Review* I.67 (1971). http://newleftreview.org/I/67/ernesto-laclau-feudalism-and-capitalism-in-latin-america

[10] Immanuel Wallerstein, "From Feudalism to Capitalism: Transition or Transitions?" *Social Forces* 55.2 (1976): 273-283.

the basis of growth are taken into account, his market-based notion of development offers a viable alternative to Marxist models that take European forms of industrial monopoly power as given.[11] If agriculture is at the core of Smith's notion of natural development, its misuse is equally important element to what he regarded as a fundamental (and *un*natural) continuity between feudal and imperial Europe.

While historians typically hold eighteenth-century political economy responsible for spreading the fiction of feudalism, they rarely consider that it was novels, not political economic treatises, which did most to popularize this fiction. The modern image of feudalism as an age of greedy barons and oppressed serfs owes at least as much to a novel like Scott's *Ivanhoe* as to the *Wealth of Nations*. Scott's literary predecessors in the Gothic novel had participated in the popularization of feudalism by helping to define its literary-historical atmosphere (and suggesting its ominous persistence into a newly dominant commercial order). *Ivanhoe*, in turning from the Gothic edifice of feudal law to its historical foundation in the Norman conquest, was equally indebted to what Ian Duncan calls "the Gothic version of history as a regression to traumatic origins" as to the Scottish Enlightenment paradigm of history as a sequence of legible stages.[12] Maria Edgeworth's novels were also major influences on Scott's historical fiction, but their relation to both Scottish political economy and the idea of feudalism is of a different sort. Like Scott, we shall see, Edgeworth conceives feudalism as a set of laws and customs organized by the rule of "absent master[s]." But unlike the antiquarian Scott, her writings present feudalism

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[11] Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing.*

[12] Ian Duncan, Introduction to Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): xxi. On Scott's debt to Scottish historiography, see James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 127-140.

in a light closer to the Marxist than to the medievalist lines of scholarship discussed above: confronting the long history of English domination in Ireland, Edgeworth's novelistic presentations of national history offer something like a romantic literary version of global dependency theory. Edgeworth's Irish Tales, I will argue, do not simply counter the attribution of feudalism to Ireland's backward political economic situation: rather, in incorporating the colonial structure of Anglo-Irish relations into the very texture of her narrative form, she fictionalizes the historical and discursive conditions that make this attribution possible. In the regional space of these novels, the enlightenment picture of linear world-historical stages figures only in the mode of parody.

In the following section, I outline the role played by rent and landholding in Smith's philosophy of history. In the view of later theorists of political economy, Smith's account of rent and landholding was one of the least acceptable elements of his thought. The problem has to do with Smith's sense that rent is "naturally a monopoly price." While it is one of the major refrains of *The Wealth of Nations* that the real value of an object and its price in a fair market ultimately "comes to the same thing," rental prices are a major exception to this rule: "[rent] is not at all proportioned to what the landlord may have laid out upon the improvement of the land, or to what he can afford to take; but to what the farmer can afford to give." In a work famous for its attack on commercial monopoly as something *un*natural, this account of landed property as a "natural monopoly" is indeed odd. I suggest that this oddity has to do with the foundational role Smith accords to agriculture and rent as the basis of *laissez-faire* political economy. And yet, Britain's agricultural colonies seemed to resist Smith's prescriptions of liberal reform. To see why, I next turn to Edgeworth's Irish Tales, arguing that these novels reconfigure Smith's ideas about rent and free-trade at the level of narrative and affective form.

Edgeworth finds in Smith's theory of rent the basis for a new poetics of national fiction; at the same time, her attention to the evils of absentee ownership in the colonies pose a political and ethical problem seemingly beyond the reach of Smith's liberal development theory. If in Smith the rise of rents causes the transition from feudalism to commercial society, In the Irish Tales absentee rents expand the aneconomic waste of feudalism at the peripheries of the commercial world. As George Boulukos has argued, her novels' call for Anglo-Irish landlords to reside on their estates was essentially sentimental rather than political in character, rooted in a belief in a paternalist structure of affection between owners and tenants (in contrast, in her treatment of Caribbean plantation ownership in "The Grateful Negro" and *Belinda*, she endorses absentee ownership).[13] And yet, Edgeworth is anything but indifferent to the geopolitical structures embedding early nineteenth-century Ireland, and her novels are exceedingly detailed in their description of the Big House economy. The bad effects she attributes to absenteeism are often in tension with her underlying faith in *laissez-faire* principles. Her novels attempt to resolve such tensions by turning the material structures of free trade into a medium of local sentimentality, one that begins in the affective relationship between Irish landlords and their tenants. In her artful deployment of the language of "letting" and "leaving be," Edgeworth conscripts the verb-forms of *laissez-faire* economics into the service of a sentimental argument for the return of absentees to their estates. This *laissez-faire* sentimentality is a critical technique of her poetics of rent, allowing her to imagine a liberal reparation of broken attachments between landlords and tenants.

[13] George Boulukos, "Maria Edgeworth's 'Grateful Negro' and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23 (1999): 21.

RENT, FEUDALISM, AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE

The history of modern Europe, Smith writes in concluding Book II of *The Wealth of Nations*, is upside-down. A surprising assertion in the context of a Scottish Enlightenment famous for the notion that history progresses in stages, and that the final and highest stage is modern European commercial society. Smith's phrase for kind of development is "the natural progress of opulence," a mode of development rooted in the "natural course of things" (411). On this account, human civilizations progress as follows: emerging from the "savage state" state of hunter-gatherers, communities develop the means of agricultural production; once communities can produce more food than they need to sustain themselves, the surplus is used for manufacturing, leading to the development of towns and cities which form a circuit of trade with country farms; finally, once manufacturing grows beyond the requirements of domestic circulation, the surplus finds outlet in foreign trade with other nations. Three stages, culminating in the political balance of the three principle social classes or "interests"—landlords, workers, and merchants—which in turn represent the three key forms of income and components of value in commercial society—rent, wages, and stock. This is what Smith means by the "natural course of things." But it is not a course that has been followed in Europe: "it has, in all the modern states of Europe, been in many respects, entirely inverted":

> The foreign commerce of some of their cities has introduced all their finer manufactures, or such as were fit for distant sale; and manufactures and foreign commerce together, have given birth to the principal improvements of agriculture. The manner and customs which the nature of their original government introduced, and which remained after that

> government was greatly altered, necessarily force them into this unnatural and retrograde order. (412)

Having accumulated along a pathway from foreign commerce, to cities, to rural agricultural districts, European wealth has moved in the wrong direction. And with it, so has history. For at the core of Smith's concept of development is the intuition that the movement of history follows the channels of wealth: to block the "natural course things"—money, commodities, credit, workers—is to risk diverting the natural direction of history itself.

It is not always appreciated that the most famous aspect of *The Wealth of Nations*—its argument in favor of unrestricted trade—is grounded in Smith's belief in the foundational role of agriculture.[14] As recent commentators have emphasized, *The Wealth of Nations* vehemently attacked the policies and practices of the British Empire on the grounds that it impoverished agricultural communities (both in England and in the colonies) for the sake of speculative financial profits.[15] It was Empire's imperative for commercial expansion that made Europe a perverse exception to the "natural course of things" (411-2*)*. This phrase is Smith's rough equivalent to the French physiocratic philosophers' slogan "*laissez-faire*," a phrase he never used but which deeply informed his writings after his time spent in Paris with Francois Quesnay and others in the 1760s; it figures in *The Wealth of Nations* as a repeated shorthand for free

[14] Smith thus claims, "The capital . . . that is acquired to any country by commerce and manufactures is all a very precarious and uncertain possession till some part of it has been secured and realized in the cultivation and improvement of its lands" (452).

[15] Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First* reads Smith's theory of the "natural course of things" as a corrective to imperialist and capitalist over-accumulation (57-68). On Smith as an anti-imperialist, see also Siraj Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2012), 106-127 and Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in England and France* (Princeton: University of Princeton, 2006), 25-100.

commercial exchange grounded in agrarian production.[16] It is true, as virtually all scholarly accounts of the last generation have insisted, that *The Wealth of Nations* is not the proleptic defense of free market capitalism it has been taken to be.[17] But Smith does indeed have a *laissez-faire* theory of commercial society: it just doesn't apply to the world of Western commerce, in his time or in ours. Rather, Smith's vision of an economic circulatory system that, *left to itself*, would harmonize individual and social interests was based on a social body whose heart is cultivated agricultural land.

If scholars seem to agree that the East India Company represented the most egregious organ of Europe's "unnatural and retrograde" (414) development, they have paid less attention to the way this development began in a past much older than modern imperialism, in what he dubbed "the feudal system" of post-Roman Europe. This matters not only because it shows how Smith situates his critique of Empire in the *longue durée* of European history, but because it reveals imperialism's reproduction of feudal political forms within the global framework of eighteenth-century commerce—a problem, we shall see, that Edgeworth takes up repeatedly. On this account, European mercantilism grew out of the feudal system, expanding the militarism and wasteful monopoly forms of early medieval Europe at a global scale. The problem with feudalism, for Smith, was that landowners failed to treat their land as "a means only of subsistence and enjoyment," using it instead as a source of "power and protection" (413, 414). In

[16] Smith writes, "The cultivation and improvement of the country, therefore, which affords subsistence, must, necessarily, be prior to the increase of the town, which furnishes only the means of conveniency and luxury" (408).

[17] See especially Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

post-Roman Europe's perpetual state of war, the productivity of land was subordinated to the military function of territory. Since landowners looked upon peasants as a reserve army rather than a revenue source, they exacted from them "little more than a quit rent" (442), "in no respect equivalent to the subsistence which the land afforded" (441): this artificial reduction in rents meant there was no incentive for tenants to improve the land, and thus no natural basis for economic development. Only with the new abundance of luxury goods made available by an overgrown foreign trade did landowners discover an incentive to raise their rents. And while he acknowledges the disastrous effects it had on the European peasantry, Smith sees the introduction of modern rent as a "revolution" (447) with the potential to restore the upside-down trajectory of European history to its proper footing: forced to pay rents "above what [their] lands, in the actual state of improvement, could afford," peasants demanded "that they should be secured in their possession, for such a term of years as might give them time to recover with profit whatever they should lay out in the further improvement of the land . . . hence the origin of long leases" (446). This introduction of long leases and high rents is the turning point from Europe's feudal past to its commercial present, bringing with it the possibility of normalizing Europe's backward development: the incentive for landlords to overcharge their tenants is the final turn in a "revolution of the greatest importance," transforming land from *territory* back into *property*, and thus establishing the conditions for *laissez-faire* agricultural production (447).

But while Smith sees the institution of rent as offering the possibility of a genuinely *laissez-faire* polity grounded in domestic agriculture and manufacturing (he cites "Leeds, Halifax, Sheffield, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton" as examples of manufacturing towns that have "grown up naturally" as "the offspring of agriculture"[437-8]), the persistent fact of imperialism made this possibility "slow and uncertain" (448). And while Smith's ire throughout

The Wealth of Nations is directed principally at the East India Company, it was in the Irish plantation system that the English first experimented with the forms of colonial subjugation that would later be exported throughout the Empire, including the imposition of feudal monopoly landownership.[18] It is in light of this place of rent in Smith's thought, at the uneasy historical disjuncture between feudo-imperial sovereignty and *laissez-faire* commerce, that I now propose to read the figuration of rent in Edgeworth's novels, and especially in her treatment of absentee landlords—a class which certainly treated their lands as "a means of subsistence and enjoyment," but whose integration within the channels of imperial commerce had done little to improve the condition of Ireland.

EDGEWORTH'S POETICS OF RENT

In an oft-cited passage from an 1834 letter to her brother Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, Maria Edgeworth remarks, "[I]t is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a work of fiction," a crisis in representation she compares to her brother's situation as a British civil servant in Punjab.[19] The passage evinces what many readers have discovered in her fiction: an "angry acknowledgement" of Ireland's resistance to literary representation as a result of political

[18] For an account of early modern Ireland in the history of British imperial practice, see Jane H. Ohlmeyer, "A Laboratory for Empire?: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26-60.

[19] Maria Edgeworth to Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, 14 February 1834, in *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols. ed. Augustus J. C. Hare (London: Edward Arnold, 1895), 2:550.

unrest.[20] Less often remarked is that the basis of her comparison between Ireland and India is grounded in something seemingly banal, "the collection of revenues, rents, etc.":

> Thank you, my dear brother, for your excellent and to me particularly interesting letter, in which you copied many good observations on the state of your part of India, and the collection of the revenue, rents, etc. Many of your observations on India apply to Ireland. . . . Some of the disputes that you have to settle at Cucherry, and some of the viewings that you record of boundaries, etc., about which there are quarrels, put me in mind of what I am called upon to do here continually in a little way.

Having worked since she was a teenager as the Edgeworthtown agent and accountant, Edgeworth was used to settling quarrels over rents and boundaries—quarrels which had intensified after the O'Connell agitations of the 1820s and the Tithe Wars of the '30s.[21] But when Edgeworth describes being "called upon" to participate in these activities, does she speak entirely from the position of a landlord, or does she also refer to her more famous calling as Ireland's premier novelist? Earlier in the same letter, she recalls being asked by Walter Scott "why Pat, who gets forward so well in other countries, is so miserable in his own"; and it was as a novelist rather than as a landlord that she had long searched for an answer. Taken as a whole, her letter links and confounds her dual occupation of landlord and novelist, suggesting that the activities of

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[20] Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81. See also Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790-1829* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2; and Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 176.

[21] Marilyn Butler describes how the increasing political independence of Irish peasants in the 1830s led Edgeworth to "wave[r] in the sympathy for the lower orders which had previously been one of her motives for writing about Ireland" (*Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 452).

"drawing Ireland" and drawing rents might not be entirely unrelated.

If in 1834 Edgeworth found that a global framework of rent collection had made literary representation impossible, her earlier novels made the treatment of Ireland's rental economy a key condition of national literary production. In her Irish Tales *Castle Rackrent* (1801), *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), and *Ormond* (1817), the relationship between landlords and tenants is central to the picture she draws of Irish national culture and to her prescriptions for reform. I would like to take seriously Edgeworth's sense that the possibility of national literature depends on the economic and affective relationships between landlords and tenants—her sense that "in a little way" the task of the novelist resembles that of the imperial landlord. Scholars routinely note that Edgeworth's experience with estate management influenced her fiction, yet this influence is usually understood to have affected her ideological positions rather than her innovative contributions to the novel form. My suggestion is not that Edgeworth's writing betrays her political alignments as a member of the Anglo-Irish landed interest, but that her novels show how Irish literary production itself fits within the transnational networks connecting (and disconnecting) Anglo-Irish owners and Irish producers. Her novels suggest that the production of a national literature depends on repairing relations between a prodigal class of absentee landlords and an abused class of Irish tenants.

Read this way, the Irish Tales develop what I would like to call a poetics of rent: a form of literary making which is not, say, the self-generative creativity of romantic genius, but a form of representation modeled on the economic relations between owners and renters. It is a poetics that adjusts itself to a world in which made things are not simply made, but *rendered* by their makers to their owners, so that the act of representation occurs in the transaction between persons who are propertied and others who are not. Thinking of poiesis as a rendering rather than

a making helps to clarify the connection between Edgeworth's representational worry about "draw[ing] Ireland" and the political economy of rent, of rendering to another what is rendered from the land. As the Irish Tales' frequent juxtapositions of economic and literary acts of rendering insist, the possibility of such a poetics depends on a relationship of care between renters and owners. Uneven conditions of property must in some sense be stabilized by a sentimental reciprocity; it is just this sentimentality between Irish tenants and absentee landlords which the Irish Tales continually seek to repair and preserve. If the younger Edgeworth believes (what she later denies) that Ireland can be *drawn*, it is only because her novels imagine a world in which the *drawing* of colonial rents can occur under conditions of amity.

When Richard Lovell Edgeworth put his daughter Maria in charge of the family estate, he had her read *The Wealth of Nations.* As Anglo-Irish beneficiaries of English conquest, the Edgeworths' enlightened taste for economic writing stemmed in part from their anxieties about the legitimacy of their property and their desire to redress the negative effects of English conquest in Ireland through agricultural improvement.[22] Committed to a moral as much as to a technological revolution of rural life, they regarded the stereotype of the "mere eating, drinking, hunting, shooting, ignorant country squire" as a "nearly extinct" figure, supplanted by the benign

[22] Richard Lovell Edgeworth writes in 1792, "I am now possessed of . . . landed property by the right of Conquest—[T]hat right has hitherto been sufficient for the common purposes & common sense of mankind—upon [what] foundation is another question" (quoted in Butler, 112). Quoting these lines, Catherine Gallagher puts forward the view that Edgeworth's concern with the legitimacy of his property "probably reinforced his commitment to the productivist ideology he frequently used to justify his tenure" (*Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], 288). On the problem of legitimacy in Edgeworth, see also Sara L. Maurer, "Disowning to Own: Maria Edgeworth and the Illegitimacy of National Ownership," *Criticism* 44.4 (2002): 363-88.

self-interest of the modern landlord.[23] In the section "The Country Gentleman" of their jointly authored *Professional Education*, they recommend *The Wealth of Nations* as "the best book to open his ideas, and give him clear views":

> The knowledge of the value and price of land, of the rents which tenants are able to pay, of the causes which affect the rise and fall of rents, is absolutely necessary to a good landlord: he deals in land as tradesmen deal in different commodities; his tenants are his customers; he should therefore know precisely the value of what he is to sell, and of what they are to purchase, that he may neither be a dupe nor an extortioner.[24]

By directing the landed interest toward a liberalized economy of rural production—in particular, by recommending that landlords learn the theory of rent—*Professional Education* frames a project of agricultural improvement in line with Smith's theory of development.

Just as the tendency to overlook the importance of land in *The Wealth of Nations* has led to a simplistic view of Smith's concept of free trade, attending to the central role of land and rent in Edgeworth opens new ways of seeing her contributions to the novel form. In her landmark reading of Edgeworth's fictions in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*, Catherine Gallagher cites the passage just quoted from *Professional Education* to signal a contradiction between Edgeworth's "productivist" economic principles—her belief in a labor theory of value—and her own experience as an author in a literary marketplace in which credit rather than labor constitutes the basis of value. "If a landlord was merely a businessman dealing in land, was an author merely a businesswoman dealing in texts?,"

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[23] Maria Edgeworth,*The Absentee*, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. 5 of 12 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 5:40.

[24] R. L. Edgeworth, esq., *Essays on Professional Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 257-58.

asks Gallagher; and finding, with Edgeworth, that literature circulates at a value incommensurate with that of the labor of writing (it is worth much less), she finds Edgeworth's writing to exemplify a "potential conflict between the very notions of economic and literary value."[25]

It is certainly true that literature occupies an odd economic position in Edgeworth's writing, but Gallagher's claim that this disproves Edgeworth's productivist principles seems to me mistaken. We can make better sense of literature's valuation when we recall Edgeworth's analogy between writing and the collection of rents. As we have seen, the objects Edgeworth recommends to the attention of her country gentleman—"the value and price of land, of the rents which tenants are able to pay"—are, from the perspective of *The Wealth of Nations* at least, not unlike literature in circulating at values relatively autonomous from any productivist standard of value. On Smith's account, the rent charged by a landlord need not reflect the value of his land—as a monopoly-holder of a certain portion of the land, he charges what he can get away with. Likewise, Edgeworth's Tales provide many examples of lands leased by tenants at rents incommensurate to their value. If indeed, as Gallagher claims, Edgeworth learned from political economy that literature is not valued at its true cost—"that her product was probably ontologically insufficient, merely epiphenomenal"—then this puts her novels on a similar ontological footing as the rents of the Edgeworthtown estate.[26] Rather than seeing literature's speculative value as pointing an incoherence in Edgeworth's political economic thought, we might turn to the place of rent in her fiction in order to consider how literary value, like land tenure, is regulated by conditions of monopoly ownership—"natural" or otherwise. To do so, I

[25] Gallagher, 260, 263.

[26] Gallagher, 267.

will argue, is to consider literature as something not simply made, but made under conditions of dispossession, rendered by the maker to the owner.

It is true, as Gallagher implies, that prices in the eighteenth-century book market rarely corresponded to manufacturing costs. But that does not mean that their valuation was purely a matter of speculative credit. Rather, the mismatch between cost and price was mediated by the monopoly rights of intellectual property holders, whose ability to control supply and inflate prices was protected by law. As William St. Clair has shown, the monopoly rights granted by the Act of Copyright (1709) to copyright holders (typically booksellers, not authors) were drawn from existing laws relating to the ownership and tenure of land.[27] Just as a landlord's rent is drawn regardless of what his tenants are able to produce on his land, the bookseller's ownership of the ideal, "intellectual" property of a text (and not merely its printed copies) meant his income was relatively autonomous from the actual costs of printing: "[I]n economic terms . . . the income taken was mainly a rent from the text not a profit from the manufacture of the book."[28] The passing of the Act of Union in 1801 extended British Copyright Law to Ireland, an event that in Claire Connelly's words "all but killed off an Irish publishing industry that was reliant upon markets for cheap reprints in Ireland, Britain, the American colonies and the West Indies."[29] The Act of Union made Irish writers dependent on London publishers in line with centuries-old structures of dependence between Ireland's "feudal" peasants and English capital. Of course, the Act of Union was also the occasion of Edgeworth's first Irish Tale, *Castle*

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[27] William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52.

[28] St. Clair, 30.

[29] Claire Connelly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790-1829,* 6.

Rackrent, and it hovers over her subsequent novels as a critical event in the shaping of national literary culture.

Castle Rackrent explicitly confronts the historical conditions of Irish literary production on the verge of the 1801 Act of Union, linking the economics of writing and the politics of Irish land. In the novel's preface the fictional Anglo-Irish editor describes how his published chronicle of the Rackrent line, told by the "illiterate old steward" Thady O'Quirk, came to be put to print.[30] His remarks reveal the conditions of exchange between editor and storyteller in terms that resonate with the forthcoming tale of the backward administration of Ireland's plantation economy:

> Several years ago he related to the editor the history of the Rackrent family, and it was with some difficulty that he was persuaded to have it committed to writing; however, his feelings for "*the honour of the family*," as he expressed himself, prevailed over his habitual laziness, and he at length completed the narrative which is now laid before the public. (6)

In calling attention to the fact that Thady was only "with some difficulty . . . persuaded" to offer his story to the editor for publication, Edgeworth signals the asymmetrical conditions under which both the Tale itself and the national history it encodes have been produced. For the "habitual laziness" the editor accuses in Thady fits within a larger political and ethnographic discourse through which English and Anglo-Irish colonists had long justified their harsh treatment of Irish Catholic labor. But here, importantly, the political antagonisms of the estate are displaced into the realm of literary production; from the relationship of landlord and tenant to

[30] Maria Edgeworth, *Castle* Rackrent, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 1:6 Subsequent citations in text..

that of the editor and author. Placing textual authority and ownership in the hands of the Anglo-Irish editor and authorial power in those of an illiterate member of the Catholic serving class, the preface reveals its own creation to rely on the same socio-cultural formations that characterize Ireland's rentership economy. The Tale that follows is offered not as a commodity made and sold by one economic actor to another, but as a kind of feudal tribute. The "productivist" conception of literary work Gallagher highlights in Edgeworth's fiction is thus figured in a larger milieu of political and economic dependency in which Irish things are not simply made, but rendered to their owners.

In suggesting that the act of retelling Irish history reduplicates the same political economic antagonism between owners and makers that characterizes that history, *Castle Rackrent* demands that the work of writing be represented hand-in-hand with the uneven conditions of cultural ownership. The comical misrecognitions between Thady and the editor restage the class divisions of the Ireland estate at the level of literary production. Although Thady is not a tenant on the Rackrent estate—he brags, "I and mine have lived rent-free time out of mind"—the editor repeatedly aligns Thady's storytelling with peasant labor (9). An early example comes in a footnote to the inscription "Monday Morning" that heads the very beginning of Thady's tale. According to the editor's note, the inscription refers to the "prejudice" of Irish workers that "no great undertaking can be auspiciously commenced in Ireland on any morning but *Monday morning*"—not so much a prejudice, we are led to conclude, as a rhetorical strategy to put off work (55). Pointing forward to the Tale's other instances of peasant resistance in the form of obsequiousness and deferral, the "Monday morning" inscription marks Thady's narration not simply as a form of labor, but as labor he'd rather not do. Like the editor's diagnosis of Thady's reluctance to give up his tale as a sign of ethnic "laziness," the novel's interplay

between narratorial and editorial voice dramatizes the tension between ownership and labor at the level of textual production.

In the division of labor that opens *Castle Rackrent*, Irish culture is made by the likes of Thady, but it is not theirs. Like the rents drawn from the land they inhabit but do not own, it is the inheritance of the Anglo-Irish owners represented by the editor. But what is at stake in the transaction between Thady and the editor is not only the ownership of the Tale itself, but the very possibility of a national literature. As the editor writes in concluding his preface, "When Ireland loses her identity by a union with Great Britain, she will look back, with a smile of good-humoured complacency on the Sir Kits and Sir Condys of her prior existence" (7); in the wake of the Union, he suggests, Irishness can only be owned, preserved, and shared in the form of an antiquarian curiosity; the form, that is, of romance.

This casting of Irish "manners and characters" as antique properties owned by Anglo-Irish proprietors adds a somewhat troubling temporal and political dimension to the book deal cut between the editor and Thady (*R,* 54). In chiding Thady for the quaint notions of obligation and honor that frame his fidelity to the Rackrent family, the editor accuses him of an archaic notion of feudal duty, and perhaps also of a kind of ideological blindness to his own oppression—his romantic ideas of *noblesse oblige* prevent him from seeing the real conditions of his servitude. After all, one way of reading *Castle Rackrent* is as the story of Thady's dog-like fidelity under the many injuries and insults of his successive masters. But even as the editor dismisses Thady's notions of honor and obligation as "not . . . of the present age," his acquisition of the Tale depends on these very same notions; for it is only in observance of them that Thady hands over his rights to his narrative (*R*, 6-7). The editor thinks Thady has mistaken the nature of the deal he has entered into, confusing the language of contract with that of homage. Perhaps, in

the language of *Professional Education*, this makes the editor an "extortioner." But in fact, as the editor also notes, Thady shares with the general body of the Irish tenantry a sophisticated grasp of modern contract law: "[A]lmost every poor man in Ireland, be he farmer, weaver, shopkeeper, or steward, is, beside his other occupations, occasionally a lawyer" (R, 63). The effect of Thady's speech act in his dealings with the editor is to invest the language of modern contract with the affective and political weight of non-contractual feudal dependency, a form of subordination under the cover of equality that offers a suitable analogy to the real geopolitical situation of post-Union Ireland.

In depicting Anglo-Irish relations through the contract rendered between Thady and the editor, *Castle Rackrent* demands a subtle but important adjustment to how Edgeworth's novels are understood as national allegories. To read Edgeworth through the political economy of rent involves rethinking her use of the Big House as an allegorical figure for Irish nationhood. As with the genre of historical romance more broadly, Edgeworth represents the State through the vehicle of the estate. [31] In the Irish Tales, national history is coded through the managerial regimes and proprietary inheritance of protagonists' landholdings. Typically, by training her protagonists to be benevolent landlords and finding them suitable English brides, Edgeworth allegorizes the liberal development of an Ireland in sympathy with England. To this account of

[31] See Sara L. Maurer, 365-66 and Esther Wohlgemut, "Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39 (1999): 645-58. The marriage plot plays a crucial role in what Corbett has called "allegories of Union" and what Ferris has qualified as "the problem of 'incomplete Union'" (15)" See Corbett, *Allegories of Union* and "Public Affections and Familiar Politics: Burke, Edgeworth, and the 'Common Naturalization' of Great Britain," *ELH* 61 (1994): 877-97. For a different account of the narratological problems and possibilities framed by eighteenth-century estate law, see Sandra MacPherson's "Rent to Own; or What's Entailed in *Pride and Prejudice,*" *Representations* 82 (2003)1-23.

the legal metaphorics of land and nation, I would add that her novels' attention to the economics of rent in the concrete space of the Irish estate displaces this form of reading into a more literal register. If, as Mary Jean Corbett and Ina Ferris have suggested, marriage plots allegorize the post-Union relationship between England and Ireland, calculation and collection of rent by a landlord from his tenants offer more than a metaphor for the extractive relationship between these two nations: the mechanisms of absentee rent quite literally *were* the means through which a great deal of wealth was siphoned from Irish land and let to circulate in English markets. The transactions between tenants, middlemen, and landlords that characterize the Big House economy at once allegorize the relationship between England and Ireland, and really are (some of) the media sustaining this geopolitical relationship.

I suggested above that *Castle Rackrent*'s apparently parodic portrayal of Irish feudal manners turns out to say something true about the relations of economic dependency between England and Ireland. In *Ennui*, a similar dialectic between feudal manners and commercial reason is involved in the novel's allegory of national improvement. The plot of *Ennui* simultaneously follows the bildungsroman form of historical romance (a metropolitan hero travels to the backward country of his ancestral estate) and disorders its developmental schema. The novel begins from the Scottish Enlightenment premise that stages of civilization are unevenly distributed across global space: Ireland in particular is cast as a bastion of ancient feudal manners, heavily contrasted with the protagonist's cosmopolitan life in London. But when Lord Glenthorn returns after a lifetime's absence from London to his Irish estate, it quickly becomes clear that Ireland's so-called feudalism is really a developed economy of imperial rent, while Glenthorn's tenants' performance of feudal fealty reveals itself as a strategic maneuver to win favor from their lord.

Indebted and debauched as an absentee landlord in London, Glenthorn is persuaded to return to his Irish estate on account of the "feudal power" he will wield there: "Ellinor impressed me with the idea of the sort of feudal power I should hold in my vast territory"; "I was only a lord, as she said, in England; but I could be all as one as a king in Ireland."[32] And indeed, when Glenthorn arrives at his estate, he is shocked to discover himself transformed in the image of a medieval lord:

> The great effect that my arrival instantaneously produced upon the multitude of servants and dependents, who issued from the castle, gave me an idea of my own consequence beyond any thing which I had ever felt in England. These people seemed "born for my use:" the officious precipitation with which they ran to and fro; the style in which they addressed me; some crying, "Long life to the Earl of Glenthorn!" some blessing me for coming to reign over them; all together gave more the idea of vassals than of tenants, and carried my imagination centuries back to feudal times. (190)

Glenthorn's first few hours at his estate are steeped in this pre-modern aura; but as he spends more time there, his tenants' choruses of "*Long may you reign over us*" sound increasingly insincere (193). In the scene in which he presides over a courtly hearing to his tenants, their performance of feudal homage reveals itself not so much as an expression of archaic manners but as a rhetorical strategy in pursuit of a long list of contractual demands: they petition him to change or renew current leases and to adjudicate bids for lands whose leases are expiring, to settle disputes between tenants and to appoint others as police and excisemen, and to make good on "legends of traditionary promises" made by "*my lordship's father that was*" (193). As in

[32] Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui*, in The *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 1:175. Subsequent citations in text.

Thady's address to the editor in *Castle Rackrent*, Glenthorn's peasants' performed fealty belies a nuanced understanding of both the modern contractual terms of their position and of the political asymmetry underlying those terms. While the tenants' many complaints relating to leases, proposals, and promises outline a set of legal-commercial concerns at odds with their language of homage, their appeal to the English imagination of a backward peasantry strategically turns Glenthorn's sense of superiority to their own ends. As he says shortly afterward, "I could not have endured the fatigue, if I had not been supported by the agreeable idea of my own power and consequence; a power seemingly next to despotic" (193-94).

Viewed from one angle, Glenthorn's apparent despotism is indeed merely apparent, an "agreeable idea" that effectively holds him "a state-prisoner in [his] own castle by the crowds who came to do [him] homage" (194). When he wonders "how these subjects of mine had contrived to go on for so many years my absence," he assumes the character of a nurturing sovereign that is itself an absence, a fiction invented by his "subjects" (193). But from a slightly different angle, this construction of sovereignty as absence stands as a striking emblem of the very real state apparatus that links the Glenthorn estate to the larger structure of British imperialism. Set as it is in the years of the United Irishmen's Rebellion, an event that just barely remains in the background, *Ennui* is quite cognizant of the real political violence lurking beneath his tenants' expressions of mock-feudal submission.[33] In its parodic portrayal of Glenthorn's assumed "despotism," *Ennui* explores how apparently annulled forms of feudal sovereignty persist in the unequal conditions of ownership that sustain transnational commerce. If, while

[33] Glenthorn is "shocked by the summary proceedings of [his] neighbors" against suspected insurrectionists (244).

living off his rents in London, Glenthorn had never considered himself a ruler, his tenants still evidently see themselves as a people ruled; and while their tributes to him are revealed as strategically performative, their complaints of distress are depicted as real. Finally, if Glenthorn's assumption of sovereignty is parodic, this is because his tenants' subjugation is structural rather than personal: absentee sovereignty is something embedded in colonial relations rather than a characteristic of individual rulers.

Ennui's portrait of Glenthorn's "reign" (193) demonstrates the real structure of de-personalized sovereignty that undergirds absentee ownership. It is for this reason that the novel, understood as a national allegory of Irish cultural rebirth, cannot rest satisfied with Glenthorn's mere return to live on his estate. The novel sets out to relieve the distress of the Glenthorn tenants by transforming Glenthorn from an unwitting despot into a good businessman: it does so by training him in political economy. Ashley Cohen has recently argued that Edgeworth's Popular Tales were effectively manuals in global labor management, devising examples of "progressive labor management techniques" to serve as "solution[s] to the empire-wide epidemic of worker disaffection."[34] In *Ennui*, a similar end is pursued through a quasi-Socratic dialogue between Glenthorn and his agent the Smithian disciple McLeod, an exchange that serves as a primer in liberal economic development theory. In a long conversation between the two men, Glenthorn expresses his good intentions to control every aspect of his estate: fixing wages, compelling the purchase of goods made in the village and discouraging imported goods, rewarding childbirth, and more. He is met at every turn by McLeod's *laissez-faire*

[34] Ashley L. Cohen, "Wage Slavery, Oriental Despotism, and Global Labor Management in Maria Edgeworth's Popular Tales," *The Eighteenth-Century* 55.2-3 (2014): 196.

recommendations against intervention: "It might be doubted whether it would be better to leave them alone" (200). The conversation ends with McLeod recommending *The Wealth of Nations* to his boss. As McLeod will later put it, the best method of agricultural improvement is "not doing and not expecting too much at first" (220). By the end of the novel, Glenthorn has been won over by the political economic wisdom of his agent.

Ennui narrates a liberal program of national development based on the replacement of local sovereignty (Glenthorn's peasants' claim on his "favour and protection") with the application of free market principles (194). Even so, the novel's turn to Smithian policy as a corrective to the wrongs of absenteeism is not entirely straightforward. In Smith's historical account, the improvement of agriculture in feudal Europe occurred when landowners stopped treating their land as territory to be protected, and began to see it instead as a source of rent to be extracted. Far from taking absenteeism and liberal development as opposed political economic logics, we might see absenteeism as the result of free-market principles applied to a world of uneven economic development. The entangled logic of absenteeism and liberal development might be seen in the implied negligence of McLeod's physiocratic language, "it might be . . . better to *leave them alone*": for the language of "leaving" assumes new meaning in a country where a great proportion of property owners have quite literally left, spending their incomes in London while leaving their lands in the control of growing class of agents and middlemen. The difficulty raised at the level of *Ennui*'s national allegory is how to endorse the liberal reform of Ireland while also preventing the desolation of a land left to itself.

Ennui's concluding episodes put McLeod's question whether it would be "better to leave" to the test. When, in the wake of the novel's pivotal *anagnorisis*—Glenthorn's discovery that he was switched as an infant, that he is the son of his nurse, and that the real Earl is Christy

the blacksmith, to whom he subsequently hands over his estate and title—the newly named C. O'Donoghoe again vacates his native land, not as an absentee landlord but as a fledging bourgeois individual: "Fired with ambition . . . to distinguish myself among men," "The enchantment of indolence was dissolved, and the demon of ennui was cast out for ever" (294). This metamorphosis sets in motion the events leading to the novel's happy ending, with O'Donoghoe happily married at the head of a new career in law. As for Glenthorn estate itself: in the hands of its new and uneducated proprietor, even McLeod's sound managerial advice does little to curb the decline of the estate, and the novel closes with a letter from Christy announcing it has burned to the ground. Left to itself, Irish land self-destructs. The transfer of absentee to native ownership does not offer the conditions of national rebirth: when absenteeism itself leaves the estate, what it leaves, simply, is absence.

In the political economy of *Ennui*, eradicating absenteeism is not enough to save the tenants of Glenthorn. Rather, the novel's resolution depends on a critical disciplining process, in which Glenthorn's tenants are taught the necessity of their dependence upon the Anglo-Irish. What finally saves Glenthorn estate is Christy's humbled recognition of his own incapacity to manage his property, which leads him willingly to hand back the estate to Glenthorn-cum-O'Donoghoe. Chastened for presuming a capacity as proprietor, Christy concludes his letter to O'Donoghoe by begging him to return. His letter features the same mock-feudal tone of submission we saw on Glenthorn's first arrival to the estate, only now there is no indication of duplicity: "I write this to beg you . . . will take possession of all immediately . . . and come to reign over us again" (E, 308). In this final action of the novel, as O'Donoghoe returns to rule Glenthorn as a converted liberal, *laissez-faire* freedom and sovereign rule coincide. The

resolution of the novel depends on this final act of voluntary submission, this substitution of willing self-dispossession for the long history of forced Anglo-Irish appropriation.

If Christy's rendering of the estate back into the hands of O'Donoghoe is meant to allegorize Ireland's liberal development, it does so only by marking a concomitant entrenchment of unfreedom among the Irish tenantry. But this unfreedom must first be converted into a structure of fellow feeling. Unlike the Glenthorn tenants' earlier manipulation of the language of submission, Christy's invitation to possess and to rule is a genuine expression of affectionate dependence. In this sense, the affective structure of feudal obligation cheekily deployed early in the novel is only fully activated by O'Donoghoe's new liberal governance of his estate. Rather than overturning the contradictions she has laid bare in the geopolitical framework of absentee ownership, Edgeworth concludes her novel by sentimentalizing this framework, making O'Donoghoe's sovereign rule a structure of liberal affection.

Laissez-Faire Sentimentality

McLeod's use of the language of letting and leaving poses a political and historical problem concerning Ireland's amenability to Smith's notion of "the natural course of things." Whereas in Smith the natural progress of commerce depends on a certain removal of sovereignty, Edgeworth presents Irish absenteeism as a form of sovereignty in which territorial governance is constituted by removal. In doing so she offers an important early exploration of the pitfalls of liberal theories of national development: even as a resolutely liberal writer, her novels are surprisingly alert to the submerged coerciveness of political economic theories of reform. *The Absentee* continues and expands *Ennui*'s depiction of what we might call the *leave-taking* of Ireland's colonial mode

of production, those forms of expropriation and accumulation that sustain absentee ownership. To do so, *The Absentee* adapts Smith's favorite trope of "the natural course of things" along with its associated rhetoric of "letting" and "leaving be" as a socio-spatial metaphor: her figurative use of the language of leaving is part of the novel's larger presentation of the effects of *laissez-faire* on a culture and landscape left to itself. More than her previous novels, *The Absentee* explores the conjunction (and disjunction) of political economy and sentiment as a problem of colonial space. The novel's solution to this spatial problem is to reconfigure Ireland's absentee economy as a *laissez-faire* structure of feeling, one rooted in affective exchange between landlords and tenants. In sentimentalizing these political economic relations, *The Absentee* finally recommends a conservative program in which political economic contradiction is glossed over by paternalist affection. But in doing so, it also points to the insufficiency of liberal political economy taken on its own as a prescription for colonial reform.

Read in its totality as a national allegory, *The Absentee* plots the sentimental repair of Anglo-Irish relations through the Clonbrony family's eventual relocation from London to Ireland. The relationship thus imagined between economic liberalism and absenteeism only become clear through Edgeworth's verbal explorations of *letting be* and *leaving be* as everyday figures of speech. This language passes in and out of conversation throughout the novel, and by no means does it consistently reflect political themes. Even where it does not, however, its most ordinary uses are worth noting for the way they cast the social world as a sphere of action that requires nothing more to operate than permission. Passing phrases like "leave me to manage all properly" (Terry O'Fay), "won't you let us have your judgment" (Lady Clonbrony), or "I should leave things to themselves" (Lady Clonbrony again) participate in the construction of a shared decorum in which engagement in social life involves a kind of active passivity: *letting* things

happen rather than *doing* things.[35] At key points in the novel, Edgeworth forces our attention on this *laissez-faire* decorum in order to reflect on the forms of blockage that inhibit the proper flow of feeling and action. The physical distance between absentees and their land is one such source of blockage.

In its attempt to re-sentimentalize Irish property relations *The Absentee* contrasts two different uses of the language of letting be. The first use corresponds to the usual interpretation of Smith's argument for free trade: letting individual self-interests compete in an open marketplace will lead to optimal socio-economic results. The concept of liberal individualism as a regulative norm of free-market society was just taking hold of the popular imagination in Edgeworth's lifetime; by the middle of the nineteenth-century, it would (somewhat paradoxically) come to buttress and inform the practices of the British Empire.[36] The second use corresponds more closely to Smith's anti-imperialist conception of "the natural course of things,"

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[35] Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 5:51, 14, 55. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number. According to Eric Lindstrom, the split rhetoric of "leave be" and "let there be" is a major crux of romantic theories of poetic creation and political sovereignty (*Romantic Fiat: Demystification and Enchantment in Romantic Poetry* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011]).

[36] Uday Singh Mehta notes that the term "liberalism" came into popular usage in 1818. See his study of the confluence of nineteenth-century imperialism and liberal thought *Liberalism and Empire: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11. On nineteenth-century free-trade imperialism see Gallagher and Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," and Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade, and Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970). Literary scholarship has only recently begun to explore the aesthetic dimensions of early free trade imperialism. For two exemplary studies, see Rebecca Cole Heinowitz, *Spanish America and British Romanticism 1777-1826: Rewriting Conquest* (Edinburgh: Univ. of Edinburgh Press, 2010) and Ayşe Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-Faire, and the Global Nineteenth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

which favors an agricultural foundation of economic development rather than state-backed financial expansion. And it is this Smithian use of *laissez-faire* language that Edgeworth adapts as a rhetoric of local feeling and attachment in her argument for a return of Irish landowners to their estates.

One of the novel's most explicit uses of *laissez-faire* language occurs not in any discussion of land or property, but in Lady Clonbrony and Mrs. Broadhurst's early (and failed) contrivance to marry off their respective children. The episode is important because it depicts a vulgar version of *laissez-faire* sentimentality rooted purely in individual self-interest, divorced from the spatial dynamics Edgeworth (like Smith) sees as constitutive of both economies and communities. The novel's final and successful allegory of union, in which Colambre and Grace Nugent settle on their Irish estate as benevolent resident landlords, sets itself against this earlier and degraded allegory of unrestricted self-interest. Much like the conversation between McLeod and Glenthorn discussed in the previous section, the scenes in which the two matchmakers hatch their plots present a parable of free market versus mercantile economics. Both ladies view their respective children as "object[s] of bargain and sale" (*A*, 37): the Clonbronys need their son's dowry to stave off bankruptcy, while Mrs. Broadhurst desires "that her daughter should obtain rank." But whereas lady Clonbrony is clumsily intrusive in her love plotting, Mrs. Broadhurst recommends a lighter touch:

> And now, *let them* but see one another in this easy, intimate, kind of way; and you will find, my dear lady Clonbrony, *things will go of their own accord*, all the better for our – minding our cards – and never minding any thing else. I remember, when I was young – but *let that pass – let* the young people see one another, and *manage things their own way – let them be together* – that's all I say. Ask half the men you are acquainted with why they married, and their answer, if they speak, will be – 'because I met miss such-a-one at such a place, and we were continually together.'

> Propinquity! – Propinquity! – as my father used to say, – And he was married five times, and twice to heiresses. (37-8, emphasis added)

At a superficial level, Smith's doctrine that "the natural course of things" makes for best policy is here further naturalized as a courtship stratagem. In Mrs. Broadhurst's appraisal, sexual desire operates much like a marketplace: marriage, like wealth, is what comes of letting individuals follow their own interests ("minding our cards," "let [them] manage things their own way") and making the most of comparative advantages ("Propinquity!").

However, this *laissez-faire* dimension of Mrs. Broadhurst's rhetoric is hardly virtuous. Her celebration of a natural economy of sexual desire indexes what the narrator refers to as her "coarseness of mind," marked by a certain friction against the customary norms of courtship (37). Edgeworth allows the ambivalent semantics of "letting" to strain under Mrs. Broadhurst's crude naturing of courtship conventions. As her approving example of her father makes clear, Mrs. Broadhurst values marriage in terms of quantity (the more, the better), and this in part explains why her initial use of the word "let" in the sense of *do not interfere* slips into the rather different sense of *don't inquire to closely* when she almost mentions her own youthful exploits ("let that pass"). Her accumulative approach to matrimony breaches decorum, and so her rhetoric moves from pleading non-intervention to ceding even rights of description: "let them be together – *that's all I say*." Playing reluctant interventionist to Mrs. Broadhurst's coarse liberality, Lady Clonbrony agrees in principle to her friend's tactics but has difficulty curbing her own impulses to meddle: "I must give him a hint," she worries from the card table, as the young people discuss the *Arabian Nights* on the sofa; "Well! Well! If they only had some music." Her accomplice scolds her: "Only *let things go on*, and mind your cards, I beseech you" (41, emphasis added).

Whereas in *Ennui* McLoed's Smithian language of letting be was clearly endorsed in contrast to Glenthorn's various managerial schemes, Mrs. Broadhurst's use of such speech is suspicious. If Lady Clonbrony is artlessly intrusive, Mrs. Broadhurst is too artfully permissive: her *laissez-faire* matchmaking exemplifies narrow self-interest masquerading as something natural. Mrs. Broadhurst's faith in the predictable results of sordid motives proves ill-founded: she "was perfectly right in every point of her reasoning but one. . . . [She] had literally taken it for granted that everything was to depend upon her daughter's inclinations"; "It really never occurred to Mrs. Broadhurst that any man, whom her daughter was the least inclined to favour, could think of anybody else" (41). Whereas McLeod sets the rhetoric of *laissez-faire* in the context of agricultural improvement, Mrs. Broadhurst's belief that the self-interests of others will lead them to predictable results is much closer to the stereotypical version of Smith as a champion of unregulated greed.

In its depiction of the underdevelopment of Irish culture and landscape, *The Absentee* links this negative version of *laissez-faire* with the damages of absentee production. Travelling in disguise to his father's estate, Colambre is struck by "the desolation of the prospect" of his father's property (111). His guide Larry proceeds to tell the history of the estate's decay, placing blame on the estate agent Mr. Garraghty ("old Nick"), himself a kind of intermediary absentee who resides in Dublin while leaving the estate in the hands of his under-agent Dennis.

> Lord Clonbrony wrote, and ordered plantations here, time back; and enough was paid to laborers for ditching and planting. And, what next?—Why, what did the under-agent do, but let the goats in through gaps, left o'purpose, to bark the trees, and then the trees was all banished. And next, the cattle was let in trespassing, and winked at, till the land was all poached; and then the land was waste, and cried down: and Saint Dennis

> wrote up to Dublin to old Nick, and he over to the landlord, how none would take it, or bid anything at all for it: so then it fell to him a cheap bargain. O, the tricks of them!

In euphemizing Clonbrony's agents' sinister methods through the seemingly benign language of letting, Larry ties the logic of *laissez-faire* to the political, economic, and ecological vulnerability of Irish land. Dennis and Garraghty's "tricks" subvert the "let[ting]" of the land from a physiocratic model of improvement into a renterial form of waste: in letting Clonbrony's land go to ruin, they let it to themselves at a bargain. Larry's depiction of the compounding surplus-values drawn from the land is linked to the Clonbrony's own leave-taking as a London absentee. The physical distance implied in colonial estate management is figured here through the circulation of letters: "Lord Clonbrony wrote"; "Saint Dennis wrote . . . to old Nick, and he over to the landlord." These textual mediations are paired with the extortionate mediations of agents and under-agents: each degree of separation between the landlord and his land opens a potential for profit and a potential for fraud. According to Larry, resident landlords, by the very fact of their residence, prevent the extortions of agencies that otherwise expand and reproduce themselves at their pleasure: "[I]t is where there's no jantleman over these under-agents, as here, they do as they plase" (136). Casting absentee ruin in the language of liberal permissiveness, Larry once again suggests that leaving Irish space to itself is not enough to guarantee improvement: what is needed, he suggests, is the affectionate oversight of resident landlords—a sentimental solution to the spatial destruction of political economic neglect.

The Absentee's presentation of the spatial effects of absentee rents is reflected in its adaptation of the genre of the Celtic tour. Here, again, Edgeworth reflects on how the political economy of the Irish estate affects the conditions of literary representation. The Irish episodes of

both *Ennui* and *The Absentee* adapt and subvert generic conventions associated with the Celtic tourist writing of Arthur Young's *Tour of Ireland* and Samuel Johnson's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. Literary critics often turn to *Ennui*'s satirical portrayal of the aristocratic travel writer Lord Craiglethorp to show Edgeworth's regionalist dissent against metropolitan writing on Ireland.[37] But whereas in *Ennui* the fulcrum of generic critique is the buffoonish vanity of the writer ("Posting from one great man's house to another, what can he see or know of the manners of any rank of people but the gentry, which in England and Ireland is much the same?" [217]), *The Absentee* focuses on the spatial infrastructure of the Tour itself.

As Colambre approaches his father's estate, he discovers that the very roads he is travelling upon are conditioned by the productive arrangements he is seeking to witness. Having noticed the excellent quality of Irish roads, Colambre is surprised when Larry warns, "The bad road's beginning upon us, please your honour" (108). They come upon a party of road workers whom Larry addresses: "How are you, Jem? – How are you, Phil? . . . So you're making up the rent, are you, for St. Dennis?" (109). When Colambre asks what road building has to do with rent, his guide responds:

> "[W]hen [these under-agents] have set the land they get rasonable from the head landlords, to poor cratures at a rack-rent, that they can't live and pay the rent, they say . . . 'I'll get you a road to make up the rent:' that is, plase your honour, the agent gets them a presentement for so many perches of road from the grand jury, at twice the price that would make the road. And tenants are, by this means, as they take the road by contract, at the price given by the county, able to pay all they get by the job, over and above potatoes and salt, back again to the agent, for the arrear on the land. Do I make your honour *sensible*?"

[37] See Miranda Burgess, "The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s-1840s," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel,* ed. John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 48-52.

"You make me much more sensible than I ever was before." (110)

Colambre is made sensible of the compounding surplus-values that accrue in the corrupt space of the absentee estate: one form of extortion literally paves the way to another. The county's road contracts, bought by St. Dennis and sold to his tenants at a profit, effect what David Harvey influentially describes as a "spatial fix" of capital, an investment in material infrastructure that resolves (however temporarily) a contradiction between an imperative for high rents and a conflicting imperative for living labor.[38] St. Dennis keeps his rack-rent; Jem and Phil keep their livelihood.

Thus, to Colambre's surprise, the form of his mobility is already shaped by this spatial fix of absentee rent: in journeying "to see and judge how my father's estates were managed," he discovers that the very roads he is travelling upon are products of the conditions he sought to investigate (134),. This discovery implicates even the text of *The Absentee* insofar as it feeds the expectations of Celtic tourist writing. When Larry insists that Colambre has as much "to do" with the nature of Irish road-making as he does, he suggests that the roaming gaze of the metropolitan tourist (and by extension, the reader of tourist writing) is just as much involved in the corruption of absentee space as any Irish driver:

> "[B]ut is it not cheating the county?"
>
> "Well, and suppose," replied Larry, "is not it all for my good, and yours too, plase your honour?"
>
> "My good!" said lord Colambre, startled. "What have I to do with it?"
>
> "Haven't you to do with the roads as well as me, when you're travelling upon them, plase your honour?" (110)

[38] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), especially 413-35.

Importantly, Larry does not condemn the rent-seeking organization of Irish road-building as a whole, but only its most pernicious exploiters: "And sure, they'd never be got made at all, if they weren't made this ways; and it's the best way in the wide world, and the finest roads we have."

The didactic message of this conversation is worth underlining, because it demonstrates how Edgeworth's acute awareness of the potential damages of liberal development is managed through a sentimentalization of rentership relations. *The Absentee* supports the roundabout mode of Irish road construction even as she starkly reveals its susceptibility to abuse. Edgeworth would have been extremely well informed on the subject of road building. Only one year after to the publication of *The Absentee*, her father would publish *An Essay on the Construction of Roads and Carriages* (1813), complete with a two-hundred page appendix excerpting and indexing the reports of parliamentary committees on English roads and turnpikes. Like her father, Edgeworth recommends neither the direct maintenance of public roads by local parishes nor the privatization of roads by turnpike trusts (the two systems of road maintenance in eighteenth-century England), although Colambre seems at least initially to intuit that something like the turnpike system would be cheaper for the county.[39] But he is readily won over to Larry's position that the combined oversight of "*rael* jantlem[en] resident in the country" will prevent the jobbing of "journeymen jantlemen" (A, 110) such as St. Dennis. Left in the hands of individual self-

[39] R. L. Edgeworth recommends the establishment of a general body in London "with extensive powers" that would employ a permanent staff of engineers to assess and improve all national roads (*An Essay on the Construction of Roads and Carriages* [London: J. Johnson & Co, 1813], 10). He also dismisses the alleged benefits of the privatized turnpike system, pointing to pervasive corruption and speculation among the turnpike trusts. Like Larry, R. L. Edgeworth attributes the better state of Irish roads to the resident landlords who oversee their construction and maintenance. See also William Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England, 1663-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 14-29.

interests, Irish roads lead straight to decay: they can only be preserved by the physical presence of a sympathetic landed interest.

I have argued that *The Absentee*'s depiction of absenteeism's effects on the landscape offers something like a proto-critique of the rhetoric of *laissez-faire* development. It does this by shifting perspective from those *who leave* to those *who are left*: from the London absentees depicted early in the novel to the inhabitants of their wasted native estates. As I suggested earlier, this critique is measured against a more positive use of the language of *laissez-faire*; and this reinvestment of feeling within the rhetoric of letting be in turn depends upon a perspectival and spatial shift to the landscape of agricultural production. In the scene that emblematizes this shift, Colambre persuades his mother to return to live on the family's Irish estate, noting that in a single season of reckless spending they had consumed "the greater part of [their] timbre, the growth of a century" (154). He then diverts his mother's attention to another object: "But let the trees go; I think more of your tenants—of those left under the tyranny of a bad agent, at the expense, of every comfort, every hope they have enjoyed!" Turning lady Clonbrony's attention to "those left," those living on the remainder of her own consumption, Colambre attempts to reorient the residual space of the absentee estate as a ground of communal affection.

The Clonbrony's return to Ireland reverses the unidirectional flow of absentee rents that characterized the novel's earlier play on the rhetoric of leaving: what is to be left is no longer the colonial estate but rather the metropolitan center of imperial commerce. As Colambre, his father, and Grace Nugent implore Lady Clonbrony to "leave all the nonsense of high life," they reconfigure this rhetoric in a way that suggests an ingrained propensity to simple rural culture (154). Irish estate life is the natural order the family will, naturally, return to—if only Lady Clonbrony will let them. "Let me see you once more among your natural friends, beloved,

respected happy!" pleads Colambre; "'O return! Let us return home!' cried Miss Nugent, with a voice of great emotion. 'Return, let us return home!'" (A, 155). Invoking Lady Clonbrony's long forgotten attachments, the family casts the economic relationship between landlord and tenant as a natural framework of paternal affection. "Well, since it must be so, let us go," Lady Clonbrony finally accedes: "And now, since we are to go . . . let us go immediately" The decision to return turns on a recognition of its inevitability. Like Smith's view of commerce as a circulatory system which the wiles of the mercantile state can derange but not stop, the Clonbrony's deep ties to Ireland must return them to their natural place: "it must be so."

In the end, Lady Clonbrony's unnatural aversion to Ireland is overturned, and the family is pulled into the current of the natural course of things. In the long run, the imploring family implies, there will be no stopping their residence on their estate: they only need to be *let* to do what they naturally would do anyway. But this inevitability depends on Colambre's sentimental depiction of his mother's forgotten attachments to her Irish tenants. Having re-established this relationship in the novel's final chapter, the narrator concludes with her own performative act of leave-taking: "[W]e leave our hero, returning to his native country" (199). Implicitly marking a tension between Colambre's return to his estate and her own gesture of removal, the narrator's final leaving-to-be takes assurance in the natural order of things her fiction has labored to restore.

Of course, this natural order, too, is a fiction. Ireland's long history of dispossession would not be fixed by the easing of commercial restrictions or the renewal of paternalist affection. In the face of the agrarian unrest of the 1830s, Edgeworth would come to disavow the political motives of her earlier novels: "Really though I wrote a story called *The Absentee* I come to think it is but reasonable that a country be rendered fit to live in before we complain of more

Absentees."[40] We have seen how this desire to render an unlivable world livable took the shape of a sentimental rehabilitation of the political antagonisms latent in the structure of Irish colonial rent. The Irish Tales' project of sentimental reform was a fiction never to be realized, but Edgeworth's attempt to find in the political economy of rent a sustaining structure of feeling succeeds in drawing a post-Union Ireland at the limits of liberal theories of development.

[40] Maria Edgeworth to Fanny Wilson, 4 January 1839 quoted in Butler, 453. Butler neatly sums up Edgeworth's change of heart: "In the 1830s she was caught in the classic position of a moderate liberal in times of revolution."

Chapter Two

The Geography of Atlantic Capital and the Romance of Accumulation

In the beginning, all the World was America.
John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*

On the first settling of a country, in which there is an abundance of rich and fertile land, a very small proportion of which is required to be cultivated for the support of the actual population, or indeed can be cultivated with the capital which the population can command, there will be no rent; for no one would pay for the use of land, when there was an abundant quantity not yet appropriated, and, therefore, at the disposal of whosoever might choose to cultivate it.
David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*

There is no rent in America. The Ricardian theory of rent is formulated in contrast to an imagined landscape rich in fertile uncultivated land, a figural space associated long before Ricardo and long after with the American frontier. According to *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation,* rent emerges as an economic category only in a country where the most productive land has been long settled. In such a country, capitalist farmers will pay landowners a rent equal to what they make in excess of their costs of production and a regular rate of profit.

Thus, the scaling of rent prices according to the qualities of $Land_1$, $Land_2$, $Land_3$, … down to $Land_n$, "the worst land in cultivation" that "pays no rent"; this is the marginal topology of capitalist agriculture that came to define sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and by the early nineteenth characterized most of Great Britain.

For Ricardo, the existence of rent—the most unproductive of revenues—follows historically upon the emergence of this geography of declining agricultural margins. Never mind that the institutional and legal framework of rental tributes and tenancy law had been formulated centuries earlier, in an England still abundant in unenclosed commons.[1] Political economy found the presuppositional space for the development of commercial norms not the actual history of European law and commerce, but in the mythologized landscape of the settler colony. America, the real and figurative prototype of this landscape, gave economic reason the abstract space it required to narrate the gradual accumulation of property, industry, and trade as what Smith called "the natural course of things." The settler colony, where rent does not exist, is the constitutive

[1] This is Richard Jones' charge against Ricardo in his historical account of rent in *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth and on the Sources of Taxation* (London: John Murray, 1831). The following lines are worth recording here for their summary dismissal of the abstract formulation of American space that concerns this chapter: "If indeed it were true, as some have fancied, that lands were always first appropriated by those who are willing to bestow pains on their cultivation; if in the history of mankind it were an ordinary fact, that the uncultivated lands of a country were open to the industry or necessities of all its population; then some time would elapse in the progress of agricultural nations before rents made their appearance at all; and when they did appear, still, while any portion of the country remained unoccupied, the rents paid on the lands already cultivated would only be in exact proportion to their superiority, from position or goodness, over the vacant spots.

"Such a state of things might occur; it is an abstract possibility; but the past history and present state of the world yield abundant testimony that it neither is, nor ever has been, a practical truth, and that the assumption of it as the basis of systems of political philosophy, is a mere fallacy" (5).

exception required for Ricardo's elaboration of the theory of rent; the requisite margin for thinking the geography of accumulation.

Ricardo was far from the first to make such conceptual use of a figural America. What made the virgin settler colony so useful a topos for political thought from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) to Edward Gibbon Wakefield's *A View of the Art of Colonization* (1849) was that it offered both an imaginative escape from, and a real economic release valve for, the population pressures and profit imperatives of agricultural capitalism. However, as More and Wakefield make eminently clear, the colonization of British America could never have occurred if not for the processes of enclosure and peasant expulsion in England: "The same men who evicted peasants financed colonial ventures that promised land to former peasants."[2] In other words, settler colonization was *the result* of the very thing for which it was imagined to provide an alternative: the widespread dispossession of the peasantry. There is more than a bit of irony in the fact that seventeenth-century political philosophy found in the mythos of American space the materials to imagine the natural origin of private property.

This chapter observes that political philosophy's conceptions of English enclosure and settler colonization violently collided in the literature and political writing of the 1790s. It was a collision that had a massive influence on the spatial imagination of early romantic poetry, whose fascination with America as both place and symbol was so profoundly shaped by a polemical intellectual culture in the shadow of the French Revolution. In announcing the "abolition of the feudal system" and projecting the reconstitution of civil life on the basis of abstract principles,

[2] Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

the French Revolution set the terms against which political thinkers forwarded a sweeping challenge to the coherence of natural law philosophy. This challenge itself can be situated in a transition in the history of radical thought from the tradition of Harrington and Locke and their eighteenth-century inheritors to a later Victorian emphasis on economics of labor and the wage; from something like Thomas Paine's defense of the Natural Rights of Man to the early nineteenth-century socialisms of the Owenites and Chartists. If there is a single historical personage who embodies this transition, as Iain Hampsher-Monk has suggested, it is the radical orator, poet, and novelist John Thelwall.[3] I will argue that Thelwall's place among Jacobin theorists of natural rights is unique not least for the pressure he places on the constructs of virgin land and "natural man" as originating concepts of political-economic development. While his writings make wide use of such concepts as "*the natural condition of man*," he identifies them as theoretical abstractions without historical content; against those who would locate the origin of property and civility in a "supposed era of perfect happiness," Thelwall presents instead a history of commercial accumulation rooted in violence, conquest, and "usurpation."[4] In his political writing and in his novel *The Daughter of Adoption* (1801), Thelwall offers a materialist challenge to natural law's abstract concepts of property and personhood by tracing their emergence through Atlantic channels of dispossession. In doing so, he develops a theoretical and narrative mode of critique through which the margins of imperial capital—in the double sense of

[3] Iain Hampsher Monk, "John Thelwall and the Eighteenth-Century Radical Response to Political Economy," *The Historical Journal* 34.1 (1991), 1-20.

[4] *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall.* Ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 455.

surplus profit and extraneous territory—become the foci for the immanent rupture of natural law categories.

In moving from Ireland to America, this chapter presents a somewhat broader account of the geographical and temporal frames of thought that emerged out of the collision of liberalism and empire. If in what follows I deal somewhat more loosely with the actual spaces of American rent extraction (Thelwall's *Daughter of Adoption* will take us to Jamaica), it is because the texts I discuss treat American space in the mode of idealization: the geographical abstractions that result were foundational to the invention of what I referred to in the introduction as "the rent chronotope." However, such abstract treatment is not without concrete historical reference. America's break with Britain in 1776 was a watershed event for liberal critiques of empire. The new autonomy and prosperity of the former colony suggested the possibilities of a more rational, less despotic organization of production and exchange, one in which the rents of empire could be turned from the wasteful revenues of the state toward the economic reproduction of the polity. When Thelwall opens his 1801 novel *The Daughter of Adoption* in "September, 1776" with the return of a West Indian planter to London, it is clear that he is situating his *Tale of Modern Times* on the precipice of a liberalization of global space—even if the narrative that follows never arrives at an acceptable overhaul of imperial networks.[5] The representative status of America in the liberal reform of the British Empire also drew upon a longer tradition of political thought that considered the American settler colonies as a metaphorical space of original property. The marginal spaces of English enclosure and imperial frontier prove comprehensive sites of analysis

[5] John Thelwall, *The Daughter of Adoption: A Tale of Modern Times*, ed. Michael Scrivener, Judith Thompson, and Yasmin Solomonescu (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2013)

for the complexities of liberal imperial reform. British romantic writing, in investing the margins of modernity with the utopian and dystopian horizons of liberal thought, also reflected critically on the historical conditions of its own spatial imagination.

I begin in the next section by sketching the way natural rights philosophy carved a conceptual space for itself in the dynamic relationship between two kinds of places, enclosures and frontiers. Whereas enlightenment political thought projected its own fantasies of legal origin onto the space of the colonial frontier, William Wordsworth's *Excursion* redraws the Atlantic geography of natural rights as the product of speculative abstraction. Wordsworth's *Excursion* offers a useful counterpoint to Thelwall's *Daughter of Adoption*, which shares a pessimistic view of America's natural rights mythology but from a rather different approach. In the second section, I outline the ways Thelwall's global political imaginary emerged through his sustained polemic against Burke, enabling him to present transatlantic finance imperialism as a continuation of Burke's mourned for "Gothic customary." In the final section, this long-view of empire finds a distinctive literary genre in *The Daughter of Adoption*'s deployment of romance. I propose a reading of romance in Thelwall that, like Marx vis-à-vis Hegel, turns Wordsworth's romantic disappointment on its head. Instead of rejecting the abstraction of natural law by narrating its confrontation with its concrete spatial reference (America), for Thelwall romance names the process through which imperial conquest itself give rise to speculative mystification.

Enclosure and Frontier

According to the founding mythology of natural law, civil society originates in an imaginative space of uncultivated land, given by God for the use and appropriation by man by the use of his

labor. While the scriptural analog of this space is *Genesis*, its historical and geographical reference is America. According to seventeenth-century theorists of rights, early colonial settlers, in bestowing value on wasteland and contracting in the preservation and sale of its produce, could be thought of as reenacting the originating framework of civil society; at least, that is how they were imagined by the Secretary to the Lords Proprietor of Carolina, John Locke. The topos of abundant wasteland is crucial to *The Second Treatise*'s account of property and civility, since the natural right to property is originally justified by the notion that *my* taking this land takes nothing from my neighbor; "he that leaves as much as another can make use of, does as good as take nothing at all."[6] It is for the protection of such rights that civil law derives its justification in turn. But political philosophy's recourse to the myth of American virgin land was prompted by the very different economies of land and property in an English countryside undergoing rapid enclosure and an Ireland beset by confiscations and a new plantation system. Locke's theory of natural rights is articulated at the juncture of two oppositional models of agrarian society: one set amongst freely available unimproved commons, the other exhibiting all the pressures of agricultural capitalism. These oppositional agrarianisms were linked both conceptually and historically: not only was settler colonization driven by the rising population of dispossessed farmers and peasants in Britain, but the mythologized space of the former was the setting for the theory of property that offered ideological justification for the latter.

If Locke's theory of property could be marshaled to justify enclosure against the egalitarian demands of the levelers and diggers, it increasingly gave ground to voices challenging

[6] *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 114.

the *un*natural basis of Britain's imperial controls. Of course, Lockean property law was a key resource in the development of eighteenth-century political economy; and we have seen in the previous chapter how Smith drew on the exemplary political geography of American land in theorizing a "natural course of things" against the unnatural mercantile system and its imperial applications. The American Revolution brought the conceptual fissures of natural rights theory into play within the very colonized space imagined by Locke as the primordial stage of civil society. If settler agrarianism had shed much of its nativist mythology by the time of the American Revolution, the mythic space of unappropriated land continued to function as a rhetorical resource. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* grounds the political claims of the American colonists by supposing them to "represent the first peopling of any country, or of the world."[7] Thomas Jefferson's agrarian ideal of a state composed of small farming communities reaffirmed the American provenance of natural right, while the westward moving frontier continued to provide the ideological image of virgin land.

Ironically, while the cultural imagination of the frontier underwrote the utopian picture of the American rural community, its geographical reality was a root cause of the very institution—slavery—that most threatened the coherence of the agrarian ideal. As Wakefield was to explain in *England & America* (1833) (in some ways the culmination of the spatial imaginary whose emergence I am tracking), the frontier was a labor sink.[8] Since the availability of cheap land made it easy for workers to become proprietors, the employment of free workers was always

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[7] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 66.

[8] Edward Gibbon Wakefield*, England & America: A Comparison of the Social and Political State of Both Nations. The Collected Works of Edward Gibbon Wakefield.* Ed. M. F. Lloyd Pritchard (Glasgow: Collins, 1968), 317-588.

expensive and the demand for slaves always high in the New World colonies.[9] Cheap land and expensive labor was a root geographical condition of American freedom and American slavery: the very conditions that made the frontier liable to projections of smallholding utopia, "every man his own master," encouraged the expansion of political unfreedom. Jefferson's idealized state of small landowning farmers shares with its suppressed morbid reality of the plantation system an economic logic thoroughly shaped by the presence of the frontier, that is, by the very space of free and unappropriated space imagined (from Locke to Paine) as the founding location of natural liberty.

This apparent contradiction in the political economy of the frontier was relatively untroubling for most observers in the eighteenth century, although I will argue later in this chapter that the American entanglement of natural property and slavery emerges, in a somewhat different form, as an unsettling dimension of Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption*. Jefferson's agrarian ideal is the most scandalous example of the link between the imagined virtues of rural smallholding and the realities of American slavery. In England, meanwhile, the longstanding political symbolism attached to the figure of the independent farmer was undergoing a related strain; and as the rural cottager disappeared from the English landscape in the course of the eighteenth century, the utopian draw of American landscape only increased. Simon White has shown how the residual figure of the rural cottager could serve the rhetorical ends of a variety of political positions. The disappearance of the cottager might offer a sentimental case against the depredations of a corrupt and dysfunctional landed aristocracy (the Whig argument), against the

[9] For a more detailed version of this argument, see Jacob Price, "Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies," in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic World System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 293-340.

greedy enclosures of newly landed innovators (the Tory argument), or against both at the same time (the radical argument).[10] White's account indicates how the transformation of the English rural countryside was a vexing fact for the entire spectrum of political thought.

Thus, in the course of the eighteenth century, the ideological polarities of English enclosure and colonial frontier came increasingly under tension. This development was as central to the spatial imagination of late eighteenth-century poetry as it was to its politics. If Coleridge and Southey's Pantisocracy scheme seemed unequivocal in locating the possibility of natural society in America (as the Pantisocrat George Burnett put it, "[we] perceived that America was the only place in which it was *possible* that such a scheme could be realized"), the scheme's failure indexed a more pessimistic view.[11] Similar pessimism regarding American emigration already been influentially articulated in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village,* where "the dreary scene" of Georgia's Altamaha river offers no comforts to the evacuated tenants of Auburn's "glades forlorn." [12] But it is in the third Book Wordsworth's *The Excursion*—a poem E. P. Thompson calls "Burke put into verse"—that the transatlantic imaginary of natural rights faces its most vigorous poetic trial.[13]

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[10] Simon White, *Romanticism and the Rural Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[11] George Burnett to Nicholas Lightfoot, dated Manchester 22 October 1796. Cited in Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 156-7. As the practicability of the Pennsylvania project waned, Southey and Coleridge occasionally considered (but ultimately dismissed) Wales as an alternative.

[12] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village, The Deserted Village, The Traveller, and Other Poems* (London: Houghton Mufflin, 1894), lines 341, 71.

[13] E. P. Thompson, "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," *Past & Present* 142 (1994), 137.

It is worth pausing on Wordsworth's exemplary critique, not only because it suitably concludes this section's brief history of natural law's imaginative geography, but because its formal and conceptual energies move in productive contrast to the writings of Thelwall that will concern us in the following sections. When the Solitary, sore from the "blasted hopes" (833) of the 1790s, leaves the shores of England for America, he seeks there a concrete embodiment of the abstract ideals the Revolution had failed: a natural humanism liberated from the tyranny of the past. In other words, the Solitary's migration aims to make literal the figurative space of natural law:

> Long-wished for sight, the Western World appeared;
> And, when the Ship was moored, I leapt ashore
> Indignantly—resolved to be a Man,
> Who, having o'er the past no power, would live
> No longer in subjection to the past. (878-92)
>
> [Let us] to Regions haste,
> Whose shades have never felt the encroaching axe,
> Or soil endured a transfer in the mart
> Of dire rapacity. There, Man abides,
> Primeval Nature's Child.[14]

The Solitary's paean to the frontiers of the New World celebrates their immunity to the inflated prices of Britain's farming districts, rapidly transformed into sources of rent for land monopolists. But America turns out to be no refuge for natural savages versed in Locke and Paine. Crossing the Mississippi, The Solitary discovers in the place of "Primeval Nature's Child"

[14] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*. Ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, Michael C. Jaye, and David García. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2007): 922-29. Subsequent citations in text parenthetically by line number.

a picture of total abjection: "A Creature squalid, vengeful, and impure; / Remorseless, and submissive to no law / But superstitious fear, and abject sloth" (962-4). As a counter to the cliché of the natural savage, the conventional racism of this passage is hardly original. What is more innovative is the conceptual dialectic Wordsworth sets in motion between the polarities of European enclosure and American frontier. If the Solitary's sojourn is a movement driven by an abstract conception of natural personhood toward the place imagined to subtend its coherence, once arrived at, this place explodes the myth it was thought to authorize. This is a dialectics of "disappointment" (to use the telling word from Book III's argument): the end reveals the vanity of a speculative expectation.

The Solitary's problem, Wordsworth implies, is that he has let his expectations be shaped by the abstraction of natural rights: in his long flight from England to America and back, he finds his notions of political justice deflated. For many critics, *The Excursion* marks a definitive turn in Wordsworth's politics: having long-since abandoned the radicalism of his youth, his mature long-poem charts a paternalistic imperialism buttressed by a program of national education.[15] While the knotty details of Wordsworth's politics are beyond this chapter's scope, in the figure of the Solitary he clearly sets his target on a specific form of 1790s radicalism; and while the sources Wordsworth draws upon for his picture of the Solitary are many, the consensus is that Thelwall was his principle model. Certainly no one in the 1790s

[15] On *The Excursion*'s apostasy, see Thompson, 137. Karen O'Brien reads Wordsworth's characterization of potential emigrants as "swarms" to indicate his anxiety that England is already beset with immigrant "savage hordes" from the peripheries of the empire. "Uneasy Settlement," *Romanticism's Debatable Lands*, ed. C. Lamont and M. Rossington (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 121-135. Tim Fulford also reads *The Excursion* as a pro-colonist poem in *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture, 1756-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 205-6.

public sphere spoke so vehemently of "rights / Widely—inveterately usurped upon" as Citizen Rant (as Thelwall was parodically dubbed in Isaac Disraeli's 1798 *Vaurien: Or Sketches of the Times*); moreover, Thelwall's flight to Wales when chased out of political life in 1798, where he styled himself the New Recluse of Llyswin Farm, was romanticism's most confirmed attempt to put radical agrarianism into practice. Critics such as E. P. Thompson, Judith Thompson, and Yasmin Solomonescu have noted the injustice of Wordsworth's rendering of Thelwall, whose decision to leave public life under the threat of government-sanctioned mob violence was certainly no mere matter of intellectual "disappointment."[16] But while scholars have come to Thelwall's aid against the calumnies of an apostate Wordsworth and his circle by reaffirming the unapologetic radicalism, the effect has been to downplay the complexity of Thelwall's own critical account of natural rights theory and its authorizing imaginative geography. In contrast to the negative idealism of *The Excursion*—its plotting of the failure of political abstraction—I argue that Thelwall presents instead a historical-materialist critique in which the abstractions of natural rights emerge hand-in-hand with the extraction of value from the land.

[16] Thompson sees Wordsworth's identification of Thelwall with the Solitary as a self-exorcism of his own youthful Jacobinism: "The Solitary, then, is the failure of Wordsworth's own Jacobinical *alter ego* objectified and manipulated. 'I do not mean to wrong him' — yet wrong him he did. And if we see John Thelwall as a model, then the manipulation is more clear. For Thelwall was driven into despondent solitude not only by his own weaknesses and disappointed illusions and 'the failure of the French Revolution' but by the bearing down of the whole of established culture and established power upon him. The absent evidence in the *Excursion* is that of counter-revolution." Thomspon, "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," *Past & Present* 142 (1994), 137. For more recent treatments of Thelwall in relation to his one-time friends of Nether Stowy, see Judith Thompson, "Citizen Juan Thelwall: In the Footsteps of a Free-Range Radical," Studies in *Romanticism* 48.1 (2009), 67-100; Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); and Kenneth Johnson, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), especially 235-249.

COMMERCE AND WAR

The title of Thelwall's most developed work of political theory, *The Rights of Nature Against the Usurpations of Establishments* (1796), makes the author's investment in the language of natural rights clear enough. What makes Thelwall unique is not so much his attempt to salvage the theory of natural rights by combining it with a political economy of labor (a combination which is very similar to Paine's, though farther reaching), but rather the terms of his engagement with this theory's most trenchant and influential opponent. The occasion of Thelwall's *The Rights of Nature* was the publication of Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace*. Burke there argued that the Pitt administration's 1795 moves to end the war with France were not only ill-advised but futile, as the Revolution had dissolved the basis for any harmonious intercourse between nations. This lost basis of peace is what Burke calls chivalry. As J.G. A. Pocock has argued, Burke's famous eulogy for the age of chivalry in the *Reflections* was no nostalgic denunciation of commercial modernity in favor of the rule of the *ancien regime*. In Pocock's reading, Burke's *Reflections* aimed to reinscribe the recent Whig defense of commerce as a "polite" peace-promoting enterprise within a tradition stemming from ancient feudal law. Enlightenment authors from Spinoza to Montesquieu to Smith had claimed that commercial nations are peaceful nations, insofar as trade demands civil intercourse even between hostile countries. This notion that trade and peace go hand-in-hand was dramatically popularized by Hume and Smith, and shared to a degree by Burke—but with an important distinction. As Burke saw it, the Enlightenment account that commerce *results* in the spread of pacific manners was a case of "mistaking the effect for the cause"; in Pocock's words, Burke "insists that commerce can flourish only under the protection

of manners."[17] Specifically, Burke argues that the manners of ancient chivalry provide the moral foundations for *doux commerce*; for profitable trade and national peace.

Pocock's account of Burke's thought is illustrated, for instance, in the claim from *Letters on a Regicide Peace* that "The whole of the polity and oeconomy of every country in Europe has been derived from … the old Germanic or Gothic custumary; from the feudal institutions which must be considered as an emanation from that custumary."[18] This claim (one Thelwall picks out for particular dissection) echoed the arguments of historians of civil society such as Adam Ferguson and William Blackstone, who suggested that the spread of the feudal law under the Goths and Normans had established the institutions and values that came to shape the character of Europe. In light of these precursors, Burke's vitriolic denunciation of the French Revolution as the monied interest's takeover of traditional power structures was not an attack on commerce itself, but rather of a commerce detached from its enabling conditions of shared religion, law, and custom. Having alienated itself from these conditions of concord, the new French government's footing in principles of natural right meant that a regicide peace could be no peace at all.

Burke's infamous condemnation of the Revolution as the mercantile interest's takeover of the national trust has fared well among recent scholars of eighteenth-century Empire, who have seen in his writings a viable critique of finance-imperialism.[19] But it is worth reflecting on

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[17] J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 199.

[18] Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace*, *in a Series of Letters* (London, J. Owen, 1796), 48-9.

[19] See Especially Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Siraj Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Sunil Agnani, *Hating Empire Properly:*

the limits of Burke's critique, especially insofar as its opposition to a new Revolutionary regime of speculative sovereignty rests on the apparently stable foundations of the feudal law. For feudalism itself was a concept invented alongside natural law, and which developed according to the imperatives and contingencies of mercantile imperial rule. Kathleen Davis' brilliant rereading of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historiography of feudalism has shown how this corpus undertook a "periodization" of the present not simply in order to define it against the customs and institutions of the distant "feudal" past, but more importantly, to entrench European sovereignty at a time of vast colonial expansion.[20] It was Pocock who first argued that the legal historians of the sixteenth-century invented the periodizing protocols of modern historiography; what Davis demonstrates is how this invention was itself strategically interwoven into the operational discourses of British imperial sovereignty. Whereas Pocock argued that sixteenth-century historians like Henry Spelman "rediscovered" the feudal law, Davis insists on how the project to periodize feudalism from Spelman to Blackstone was motivated to provide European nations a shared ancestry of law and character (Burke's "similitude" of law and religion) which in turn could be used to justify the expansion of European legislation over non-European colonized communities. By making this ancestry the condition of legal and political legitimacy, the fiction of "feudalism" offered a justificatory apparatus for modern colonial enterprises.

Davis' sense that the *writing* of feudalism was a central technology of European imperialism is helpful for understanding Thelwall's opposition to Burke's conception of

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The Two Indies and the Limits of Enlightenment Anticolonialism (2013 Fordham University Press, 2013).

[20] Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

chivalry. As Davis argues, the crossover of feudal history and colonialism becomes visible precisely at the point where the spatial and historical logic of natural law breaks down: "natural law … and the English law … interchange precisely at their breach—a breach of territorial conquest inextricable from the historical breach of commerce."[21] Likewise, Thelwall's response to Burke insists on the legal and historical breach that links the original conquest of England's feudal past to the rapacity of its commercial present. Although Burke does not feature in Davis' study, he very much belongs to the line of thought Davis describes in her reading of Blackstone: like the constitutional historian, Burke "want[ed] a *European* past for England—which, according to his admired predecessors, meant a *feudal* past."[22] France, in effectively divorcing itself from its past, had from Burke's perspective made itself un-European: hence the comparisons in *Letters on a Regicide Peace* between members of the Directory and cannibal slaves. In contrast, Thelwall calls explicit attention to the ways colonial commerce—including in slaves—remobilizes the constitutive violence of European feudalism. Thelwall is unique within the 1790s radical tradition to the extent that his work articulates the breach of natural law that conjoins legal historiography and imperial accumulation. For Thelwall chivalry comes to name, not a traditional safeguard against the abstractions of modernity, but an ongoing historical violence that links both modern commercial accumulation and the sovereign properties of England's "entailed inheritance."

When, in *The Rights of Nature*, Thelwall confronts Burke's argument for the chivalric origin of commercial manners, he lays against him (as Burke had against the Enlightenment

[21] Davis, 62.

[22] Davis, 64.

theorists of *doux commerce*) the charge that "cause has been misstated for effect, and effect for cause" (443). It is not that the unmannerly Thelwall denies that manners can have real effects in the world: he concedes that "general harmony of *manners* endear the reciprocations, and prolongs the intercourses of social life," even between nations. But he denies Burke's premise that the "similitude" of manners, derived from a shared feudal origin, is the cause of commercial peace and prosperity. At this point, Thelwall may seem to be countering Burke by simply reasserting the Whig doctrine of commercial sentiment's pacifying tendency—the very theory Burke was trying to place in a more complex historical frame. In fact, Thelwall's account departs radically from the theory of *doux commerce.* If commercial manners have a countervailing tendency on the "force" of feudal institutions, their spread has nothing to do with strengthening amicable ties between nations. On the contrary, Thelwall proposes that the chivalrous etiquette of merchants is entirely compatible with the eighteenth-century reality of global war:

> it would not be difficult to prove, that the frequency and obstinacy of wars, in later times, is to be attributed to the very circumstance which prevents the perfect separation of the hostile nations. This circumstance is not 'similitude of laws; … not 'similitude of religion'; … The real cause of the phenomenon is to be sought in the commercial system; which, while it furnishes the pretenses and means of war, still keeps up a circuitous and clandestine, if not a direct and open intercourse between the contending nations. This, also, it is which, not only more than treaties and compacts, but more than resemblances, conformities, sympathies—more than *vicinity* itself, binds together the aggregate of nations. (443).

More than simply re-inverting Burke's inversion of the causal order between manners and institutions, Thelwall throws out the premise of commerce's pacific influence. Good manners are now presented, not as the pacifying product of the shared religious and legal institutions of Europe, nor as the polished sentiments of peaceable merchants, but as the mode of

"intercourse" of those who profit from the conflict of nations. Burke saw in the notion of *doux commerce* a misplaced proof of the gentle effects of chivalry; against Whig convention, he rooted feudal and commercial manners in shared institutional foundations. Thelwall also roots commerce and feudalism in shared foundations; but for him, they are defined by conquest, rapine, and war.

As Thelwall liked to point out in his lectures, Western Europe's rapid accumulation of commercial wealth coincided with more warfare, not less: "since her glorious, happy, and venerated revolution [Britain] has spent almost as many years in slaughter and devastation as in peace and tranquility."[23] Indeed, for Thelwall, warfare and accumulation are the twin engines of European development. Together they constitute a "war system" radically opposed to the "*natural* progress" (473) of commerce. Like Burke, Thelwall argues that the institutions of state finance orchestrated in the wake of 1688 opened the way for a militarized empire largely under the control of discrete mercantile interest groups. But unlike Burke, Thelwall's critique of state military-finance is measured by its effects on the lives of workers. In his *Tribune* lecture "The History and Progress of the War System," for instance, he correlates the frequency and duration of wars alongside the declining subsistence of poor workers from the time of Henry VII to the present. In this account, 1688 is a tipping point in an ongoing process of warfare and rural dispossession. As a result of the national debt and the doctrine of "*balance of power"*, Thelwall charges, England was at war "50 years out of one hundred"; in the same period, the price of labor diminished to the point that four to eight times as many days of work were required to purchase a

[23] *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, Consisting Chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall From the Commencement of the Second Course in February 1795, to the Introduction of Mr. Pitt's Convention Act*. Vol. 3 (London: H. D. Symonds, 1796), 96.

given amount of bread.[24] The Glorious Revolution, far from emblematizing the protections and liberties of civil government, accelerates a longer historical tendency toward civilizational degeneration. And the global commercial order it ushers only widens its field:

> When I say that half the last century has been consumed in war, I do not take into the calculation the cruel and unprincipled wars which have been waged in the *East Indies*; where Commerce, that ought to hold up the laurel of peace, and scatter plenty over the world—Commerce, that ought, upon the wings of science, to be soaring to the light of truth and liberality, has become the vilest agent of depredation and murder—has bathed her feet with blood, and cloathed her head with horrors, so as to be no longer known to those who admire the purity of her native attractions.[25]

Likely influenced by Burke's own speeches for the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Thelwall points to India to demonstrate the vacuity of any argument equating commerce and peace. Presenting the case of India through a rhetorical preterition that pretends to downplay its importance to the preceding argument ("I do not take into calculation..."), this passage in fact expands the spatial and conceptual frame of the lecture's overarching linkage of dispossession and the war system. While the history Thelwall has charted is national, its causal network is global.

We have seen that Thelwall responds to Burke's claims for the chivalric origin of commercial politeness by asserting the immanent connection between civil manners and global war. This assertion, in turn, can be traced through Thelwall's broader challenge to the institutions

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[24] *The Tribune*, 99.

[25] *The Tribune,* 98. These lines, delivered in a lecture of Oct. 23rd 1795, are hard to square with Gregory Claeys' claim that "in 1795-96, Thelwall began to accept commerce to a much greater degree than formerly." *The Politics of English Jacobinism*, xlii. The lecture is not included in Claeys' edition.

of state-finance that undergird Britain's new conquest economy. Whereas Burke found that France's political reconstitution had, by destroying its chivalric ties to ancient Europe, put the nation on par with "negro slaves, covered in the blood of their masters," Thelwall counters that the manners of commerce are themselves the polite expression of an underlying barbarity.[26] It is precisely this breach between the "natural" tendency of commerce (science, peace, and plenty) and the violent reality of its operation (conquest, "depredation and murder") that opens the way to Thelwall's more radical historicization of eighteenth-century imperial speculation in his engagement with the historiography of feudalism.

Thelwall approaches the idea of feudalism on two levels, as at once historically bounded and conceptually transportable. In his section on "The Feudal System" in *The Rights of Nature,* the term denominates, first of all, a certain historical moment in European development: specifically, it is a state Thelwall defines by a threefold monopolization and accumulation of property, knowledge (scholasticism), and force. This conception of feudalism involves denaturing the language of those same juridical historians who provided Burke with his concept of chivalry, to reveal what Davis calls the "point of rupture" between the moral and historical

[26] Thelwall is fond of using comparisons between the state of the English poor and West Indian slaves to undermine the logic of imperial sovereignty and commerce. Witness his description of the "funding system" as an amplified form of non-European savagery: "Citizens, we have heard moralists declaim with great severity against the practices of barbarous nations, who are said to expose their children to be devoured by wild beasts, or to sell them into slaverv. But I would like to know, whether the Africans, who have been thought a set of wretches, who ought to be kept in chains, and made slaves from generation to generation, in our West India Islands, because some of them are so lost in brutal ignorance, as to sell their children and relatives, or any other set of barbarians, about whom we have related (perhaps invented) so many monstrous tales, do in reality surpass this funding system. Do we not by this profligate practice, in reality, sell our children, our grandchildren, and all their progeny (as far a our power can extend) to the end of time? Do we not, I say, thus fell them to misery, and to absolute slavery?" Lecture XXXIII, *The Tribune* Vol. 3, 5.

justifications of the feudal law. But, second, once feudalism is thus characterized on the basis of militarized territorial accumulation, the concept achieves a kind of spatiotemporal mobility. Thelwall finds feudalism not only in the distant medieval past, nor only in present-day old regimes (including England) that derive legitimacy from past establishments, but everywhere where conquest is the operational mode of political and commercial power. Precisely because this conception of feudalism fails to respect the periodizing logic of juridical history, Thelwall is able to use feudalism against its legitimating function in constitutional thought. The Norman conquest, which brought feudal law to England, counts as the foundational fiction of English statehood only to the extent that it inaugurates a system of conquest that persists (in dramatic new forms) in present-day imperialism and speculative commerce.

In the following section I will show how *The Daughter of Adoption* maps this configuration of feudalism through the terrain of Atlantic capital, rearticulating the circuit of enclosure and frontier through the dynamics of imperial conquest. But it is necessary first to show how Thelwall separates the dynamics of feudal conquest from the natural law framework that informs eighteenth-century feudal historiography, as this hermeneutic is central to Thelwall's sense of genre. To disrobe the accumulative violence of feudalism from the juridical language of feudal historiography, Thelwall turns to the Blackstone's account the Norman conquest. As Davis highlights in her reading of *The Commentaries*, Blackstone's lack of comfort with a French origin of English law leads him to posit feudalism not as a pure expression of sovereign order but as a convenient "fiction;" a legal structure not "imposed" by the will of a conqueror but rather invented by the mutual consent of English landowners.[27] While Thelwall

[27] Davis, 64. Writes Blackstone, "This new polity therefore seems not to have been *imposed* by the conqueror, but nationally and freely adopted by the general assembly of the whole realm";

agrees with the essentially fictional status of feudalism, he emphasizes how its foundation violates the natural law that Blackstone preserves in his account: "the very principles of property were violated in [this] system … plunder, not property was the principle of the feudal system" (493). The aim of Thelwall's critique is double. On the one hand, he attacks the legal framework of feudalism as a mere apology for conquest: "A regular organization was accordingly invented to secure, and a correspondent system of laws to sanctify, the usurpation" (492). But it is not simply the Norman foundation of English feudalism that comes under attack: it is, more directly, the language of feudal historiography itself, whose notions of "consent" and natural obligation continues to "sanctify" the law of plunder. Thelwall emphasizes this sanctimonious dimension in a lengthy quotation from *The Commentaries*, replacing key terms and phrases with others less juridical and more explicitly brutal. He thus "translate[s]" Blackstone's "legal language into plain English": "rights of conquest" becomes "rights of robbery murder"; "possessions," "usurpations"; "receiver of lands," "receiver of stolen property"; "benefactor or lord," "chief robber"; "prince or general himself," "captain, or generalissimo, of the banditti himself" (492).[28] The point is not only to insist on the foundational violence obscured in Blackstone's account; it

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"it became a fundamental maxim and necessary principle (though in reality a mere fiction) of our English tenures, 'that the king is the universal lord and original proprietor of all the lands in his kingdom; and that no man doth or can possess any part of it, but what has mediately or immediately been derived as a gift from him, to be held upon feodal services.'" William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott, 1893), 50, 51.

[28] This reading Blackstone to expose the breach of its ethico-juridical logic is part of a critical hermeneutic that Thelwall describes and practices elsewhere. See, for instance, these comments on one of his favorite historical resources, Hume's *History of England*: "Such books, thought written by *high-flown* Aristocrats themselves … are pregnant with facts that *if properly known and digested*, would hurl Corruption from its high-built seat." *Politics of English Jacobinism*, 265. Thelwall's line-by-line correction of Blackstone is a practical demonstration of what this proper knowledge and digestion involves.

is to show how the very discourses that present feudalism as a groundwork of political legitimacy are complicit in the persisting conquest economy of feudo-mercantile imperialism.

The long history of feudalism supplements the conjectural history of natural law insofar as it offers an alternative framework of historical development rooted in militarized territorial accumulation. But to see how it might open such a history, it must be decoupled from the language of natural law. It is precisely this immanent critique of the juridical language of nature that enables Thelwall to remain committed to the concept of natural rights. Once feudalism and mercantile rule are divested of every justification on the basis of natural law and revealed in their naked historical violence, nature can be reclaimed as a purely abstract regulative ideal. Pace Wordsworth and Burke, the abstract status of natural rights becomes its attraction: "When I talk of nature, and *the natural condition of man*, I do not refer to any supposed era of perfect happiness, or poetical vision of a golden age: neither do I argue upon any theological or philosophical hypothesis of origin or creation" (455). By refusing to turn "nature" toward an account of a historical or geographical origin of civility, Thelwall is able to rearticulate the conjectural geography of natural law as a geography of conquest. He does so in *The Daughter of Adoption*.

Romance and Accumulation

We have seen that in *The Rights of Nature*, Thelwall countered Burke's theory of manners by locating the problem of modern accumulation in the "Gothic custumary" itself, "the very perfection of military barbarism" (497). In *The Daughter of Adoption*, Thelwall restages this reading of the accumulative origins of chivalry by displacing it from the Norman conquest to the

Atlantic circuits of modern capital. In doing so, his work offers a fruitful contrast to radical and romantic configurations of American unappropriated land discussed earlier in this chapter. In the writings of Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, the natural rights topos of unappropriated land is presented as a utopian alternative to the economic contradictions embedded in rural European space: whether liberating (for young Coleridge and Southey) or disappointing (for Wordsworth), this imaginary space functions (as it does for natural rights theory in general) as the abstract origin for the pursuit of civil liberty. In contrast, *The Daughter of Adoption*'s treatment of New World space does not unfold along the axis of utopian wish and dystopian collapse. Instead of positing the natural rights ideal as an abstraction divorced from the abject reality of settler life, Thelwall's novel demonstrates the real abstraction of speculative violence that is constitutive of Atlantic commerce.

This speculative violence has a literary genre: its name is romance. Enlightenment criticism had placed the generic development of romance in a pre-commercial age of superstitious credulity. Ferguson's account of chivalry and romance in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*—an important source for Burke's championing of the chivalric origin of commercial polish—not only describes romance standbys such as the fantastic, the gallant hero, and the vulnerable and meek female victim as suitable themes to the era of "feudal establishments," but also places this "romantic system" on par with the "advancement of commercial arts" as a cause for the civilized advancement of modern European states.[29] Ian

[29] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 183-193. See also James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical,* Vol. 1 (Dublin: Exshaw, Walker, Beatty, White, Byrne, Cash, and McKenzie, 1783), 233-320.

Duncan has argued that the rise of the modern romance helped to bring the novel into the service of the formation of national identity. It did so through the imaginative resources of the late eighteenth-century romance revival: from Walpole to Dickens, "Romance marks the novel's claim upon imaginative authenticity as a form of national life."[30] I will argue that for Thelwall, on the other hand, the romantic imagination is not so much a noble inheritance to be reclaimed, but a genre of speculative, possessive abstraction whose feudal origin of "usurpation" prefigures and persists within modern practices of empire.[31]

One way *The Daughter of Adoption* narrates the shared history of feudalism and modern empire is through the aesthetic education of its protagonist, Henry Montfort. Henry is son to the prickly and avaricious Jamaican planter Percival Montfort and his wife Amelia, a rational and

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[30] Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel*, *1760-1850: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

[31] Thelwall's *The Fairy of the Lake: A Dramatic Romance* similarly links the romance form to practices of imperial accumulation in the pre-feudal context of the Arthurian legends. In this play Thelwall places Arthur (predictably) in the role of native defender of Briton liberty, but in a way that debunks the standard radical identification with Anglo-Saxonism against the depredations of the "Norman yoke." The main action of the play occurs some years after the fabled treachery of the Saxon enchantress Rowena, who has seduced the English king Vortigern in order to acquire lands for her mercenary father Hengist. Her father slain by the knights of the roundtable and her now-husband Vortigern on the run in Cambria, Rowena undertakes to charm Arthur into marriage through the means of romantic enchantment. Arthur's oppressors are thus aligned not with the Norman yoke but with "the chains of *Saxon* usurpation" (my italics), while romance is presented less a specifically feudal genre than as an ideological form highlighting and serving the abstract desires of conquest. In *The Fairy of the Lake* as in *The Daughter of Adoption*, romance as a form is tied not to a specific stage of national history but to the practices of violent dispossession that runs through that history at all its stages. See *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement: he Fairy of the Lake: A Dramatic Romance; Effusions on Relative and Social Feeling; and Specimens of the Hope of Albion: or, Edwin of Northumbria: an Epic Poem. By John Thelwall. With a Prefatory Memoir of the Life of the Author, and Notes and Illustrations of Runic Mythology* (London: W.H. Parker, 1801): 1-92. On radical discourse's rhetorical opposition to the Norman yoke, see Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in the Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: St. Martins, Press, 1997), 46-111.

nurturing mother partial to the sentiments of dissenting radicalism. His parents' unlikely match[32] establishes the binary of dissipation and improvement that shape the vacillating Henry's bildungsroman. For his first six years of life Henry is educated by his mother on a curriculum modeled on instructional reformers like Anna Laetitia Barbauld (67). Rather than disciplining Henry with "idle terrors of superstition" or "false systems of morality," Amelia strives to teach her son to use his own moral and rational sense by establishing "a proper foundation of facts and realities"; in this she follows the maxim Thelwall had laid out in *The Peripatetic*: "nothing should be inculcated on the infant mind but what it is adequate to comprehend" (110).[33] Like Thelwall (and against Burke) Amelia denies the educational merits of the sublime; to this end she clears her library of romances, fairy tales, and "all those silly or those mysterious books that are calculated to impress erroneous or disputable notions of the general system of things, to inculcate false systems or morality, and the idle terrors of superstition" (68). When Henry's father returns from his plantations in Jamaica, he chastizes Amelia for "the doctrines of [her] petticoat philosophers" regaling Henry with "tales of devils, witches, and hobgoblins;" "His principle delight was to … see him shuddering at some tale of nautical superstition." Percival's enjoyment of such tales is more than a matter of taste. As his name suggests, he is himself a romantic character, an "adventurer" whose speculative ventures in the West Indies are presented as "romantic … enterprize[s]" that share his favorite tales' drive for conquest, possession and

[32] But one is reminded of the radical poet and novelist Charlotte Smith's disastrous marriage to Benjamin Smith, son of the wealthy West Indian merchant and East India Company director Richard Smith. Before leaving Benjamin and being forced to support herself and her children through her writing, Smith had written much of her *Elegaic Sonnets* while accompanying him in debtor's prison. Thelwall was a great admirer of Smith's poetry, and likely had her in mind in his depiction of Amelia and Percival.

[33] See *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 386.

distinction: “Both the ridiculous books he had purchased for the boy, and his own hyperbolical tales of marvelous sights and adventures, had encouraged a romantic thirst for enterprize and a desire to be distinguished by extraordinary exploits.” Thus Ferguson’s feudal “romantic system” returns in the speculative feats of the West India proprietor.

The Daughter of Adoption suggests that romance’s origin in an age of feudal chivalry is reproduced in the age of sophisters, economists, and calculators. What links them is the glory of possession. Siraj Ahmed argues that the eighteenth-century trope of colonial degeneration—the settler who regresses into more primitive manners and habits in the distant climates of empire—is best read not as a xenophobic expression of European supremacy, but as Enlightenment thought’s internal register of how civil society is founded in the very processes of dispossession that were being repeated in the colonial world.[34] By threading the genre of romance through the transatlantic circuit of enclosure and frontier, Thelwall similarly uses romance as an apparently “degenerate” form to narrate the dispossessive constitution of European manners. In a single sentence describing Percival’s degeneration into “a very West-Indian” (60), Thelwall provides a concise illustration of Ahmed’s point: the sentence’s successive conjunction “or” progressively shifts the cause of degeneration from foreign climate, to political institution, to a penchant for property-as-theft to which Percival is already “predisposed”: “The passions and vices of the climate, or, to speak more correctly, the habits of the order, or *disorder*, of society there established, had seized with irresistible violence, on a mind already predisposed to their influence” (73). Percival’s romantic adventurousness is characterized by a passion for possession

[34] Siraj Ahmed, “Dispossession and Civil Society: The Ambivalence of Enlightenment Political Philosophy,” *The Eighteenth Century,* 55.2-3 (2014).

that in Thelwall's writings is not specifically Creole, but general to the long history of imperial accumulation.

In *The Rights of Nature*'s reworking of Blackstone's account of the origin of feudal absolutism, Thelwall had emphasized the combination of violence and abstract exchangeability that underlies notion of sovereign property: "Every thing is HIS: *his* country, *his* victory, *his* people. He bought them at the common mart of feudalism; and the price was blood." (491). In *The Daughter of Adoption,* Percival's romantic disposition is characterized in part by his mistaking the nature of affection for possession; and he addresses his family with a proprietary imperiousness that echoes the lines just quoted from *Rights of Nature*: "Every thing to which the pronoun *my* could be attached had considerable importance in his eyes. From this rule we must not mistake even his wife" (62); "The vanity of the father seemed almost to swallow up every other passion, and '*my* clever little Henry! *my* fine boy! and *my* brave lad!' were the constant themes of his arrogant exultation" (63). Just as Percival's taste for romance perverts Amelia's attempt to ground Henry's education in the firmness of "realities and facts," his passion for possession replaces the materiality of affection with abstract relations of property. In this way Thelwall turns the anti-Jacobin accusation of Jacobin "abstraction" against the defenders of property themselves. In doing so, he codes romance as the generic form of an abstract violence that arises when the desire for property supersedes its utility to the community.

The Jacobin anti-gothicism of the novel's treatment of romance is thus intimately tied to its account of the political economy of Empire. But it is not the colonies alone that receive Thelwall's condemnations as bastions of a semi-feudal speculative acquisitiveness: he brings the trope of romance back home to an increasingly impoverished rural English landscape. The novel's description of this landscape confirms Burke's worry that "the spirit of money-jobbing

and speculation [has gone] into the mass of land itself, and incorporate[d] itself with it."[35] In an important episode early in the novel after Henry has been sent to school, he and a group of fellow Eton students on a drunken lark raid the henhouse of a nearby farm. Henry is caught by the farmer, abandoned by his mates, and locked in an outbuilding. As he surveys the scene of his imprisonment from a small window, the decayed surroundings acquire an aura of enchantment that piques Henry's disordered temperament: the various apartments of the farmhouse "had been rudely fitted up" amongst the ruins of an "antiquated mansion," "with painted panels half-blurred by time and fragments of rude gothic carved work" (87). In this situation Henry is overcome with the superstitious impressions his bad education under his father has made him susceptible to: "Ghosts, goblins, murdered travelers, clanking chains and demons of the night—all the horrible absurdities with which Montfort's favorite tales and story-books had stuffed his remembrance, recurred to his mind." (86). But Henry's captor is not the gothic villain his father's influence has conditioned him to expect, but rather the good and reasonable rustic Wilson. And as Wilson tells Henry his own story of poverty and loss, Thelwall relocates the source of the scene's apparent enchantment from the realm of the supernatural to the speculative violence of accumulation.

Wilson's farmhouse is located in a recently enclosed countryside whose small cottages are being rapidly appropriated by large proprietors.[36] As in Thelwall's political writings,

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[35] Edmund Burke*, Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. Intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 281.

[36] Wilson echoes Thelwall's sense that enclosure is a form of legal theft: "as a poor cottager said hard by here, when the common was closed—If the poor rob the rich, there is a great cry about justice; but nobody says anything about justice when the rice rob the poor!" (88).

Wilson's story shows how enclosure renders the poor vulnerable to the predations of the rich. But Wilson's account is more attentive to actual mechanisms of rural dispossession, in a way that cements the novel's pairing of romantic fancy and accumulative abstraction. Unlike the similar story of the farmer Hawkins in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, whose farm is destroyed by the brute force of his flatly despotic landlord Tyrell, Thelwall tells of a more polished and commercially savvy cheat. Wilson is the victim of predatory lending. Fallen on hard times and behind on his rent, the landlord's steward Mr. Talbot slyly offered to loan him rent-money. As the loan came due, Talbot conspires with a neighboring landlord named Walcot, "the great 'nopolist, who rents a matter o' seven or eight hundred a year in these parts" (95), to trick Wilson out of his land. Aware of Wilson's inability to pay the extortionate interest on his loan, Talbot suggested that he sell his property to Walcot: "he will give you the full-market price for every-thing: by which you will save all expences of lawyers and sheriffs' officers, and all the loss and discredit of a public auction" (96). When Wilson complains that the sale will leave him without means to acquire a new farm, Talbot sooths him with a promise of fair wages on Walcot's property.

The episode offers as clear a description of primitive accumulation as the proletarianization of the rural worker as can be found in Marx's *Capital*. Although Henry saves Wilson from total dispossession by giving him the money for his debts, Thelwall's critique of structural dispossession stands: like Maria Edgeworth in her Irish tales, he singles out the intermediary agents and stewards of the rural economy, those materialized "spirit[s] of money-jobbing and speculation" who in Burke's memorable image unmoor property in land "to be blown about, like the light fragments of a wreck."[37] In terms of the novel's gothic framing of

[37] Burke, *Reflections,* 282

Henry's encounter with Wilson, I want to note how the aura of romantic enchantment that first overlay the farm and its ruined environs has shifted from an apparently supernatural origin to a political-economic one. The "half-ruined" and abandoned appearance of the landscape can now be ascribed to the processes of enclosure; with it, the spectral presence of ghosts and hobgoblins has given way to speculative force of landed monopoly. It is, of course, a standby device of the 1790s gothic fiction pioneered by Ann Radcliffe to reveal the rational cause of what at first seem supernatural phenomena. But in Thelwall's case, the underlying "facts and realities" (to recall the terms of Amelia's anti-romantic educational philosophy) of Henry's romantic imagination have a spectral quality of their own: the fanciful abstractions of Henry's enthusiastic, disordered sensorium have been done away with, replaced by the real abstractions of credit, debt, and accumulation.

When Thelwall calls paper credit the "Union of Feudal and Commercial Tyranny," he has experiences such as Wilson's in mind.[38] And while this episode links the gothic spectrality of credit to the processes of enclosure and dispossession in rural England, the novel also places these phenomena in a wider circuits of Atlantic accumulation. Against Enlightenment historiography's understanding of the fundamental break between the feudal and commercial "systems," *The Daughter of Adoption* follows Thelwall's earlier political writing in conceiving of abstract dispossession as the engine of a conquest economy stretching from the Norman invasion to the present. If romance undoes the binary between feudalism and modernity by outlining a long-durational movement of imperial conquest, it also troubles the theoretical distinction between spaces of enclosure and frontier by narrating their connection through the

[38] *The Politics of English Jacobinism*, 498.

circulation of Atlantic capital. In an important respect, of course, the Caribbean setting of the novel's colonial episodes is a drastic shift from the American frontiers that animate natural rights theory and so fascinated Goldsmith, Coleridge and Wordsworth. This shift matters in part because the particular spatial and political context of the West Indies helps to highlight issues that are more easily obscured in the American imaginary of natural rights. Like the United States (of course, on a much smaller scale), larger sugar islands like Jamaica and St. Domingue remained relatively rich in uncultivated land despite a century and a half of cash cropping. As we will see in more detail in Chapter Three, even by the time of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act that ended (formally, at least) slave labor in the British colonies, the availability of land in Jamaica was a problem for colonial administrators who wanted assurance that freed slaves would turn wage laborers rather than settling their own inland economies. In the restricted geography of the sugar islands, the problematic nexus of labor in the dynamic of enclosure and frontier could be more immediately grasped than on the mainland. In displacing the American pole of the Atlantic circuit of accumulation to the Caribbean, *The Daughter of Adoption* not only lays bare the myth of commerce's origin in the combination of natural surplus and free human labor: it demonstrates the complicity of this myth, now identified as a *romance*, in the violent accumulation of capital.[39]

The novel presents the circuit of English enclosure and New World accumulation first by establishing a parallel between Wilson's near-dispossession by Walcott and Percival's West

[39] Thelwall explicitly calls out natural law's founding myth as a "romance" in *The Rights of Nature*: "Little more concern have we with narratives, or fables of the origin of civil institution. This is a subject more profitable in speculation than as a matter of history…History, obscure with respect to the early transactions of particular states, is, of necessity, silent as to the beginnings of constituted society. *But politics has its romance*, as well as natural philosophy… Even the sage Plybius, like the eccentric Burke, has indulged his fancy with discoveries in this *terra incognita* of human history" (455).

Indian enterprises. Even before Henry's encounter with Wilson, we are presented with a perhaps even more explicit demonstration of predatory lending as a means of accumulation in Percival's original acquisitions of property in Jamaica. These acquisitions result from a series of transactions that reveal the particular New World entanglement of unimproved land, financial credit and property law. Percival had gone to Jamaica to escape legal prosecution rather than with the explicit aim of becoming a planter. His first estate was originally the property of another debauched adventurer, Stantoun, who despite having previously wasted his own English property had been convinced by a local land agent to purchase a massive unimproved estate. The agent works in the service of Percival Montfort's Jamaican host, a "worthy planter," who convinces Percival to advance him the necessary funds. By first encouraging Stantoun's reckless spending, "feeding his imagination with a prospect of distant riches," and later "strenuously insisting on the repayment of what was already advanced," Percival manipulates the romantic desire for property for his own ends: "law and authority siding with [Percival], he obtained complete possession of the whole property upon terms dictated by himself, or rather by the same worthy proctor by whose advice he had, in the first instance, entered upon the speculation" (74).

In Jamaica, at least, the transformation of unimproved land into wealth is not a matter of labor bestowing value on the gifts of nature; rather, labor figures here only as the exploited vehicle of a romantic speculative desire. Later in the novel, Thelwall again reconfigures colonial improvement within the framework of romance of accumulation when Henry Montfort travels to the West Indies to see his father's plantations. On route for Jamaica, Henry briefly ports on the shores of Revolutionary France and then stops in St. Domingue to visit his father's associate, the planter Mons. Remau. But Henry will never arrive in Jamaica: his trip is cut short by the epochal slave uprising of 1791. Understandably, it is this episode which has drawn the most attention by

recent critics: it's depiction is one of only a handful of contemporary representations of that event, and Thelwall's troping of slave insurrection to address the legitimacy of revolutionary violence has fascinated scholars interested in romantic and Jacobin responses to the slave trade.[40] But scholars have paid less attention to how the novel frames both planter and insurrectionary violence within a transatlantic framework of colonial improvement and property speculation. By passing over the novel's explicit parallels between Wilson's English dispossession and the factors of West Indian accumulation, critics have yet to fully appreciate Thelwall's confrontation with the global geography of natural rights. This confrontation comes out clearest when Henry visits the unlikely Pantisocratic hideaway of the philosophical cottager Parkinson in the highlands of St. Domingue, a setting that locates the natural-rights ideal of the cottager within the circuit of Atlantic enclosure and slavery.

Henry comes to Parkinson's retreat a few days after landing at Port-au-Prince. Thoroughly disgusted with his hosts' cruel treatment of their slaves, he embarks with his new friend and servant Edmunds (a Jacobin-leaning "wayward youth" [123] who is the novel's closest proxy for Thelwall) on a peripatetic excursion through the tropical countryside. When they eventually arrive at Parkinson's cottage to find the "venerable philanthropist" nursing his "sick negro" (146), it is clear that they have entered a very different kind of space: no longer the

[40] See for instance Peter Kitson's two essays, "Bales of Living Anguish: Representations of Race and the Slave in Romantic Writing." *ELH* 67.2 (2000), 515-37; and "John Thelwall in Saint Domingue: Race, Slavery, and revolution in *The Daughter of Adoption,*" *Romanticism* 16.2 (2010), 120-38. See too Michael Scrivener, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in the Age of Revolution and Reaction, 1776–1832* (London: Pickering & Chatto 2007), 118–45, and *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); and Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 86-94.

degenerate world of the St. Domingue plantocracy but an idealized landscape of the improving cottager. But the novel does not in fact allow so easy a distinction: Parkinson's retreat is thoroughly embedded in the network of Atlantic accumulation.

The link between colonial violence and enlightened improvement is already apparent in before friends arrive at Parkinson's, during excursion walk through the tropical countryside. The picturesque setting occasions a number of reflections on the relation between political history and nature. In what is certainly the most remarked upon passage in the novel, their conversation in the beautiful "dell at Lambé" rehearses a real-life discussion Thelwall had with Coleridge and Wordsworth during his 1797 visit to Alfoxden. For three poets accustomed to being spied upon by government agents, a walk in the woods was a time to joke about their reputation as Jacobin conspirators. Coleridge recalls their conversation as follows: "We were once sitting in a beautiful recess in the Quantocks, when I said to him—'Citizen John! this is a fine place to talk treason in!'—'Nay! Citizen Samuel,' replied he, 'it is a place to make a man forget that there is any necessity for treason!"[41] It is worth teasing out the ambiguity of Thelwall's response. On the one hand, he seems to celebrate the depoliticized purity of the natural landscape: as Thelwall's own recollection of the event has it, the walk "philosophized our minds into a state of tranquility which the leaders of nations might envy and the residents of Cities never know."[42] On the other hand, the necessity of treason is not annulled in this space, but only forgotten, an observation that might undercut the virtues of the poets' philosophical tranquility.

[41] Quoted in Scrivener, Solomonescu and Thompson's edition of *The Daughter of Adoption*, 488.

[42] *Daughter*, 486.

This well-documented conversation shows the political ambivalence of a romantic nature split between the utopian alternatives of renovation and retreat; just the ambivalence I have been arguing marks natural law's American ideal. The West Indian transplantation of the scene in *The Daughter of Adoption* not only makes this geographical connection explicit; in doing so, it overhauls the possibility of viewing the natural world as a space purified of political violence:

> What a scene, and what an hour, Edmunds,' said [Henry], bantering, 'to hatch treason in!'
>
> 'What a scene, and what an hour, sir,' replied Edmunds, with the most undisturbed composure, 'to make one forget that treason was ever necessary in the world!'
>
> 'True, Edmunds … If the facts of history could be forgotten also. But alas! If I mistake not the hand of Tyranny has engraved even here the indelible memorials of her cruelties and oppressions.
>
> 'Look at yon cavern, half way up the rock. The faint appearances of a long neglected road will conduct your eye to the spot. That opening, which is now more than half obscured by the luxuriancy of the surrounding foliage, was once, perhaps, the entrance of one of those mines, in the cruel drudgery of which the barbarous Spaniards consumed the whole aboriginal population of this ill-fated island.' (142)

Challenging Edmunds' Solitary-like desire for a natural retreat from the necessities of political violence, Henry points to signs of genocidal history still visible in the shadows of the American idyll It is remarkable that for all the attention this passage has received, no commentator has noted how Henry's reference to the island's Spanish colonial history refracts the novel's take on the romantic virtues of nature. Peter Kitson, Michael Scrivener, Judith Thompson, and Arnold Markley all quote the first few lines of the exchange but ignore the "indelible memorials" pointed out by Henry; Yasmin Solomonescu notes the passage's reference to "the oppression of native peoples" but only in passing. By reading the scene as a simple repetition of the 1797 trip, the interpretations that result curiously follow Edmunds in failing to remark the historical

particularity of the scene: for instance, in Michael Scrivener's reading, "the very idea of a utopian enclave here seems to be a nostalgic imagining of what might have been if Thelwall had been able to join the Nether Stowey circle in 1797." Certainly Thelwall was still smarting from this exclusion when he wrote these lines, but there is nothing nostalgic in Henry's recontextualization of the utopian retreat as a site of colonial genocide. On the contrary, Henry schools Edmunds' romantic enthusiasm for a depoliticized nature by offering an alternative hermeneutic that, in the mode of W. J. T. Mitchell's theses on "imperial landscape," finds beneath the "naturalizing … conventions" of the scene its indelible traces of forced dispossession.[43] When this episode is read in light of the novel's meditations on the Atlantic coordinates of natural rights, we can see how Henry's historicist (rather than allegorical) reading of the landscape reinserts the scenic idyll within the material circuit of imperial accumulation. Viewed at the right angle, Henry suggests, the tropical picturesque offers no retreat from the necessity of treason.

The episode in the dell of Lambé suggests that the space of the romantic retreat cannot be easily separated from the violence of accumulation. When Edmunds and Henry arrive at Parkinson's cottage a few pages later, their ensuing chat demonstrates the same point; but here the philosophical nature of their conversation has the effect of more directly reframing the debates about speculation that dominated the political polemics of the 1790s. Burke's paradigm-defining critique of Jacobin speculation encompassed both philosophical and financial abstractions: in his view, *philosophes* and financiers had jointly destabilized the nation's "entailed inheritance" of political liberty grounded in property. We have seen how Thelwall's

[43] *Landscape and Power.* Ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

political writing accepts the terms of Burke's conservative rhetoric while also turning it dialectically to radical ends, suggesting Burke's articulation of the speculative to be already implicit in the logic of ancient property. It is at Parkinson's cottage that Thelwall extends the novel's critique of accumulative dispossession as a form of speculative romance that encompasses the geography of natural rights.

As Scrivener, Thompson, and Solomonescu identify in their edition of *The Daughter of Adoption*, Parkinson is a composite of a number of romantic radical figures. Most obviously a Coleridgean Pantisocrat and a Godwinite theorist of "things … as they are" (163), his name links him to the physician James Parkinson, Thelwall's friend and a founder of the London Corresponding Society, and perhaps also to Leonard Parkinson, a leader of the Trelawney Maroon uprising in Jamaica of 1795-6.[44] He is also, to some extent, a figure of Thelwall's own self-styled existence as the New Recluse at Llyswen Farm. As Henry and Edmunds are drawn to Parkinson's home by the music of his pipe, the narrator calls the place "the cottage of the minstrel," a phrase Thelwall used to describe his own former cottage; and the improvements Parkinson has made on his lands bear close similarity to Thelwall's projects at Llyswen.[45] Parkinson combines the minstrel, the theorist, and the improver; his charming cottage and pleasingly arranged grounds (which, it turns out, include the waterfall that Henry and Edmunds have just been admiring) develop a landscape aesthetic suited to his vocation as naturalist-settler. As Kitson and Solomonescu have argued, the following episodes show Thelwall rejecting the philosophical abstractions which leads Parkinson to reject the violence of the upcoming slave

[44] *Daughter,* 24.

[45] *Daughter,* 146n.

insurrection in deference to a higher ideal of rational improvement.[46] Parkinson argues against insurrection on consequentialist grounds, claiming that slavery will only end as a result of planters' enlightened self-interest: "in no single instance was slavery abolished by the insurrection of slaves!" (161). As Thelwall already grasped in 1801, the St. Domingue revolt would prove an epochal exception to this tendency. But Edmunds' response to this line of argument is not to quibble over abstract probabilities, but rather to insist (as Thelwall had in his lectures) that insurrectionary violence is what results of violent political institutions, and thus cannot be argued away on moral grounds: "In the mean time, sir, we reason, but the poor negro feels" (161).

Opposing reason to the affective materiality of revolt, Edmunds suggests a critical limit to the kind of intellectual radicalism associated with Jacobin "speculation." But this failure of pseudo-radical intellection is in fact tied in to the novel's earlier critique of the speculative violence of property. Edmunds lines repeat almost word for word—but with a critical difference—an earlier statement by Wilson. When Henry apologizes for raiding the henhouse—"I did not think"—Wilson responds by opposing the unthinking privileges of property against the rational affect of the dispossessed: "No, no, young gentleman, the rich do not think; but the poor are obliged to feel!" (89). Edmund's repetition of Wilson's earlier lines demonstrates the capacity of feeling as a resource of the oppressed against two apparently contrary forms of speculative violence: the abstract rationality of the enlightened improver on the one hand, and the irrational accumulative desire of the rich on the other. The posture of radical intellectualism can't be entirely separated, Thelwall suggests, from the very forms of aristocratic corruption it

[46] See Solomonescu *John Thelwall* 86-94, and Kitson, "Bales of Living Anguish."

opposes: both involve an indifference to the material suffering of the disenfranchised. It is a point that Thelwall had sharpened against Burke's casting of the French Directory as "tribunals of Maroon and Negro slaves, covered with the blood of their masters." Thelwall, "no apologist for the horrible massacres of revenge," responded by linking the violence of revolutionary disorder to the violence of the order of property: "Had the Maroons and negroes never been most wickedly enslaved, their masters had never been murdered." In the face of the reality of enslavement, rationalist arguments against insurrection were hopelessly, unfeelingly, abstract: "We cannot expect whole nations (whether of Maroon negroes, or of feudal vassals) to become of a sudden so entirely speculative." (408).

Read alongside Thelwall's earlier attack on Burke and Wilson's remarks on the feeling of dispossession, Parkinson's philosophical attitude of retreat from the materiality of political oppression no longer seems to retreat very far: instead, it appears as an "entirely speculative" posture continuous with the speculative violence of New World property. Nor is this continuity entirely conceptual: it is inscribed in the very space of his idyllic cottage, which itself represents an aestheticized expression of the theoretical and pragmatic dimensions of natural-rights thought. Edmunds and Henry are surprised to learn that the very cataract they had been admiring during their earlier excursion was the product of Parkinson's "agricultural improvement"; the dell of Lambé is retrospectively recast as the picturesque result of a Lockean employment of rational labor in the natural landscape.[47] But Edmunds quickly sees a troubling implication of

[47] Parkinson describes his improvement as follows: "had already fixed upon this little dell as the place of my retreat: and observing that nature had, in a manner, scooped out a channel, through which a torrent might easily be directed, I caused the drains to be all collected to a single focus; and, having made a breach in the face of a rock, by the assistance of gunpowder, I opened all my sluices, and trusted the issue to the influence of the simple laws of gravitation." (147). On a smaller scale, Thelwall had made a similar waterfall at Llyswen; like Parkinson, he described it

Parkinson's aesthetics of natural property. As Parkinson explains, the waterfall in the dell is the product of draining a nearby "extensive marsh; a part of the concession of Mons. Rabeau." While describes his project in a language of utilitarian mutual benefits to himself and Rabeau, Edmunds counters by indicating the disastrous effects of this rational improvement:

> 'The consequences are, that Mons. Rabeau has brought several hundred acres of waste land into a state of successful cultivation, and I have embellished my retreat with one of the finest waterfalls in St. Domingo.'
>
> 'I am afraid, sir,' said Edmunds, 'there is another consequence, which you have not taken into the account.
>
> *P*: 'I understand you, young man:—the negroes who cultivate that waste. I own, indeed, with some confusion, that, in my zeal for agricultural improvement, I did not consider that circumstance till it was too late" (147-8).

The "natural" basis of property that underwrites Parkinson's cottage ideal is put in its place within the geography of Atlantic capital. This aesthetic locus of improved nature is no escape from the circuit unnatural accumulation, but rather the latter's margin: the eccentric place that defines is shape and enables its surplus-capture. For all his "zeal" for theoretical speculation, Parkinson, like Henry raiding Wilson's henhouse, "did not think,": his Pantisocratic pleasure grounds open the unappropriated land of the colony not simply to his own labor and enjoyment, but to the forced labor of those who are denied the natural right of self-possession. Rather than the retreat from plantocratic degeneracy it initially seems, the cottage and its environs suggest the extreme proximity between the natural-rights mythos of original property and the reality of Atlantic slavery.

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in his letters in terms of an aesthetic expression of rational agricultural improvement. See Judith Thelwall, "Citizen Juan Thelwall: In the Footsteps of a Free-Range Radical," *Studies in Romanticism* 48.1 (2009), 71.

Might we say that Parkinson's cottage emblematizes the utopian rift that organizes itself at the margins of capital accumulation? Parkinson's cottage is not among those places Giovanni Arrighi and Ian Baucom call "spaces-of-flows," those geographical hubs of cycles of accumulation whose successive crises and movements have become so central to our comprehension of modernity.[48] Such spaces-of-flows have proven especially useful for analyzing the macro-historical dynamics of accumulation. But a different kind of analytical purchase is offered by those places constituted at the boundary-lines of accumulative cycles. Parkinson's cottage is not—yet—a place in which the materials of social production become decoded as surplus value; but it is not quite outside the circuit of this transformation either. It is rather a next-best place in the spatial organization of production, a Ricardian $Land_n$, a place whose near-exteriority to the flows of capital enables the simultaneous reproduction and dislocation of liberalism's foundational categories (freedom, property, equality). The conquest of such next-best places plots the romance of accumulation. But if such an account seems to entirely foreclose the world within the contradictions of European commerce, *The Daughter of Adoption*'s central portrayal of the St. Domingue Revolt suggests to the contrary that the margins of imperial accumulation condense modes of feeling and action extraneous to the categories of liberal thought.

[48] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1996), 83; Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 25.

Chapter Three

Annihilated Property: Slavery and Reproduction After Abolition

> Ricardo shows that we should not interpret as a sign of nature's fruitfulness that which indicates, and in an ever more insistent manner, its essential avarice … Ground rent is an effect, not of a prolific nature, but of the avarice of land.
>
> —Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

In 1827 and '28 Thomas De Quincey published a series of articles in *The Edinburgh Post* about recent Parliamentary hearings on the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies. Attacking the "schemes of personal aggrandizement" of anti-slavery campaigners, De Quincey takes the side of colonial planters against what he views as a new Jacobin terror. Ironically, his defense of property and slavery hinges on a quotation from the one-time pantisocrat and abolitionist Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

> Mr. Coleridge, in speaking of the French Revolution, used to say, that the whole opposition to it in this country … commenced and moved under the impulse of what he called '*the panic of property*;' a very salutary panic at any rate … and well it would be if some such panic could arise to irritate

> the public torpor at this time. … We have already had solemn proposals for confiscating tithes and Church Property in Ireland; for confiscating the whole Funded Property of the British Empire; and now, finally … *for annihilating (as eventually it would prove) the colonial property of the West Indies*.[1]

In his nostalgia for anti-Jacobin panic, De Quincey seeks an affective register for proslavery rhetoric that could match the moral appeal of the abolition movement. By the 1820s a new consensus had emerged affirming the inevitability of legislation that would grant freedom to colonial slaves. In the wake of the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 and the establishment of the Anti-Slavery Society in the same year, the question of legislated emancipation was no longer *if* but *when*; by 1826, not just *when* but *how*—and in particular, *how much* would it cost, and *who* would foot the bill? The new consensus against the legitimacy of colonial slavery shifted the topic of debate to the rights, not of slaves, but of colonial slaveowners, and in particular to the extent of the government's obligation to compensate them for the loss of their human property—a question that prompts the indignant De Quincey to exclaim: "What a compensation!" (216n). In De Quincey's panicked eyes, the concept of compensation—of equivalence and

[1] Thomas De Quincey, *Complete Works of Thomas De Quincey.* Vol. 6. Ed. David Groves and Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), 203. Coleridge's comments on the "panic of property" are to be found in his essay "On the Errors of Public Spirit: Or Extremes Meet" *The Friend,* 19 October 1809: "[T]o withstand the arguments of the lawless, the anti-Jacobins proposed to suspend the law... "Oh! if these mistaken men, intoxicated with alarm and bewildered by that panic of property, which they themselves were the chief instruments in exciting, had ever lived in a country where there was indeed a general disposition to change and rebellion! … But alas! The *panic of property* had been struck in the first instance for party purposes; and when it became general, its propagators caught it themselves, and ended in believing their own lie" (157-8).

reciprocation—losses all sense in the post-emancipation colonies, as emancipation would undermine the very foundations of property upon which economic exchange depends.

If property in an emancipated West Indies could be said to have no future, it was because slavery had always been essential to the reproduction of colonial wealth. This chapter considers how the formation of certain racist concepts and affects (including but not limited to De Quincey's panic) were keyed to questions of economic and biological reproduction raised in the emancipation debates of the 1820s. These debates outlined a crisis of colonial reproduction that originated in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and that challenged a central tenet of classic political economic reason: namely, that the dynamics of production and circulation are governed by the reproduction of the working body. Historians of slavery have long pointed out that new world slavery arose in part from new world geography: where land was plentiful and cheap, free white workers always preferred to buy their own property rather than work the land of others, giving rise to a perpetual labor deficit.[2] Whereas anti-colonial theorists of the enlightenment

[2] Significantly, this view of the spatial economics of slavery first emerged out of the discussions of colonial reforms we will consider in what follows. The key early theorist in this regard is Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whose geographical conception of the "field of production" is remembered most often as a forebear of Karl Marx's theory of primitive accumulation. Wakefield's economic thinking was strongly shaped by the emancipation debates of the 1820s, especially by the work of under-secretary for the colonies Robert Wilmot-Horton (discussed below). On Wakefield see Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 56-9 and Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism, 1750-1850.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), 100-29; see also Barbara Solow and Stanley Engerman, Solow, Barbara and Stanley Engerman. "British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams: An Introduction. *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams*. Eds. Solow and Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 1-24 and Jacob Price, "Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies." *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System.* Ed. Barbara Solow. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 293-4.

(Adam Smith foremost among them) argued that free labor was inherently cheaper and more productive than slavery, in the colonies unfree labor was necessary for what came to be called economic "reproduction"; that is, a return on investment sufficient to replenish the costs of capital and the subsistence of laborers required for renewed production. The emancipation debates circle around a rift, increasingly visible after abolition, between the reproduction of colonial capital and the reproduction of the working body. When De Quincey claims that emancipation would destroy the total property of the West Indies, he doesn't mean the transformation of slaves into non-slaves, property into non-property. Rather, he refers to a situation in which colonial capital can no longer command the labor it requires to realize its value, slaves being set free to reproduce themselves (their bodies, their communities) outside the channels of British commerce.

My aim is to trace some of the ways black reproduction resisted the logic of West Indian property and accumulation in the period between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the end of colonial slavery in 1833. It was during these years, as planters were forced to rely on their slaves' sexual fertility to replenish their slave populations, that the breakdown of political economic concepts of reproduction became painfully apparent. The crisis of colonial reproduction not only challenged the rationale of metropolitan abolitionism (which asserted slave-trade abolition would lead naturally to emancipation through gradual amelioration), but also prompted literary innovations among writers seeking to represent persons whose very existence seemed to counter the reproductive demands of the post-abolition plantation. This chapter finds in those euphemized by slavery apologists as "non-effective persons"—slave mothers, infants, runaways, obeah men, the sick and dying—personifications of the plight of property on the verge of annihilation.

My argument will proceed in four sections. In the first, I show how shifting concepts of slave-value within the emancipation debates upended the notions of reproduction that had grounded political economic arguments for abolition. Colonists and their advocates, in claiming that the British state owed them for the "peculiar disability" of their property (its debt-encumbered inaccessibility to global markets), articulated a transnational perspective in which social death, not natural fertility, is revealed as the origin of colonial value. Taking the compensation debates as a retrospective lens onto post-1807 colonial crisis, the next two sections suggest that this morbid theory of colonial value offers new ways of reading the period's literary production. The second section turns to James Montgomery's 1809 abolitionist epic poem *The West Indies,* showing how the transatlantic violence undergirding colonial reproduction is reflected in the poem's astute refiguration of one of eighteenth-century abolitionism's central tropes: the melancholic slave mother. Montgomery's figure of Africa's "miserable womb" anticipates the pairing of property and disability that would become prominent in the compensation debates. But while *The West Indies* celebrates the British abolition of the slave trade as restoring a natural, sustainable form of colonial labor, my third section shows how Matthew Gregory Lewis' 1815-18 *Journals of a West India Proprietor* locates a resistance to natural reproduction in creole blackness itself. Lewis' genre-mixture of plantation manual and ethnopoetic ballad collection consolidates this chapter's twin concerns with literature and liberal economic reform, starkly revealing how the crisis of colonial reproduction contributed to the racial imagination of British liberal imperialism. Finally, the chapter closes by considering the way colonial planters sought to preserve their claim to political and racial supremacy despite the worthlessness of their property. In *Hamel the Obeah Man* (1827), Cynric Williams simultaneously gives form to De Quincey's desire for a panic of colonial property and suggests

that this panic is itself a symptom of a collusion between liberal abolitionism and metropolitan finance. In place of the gothic terrors of annihilated property, Williams reworks the genre of historical romance to suggest the possibility of a colonial future even in the context of mass debt.

Taken together in the retrospective shadow of the emancipation debates, Lewis, Montgomery, and Williams allow us read the literary history of the post-abolition period outside the moral frameworks that continue to dominate scholarship. To view the history of emancipation as a struggle between enlightened anti-slavery crusaders and greedy colonists is to profoundly mistake the terms of political debate that shaped the structural transformation of West Indian society, and to thereby obscure the formal conditions by which racial oppression persisted in the post-emancipation Caribbean. romanticist scholarship, even when it has been critical of the ideologies of abolitionism, has often accepted an account of colonial emancipation as a victory won on moral grounds (no doubt in part due to the sway of abolitionist views within metropolitan public discourse during the lead-up to emancipation).[3] But the moral victories of abolition should be weighed against the economic concessions of the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833, which were a veritable triumph for owners of colonial property: not only were slaveowners paid an imagined market price for property that had no market, but the strict vagrancy laws and

[3] That the literary history of abolition circa 1807-1833 continues to be framed from a moral perspective is suggested, for instance, in Peter Kitson and Debbie Lee's impressive eight volume set *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation: Writings in the Romantic Period* . (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999). While Kitson and Lee devote an entire volume is dedicated to debates on emancipation 1823-6, the collected documents—by William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, Reverend John Hampden, George Canning, and James Stephen—suggest the debate was entirely shaped by the moral arguments of emancipationists, with the sole anti-abolitionist (Hampden) taking a defensive role. While the writings of the Anti-Slavery Society were critical to reigniting the debate over colonial slavery after 1823, the framing of anti-abolitionism as a purely reactive force marginalizes its role in shaping the terms of the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act.

terms of apprenticeship supplied in the Act guaranteed that freed blacks would continue to provide planters with cheap labor. Against the teleology of abolitionist victory, I suggest that the category of reproduction offers a better prospect onto the literary history of this period. In exploring how ideologies of race morphed under the crisis of colonial capital, I approach the problem of reproduction in the spirit of feminist Marxists such as Leopoldina Fortunati, Selma James, Silvia Federici, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, who have described how capitalism does not progress simply by the rapid commodification of all elements of social life; it also requires the expansion and demarcation of certain forms of non-capitalist, "natural" production that sustain capitalist production without participating in it directly.[4] Gender and colonialism maintain this critical demarcation between natural and capitalist production (women's work and men's work; peasant labor and industrial labor), revealing themselves as ideological apparatuses necessary, as Althusser paraphrases Marx, to the "reproduction of the conditions of production."[5]

In showing how the divide between natural reproduction and capitalist production operated in the post-abolition West Indies, I seek to expand our histories of political economy beyond its familiar metropolitan frameworks. As I noted in the introduction, Michel Foucault finds the writings of David Ricardo exemplary of a historical shift in the origin of value from

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[4] Fortunati's work is especially relevant here: "Under capitalism, *reproduction is separated off* from *production* … the general process of commodity production appears as being separate from, and *even in direct opposition to*, the process of [social] reproduction." *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, Trans. Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995) (8). See also Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Woman and the Subversion of Community* (Bristol: Walling Wall Press, 1975) and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

[5] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127.

"nature" to "avarice": to simplify slightly, whereas Smith and other eighteenth-century theorists had claimed that all wealth originates in the natural power of the soil, Ricardo showed in 1817 that the value of landed property arose from scarcity and overpopulation. But in the years Ricardo was writing, the most dramatic evidence of this shift was not in the English agricultural landscapes that preoccupied British political economists, but in colonies such as the West Indies that were still characterized by abundant and fertile uncultivated land.

The tropics lacked the Malthusian pressures of scarcity and overpopulation that made free labor so cheap in the emerging industrial centers of Europe. As opponents of emancipation argued repeatedly and consistently, the "prolific nature" of the tropical sugar islands was not a boon, but an obstacle to colonial production under conditions of free labor, as it made it unnecessary for individuals to sell their labor in order to survive. Proslavery interests argued that free blacks would never assent to work for wages since they could easily produce their own means of subsistence on their own plots of land: "if he worked one day in the week, he would have all kinds of subsistence, which his habits at present, and the habits of similar persons around him, are likely to require. Two days, perhaps, will be better, as affording a full allowance of time" (Moody, 71).[6] Whereas abolitionists argued for the economic benefits of emancipation on liberal grounds, anti-abolitionists countered that the colonial dynamics of land, labor, and reproduction simply did not follow the commonsense of liberal political economy. According to

[6] Thomas Moody, *Slaves: Berbice and Demerara: Minutes Taken Before His Majesty's Privy Council, in the Matter of the Berbice and Demerara Manumission Order of Council* (London: House of Commons, 1818) 71. These lines from planter Thomas Moody, given as testimony before the Privy Council in 1828, were often cited by pro-colonists in the emancipation debates. See for example Robert Wilmot-Horton, *Second Letter to the Freeholders of the County of York, Being an Inquiry into the Claims of the West Indians for Equitable Compensation* (London: Edmund and Lloyd, 1830), 7-10.

them, liberal abolitionism mistook the origin of colonial wealth. Abolitionists thought wealth could be reproduced by nature, and that the natural reproduction of free black workers would aid in the effort. The colonist response was that wealth is not the product of nature, but of avarice and violence: without the threat of hunger faced by English factory workers, only the coercion of the master could guarantee a future of colonial wealth.

The compensation debates offer a useful point of departure for this inquiry, revealing how, in the debt-ridden post-abolition West Indies, landed property and property in slaves were conceptually intertwined by their mutual exclusion from the marketplace. It was the difficult task of the proponents of compensated emancipation to determine how the government might evaluate plantation properties—slaves and land—that had lost the very conditions of their value. If such a program seems contradictory, it is certainly not an isolated instance in the history of financial crises. Britain's eventual payment of £20,000,000 to planters for their soon-to-be annihilated property might resonate with twenty-first-century readers' recollection of the American government's purchase of hundreds of billions-worth of faulty mortgages from the nation's largest banks. In both instances, the calculation underpinning the logic of "too big to fail" is one that measures the costs of irretrievably sunk capital against the conditions of production such valueless property sustains. In purchasing colonial slaves for the purpose of emancipation, England accepted a raw deal. If this was the cost of exonerating itself for its role in the development of colonial slavery, it also enabled white planters to reconsolidate their control over the structures of colonial ownership. Reading Montgomery and Lewis within the economic history of colonial emancipation allows us to glimpse the entwined philosophies of nature and value that subtended moral debate. By examining how these philosophies strained the

affordances of post-abolition literature, we can begin to see how the racial imagination of romantic imperialism took shape under the reproductive pressures of liberal reform.

THE "PECULIAR DISABILITY" OF COLONIAL PROPERTY

Long before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, it was clear that the West Indies' status as the "crown jewels in the English colonial empire" was in decline.[7] Rather, as one writer put it in 1788, they had become "a dead weight about the neck of this country."[8] After the passage of the Abolition Act, many of the richest planters (anticipating the falling value of their plantations) cashed out and resettled in Britain; eventually, the majority of estates on many of the Caribbean islands were held by planters who lacked the liquidity to get out while they could, mortgaged (often at double or triple their actual value) to English banks and merchant companies.[9] Discussions of emancipation in the mid-1820s alarmed these metropolitan mortgagees as to the fate of their West India securities. One petition forwarded to Parliament in 1826 by a group of West India merchants in London claimed that the very invocation of emancipation had so shaken

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

[8] Quoted in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 355n.

[9] Advocates of compensation asked with some justice why the plantation fortunes inherited by abolitionists like Zachary Macaulay and Fowell Buxton (who opposed compensation) should be left intact, even as they advocated the state's seizure of current planter's property. "Surely these persons are as much entitled to make restitution, and contribute to the sacrifice, as … the present embarrassed, contemned, and slandered Proprietors and Planters of the West Indies." R. Alexander; quoted in Wilmot-Horton, *First Letter to the Freeholders of the County of York, Being an Inquiry into the Claims of the West Indians for Equitable Compensation* (London: Edmund and Lloyd), 43-4.

public confidence in the colonial trade that "West-India securities [had] become nearly valueless as transferable property—a circumstance which, at a period of general alarm and panic … must subject the holders of such property to extreme and peculiar difficulties" ("Petition," 390). In the sense that it was excluded from the global exchange of equivalent values, colonial property was thus already annihilated.

Like De Quincey's "panic of property," the "general alarm and panic" mentioned by the petitioners is an ambiguous mixture of racial and pecuniary anxiety. The logic of annihilated property was only comprehensible within a colonial imagination distressed by the possibility of black communities sustaining themselves beyond the control of plantocratic administration. The petitioners express their doubts that "freed negroes will work for hire, and carry on the ordinary cultivation of estates in an orderly and effectual manner;" and since colonial landed properties "would cease to be of any worth when deprived of its labourers," they go on to insist that the "slaves themselves [are] an inseparable element of the securities held by your petitioners." (390). In claiming that slaves were in effect an extension of the landed properties whose mortgages they held, the petitioners clearly angle themselves as beneficiaries of eventual compensation payments—the only means, they realized, by which they might make back a portion of their worthless securities. But their equation of slaves and land also points to a more profound transformation in the way economic value was conceived in the under the weight of nascent colonial collapse.

In the official discourses of emancipation, property in slaves came to be valued not according to their positive worth, but rather by the prospective damage their freedom would bring on colonial estates. This negative mode of evaluation, explicitly countering older notions of the "natural" value-giving powers of labor and land, conceived the reproduction of black

bodies as an inimical to the production of colonial wealth: in the racial imaginary of the compensation debates, blackness comes to be imbued with the temporality of colonial collapse. We can begin to appreciate this peculiar temporality by comparing it to J. G. A. Pocock's influential account of the new "time consciousness" that emerged from eighteenth-century state finance. As Pocock argues, the time consciousness of financial modernity is rooted in the promise of future repayment of stock in a regime of mobile property: "it is known that this date will in reality never be reached, but the tokens of repayment are exchanged at market value in the present" (112). In the heavily mortgaged estates of the West Indies in the 1820s, we see something like the reverse movement: the indebted status of plantation property makes it increasingly *im*mobile. Commodities that had previously existed in a global regime of exchange now took the appearance of an older, more inflexible possession: rather than circulating in the air of financial speculation, they were sinking in the mud of looming foreclosure. Paradoxically, as we shall see, the immanent insolvency of such speculative futures became the basis for slaveowners' defense of their rights of ownership and the ground on which advocates of compensated emancipation calculated the state's indemnity for emancipation. These claims in turn depended on a thorough re-evaluation of the economic and geographical frameworks that had oriented previous attempts at colonial reform.

When the West India merchants refer to slaves as "an inseparable element of [their] securities," they echo an equation between slaves and land that had become conventional among plantation writers. As Nicholas Draper writes in his valuable account of emancipation, "it was an important part of the representational strategy of the slaveowners to constitute themselves as 'proprietors,' as owners of *land* rather than as owners of slaves" (80). It is hardly surprising that, accused as mercenary tyrants malignantly grasping to their whips, colonial planters claimed the

prestige of land. But there was more than rhetorical posturing to this refashioning of the colonial planter as "landlord." Nor was it simply the case that planters, threatened by the growing legislative traction of abolitionism, sought to stabilize their ownership by claiming the most comprehensive legal title. Rather, the impossibility of severing land and slave ownership was intimately tied to the complexity of evaluating property on the verge of erasure.

In defining their slaveholdings as a "fixed and permanent" entitlement, planters always made reference to the insolvency of this property, its consequent untransferability in the global marketplace. When in a Parliamentary Report of 1832 the West India Committee complained of the "severe distress affecting the Proprietors of the Soil"—that is, slaveowners—they claimed for their property a privilege precisely on its lack of transferable value: "it is rather as Landowners than as Merchants, that they appear before The House. They are thus entitled to the benefit of any distinction which may be made in favour of those interests *which are fixed and permanent,* as compared with the more fleeting and occasional objects of commercial enterprize."[10] Not just landlords, then, but *distressed* landlords. It was precisely this distress that licensed West India proprietors to claim their slaves among the "fixed and permanent" properties of their estates: "the West India Planter [is] under a peculiar disability to relieve himself by any transfer, or altered direction of property, from the distress under which he now labors." Paradoxically, slave ownership was said to enjoy the same privileges as land ownership precisely because they had become untransferable.

[10] *Report from the Select Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, and an Appendix and Index*. (Parliamentary Papers 1831-2, Vol. XV) 3.

The "peculiar disability" of colonial property was central to the way politicians and administrators came to think about the compensations that would be due to slaveowners after emancipation. Robert Wilmot-Horton, one of the most vocal advocates of compensation, argued that the conditions of colonial property had made it impossible to determine prospective payments to slaveowners on the basis of the "exchange value" of their slaves, since slaves had become effectively unexchangeable. In such a context, Wilmot-Horton argued, the "deterioration of the property of the master" was "the only equitable principle" of compensation: if planters could maintain the same profits with free workers as they had enjoyed with slaves, the government wouldn't owe them a thing. Only in cases where planters were either incapable of replacing their slaves with waged free workers, or where these workers failed to be as productive as their slaves had been, would the government be on the hook for the difference: "the principle of compensation will extend to a definite proportion of the property of the planter, who will be obliged to throw out of cultivation part of the soil, which, from its extent and fertility, is a mere drag."[11] Under Wilmot-Horton's principle of deterioration, slave property has no intrinsic value: its price would be determined solely by a prospective loss of other property. It was this prospect that, for De Quincey, made Wilmot-Horton's plan ridiculous ("so much 'glib nonsense' was never packed into eight pages"[12] he writes) because in the event that planters were unable to replace their labor, government would be obliged to repay planters for the whole of their estates. This is what De Quincey means by the "annihilation of colonial property": not simply the slave's metamorphosis into non-property, but the prospect that without the ability to coerce blacks to

[11] Robert Wilmot-Horton, *The West India Question Practically Considered* (London: John Murray, 1826), 89.

[12] De Quincey, 216n.

work plantations, the government would be forced to pay for the entire "colonial property of the West Indies."

As both Wilmot-Horton and De Quincey recognized, the problem of compensation was not simply whether to repay colonists for the seizure of their commodities, but how to preserve the very conditions of commodity value when generalized indebtedness had rendered exchange impossible. If, previous to 1807, planters could be represented as speculators in the commodity market of African bodies, the financial distress of the 1820s finished the process that the abolition of the slave trade had begun: the transformation of slaves, not into free workers, but into immoveable property. Ironically, the event they cited as the root of the distress that placed slaves among their "fixed and permanent" holdings was the abolition of the slave trade. It was this event, after all, that had placed the first major restrictions on the transferability of slaves:

> In the year 1807, Parliament made this trade in slaves illegal, and highly penal; the acquisition of new slaves from Africa was prohibited ... The Planter has thus been placed under the necessity of rearing all the slaves requisite for the cultivation of his land, and of maintaining, in addition to his effective male slaves, and a limited number of non-effective persons, the larger number of women and children, whose existence on the particular Colony, if not on the particular estate, this necessity occasioned.[13]

If colonial distress had transformed slaves from "fleeting and occasional objects of commercial enterprize" into properties "whose interests are fixed and permanent," colonists argued that it also expanded the state's obligations to cover the entirety of plantation property: since it was British capital that had gained most from the slave trade, the state ought to pay its share toward the future of colonial production. But, as the above quotation makes clear, it was not simply legal

[13] *Report from the Select Committee*, 5.

restrictions on the importation of slaves that made 1807 the signal year of West Indian decline. More important were the pressure these restrictions placed on planters to take care of the procreation of their labor force.

In raising the topic of reproduction, the authors of the West India Committee report returned to one of the major polemical arguments of pre-1807 abolitionism. The anti-slavery movement had long drawn on Adam Smith's argument that the "wear and tear" of slaves is more expensive than that of free workers; on these grounds, they argued that the closure of the slave trade would not only lead to the gradual amelioration of plantation slavery, but it would in fact improve the profits of colonial plantations.[14] But what Smith's analysis overlooked is how efficiently West India trading companies provided African labor well below the "natural" or subsistence cost (food, shelter, procreation), thus allowing planters to circumventing the requirement to pay for the reproduction of labor. Beneath the racial cliché that only African slaves could withstand the arduous work of the sugar plantation was the simple fact that since it was easy for colonial immigrants to produce their own subsistence, they would never work on a sugar plantation but for the most expensive wages. The triangular trade was the complex antidote to this basic labor deficit. With easy access to new and cheap slaves, pre-abolition planters hardly needed to care about the long-term subsistence of their workers; on some estates, average life-spans among slaves were said to be as short as seven years.[15] Whether the purchase of slaves

[14] On the fate of Smith's "wear and tear" argument in abolitionist debate, see Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment* 19-72.

[15] As David Brion Davis notes, this figure (frequently invoked by late eighteenth-century abolitionists) was likely exaggerated. It was clear, however, that in the Caribbean "slaves never achieved a positive growth rate that would have lessened the system's dependence on continuing importations from Africa" (117). Davis also comments that "a Brazilian sugar planter could double his investment if an adult slave lived and worked for only five years."

was more expensive than "rearing" them was not a question that could be answered with reference to the natural costs of "wear and tear" alone: it needed to take into account the entire transnational framework of colonial production along with the financial system that sustained it.

In this way, the debates over slave property and the correct means of compensation turned on the broader question, then being adjudicated by what would come to be called "classical political economy," concerning the nature of surplus value itself. If value was rooted in the natural capacities of labor and soil (as the Enlightenment sciences of wealth had claimed), then it was surely to the planters' advantage to do away with the artificial violence of slavery, which only sapped the strength of both. Along these lines figures such as Clarkson and Wilberforce had asserted that abolition would return colonial production to its foundations in the natural powers of sexual reproduction: planters "would treat the slaves they did have with more care and attention … they would see to it that pregnant women had proper provisions and they would promote marriage. For without births among slaves, the plantation system would fail."[16] At the turn of the century this argument was validated by no less an authority than Thomas Robert Malthus. The 1806 edition of his *Essay on Population,* broke his previous reticence to

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(116). In the post-abolition period, planters borrowed the language of political economy to rationalize the grim demographics of slavery. The anonymous planter novel *Marly, or a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (1828) written by a Scottish former slave driver, notes the "very natural" inclination of planters to buy new male slaves rather than pay the costs of reproduction: "This mode of purchasing labour, it must be confessed was *very natural*, especially to planters who were necessitous, and the great body of planters for a very long period have been necessitous; and in consequence, it was very natural for them to seek for labourers, who would tend to relieve their difficulties." *Marly, or a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (Oxford: MacMillan Education, 2005), 91.The speaker goes on to deny "that it was cheaper to purchase than to rear," though he admits this calculation was accepted by "the generality of the planters."

[16] Debbie Lee, Introduction, *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, Vol. 3 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), x.

speak out on the abolition debate, vehemently denying that the closure of the slave trade would harm colonial profits: "it is contrary to the general laws of nature to suppose, that they [planters] would not be able by procreation fully to supply the effective demand for labour."[17] Malthus' comments on the slave trade echo his belief (one notably challenged by Ricardo) that the natural surplus of the soil is the origin of value.[18] But whereas "Malthus had no interest in slavery as a transatlantic phenomenon,"[19] the oceanic division of colonial space suggested a different origin of colonial surplus, rooted not in the reproductive capacities of soil and labor but in a geography of harm. In an influential 1824 proslavery tract, the West India Committee Chairperson Alexander M'Donnell actually invoked Ricardo against the abolitionists to argue that the value-generating capacity of labor had two specific conditions—starvation or coercion: "men will not work without compulsion; that compulsion is of two kinds, the coercion of a master, and the dread of starvation … in a country where the abundance of food puts the latter stimulant out of the question, the ground, if cultivated at all, must be cultivated by the system of slavery" (71). As M'Donnell explains, the "spontaneous bounteousness of nature" (59) in the tropics makes slavery necessary. It was of course conventional for defenders of slavery to invoke the

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[17] Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on Population: Or, a View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; With an Inquiry into our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it Occasions.* Vol. 2. London: J. Johnson, 1807, 482n. Drescher discusses the uses of Malthus' population theory on both sides of the abolition debate in *The Mighty Experiment,* 41-45.

[18] Ricardo's chapter on Malthus is an attempt to thoroughly disentangle the concept of wealth from its enlightenment-forged connections to the powers of the soil. As Ricardo says pace Smith: "The labour of nature is paid, not because she does much, but because she does little. In proportion as she becomes niggardly in her gifts, she exacts a greater price for her work. Where she is munificently beneficent, she always works gratis." *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation,* Ed. Piero Sraffa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 209n.

[19] Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment,* 42).

destitution of the English working class, but M'Donnell's comments move beyond the typical paternalism by fitting both metropolitan labor and colonial slavery within a single global regime of value-extraction whose condition is the deterioration of the working body (whether by starvation of by force).

If I have given more attention to defenders of colonial slavery than they would seem to deserve, it is partly because the economic dimension of their writing maintained a transnational focus that was largely absent in the national frameworks abolitionists drew from Malthus and Smith. For what characterized the reproductive structure of the triangular trade and differentiated it from Malthus's theory of population was that the scene of labor was an ocean away from the scene of reproduction. The subsistence needs of the laborer were in this way entirely excluded from the political economic logic of value. Since the price of labor was disarticulated from the costs of subsistence, there was in fact no reason to think that their re-articulation under a supposed "natural law" of population would be to the advantage of the planter. Catherine Gallagher has given the name "bioeconomic" to the Malthusian grafting of economic value onto the basic needs of human biology, tracing this configuration of capital and life forward through the development of the Victorian novel.[20] In contrast (and with the work of Achille Mbembe in mind), we might designate as "necroeconomic" the reproductive procedures of Atlantic colonialism—procedures, I will argue in the following section, that overcome tropical nature's resistance to capital accumulation by violently redistributing the sexual dimension of colonial labor. Or, turning to James Montgomery's *The West Indies,* we might find a critical language in

[20] Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).

this poem's figure of Africa's "miserable womb," a trope that distils the violence of a transatlantic division between "natural" human reproduction and commodified work.

YARICO'S HEIRS

The question of reproduction and its relation to colonial wealth finds an unlikely literary mediator in a pervasive character-type of romantic-era abolitionist poetry. When poets attacked the avarice of West Indian production, they did so through the figure of the melancholic slave mother. By speaking in the imagined voice of the bereaved Africans whose children have been stolen, or of enslaved women in the Caribbean lamenting the loss of their murdered or stillborn children, the poems of Ann Yearsley, Hannah More, Robert Southey, Mary Robinson, and many others condemned the wasteful greed of the slave system by juxtaposing the opulence of rapacious planters against the maimed fertility of slave families and communities.[21] Motherhood is of course a prime subject for melodrama, but there is more to the trope of the slave mother than her capacity to draw tears from a sympathetic white audience.[22] Rather, we can hear in her

[21] A short list of better-known renditions of the romantic slave mother: Hannah More, *The Sorrows of Yamba; or, the Negro Woman's Lamentation* (London: J. Marshall, 1797); Robert Southey, "To the Genius of Africa," *Poetical Works of Robert Southey, Collected by Himself,* Vol. 10. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853); Yearsley, Ann. *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788); Robinson, Mary. "The Negroe Girl," *Lyrical Tales.* (London: Briggs and Rees, 1800).

[22] Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984) had made the pitying mother of a sick child the emblem of his theory of sympathy: her compassion amplifies her own suffering in comparison to her infant, who "feels only the uneasiness of the present instance, which can never be great." (12).

voice an indictment of the pre-1807 structure of colonial labor and production that drew profit from a transnationally dispersed assault on reproduction.

The complexity of the slave-mother figure and its limits for abolitionist writing become clear in the case of its eighteenth-century progenitor Yarico, an emblem of betrayed love in the contact zone first described in Richard Ligon's *History of the Island of Barbadoes* (1657) and cemented in the English reading consciousness by Richard Steele's 1711 *Spectator* essay "Inkle and Yarico" (adapted in countless cross-genre adaptations throughout the century).[23] Ligon's anecdote of a shipwrecked merchant who after being sheltered by a Native American maiden later sells her into slavery becomes in Steele's hands a symbol for the bad moral sentiments of the mercantile world. *The Spectator* improves Ligon's version by making Yarico pregnant with Inkle's child, turning her fertility (and his) into the proof of Inkle's damaged sensibility: "the prudent and frugal young man sold *Yarico* to a *Barbidian* merchant; notwithstanding that the poor girl, to incline him to commiserate her condition, told him that she was with child by him; But he only made us of that information, to rise in his demands upon the purchaser." The tears in Mr. Spectator's eyes on hearing this tale precipitates the sentimental troping of the betrayed slave mother in later abolitionist writing. But it is in fact unlikely that Inkle's claiming of Yarico's pregnancy to raise his asking price would have been successful. Through most of the

[23] See the collection of sources in Frank Felsenstein's *English Trader, Indian Maid: Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World. An Inkle and Yarico Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1999). As Felsenstein notes in the introduction, *Inkle and Yarico* was reproduced across borders, forms and genres more than sixty times in the eighteenth-century, including George Coleman the Younger's popular 1788 opera. In Felsenstein' s account, the appeal can also be tracked beyond explicit invocations of the Yarico story to include more vague references to trans-oceanic betrayal, as in William Wordsworth's "The Mad Mother."

eighteenth century, the slave trade's efficiency in supplying the West Indian colonies with cheap renewable labor made planters reluctant to take on costs of maternity and child-care among their slaves. Female slaves were viewed as a liability, leading to a significant gender imbalance on West Indian plantations: in the cost-benefit matrix of the plantation it was deemed cheaper and more convenient to buy strong young men, work them to death, and repeat.[24] If Yarico's commodified maternity embodies the sexual violence inherent in colonial slavery, moral outrage against Inkle did not always take account of global distribution of slavery's reproductive violence.

It is these transnational circuits that James Montgomery seeks to transcribe into poetic form in *The West Indies*.[25] In this poem, the figure of the slave mother emerges as a symbol of

[24] Demographic historians agree that the vast majority of slaves brought to the New World were young men. Children and women fetched much lower auction prices, and were more typically employed as domestic servants than as field and factory workers. As Heather Cateau puts it: "[Planters] were convinced that in view of the large profits they received from sugar cultivation, and the relative cheapness of enslaved persons, it was more economical to buy new workers than to reproduce them naturally. Local reproduction was regarded as simply a loss of valuable labour time. Thus pre- and post-natal care for pregnant women, as well as infant care, were not parts of management's policies." Cateau, "Women, the Womb, and Weaning: Natural Increase on Eighteenth-Century Sugar Plantations." *Engendering Caribbean History: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. A Reader*. Ed. Verene Shephard (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011). 328. See also Orlando Paterson, *The Sociology of Slavery* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), 105-6. Whereas Paterson follows his British abolitionists sources to claim West Indian plantations remained predominantly male at the turn of the century, Sasha Turner has traced how this organization of reproduction began to change in the decades leading up to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807), as planters (including Taylor) consciously began to recruit more female slaves in order to anticipate the reproductive demands of the post-abolition colony. "Home-Grown Slaves: Women, Reproduction, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Jamaica 1788-1807," *Journal of Women's History* 23.1 (2011).

[25] James Montgomery, *The West Indies. Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. (London: R. Bower, 1809). Subsequent citations in text.

the necroeconomic organization of Atlantic capital. Published in 1809 to commemorate the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, and thus during the final ebb of a twenty-odd year flood of British anti-slavery verse, Montgomery's four-book epic of colonial conquest and reform offers an exemplary instance of the abolitionist trope of violated African maternity. In *The West Indies,* the production of abolitionist sympathy is formally tied to the poem's presentation of slaves as the bearers of a reproductive fecundity both external and necessary to the production of colonial capital. To be sure, the poem shares Malthus' optimistic view of the reformability of West Indian colonialism. Looking back on the history of the slave trade two years after its abolition, *The West Indies* champions Britain's abolitionist re-naturalization of its Empire: the poem concludes with Africa, personified as a "miserable mother" (IV.111) who has been weeping for her transported children, suddenly freed from "unsanctioned fetters" (IV.126) by a parade of English abolitionist heroes including Granville Sharpe, William Cowper, Wilberforce, Clarkson, William Pitt, and Charles Fox. Clearly, Montgomery's narrative of abolition as victory of Whig sentiment leaves little room for colonial agency. But the poem's commemorative patriotism rests uneasily alongside its presentation of an anti-reproductive basis of wealth which would continue to haunt the British colonies well beyond the abolition of the slave trade.

The West Indies' figure of Africa's "miserable womb" emerges in the poem's second book, which tells of the islands' historical and ecological transformation from landscapes of fertility to scenes of avaricious exploitation. Montgomery shows how the making of colonial profit required destroying the natural fecundity of both the tropical landscape and the bodies within it. In mapping the way colonialism draws value from the waste of both land and labor, the poem precipitates the morbid constructions of property-value that would come to prominence in the emancipation debates. The islands' metamorphosis from zones of natural fecundity to ones of

consumptive waste is told through the arrival of two invasive commodities, sugar cane and African slaves, both brought by sixteenth-century Spanish colonists. In both cases, Montgomery contrasts the lucrative sterility of the endogenous commodity with the threatened reproductive integrity of the bountiful Caribbean landscape. The arrival of the cane interrupts the second book's opening sketch of the islands' plentiful flora:

> —An eastern plant, ingrafted on the soil
> Was till'd for ages with consuming toil;
> No tree of knowledge with forbidden fruit,
> Death in the taste, and ruin at the root;
> Yet in its growth, were good and evil found,—
> It bless'd the planter, and cursed the ground.
> While with vain wealth it gorg'd the master's hoard,
> And spread with manna his luxurious board,
> Its culture was perdition to the slave,—
> It sapp'd his life, and flourish'd on his grave. (II.9-18)

In these lines and throughout *The West Indies*, Montgomery's verse turns on paradoxical identifications of blessing and curse, flourishing and decay, abundance and dearth. What these compounding oxymora repeat is the mercantile necromancy of turning death into profit. If the "culture" of the cane breeds "perdition" (*perdere,* 'put to destruction') this destructiveness itself makes a surplus; and while Montgomery inverts standard Enlightenment theories of value by making labor consumptive rather than productive, the islanders' "consuming toil" nevertheless contributes to Spaniards' "vain wealth" just as their consumed bodies fertilize the soil of the flourishing canes. Montgomery's West Indies display the logic of surplus that Foucault discovers in Ricardo: it is not the plentifulness of the tropics that makes them so lucrative, but rather the avaristic exhaustion of this plentifulness by the invasion of sugar cane. While the poem's descriptions of the native landscape may celebrate the physiocratic fecundity of nature, these

images of natural reproduction are unrelated to the poem's account of colonial profit. Productive nature is simply a foil to the avaricious consumption that gives rise to the "master's hoard."

As Book II continues, its opening diagnosis of wealth's source in soil exhaustion comes to be transposed onto the body of the colonial laborer. Montgomery's elegy for a Caribbean habitat disrupted by the deadly culture of the cane is expanded, first, by Spain's extermination of Kalingo and Taíno communities (described in Montgomery's conventional racism as timid, beautiful, and weak), and followed by the importation of African slaves:

> [Spain's] foot had spurn'd from earth's insulted face
> Among the waifs and foundlings of mankind,
> Abroad he look'd, a sturdier stock to find;
> A spring of life, whose fountains should supply
> His channels as he drank the rivers dry:
> That stock he found on Afric's swarming plains,
> That spring he open'd in the Negro's veins. (II.113-20)

Figure 1, from James Montgomery, *The West Indies*. The engraving illustrates a typical scenario in abolitionist poetry (derived from *Inkle and Yarico,* but notably transplanted to Africa in Thomas Day's popular *The Dying Negro* [1775]) in which stranded sailors receive the generous hospitality of African noble savages, and then enslave them. In this scene the mother instructs her child to pity the sailor: "—Pity the poor White Man who sought our tree, / No wife, no mother, no home has he." The juxtaposition between motherless sailor the bare-chested mother with her naked child captures the poem's sense of the distinction between reproductive and non-reproductive wealth. The white man has his bundle of possessions; the African has only her fertility.

This is, in part, a repetition of the cliché that only African workers could withstand manual labor in the tropics. But even as Montgomery invokes the black slave's "hardier fibre" and a "sturdier stock," it is not simply racial hardihood that governs the logic of African slavery in this poem. Rather, it is the law of population distorted through the networks of transatlantic commerce. What Montgomery discerns is that the commodification of African labor relies first and foremost on the separation of this labor from the generational requirements of communal life. The slave trade makes possible a form of labor that is antithetical to reproduction, severing the "consuming toil" of "Afric's strong sons" from the "miserable womb" of their parents:

> Thus, childless as the Charibbeans died,
> Afric's strong sons the ravening waste supplied;
> Of hardier fibre to endure the yoke,
> And self-renew'd beneath the severing stroke;
> As grim oppression crush'd them to the tomb,
> Their fruitful parent's miserable womb
> Teem'd with fresh myriads, crowded o'er the waves,
> Heirs to their toil, their sufferings, and their graves. (II. 125-32)

The "miserable womb" figures the perpetual bereavement that constituted eighteenth-century imperial wealth. As these lines illustrate, the slave trade gets around "natural" subsistence costs of labor by creating a transatlantic division between work and sex. By splitting labor and reproduction via the channels of Atlantic finance capital, the brutality of the plantation is presented in a new light: not as a failure of economic reproduction, but as a solution by non-reproductive means. This is the double meaning implied by the phrase "severing stroke," condensing the doubled violence of homicidal labor and forced migration. The severing stroke represents not only the blow that impels labor in the field, but also the oceanic severance of this labor from its reproductive source in Africa. It is only on the basis of this "self-renewing"

organization of slave death, and not on the basis of any stereotypical racial difference, that African labor distinguishes itself from the "childless Charibbeans" they replace. Against Malthusian wisdom, *The West Indies* shows how the transatlantic division between work and sex enables an exploitation of labor beyond the limits of biological subsistence. Nature, on this model, ceases to be a regulator of capitalist production. Rather, the imagined human and environmental fecundity of Africa's "swarming plains" is transformed from fount of communal plenty to a reservoir of perpetual suffering.

The West Indies' couplings of death and fertility, destruction and profit figuratively condense the transatlantic division of sex and work that the slave trade turned into an organ of accumulation. In separating reproduction from the scene of production, the slave trade enabled planters to exploit their labor beyond any natural limit imposed by the law of population. We thus find in Montgomery's poem a variation on the insight of Leopoldina Fortunati's *The Arcane of Reproduction*, wherein the modern family home is revealed as the "secret workshop" through which gendered reproductive labor is indirectly exploited by capital (69). *The West Indies'* history of slavery maps this gendered division of sex and work across the racial and geographic axes of the triangular trade: Africa becomes the secret workshop of colonial capital, at once essential to its mode of production and excluded from its channels of value.

CREOLE BALLADRY

Montgomery celebrates the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act as a Christian restoration of the natural laws of population, one that would lead planters to treat their slaves more leniently in the interest of increasing birthrates among their slaves. But abolition did not have the ameliorating

effects its architects had hoped. By 1815, it was clear that slave populations were deteriorating. Abolitionists feared that new slaves were being smuggled in from adjacent colonies, and calls were made for a new Slave Registry that would record births and deaths on all West Indian plantations. It was against the backdrop of these fissures in abolitionism's demographic projections that Matthew Lewis, famous author of the scandalous gothic classic *The Monk,* wrote his *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, a text that captures the moral and economic tensions that resulted from the failed hopes of gradual amelioration.

When Lewis inherited his father's Jamaican estates 1812, he had already imbibed his contemporaries' enthusiasm for abolition, and had even collaborated in a minor way with anti-slavery legislators toward the passage of the Abolition Act.[26] Against the fervid anti-abolitionism of his father, Lewis saw himself as belonging to a shrinking class of liberal cosmopolitan slaveowners who disapproved of the slave trade. Lewis wrote to Wilberforce for advice in improving the conditions of his slaves, and met with him in the interim between his two trips to Jamaica in 1815-16 and 1817-18; he brought to Cornwall Estate numerous schemes of compassionate reform, abolishing the cart-whip, instituting new holidays, limiting working hours and corporeal punishment, and—to the point of the present argument—encouraging childbirth among his female slaves. While he came to believe that emancipation would do his slaves more harm than good, his experiments on Cornwall estate put to the test the political economic theses that sustained pre-1807 abolitionism's faith in gradual amelioration.

[26] In 1806 Lewis alerted The Whig leader Lord Holland that anti-abolitionist planned to use his wife's Jamaican estates as evidence of abolitionist hypocrisy. See D. L. Macdonald, *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 52.

But Lewis' managerial experiments reflected more than a new interest in plantation reform. Rather, his attempt to liberalize plantation administration was part and parcel with his documentary interest in the cultural and literary practices of his slaves: his journal entries move fluidly across the genres of between descriptions of pest removal, cane extraction, slave songs and dances, and his own poetic productions. Scholars of Lewis' *Journal* unanimously refer to him as the author of *The Monk*, but they have not typically read his colonial ventures in light of Lewis' related vocation as a balladeer—a vocation which, Maureen McLane reminds us, refers in "its full extension" to "song-collecting, compiling, editing, essay-writing, publishing, inventing, forging."[27] I will argue that the *Journals* present balladeering itself as a model of liberal plantation authority. Lewis was a translator of German folk-ballads before becoming famous as a writer of Gothic romances; indeed, Walter Scott claimed that it was the poetic interruptions of *The Monk,* imitative of the style of ancient German and English ballads, that captivated the English reading public more than the prose narrative itself.[28] Although it did not reach the presses until 1834, eighteen years after his death, Lewis had always intended his *Journal* for publication, anticipating the public's interest in his collection of slave songs, Ananse ("Nancy") stories, and obeah rituals.[29] At the risk of further expanding McLane's already expansive definition of balladeering, I propose to read Lewis' detailed records of estate

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[27] Maureen McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 87.

[28] Scott acknowledged his own considerable place in the tradition of British balladeering to be due to Lewis' influence and tutelage: "out of this accidental acquaintance, which increased into a sort of intimacy, consequences arose which altered almost all the Scottish ballad-maker's future prospect's in life" ("Essay on Imitations," 35).

[29] D. L. Macdonald's claim that in turning Jamaican planter "Lewis gave up literature for sugar" is a considerable overstatement *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography,* 47.

management within his long-term aesthetic interests in the ballad. His *Journals* can be read in their unfinished totality as an exercise of what I will call creole balladry, a poetic form that delinks performances of authority and submission from antiquarian modes of racial identity, national character, and natural law.

A letter Lewis sent to a friend of 1816 is emblematic of his use of the ballad as a genre of performative authority. He describes a favorite storyteller among his slaves named Goosee Shoo-Shoo, "a certain (I was going to say *fair*) lady, who appears wonderfully adroit in her profession…reminding one forcibly, though in more humble grade, of the Eastern story-tellers of certain renowned 'Hunch-backs', 'Wonderful Lamps,' etc. etc."[30] Goosee Shoo-Shoo tells a "Nancy story" about a King who, by the sheer fiat of his fiction-making abilities, persuades his daughter to marry "a lilly nigger-man vidout ed" (in a strange variation on the emperor without clothes, he convinces her that the man *does* have a head). Presented in the voice of a slave balladeer, "lilly nigger-man vidout ed" allegorizes Lewis vision of liberal sovereignty as a creative practice: like Goosee Shoo-Shoo's king, he welcomes the transformation of plantocratic authority from a structure sustained by violence to one sustained by fictional performance.[31] But

[30] Matthew Lewis, *Journal of A West India Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica*. Ed. Judith Terry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 255. Subsequent citations in text.

[31] In a brilliant recent interpretation of this tale, Monique Allewaert develops the trope of acephaly (headlessness) toward a rather different problematic, showing how the "lilly nigger-man vidout ed" projects a mode of colonized life that is both conditioned by and resistant to the biopolitical terror of the plantation regime. See *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 85-114. By contextualizing the tale in the era of post-abolition reform, my aim is not only to more carefully historicize Lewis' engagements with the cultural forms of slave violence, but to examine the contradictions that emerge out of his use of Goosee Shoo Shoo's tale toward the instantiation of a de-terrorized mode of sovereignty, at the same time containing the horrors of the plantation in the sublimated form of a creole poetics.

as we shall see, this fiction of benign plantation mastery soon runs up against the problem of the reproduction of colonial property. In his *Journals*' exasperated description of their refusal to reform their bodies according to liberal economic norms, Lewis' balladry expresses a crisis of reproduction in a language of racial "perversity."

In contextualizing his *Journals* in light of Lewis' longer preoccupation with folk poetics, we should note that Lewis did not fit neatly within established cultures of ballad collection. McLane, Katie Trumpener, Nick Groom, and Marilyn Butler have taught us to recognize eighteenth-century balladeering as a sub-discipline of national anthropology.[32] Whereas antiquarian works like Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and James Macpherson's *Ossian* participated in an ethnopoetic movement that defined a form of national belonging, Lewis' balladeering practices—most notably, his *Tales of Wonder* of 1801—flagrantly disregard national, historical, and generic taxonomy, opting instead for a criteria rooted in subject matter and aesthetic effect.[33] Readers trained in the tradition of Percy were perplexed and even enraged by *Tales of Wonder*'s random assortment of texts from various national backgrounds, including originals and imitations by Lewis, Scott, and Robert Southey, translations from Johann Gottfried Herder's *Volkslieder,* and well-known selections cribbed

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[32] Maureen McLane, *Balladeering*; Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy's Reliques* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[33] As he wrote to Walter Scott, the aim of the *Tales of Wonder* was "to collect all the *marvellous* Ballads that [he could] lay his hands on"; the only criterion of was that they include, in one shape or another, "a witch or a ghost." quoted by Douglass H. Thompson in his introduction to Lewis' *Tales of Wonder,* Ed. Douglass H. Thompson (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2010), 17.

straight from Percy's *Reliques.*[34] Likewise, *Journals of a West India Proprietor*'s assorted descriptions of slave stories, songs, dances, and everyday life display just this mingling of national poetic characteristics divorced from origins. While Lewis takes great interest in the racial peculiarities of his slaves, nowhere does he explain Afro-Caribbean practice as expressions of African tradition. On the contrary, part of Lewis' praise for the abolition of "the execrable slave-trade" relates to its effective separation of Creole society from its African roots. For Lewis, abolition simultaneously intensifies and softens the "natal alienation" that, for Orlando Patterson, defines the sociology of slavery.[35] Rather than a source of despondency, in the *Journals* natal alienation introduces a de-nationalized form of poetic value. Cut-off from savage African superstitions, yet unburdened by the horrors of the middle passage and colonial "seasoning," Lewis' slaves are described as participating in a kind of pure syncretic play.[36] His descriptions of the pleasures of black creole labor—a mere burlesque of work to Lewis' eye—are such that he wishes he too could give up his cultural origins as an Englishman, as though creolization were the ideal of the balladeer: "it appears to me almost worth surrendering the luxuries and pleasures of Great Britain, for the single pleasure of being surrounded with beings who are always laughing and singing, and who seem to perform their work with so much *nonchalance*, taking up their baskets as if it were perfectly optional whether they took them up or left them there" (65).

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[34] See Thompson's introduction to *Tales of Wonder* (16).

[35] Patterson advances the notion of natal alienation in *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[36] The superstitions put to rest by abolition, according to Lewis, include the belief that suicide would return oneself to Africa (65). He also implies that slave revolt is a predilection of Africans, not creoles: describing a recent narrowly averted rebellion, "It appears that above two hundred and fifty had been sworn in regularly, all of them Africans; not a Creole was among them." (138).

Speciously divorcing the cultural world of his slaves from the constant threat of violence under which they work, Lewis presents planter authority and slave labor alike as practices of creole balladry.

In describing his slaves' balladic playfulness as rooted in their natal alienation, Lewis' *Journals* encode the reproductive crisis of post-1807 colonial property at the level of cultural performance. One of the ways that Lewis describes his slaves' happy submission to his liberal mastery is through their promises of increased childbirth. As they were clearly aware, one of Lewis' main goals in restructuring the operation of Cornwall Estate was to increase his slave population; but he had frequent occasion to bemoan the "extreme nicety required in rearing negro children" (62). If creole balladry draws its performative originality from slaves' severance from African traditions, it is precisely at the point at which natality itself appears as a practice of balladry that Lewis' fiction of liberal authority begins to break down.

The Cornwall slaves' promises of procreative fidelity are first delivered upon Lewis's very first arrival at his estate. Crossing the gates in his carriage, he is overjoyed by the spectacular reception staged by his slaves, even as he expresses doubts about their sincerity. Plantation authority and submission is from the outset a matter of performance: "Whether the pleasures of the negroes was sincere may be doubted; but certainly it was the loudest that I ever witnessed: they all talked together, sang, danced, shouted, and, in the violence of their gesticulations, tumbled over each other, and rolled about upon the ground" (41). As the play of sovereignty and fealty continues, it takes a peculiar form: a kind of tributary presentation of the slave body as object of reproductive capital. Lewis' slaves anticipate his overwhelming concern with the growth and maintenance of an effective laboring population:

> One woman held up her little naked black child to me, grinning from ear to ear;—'Look, Massa, look here! him nice lilly neger for Massa!' Another complained,—'So long since non come see we, Massa; good Massa, come at last.' As for the old people, they were all in one and the same story: now they had lived once to see Massa, they were ready for dying to-morrow, 'them no care.' (42)

Lewis' liberal paternalism has a great deal in common with Edgeworth's, and his rendering of his slaves' docile ingratiation seems to echo the colonial mimicry of Edgeworth's Irish Catholic peasantry. Like the tenants of Glenthorn Estate in *Ennui*, who sing "*Long may you live to reign over us*" upon the arrival of their absentee landlord, Lewis' slaves' performance of fealty gives shape and form to the otherwise formless structure desire that undergirds colonial authority, ironizing it through its transcription into the dialect of the oppressed.[37] In Lewis' case, this "insincere" performance of fealty is expressed in two ways—a promise to procreate and a promise to die—both of which articulate the problematic role of the body as an object of reproductive capital. The woman who holds up her "nice lilly neger" makes her offspring the emblem of her fidelity: the paternal compact of master and slave is transacted through the body of the child. It is not lost on Lewis that this tribute is pitched at his anxiety for a growing slave population. Later in the *Journal*, he recalls this moment while reading a Report from the African Institution alleging planters' indifference to the "preservation of their present stock of negroes": "Certainly the negroes in Jamaica are by no means of this Reporters opinion, but are thoroughly sensible of their intrinsic value in the eyes of the proprietor" (133).

[37] *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, vol. 5 of 12 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 190.

Read in this light, the woman's tribute of her child turns reproduction into a terrain of struggle for control of the slave body. Indeed, Lewis' complaint of "the extreme nicety of rearing negro children" may belie practices of infanticide and abortion as methods of slave resistance.[38] His descriptions of infant mortality are inflected with accusations of carelessness, insincerity, and performance, making child-death a trope of creole balladry. In one instance, a woman alarmed by her infant's sleepiness "began dancing and shaking it till it was in a strong perspiration, and then she stood with it for some minutes at an open window, while a strong north wind was blowing" (63); in another, a mother whose child shows marks of having fallen later admits to having dropped him (206). Both children died. Although we cannot know if infant deaths on Cornwall were intentional, it is clear that Lewis' self-image as a tolerant, enlightened proprietor cracks when confronted with his inability to control the reproduction of his slaves. But the child is not the only figure of paternalist compact in the play of submission cited above. Like the woman's presentation of her child, the "old people['s]" promise to willingly and happily die is equally a pledge of allegiance based on their own bodies' status as bearers of capital. If, on one level, their supplication is meant to tickle Lewis' vanity by suggesting they have stayed alive just for him, on another they offer their own death as a form of tribute—"them no care". If post-abolition plantation owners now worried more about naturally reproducing their worth in slaves, new restrictions on the use of force and the declining productivity of some estates also introduced the burden of supporting those referred to in the West India Committee report as

[38] Reproductive forms of slave resistance have become a mainstay of Caribbean and African American literature, perhaps most famously memorialized in the character of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (New York: Vintage, 2004). See also Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco,* Trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Pantheon, 1997) and Dianne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

"non-effective persons"—the injured, sick, elderly, idle, belligerent, and rebellious. The supplicating "old people" who greet Lewis on his arrival at Cornwall are just one version of this type; their tributary expression of a willingness to die can be read as a general acknowledgement of their own status as sunk, irretrievable capital.

Lewis' main frustrations were not with the old and sick, for whom he expresses compassion, but with those "worthless fellows" who take advantage of his liberal reforms. Much of the drama of the *Journals* rises from Lewis' half-fascinated, half-exasperated accounts of his least valuable slaves: Nato, the "most worthless fellow on the whole property…a thief, a liar, a runaway, and one who has never been two days out of the hospital since my arrival" (217); Hercules, a perpetual runaway who returns to Cornwall only "upon hearing that there was a distribution of beef, rum, and jackets" (84) and then steals Lewis' sheep and turkey; Adam, an obeah man suspected "of poisoning more than twelve negroes" (220); Catalina, who "is either mad, or has long pretended to be so, never works, and always steals" (211). Balladeers of anti-reproductive disorder, these and other "worthless fellows" seem to have a contagious effect on the plantation: Lewis constantly complains that his hospital is full of slaves with nothing wrong with them, "feigning sickness out of mere idleness, in order to do nothing" (125). Whether throwing up his hands over negligent mothers or lecturing malingerers in the plantation hospital, Lewis' celebration of the practices of play and performance I have called creole balladry strain hardest when confronted with the failure of capital reproduction.

It is where creole balladry fails to conform to the economic assumptions of liberal reform that Lewis' racism becomes inflected with the "panic of property" so characteristic of post-1807 colonial writing. As we saw earlier, West Indian property owners articulated their panic in terms of a failure of exchange, resting their claim to absolute authority in the untransferability of their

estate properties. The failure of exchangeability is both an economic and an affective reality in Lewis' *Journal*. If, one the one hand, he adopts the colonists' line that abolition hurt individual slaves' paths to freedom by making it difficult for planters to replace them, on the other he sees the plantation is characterized by a failure of sentimental reciprocity.[39] More, this lack of affective exchange between himself and his slaves is at the core of the failure of his liberal reform:

> The negroes certainly are perverse beings. They had been praying for a sight of their master year after year; they were in raptures at my arrival; I have suffered no one to be punished, and shown them every possible indulgence during my residence among them; and one and all they declare themselves perfectly happy and well treated. Yet, previous to my arrival, they made thirty-three hogsheads a week; in a fortnight after my landing, their product dwindled to twenty-three; during this last week they have managed to make but thirteen. (141)

What Lewis here regards as racial perversity is his slaves' failure to conform to his much-cherished trope of the "grateful slave." George Boulukos has tracked the eighteenth-century development of the theory that blacks were racially predisposed to gratitude, a convenient notion in an era that saw the explosive rise of their forced, non-compensatory labor.[40] Whereas, for instance, Edgeworth's popular tale "The Grateful Negro" made this notion the basis of a program for profitable reform, Lewis' attempts to put this theory into practice perpetually opens a gulf between the grateful and the profitable slave. Externalized from both economic and affective

[39] "It would be unjust to his companions to suffer any one in particular to be withdrawn from service; as in that case two hundred and ninety-nine would have to do the work, which was now performed by three hundred" (123).

[40] George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

exchange, his slaves bear no relation to the demands of plantation capital. What Lewis perceives as a lack of thanks for his kindness is nothing more than an expression of the gulf between the subsistence demands of the slave and the productive demands of the plantation. The perverse ingratitude of the creole slave is the racialized embodiment of the crisis of colonial reproduction.

I have argued that Lewis' *Journal* is the expression of a joint managerial and ethnopoetic project, one that fails just at the point that profitable administration proves incompatible with the racialized "nature" of the Cornwall slaves—their sexual reproducibility, insincerity, and ingratitude. In diagnosing his slaves "perverse" exclusion from the domain of exchange, Lewis anticipates the colonial apologists of the 1820s who grounded their unique authority and property rights on the non-transferability of their estates. But if Lewis's *Journal* exemplifies a panic rooted in the failure of colonial reproduction, it is also possible to read the ballads he collects against the grain of creole perversity. I will conclude this section with a reading of one slave song, "Take him to the Gulley," which powerfully portrays the necroeconomic structure of colonial capital.

"Take him to the Gulley" memorializes the atrocities committed on Spring Garden estate by its owner, Mr. George Bedward. When Bedward's slaves were deemed incurably sick or infirm, it was his policy to have them tossed into a nearby gulley where they were abandoned "to be half-devoured by the john-crows, before death put an end to their suffering" (204). Lewis tells of one slave who managed to escape and survive in Kingston. When Bedward met him in the street some time later and tried to seize him as his property, the man's cries rallied the sympathies of the crowd; chased out of town, Bedward "never ventured to advance his claim on the negro a second time" (204). And so Lewis ultimately finds in colonial urbanity a structure of moral sentiment that counters the exceptional violence of planters such as Bedward. But the

slave song Lewis includes in his journal offers a very different orchestration of sentiment and violence. In "Take him to the Gulley" Spring Garden represents a general condition of colonial production: it is exemplary, not exceptional. The figure of the murdered "non-effective person" becomes a metonym for the general disability of colonial property:

> "There is a popular negro song, the burden of which is—
> 'Take him to the Gulley! Take him to the Gulley!
> But bringee back he frock and board,'
> 'Oh! massa! me no deadee yet!'—
> 'Take him to the Gulley! Take him to the Gulley!'
> 'Carry him along!'"

What is most chilling in this song is not just the atrocity it commemorates, but the way its work-like repetitiveness gives form to the regularization of plantation atrocity. In the back-and-forth between the voice of Bedford and the supplicating slave, the song enacts the form of a dialogue which is not in fact a dialogue at all: the insistent rhythm of Bedward's injunction is all the more indifferent as it rolls over the infirm man's unheard plea. But it is not the opposition between the voices of master and slave, but the contrast between two forms of property that I would like to focus on here: the living but worthless slave versus the dead but minimally valuable "frock and board." To understand the strange political economy of these objects, we have to attend to the dramatic irony that arises from Bedward's apparent inversion of their value. The living slave is treated as an object whose value is worn-out and thus condemned to death, whereas the dead frock and board are to be brought back, re-produced: they and not the slave will live to work another day. If we note that the repetition of the lines "Take him to the Gulley! Take him to the Gulley!," invokes the chanting structure and tasking subject of the field-work song, we must also note that the song's figure of valuable labor is not the slave, but the board that discards him. To

imagine this song sung in the fields, its rhythms synched to the hacking of cane knives, is to see all slave labor as metaphorically linked to the labor of taking to the gulley. Though sung in the voices of the master and the slave, the song's form aligns it with the inert matter brought back to the plantation by the singers: it is a song sung to a labor that carries its own death.

Not unlike the reporters of the West India Committee, the singers of "Take him to the Gulley" present a theory of value rooted not in the productive ability of labor and soil, but in the capacity to get rid of unusable capital in a time of crisis. Through the imperiled figure of the non-effective person, "Take him to the Gulley" offers an image of the time-consciousness of colonial property on the verge of annihilation, presented through the labors of those upon whose bodies the future of colonial property depended. The Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833 salvaged the future of colonial property by freeing the capital sunk in slave's bodies, at the same time ensuring that their labors would continue not to be their own. But if this emancipated capital was turned over to the English creditors who now owned the mortgages on West Indian estates, what was to become of the planters who remained? While the history of post-emancipation ownership and its cultural forms in the Caribbean is well beyond the scope of this chapter, the question of how colonial power would be orchestrated after the migration of its capital was obviously a pressing one for those planters in the 1820s who had not the means or inclination to get away. What would it be like to live in a world of properties whose values had flown away?

STRANGE PROPERTY

It might be like living with ghosts. A shadow skirts the darkness in the anonymously published anti-abolition novel *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827). The form of an old blind man, known for the

first half of the novel only by the name "the duppie," is often spotted lurking at the entrance to a mountain cave known to be the haunt of rebel slave conspirators: "I have heard often that such a figure has been seen by the lagoon; and many Negroes have purported there is a duppie haunts the rocks and even the cave itself."[41] The mystery of the duppie generates a great deal of gothic worry in the first half of the novel, supernaturalizing the locale of slave revolt. Eventually, however, we learn that the duppie is not a ghost at all, but rather a slave named Samuel who has been stolen and emancipated by a network of scheming evangelical abolitionists. Samuel's apparently spectral personhood emblematizes the terror metropolitan finance felt at the prospect of losing their West Indian capital. As John Mitford-Freedman had put it to the House of Lords in 1826, speaking on behalf of owners of West India securities: "At present, no person would advance a shilling on West-India Property. But, amidst their distress, the unfortunate proprietors were obliged to go on, or the slaves would starve. Thus, there was no hope for them, since *they could not get rid of their property.*"[42] English banks and merchant houses were tormented by the lived presence of West Indian slaves who would not return the capital invested in them.

But though *Hamel, the Obeah Man* provides a literary form for De Quincey's longed panic of property, it does not endorse De Quincey's fears. On the contrary, the novel offers a rehabilitated view of harmonious plantacratic society, in spite of the imminence of property annihiliation: to do so, it seeks to unmoor social order from its grounding in the value of property. Whereas De Quincey's call for panic issues from his anti-Jacobin sense that "the

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[41] Cynric Williams, Hamel, *the Obeah Man*, ed. Candace Ward and Tim Watson (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2010), 165. Subsequent citations in text.

[42] "Petition of West India Merchants for Protection of their Property." *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 15 (1826) 385-96.

relation … in which we all stand to PROPERTY" is "the most comprehensive relation of any which belongs to the social state," such a view was no longer available to colonial planters who sought to validate their society at a moment of mass colonial insolvency. In place of the legitimating figures of property, *Hamel the Obeah* man takes the surprising tack of borrowing the figures of black slave culture itself. In this section I show how the novel reconfigures the genre of historical romance to strip it of its conventional plotting through the restoration of property; to do so, it turns to forms of slave spirituality—the duppie and the obeah man—as figures of a plantocracy without worth of property.

Tim Watson has suggested that the author of *Hamel the Obeah Man* was Charles Taylor Williams, who had published a pro-slavery, semi-fictional travelogue *Tour through the Island of Jamaica* under the name Cynric Williams in 1826.[43] Watson reads *Hamel* as a Caribbean variant of the genre of "the historical romance of the cultural periphery" pioneered in Scott's Waverley Novels. Adapting Trumpener's powerful account of historical romance as offering (in his words) "an account of the nation that emphasizes transformation, 'collapse,' and loss," Watson notes the appropriateness of the genre for the task of romancing the supposed paternalism of a plantocracy in decline: "Faced with a threatening present, people like Williams turned to the romance of a lost past."[44] In what follows I want to pay attention to the ways in which this variation of historical romance establishes both its generic consistency and its national allegory by situating

[43] Tim Watson, *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67. See also Tim Watson and Candace Ward, Introduction, *Hamel the Obeah Man* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2010), 18-20. As Watson points out, contemporary reviews of *Hamel* identified the author as Cynric Williams.

[44] Watson, *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction*, 72. On historical romance see Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism* 141.

itself against another genre and figure of colonial anxiety: the Caribbean gothic and its central figure of the obeah man. The novel's orchestration of these two associated genres, I would like to suggest, involves reconfiguring the relationship between categories of race and property; specifically, the novel finds in obeah's derivation of political power from worthless plantation objects a model for a possible future of white colonial power.

Hamel the Obeah Man presents its paranoid vision of conspiratorial emancipationists in Jamaica through the narrative conventions of Gothic horror fiction. The novel's *Monk*-esque anti-hero is Roland, a lecherous Methodist missionary with ties to London abolitionism. Roland conspires with a group of insurrectionary slaves to overturn white rule. Set in late 1822, the novel fictionalizes an actual planned revolt that was only narrowly averted in St. Mary and St. George parishes just prior to the 1823 Demerara rebellion. Williams presents the occasion as a vindication of planter virtue against the corrupt influence of an anti-slavery metropolis. *Hamel the Obeah Man* pitches its attack on liberal abolitionism through two interweaving plotlines, each of which uses a specific generic form to encode a different version of the annihilation of colonial property. The first plot is that of the slave revolt. Roland, along with the self-proclaimed Brutchie (king) Combah and the mysterious obeah man, Hamel, plans to violently liberate slaves from their masters, burn the plantations in the parishes, and kidnap the beautiful daughter of the noble if ridiculous planter Mr. Guthrie; this plot is a clear condemnation of metropolitan emancipation schemes as self-serving and irresponsible projects for the destruction of property. The second plot, which ultimately subsumes that of the slave revolt, is the story of the novel's hero, Oliver Fairfax, who returns to Jamaica after a long absence with the aim of reclaiming the "demesnes of his ancestors" (204) from a corrupt attorney; his eventual repossession of his

mortgaged estate narrates an imagined victory of planter virtue over the speculative annihilation of property by metropolitan credit.

The long expository chapter describing the history of the Fairfax's property-line tells what had become a familiar story for colonial planters.[45] The decline of Belmont estate tracks a broader pattern of increasing reliance on commercial credit alongside the decline of plantation revenues, leading to legal battles with creditors, "debts … accumulated, Negroes mortgaged, and difficulties of all kinds augmented" (203), and finally the foreclosure of Belmont estate and its adjoining properties. The English creditor, Mr. M'Grabbit, has placed Belmont in the hands of a gluttonous ex-brewer and sanctimonious abolitionist Mr. Fillbeer, who has been running the estate into the ground, selling slaves for cheap to Roland, and failing to send either accounts or produce back to M'Grabbit or Fairfax. The story of Fairfax's heroic return to Jamaica to take back possession of Belmont hinges on a legal technicality, one that highlights the damaged state of West India property and differentiates the narrative from the standard romance of rightful repossession. As it turns out, the terms of the original mortgage were meant to expire at the death of Fairfax's father. Although M'Grabbit remains the executor and trustee of the Belmont property until it clears its debt, the entail of the elder Fairfax made the estate unalienable and

[45] Jacob Price coins the phrase "ontogeny of debt" ("book debt, bond, judgment, mortgage) to describe the typical movement of credit in the Atlantic colonies: "In his dealings with a merchant (in the colonies or in Britain), a planter ran up a debt on the trader's books too large to be cleared by the next crop or two. To assuage the merchant and gain more time, the planter entered into a bond for the debt. When the bond was not cleared in the time specified, the merchant or his representative went to court and obtained a judgment against the planter. To forestall action on the judgment, the planter gained more time by giving the merchant a mortgage on some or all of his real estate and slaves." "Credit in the Slave Plantation Economies," *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 324-5.

made all decisions about the property require Fairfax's assent. Although M'Grabbit and Fillbeer originally concealed this condition from the Fairfax to keep the estate in their own possession, M'Grabbit has grown fed up with Fillbeer and agreed to let Fairfax replace him as attorney on both Belmont and the rest of the mortgaged properties. This is an odd twist on the familiar formula of national allegory, whereby the restoration of rightful inheritance figures the legitimation of the nation: Fairfax's return to the "demesnes of his ancestors" (202) as the trustee of his own mortgaged property allegorizes a very provisional re-affirmation of plantocratic power. As a fantasy of colonial futurity, it is one that imagines the preservation of property *in spite of* the state of generalized insolvency.

Two plotlines, then, one gothic and one historical-romantic, each bearing a different configuration of the threat of annihilated property: the liberation of owned persons; the foreclosure of an insolvent world. Both are told against the backdrop of dissolving ties between a righteous but beleaguered plantocracy and an English government under the thumb of ostentatiously self-serving abolitionists—"the ultra pious, and others interested in the importation of East India sugar" (202). Each plot projects a very different vision of West Indian colonial futurity: in the first, the terrifying prospect (ultimately forestalled) of an end to white rule through violent rebellion and the instantiation of Haitian-style black sovereignty; in the second, the provisional restoration of white legitimacy and plantocratic virtue. Where these two plotlines converge is in the role played by novel's eponymous obeah man, Hamel. Hamel plays the part of the indispensable outsider without whom the community cannot be restored and the plot cannot resolve itself. Hamel bears an ambivalent relation to all established parties in the novel, a positionality that is expressed in terms of his religion (as an obeah practitioner, but also, it is obliquely suggested, as a Muslim) as well as in his regard for the institution of racial slavery:

if, as Kamau Brathwaite notes, Hamel orates "the first Black Power speech in our literature" he also attacks abolitionism and argues against the possibility of immediate emancipation in terms that precisely echo pro-slavery advocates.[46] It is Hamel who orchestrates the novel's transition from the gothic horror of slave revolt to the romance of repossession: originally a co-conspirator with Roland and Combah in staging the rebellion, he is also instrumental in bringing it to a halt and restoring Fairfax—his owner, as it turns out—to his property. And it is in Hamel's obeah practices that provide the novel with a conceptual apparatus for a colonial future detached from the solvency of property.

In *Hamel*, you can tell whether a character is pro- or anti-slavery depending on how afraid he or she is of obeah. This dividing line doesn't fall quite where one might expect. *Hamel* turns the colonist fear of obeah, as a technique and figure of violent liberation, against the liberalism of humanitarian reformers: the characters who most fear it are not the planters but the individuals conspiring against them. While it is the local planter family the Guthries who stand the most to lose from the rumoured plans of revolt, Guthrie's daughter Joanna is no Radcliffian heroine beset by fear of Hamel's supernatural wizardry; her interactions are Hamel are cordial. Rather, it is Roland, the novel's humanitarian arch-villain, who most fears Hamel. In associating fear of obeah with liberal abolitionism Williams significantly reworks the gothic troping of slave spirituality as it had developed during the heyday of obeah-fever in the pre-abolition British

[46] Kamau Brathwaite, "Creative Literature of the British West Indies', *Savacou,* 1.1 (1970), 71. Here is one instance of Hamel's pro-slavery rhetoric: "what will be our freedom? What are we to do—the ignorant, nasty, drunken Negroes, who were born slaves in Congo, and Coromantin, and Houssa, and Mundingo. Some will make the others work: there will be slaves for ever, unless the white men stay with soldiers and cannons to keep the strong ones from beating the weak ones, and making the women do all the work" (161).

public sphere. As Alan Richardson notes, British fascination with obeah indexed imperial anxieties that were particularly live in the years of the Haitian Revolution 1791-1804; the well-known association between obeah and slave revolt fit a Revolutionary-era romantic preoccupation concerning the power of a superstitious imagination to spark real violence.[47] The eruption of poems, stories, and stage-plays about obeah mostly waned by 1807; in giving obeah so prominent a role in his novel, Williams at first seems unfashionably late to the party.[48] But the figuration of obeah could be put to a very different use in the context of missionary reform in the 1820s. The push for Christianizing slaves was justified not only under the banners of humanity, sympathy, and civilization, but also for economic reasons: the liberal argument for emancipation required the premise of continued black labor on white plantations; the civilizing process of Christianization could be pointed to as proof that slaves were willing to convert themselves into a free peasantry, eager to save their souls through good hard work.[49] Christianization was part and parcel with the liberal program of turning slaves into free workers within the reproductive norms of agricultural capitalism. Against such arguments, pro-slavery rhetoric could make use of

[47] Alan Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807," *Studies in Romanticism,* 32.1 (1993), 3-28.

[48] Ten years before *Hamel* Lewis wrote "the belief in Obeah is now greatly weakened" (62)—though the contents of his *Journal* often suggest otherwise.

[49] As Catherine Hall argues in her account of black missionaries in the Victorian Empire, the adoption of Christianity on the part of ex-slave communities in pre-emancipation years was by no means a unilateral vanquishing of African tradition but rather a selective recognition of the advantages to be gained by alignment with missionary abolitionism. *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), This is not to deny, however, the role played in the development of a Victorian moral imperium by a strategic convergence of liberal political thought and missionary reform.

the persistence of Afro-Caribbean modes of spirituality as evidence that an emancipated West Indies could have no future.

Along these lines, Williams enlists obeah in the service of plantocracy against the liberal abolitionist program of reforming slaves into free Christians. This is not, however, as straightforward as the hackneyed argument that "ignorant, lazy, drunken Negroes" (161) were racially unequipped for freedom; while Hamel himself uses these words and makes this argument, his own character is a clear refutation of it. My argument here that the novel's unconventional tolerance for obeah is a tolerance for the condition of sunk capital that structures the post-abolition sugar colony. The "strange properties" of the objects assembled in Hamel's cave, which exert a power in the absence of economic value, offers the possibility of a politics in a world of annihilated property. The essential drive of the plot is thus to recover such a possibility from the gothic threat of slave revolt, to recuperate the condition of worthless property under the authority of the plantation.

When Roland first stumbles upon Hamel's secret cave while seeking refuge from a hurricane, he is alarmed by the profusion of objects he discovers there. Along with the scattered belongings of runaway slaves are numerous instruments of obeah, all characterized by their waste and inutility: the hair of white men, dogs and horses; the feathers of various birds, bullets, old nails, and rags all organized in an assortment of broken human skulls. These are objects that have lost their proper worth; and yet their very collection and preservation suggests their magical reinvestment with some alternative value: "strange property" (68), Roland calls it. The associative link of obeah's strange properties with the destruction of real property is clinched a few pages later. Fallen asleep in the cave, Roland dreams he is on a sugar estate engulfed in flames. Hearing the planter's daughter calling for help from her burning home, he runs into the

building; but instead of saving her, he attempts to seduce her in her bed; she dies in his arms while a ghostly "fiend" risen up calling for revenge. Roland opens his eyes to find Hamel standing over him, "perceiving the very figure of the demon of his dream"; he cries out: "Who or what art thou?" Hamel's entrance into the novel coincides with this nightmare of destroyed colonial capital: the obeah man, like his instruments, is invested with a strange property that rises from the annihilation of the plantation.

This episode establishes one of the hallmark aesthetic structures of its gothic plot: the production of white panic through the ambiguous relation of black personhood to colonial property. The ambiguity comes through in Roland's difficulty finding the right interrogative pronoun for Hamel: is he a "who" or a "what," a person or a thing? Hamel's response offers Roland no help in this regard: "Master, what you will" he replies; and then again: "What you please—a Negro." In addressing Roland as "Master" while refusing to give his proper name, Hamel offers a mastery that is stripped of all power over its object: He is master, yes, but of he knows not what or who. At the same time, his qualified answer "a Negro" seems to make the very undecidability between person and thing a condition of blackness. The ontological fuzziness of Roland's query links the ambiguous status of the slave person/thing to the spectral, racialized "fiend" who rises from the ashes of the plantation.

Is there a certain similarity between Hamel's ghostly ownership of the wasted objects of the plantation, and Fairfax's own desire to regain power and prestige by repossessing a decimated property in a decimated colony? What is the relationship between the power Hamel derives from his "strange property" and the power eventually reestablished in Fairfax's trusteeship at Belmont? The novel wants to retain the plantation's place as the locus of colonial authority even as it acknowledges the harnessing of plantation "ownership" to the interest to

metropolitan creditors; it wants to assert the political independence of the planter even as, legally and economically, he is subordinated to the point of ruin under the rule of imperial finance. It's language for this power-in-property-not-one's-own is the arcana of obeah. When, for instance, Roland hears from Mr. Guthrie that Fairfax has returned to the island to reclaim his property, Mr. Guthrie chides him: "have you been wrestling with a Duppie in your sleep—an incubus? Or have you been *Obeah'd*?" (211). While the joke alludes to Roland's own scheming with Hamel, it also uses obeah to frame humanitarian terror at the prospect of colonial autonomy. Redeploying obeah in this way requires stripping this structure of its conventional racist anxiety. The work of the novel, in its movement from the gothic to the historical romance, is to undo the association of blackness and worthless property so that a white creole plantocracy can reassert its power even within a structure of financial dispossession.

The intertwining of genre and the racialization of property and politics becomes clear if we return to "the duppie," Samuel, whom we eventually learn is a faithful slave of Fairfax's who has helped him return to Jamaica. The duppie's apparently threatening ontological ambiguity is represented in a mumbled somniloquy overheard by Fairfax and Michal when they stumble upon him as he sleeps in Hamel's cave: "Cha! cha! the hangman tie him strong—oh this white man! that looks so fair and smells so sweet. Oh wicked wicked man. *Negroes are nothing*" (231). The dream combines a project of vengeance against whites with a cryptic identification of blackness with ontological absence: this is precisely the coordination of race and property earlier emblematized in Hamel's obeah and Roland's dream. The literal reference of the duppie's words are soon revealed, however: the white man referred to is Roland, who killed Samuel's child in front of him and who Samuel fears will kill him also to keep his crime secret. As for the statement "Negroes are nothing," its oracular opacity is perhaps explained by its resonance with

Samuel's later description of Roland's swindle to buy him at a discount from Fillbeer. As he explains to Fairfax: "'I was made free, master,' said the Negro: 'Roland bought me …He taught me to counterfeit blindness, and *bought me for nothing*; but it was not to make me free: he would have sold me, and sent me from the island. [Fillbeer] only sold me on condition that Roland made me free'" (235).

We can read this episode as a colonist allegory for the faulty logic of compensated manumission. In describing Samuel's purchase and manumission under the sign of Roland's criminal paranoia and Fillbeer's corrupt abolitionism, the novel attacks the moral imperatives of liberal compensation schemes such as Wilmot-Horton's. On the one hand, Roland's training of the Duppie to "counterfeit blindness" echoes planters' assertions in the emancipation debates that under any law of compulsory manumission slaves would feign weakness or injury in order to obtain a cheaper price for their freedom.[50] On the other hand (and more to the point): while the discovery that Fillbeer gave Samuel away solves the riddle of mysterious statement "Negroes are nothing" (and illustrates' Fillbeer's irresponsibility as the Belmont trustee), it also makes Samuel's apparent ontological spectrality (his "nothingness") a matter of an economically unsound and even racist humanitarianism that views blacks as worthless. As Hamel puts it elsewhere: "why does king George want to make the slaves *free for nothing*, after the white men have paid for them? You know master, there must be something wicked here, if the king says we should be free" (161). Here as throughout the novel, Williams suggests it is really virtuous

[50] See *Slaves: Berbice and Demerara: Minutes Taken Before His Majesty's Privy Council, in the Matter of the* Berbice *and* Demerara *Manumission Order of Council* (House of Commons, 1818).

planters like Fairfax who know how to respect and value their slaves; to humanitarian liberals like Roland, it's as if they don't exist: they look like ghosts.

Hamel rests its pro-slavery case on a rejection of the view that colonial capital is something that can be naturally reproduced. The fertility of the island is the source of destroyed property, not wealth: "the trees grow so wonderous fast in this country, that even a house is upturned by them in a year or two, if it is deserted" (228). It is from such deserted homes, abandoned to the tropical fecundity, that Combah's rebels hatch their evil plots. The gothic terror they inspire is grown in the wilderness, linked to the natural fertility that stands opposed to the wealth-generating power of the avarice of land. The novel rejects the liberal claim that the best guard against this terror is emancipation; William's aim, rather, is to reassert plantocratic power, even in the absence of plantocratic wealth. To accomplish this fantasy in a world supposedly ruined by liberal-abolitionist terror, the novel turns Fairfax himself into a kind of secularized, de-Africanized obeah man. Before Hamel sets sail in the novel's closing pages, he teaches Fairfax the secrets of his cave: "'It is all yours,' said he to Fairfax, 'Use it to defend your property, and your wife to be. No Negro, no man but myself knows the intricacies of this cave at all" (425). If the strange property of the obeah man is a power derived from things that have lost their worth, in *Hamel,* likewise, the future of colonial property is strange. Fairfax's romance of repossession overturns the gothic identification of racial terror and ruined property; it seeks to reestablish white authority by putting it in the place of the obeah man.

Chapter Four

Bare Possession: Property and History in a Liberal Empire

> The abolition of landed property in the Ricardian sense, that is, its conversion into State property so that rent is paid to the State instead of to the landlord, is the ideal, the heart's desire, which springs from the deepest, inmost essence of capital.
>
> Karl Marx,
> *Theories of Surplus Value*

> [Francis Osbaldistone]: "I received his directions to go down to Osbaldistone-Hall … and take all necessary measures to take that possession which sages say makes nine-points of the law."
>
> Walter Scott,
> *Rob Roy*

When sages say that possession makes nine-points of the law, they mean that having something is a near proof of owning it. But we might also say that law is a system founded on a distinction between owning and possessing. Legal historians of both liberal and conservative stripe have often described law as an artifact of territorial appropriation, an event that therefore precedes law: Carl Schmitt calls the claiming of land-ownership "the primary act in founding law,"

arguing "in every case, land-appropriation, both internally and externally, is the primary legal title that underlies all subsequent law."[1] But although many theories of property begin with possession, possession is not the same thing as ownership. James Mill – in a book that will draw much of our attention in what follows – writes that originally the idea of property "probably included nothing more than use during occupancy, the commodity being liable to be taken by another, the moment it was relinquished by the hand which held it."[2] As his *History of British India* goes on to say, however, civilizational progress required the invention of much more extensive advantages of ownership than possession alone.[3] The central concept of this dissertation, rent, names a political-economic relation organized by the disjunction between ownership and possession, rent being the share of the land due from tenant to lord, possessor to owner. As I have suggested throughout, rent, as economic transaction, is also a technology of political legibility, *rendering* the hierarchies of property and sovereignty, *dominium* and *imperium*.

In this chapter I suggest that our histories of liberal empire might be well served by closer attention to the administrative effects of the imaginative distinction between property and

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[1] Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum,* Trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 45, 46.

[2] James Mill, *The History of British India*, 3 Vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), I.179. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text by page number.

[3] Possession and ownership can be construed as belonging to entirely distinct legal traditions. Andre Van der Walt notes that "English land law strictly speaking does not have a concept of ownership – property in land is protected as possession." *Property in the Margins* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009), 38 n. 16. Common law's preoccupation with possession contrasts with civil law's conception of absolute ownership. Brenna Bhandar elaborates the principle of relative title to land as a structural element of settler colonization in her essay "Possession, Occupation and Registration: Recombinant Ownership in the Settler Colony," *Settler Colonial Studies* (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2015.1024366.

possession. Whereas enlightenment theorists and critics of imperialism grounded their understanding of sovereignty in a natural rights conception of property (a conception that was always more or less tacitly understood to imply the historical reality of *dis*possession), the confluence of classical political economy and imperialism represented a logistical turn from the improving capacity of property to the economic relations among those with only the minimal possessions necessary to their subsistence.

Recent scholarship has occupied itself less with the category of possession than that of dispossession—and understandably so. Property and dispossession are mutually constitutive, a fact Jean-Jacques Rousseau knew well and that Joseph-Pierre Proudhon put into a famous anarchist slogan. But if property is theft, its practical existence is always articulated through a hierarchy of rights and obligations that is much more complex than the term "dispossession" suggests. Karl Marx's theory of "primitive accumulation" illustrates the point. Jordana Rosenberg and Chi-ming Yang gloss this process as one in which enclosure "creates private property out of commonly held resources and land; in the process, it generates a rootless population 'free' to sell itself into wage labor."[4] If in the first instance, enclosure disrupts certain forms of common access to resources, it is not dispossession itself but the *creation* of new forms of possession—in this instance *labor-power*—that provide capitalism with its accumulative motor. Whereas in serf and slave societies the laborer's employment is bound up with his body, owned by the master in connection with other instruments of production, capitalism recognizes

[4] Jordana Rosenberg and Chi-ming Yang, "Introduction: the Dispossessed Eighteenth Century," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 55.2-3 (2014), 138.

the worker's labor as a discrete possession of her own that can be contracted for in the market.[5] If dispossession is a condition of the proletariat, it is the invention of this new form of possession that characterizes it as a class.

But labor is not the only form of possession that enables the transfer of resources away from its possessor. From the farming plots of the sharecropper to the worker-owned automobiles of the "sharing economy," capital is adept at turning the possessions of the dispossessed to its advantage. This chapter advances the category of "bare possession" as a rubric of global capital accumulation, one that became visible in early nineteenth-century British political theory and literary culture. By bare possession, I refer to forms of occupation or title that afford their holder an (always historically determined) level of subsistence while transferring an economic benefit to another. Bare possession is what you have that keeps you alive (more or less) while facilitating the abstraction of a surplus for someone else. Although it too belongs within the conceptual nexus of biopolitics, bare possession is not "bare life," Giorgio Agamben's term for those at the margin of animal and political life (prisoners, slaves, refugees…) whose exposure to legal violence grounds the legitimacy of sovereign power.[6] While such forms of biopolitical subjection are obviously involved in liberal imperialism, they are not the mode through which liberalism itself seeks to understand and implement political order. To refer again to Schmitt: if liberalism is a politics that wants to abdicate the sovereign decision to kill (which it seeks, always

[5] This is the freedom "in the double sense" that Marx describes in his chapter on "the Buying and Selling of Labor-Power": labor-power arises as a freely-held possession only to the extent that its possessor is "free" of any other property that might guarantee her survival. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fawkes, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1991), 272.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

provisionally, to replace with economic rationality), the locus through which liberalism thinks sovereignty is not *death* but *need*.[7] The procedures of liberal empire apply political economy toward maintaining the necessities at life at what Ricardo calls their "natural" or subsistence level, so that the obtaining of needs occasions the abstraction of surplus value. Bare possession is the object of such need: thus, for instance, the bare possession of labor power affords the worker "the quantity of food, necessaries, and conveniences become essential to him from habit,"[8] while his labor produces a benefit to its new purchaser.

There are many mechanisms of bare possession: proletarian labor is one; debt-bondage is another. But it was the theory of rent, as applied to agricultural land by the writers of political economy, that established a systematic logic of bare possession that would become essential to the organization of liberal imperialism in the nineteenth century. My focus here will be on reforms to East India Company rule in preparation for the loss of its trading Charter in 1833. As the Company transformed itself from a trading association to a tax collector, it adjusted peasant land-tenure rights to ensure the maximal extraction of rents. In its earlier reforms had sought to introduce a "rule of property" in Bengal, handing land titles to a new class of semi-feudal owners and dispossessing large portions of the population in the process. If these reforms illustrated Proudhon's dictum that "property is theft," the Company's early nineteenth-century reforms employed political economy to balance a "natural" return to Indian peasants with maximum surpluses to the Company. The development of the theory of rent is closely tied to this context.

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[7] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially 16-33 and 53-66.

[8] David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation. The Works and correspondence of David Ricardo.* Ed. Piero Sfraffa. Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 93.

Robert Thomas Malthus' writings on rent were composed during his appointment as chair of political economy at the East India Company's College at Haileybury; David Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* was written at the prompting of James Mill as he wrote the *History of British India;* it was under Mill's influence in his later appointment as the East India Company examiner that Ricardo's rent doctrine would be applied to Indian revenue reforms. In what follows I examine how two writers, Mill and Walter scott, arrived at an understanding of landed property as a bare possession which in turn demanded a new conceptualization of writing itself. Mill's *History of British India* (1818) and Scott's late novel *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827) eschew the "fictions of property" established by enlightenment political philosophy: they present the value of land not in terms of the improving actions of its mythic original possessors, but through the historical production of new forms of occupation and scarcity.

Bare Possession and Historical Method

As the official Examiner of East India correspondence, James Mill is an obvious source for any account of the Company's early nineteenth-century transformation. Walter Scott is less so. Scott's trademark figuration of national sovereignty through narratives of restored property rights aligns him with the natural law tradition in ways that make him seem an odd fit for the sort of argument I want to make here. For what the Waverley Novels narrate again and again is the sentimental solution to dispossession by the speculative restoration of property. In *Rob Roy,* for instance, the overarching plot of Frank's restoration of Osbaldistone Hall is threaded through a narrative of political upheaval in the "over-peopled" Scottish Highlands, a landscape of material

scarcity whose capacity to sustain the lives of its possessors (and thus, as Mr. Jarvie tells Frank, to prevent political revolution) depends on the credit of Frank's father's merchant company in London.[9] The novel's speculative grounding of legitimate property is thus articulated through a global regime of financial imperialism on the one hand and mass poverty on the other. But if *Rob Roy* is typical of the Waverley Novels in containing the problem of scarcity in a narrative of property restoration, *The Chronicles of the Canongate* represents an important departure. In this chapter I follow critics such as Ian Duncan and Alex Dick who have seen in *The Chronicles of the Canongate* a turn away from the formal principles of his prior fiction, inaugurating a new stylistic and thematic pessimism that Duncan calls "late Scott."[10] In this novel, Scott abandons the framework of speculative legitimacy that had ordered both his literary productions and his authorial identity: especially in its concluding tale "The Surgeon's Daughter," the only work of Scott's set in India, he imagines bare possession as a principle of narrative order and literary authority. This move, in turn, offers a productive point of comparison with Mill's *History of British India*, which re-imagines colonial authority through the minimal possessions of the colonized subject.

Reading Mill and Scott together lets us see how a declining salience of natural law as a groundwork of imperial legitimacy demanded new genres of historical writing. Both Mill and Scott seek narrative forms of cultural comparison and global comprehension that begin not from

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[9] Walter Scott, *Rob Roy,* ed. Ian Duncan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 237.

[10] Ian Duncan, "Late Scott," *The Edinburgh Companion to Walter Scott*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2011), 130-142; Alex Dick, "Walter Scott and the Financial Crash of 1825: Fiction, Speculation, and the Standard of Value," *Romanticism, Forgery, and the Credit Crunch* (Romantic Circles Praxis Series, 2012), https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/forgery/HTML/praxis.2011.dick.html.

the nobility of property as an ideological construct, but from the gradations between ownership and possession that enable the extraction of economic surplus. Mill and Scott suggest that genres of enlightenment history are indebted to a moribund notion of property tied to a mistaken conception of value. While both authors preserve to a degree the "universalism" of the conjectural history they imbibed from the Scottish Enlightenment (both men studied under Dugald Stewart at the University of Edinburgh), their depiction of a progressive historical drift to higher forms of civilization is inflected by a comprehension of imperialism's geographical dissemination of material scarcity, which is itself the condition of a new "universal" and globalized theory of value. The form of globalization introduced in these writings is not one that advocates the dissemination of cosmopolitan values or promotes an ethic of "global hospitality";[11] nor is it one that threatens conservative notions of "tradition" by homogenizing national cultures, through the logic of commodity exchange. Rather, what is "global" here is expansion of a political-economic logic in which the creation of value depends on limiting access to the material means of communal life. This is a different conception of universal history than the one we associate with the Scottish enlightenment, and it significantly affects the metaphors Scott and Mill use to reflect on the practice of history.

Consider the sounding universalist moment in the preface of *The History of British India,* when Mill announces that intimate familiarity of Hindu traditions and customs is totally unnecessary to writing India's history, for the product of such knowledge would be inevitably inferior than that derived from the "universal principles" of the judging historian. Mill's lack of

[11] Evan Gottlieb proposes an exculpatory reading of this kind of globalization as one of the key commitments of a "Romantic globalism." *Romantic Globalism: British Literature and Modern World Order, 1750-1830* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014).

interest in the lived specificity of Indian life exemplifies the "liberal exclusion" Uday Sing Mehta has described as central to the imperialist project to impose Western standards of knowledge on the East.[12] Already in *The Chronicle of the Canongate,* Scott parodies Mill's prejudicial universalism when the narrator's friend, the dryly analytical lawyer Mr. Fairscribe, suggests that a lack of acquaintance with Indian customs is no impediment to writing an Indian tale: "You will tell us about them all the better that you know nothing of what you are saying."[13] But aside from Mill's racial prejudices, his preface's account of the judging historian also demands to be read within the book's wider argument about the bad sense of East India Company policy: introducing a book that will attack the mercantilist economics of a treasure-seeking Company in favor of a capitalist empire of industrial wealth, Mill opposes a treasure-seeking historiography to one premised in a modernized division of labor. Repeatedly in the preface, Mill censures a notion of history as collecting and hording: "a life, in any great degree devoted to the collecting of facts by the senses and the acquiring of tongues, is … incompatible with the acquisition of that knowledge, and those powers of mind, which are most conductive to

[12] For a detailed discussion of the "liberal exclusion [that] can be viewed as intrinsic to liberalism and in which exclusionary practices become endemic" (49) see Uday Sigh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[13] Walter Scott, *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 155. Mill's *History* was not among the books in Scott's library, and there is no evidence that he ever read it. But Scott very likely had at least a passing acquaintance with the book and its methods from his many friends in the Company service, as well as from the many reviews of *The History* in journals he subscribed to. That Scott has Mill in mind is strongly suggested by the way Croftangry's dialogue with Mr. Fairscribe echoes an *Edinburgh Review* article of 1818 (reviewer: "There is one objection against Mr. Mill, that he anticipates, and against which he reasons in a matter to us very satisfactory. He has never been to India."; Croftangry: "the only objection is, I have never been there"). *The Edinburgh Review; or Critical Journal* 61 (Dec. 1818), 3-4.

a masterly treatment of evidence" (xviii). Mill's critique of the fawning orientalism of William Jones & co. is aimed not simply at their excessive extra-European sympathy, but at the economic system underlying the "habits" of the orientalist historian, who spends his days "*treasuring up*, by means of perception and the languages, the greatest portion of knowledge in regard to India." These habits of accretion rather than digestion – of "mere observing" – are for Mill "almost as different as any mental habits can be, from the powers of combination, discrimination, classification, judgment, comparison, weighing, inferring, inducting, philosophizing in short; which are the powers of the most importance for extracting the precious ore from the great mine of rude historical materials" (xiv).

The contest of metaphors between a piratical "treasuring up" and a judicious extraction of value elaborates, at the level of rhetoric, what we might call a labor theory of historiographic method. The writing of history, like the "extraction [of] precious ore" depends fundamentally upon labor. And, as Mill emphasized throughout his life and writings, labor is pain—something we have recourse to only when necessary to our survival. Which is to say that Mill's preface offers more than an argument for Western epistemologies at the expense of Eastern ones: its case for a European historiographic hegemony is coded through a political economy of bare possession—which is, as we shall see, key to the administrative reforms demanded by his *History* itself.

The History of British India and *The Chronicles of the Canongate* present two distinct but related visions of how the universality of bare possession changes the conditions of historical knowledge. Criticism on both texts has emphasized their shared concern to establish transnational modes of cultural comparison: Balachandra Rajan notes that Mill's invention of the category "British India" establishes the conditions of a "judgmental history," whereas readers of

The Chronicles such as Dick and Padma Rangarajan have noted that the novel's interimperial narrative as "provides a standard of comparison through which various cultures can be measured against each other."[14] My point is that the formal and narrative deployment of such universalist standards was not simply the ideological imposition of Western forms of historical thought, but rather stemmed from both writers' perception of empire as a structure in which the extraction of wealth requires the establishment of subsistence-level communities of labor. Indeed, in drawing their conclusions, both Mill and Scott present their own authorial labor as shaped within a subsistence regime of value. John Stuart Mill liked to talk about how his family's meager income during the twelve-year composition of *The History of British India* was derived wholly from the many review articles feverishly written by his father.[15] And Mill certainly offers his own laborious life as proof of his chops as an historian:

> the whole of my life, which I may, without scruple, pronounce a laborious one, has been devoted to the acquisition of those qualifications; and I am not unwilling to confess, that I deemed it probable I should be found to possess them in a greater degree than those, no part of whose life, or a very small part, had been applied to the acquisition of them. (*xix-xx*)

I want to take Mill's rhetoric of labor in its fullest implication here: the "possession" of the historian's qualification is valuable precisely insofar as it is his sole means (or one of few) of

[14] Dick, "Walter Scott and the Financial Crash of 1825," 27. See Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* (Durham and London, 1999), 90, and Padma Rangarajan, History's Rank Stew: Walter Scott, James Mill, and the Politics of Time, *Romanticism* 21.1 (2015): 59-71.

[15] Alexander Bains notes the assertion and doubts its credibility, "wonderful though [his exertions] were." Bains' point is not that the Mills were richer than they pretended, but that the tiny income from James Mill's review and magazine work could not possibly have sustained them. *James Mill: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1882), 163.

subsisting. It is a bare possession. Likewise, Scott wrote *The Chronicles of the Canongate* during a close brush with bankruptcy that profoundly rattled his sense of his literary property. But if Mill sees the habits of the laborer as the condition of universalist historical perception, we will see in what follows that his model for historical representation is not labor but the state. In the following section I will show how the reformist program of *The History of British India* is based upon a conjunction of political representation and the land-rent appropriated as company revenue. What this model of colonial reform overlooks is that colonialism lacks the structure of political representation that this system would enable. In the final section, I will show how Scott's *Chronicle of the Canongate*'s parodic reworking of Mill's universalist historiography makes this non-representational condition of coloniality a formal element of a fiction of bare possession. By beginning with Mill, however, we will gain a sense of how the imperial world transformed from a "rule of property" to an administration of bare possession.

RENT AND REPRESENTATION IN *THE HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA*

Although Mill had little nice to say about Hindu traditions, there was one field of statecraft he felt they got right. In the chapter on taxation in his *History of British India* (1817) – the book destined to become "the official textbook of the East India Company's college at Haileybury"[16] that both solidified Mill's reputation as a historian and guaranteed his rise through

[16] Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's* History of British India *and Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 128.

the Company ranks – he uncharacteristically praises ancient Hindu law for what was long considered a central feature of Oriental despotism: the sovereign ownership of the land.

> the Hindu mode of raising the revenue of the state, wholly, or almost wholly, by taking as much as necessary of the rent of the land, while it is the obvious expedient which first presents itself to the rudest minds, has no inconsiderable recommendation from science itself (195).

Footnoting David Ricardo as the purveyor of recent economic science, Mill's argument is that by appropriating all lands under the state, Hindu society had managed to avoid the rise of a parasitic aristocracy. Heavily qualified as it is, Mill's defense of Hindu modes of taxation is surprising in a book famous for "the marked lack of sympathy for every aspect of Hindu civilization."[17] What Mill likes about Hindu despotism – what he takes from it as a key component for his own recommendations of colonial reform – is a common-sense distinction between state ownership and peasant possession of land as the condition for the "revenue of the state." Recent interpretations of Mill's writings on empire emphasized the blinkered Eurocentric chauvinism of his espoused preference for "universal principles" over tenets of tradition. Javed Majeed's important *Ungoverned Imaginings* offers a somewhat more complex account of Mill's politics, identifying the ideological target of *The History of British India* not as the culture the colonized but rather the aristocratic prejudices hindering British reform—an account that gains credence in the above description of a "rude" and barbarous nation that nonetheless devised scientifically valid principles of taxation, which have apparently been subverted by the "superior" British

[17] Duncan Forbes, "James Mill and India," *The Cambridge Journal* 5.2 (1951), 25.

occupiers. While it may be that Majeed "overstates his case,"[18] his account usefully suggests that the East India Company's romantic-era reformation cannot be summed up by new cultural attitude alone; indeed, the devastating implications of Mill's European supremacism only become clear in the context of his calls for political economic reform.

I would like to consider how this dimension of Mill's work emerges from a ecological and economic preoccupation with the subsistence of the colonial state. In modeling the new Company-State on a half-mythologized ancient Hindu despotism, Mill's *History of British India* fantasizes a colonial space devoid of the limits to accumulation that characterized the center of the empire. Whereas postcolonial readings of Mill have largely emphasized the exclusionary character of his thought, Mill's historical methodology was not simply a reflection of his philosophical or ideological positions; these positions themselves are articulated through a perception of a global economy in which the bare subsistence of laboring populations is viewed as the basis of value. It is this view of the ecology of global empire that leads Mill to focus so insistently on the role of landed property to colonial sovereignty through the conjoined mechanisms of *representation* and *taxation*: rather representing the state on the model of the estate (like the Whig historian), he attempts to understand political formation through its material links to the soil, tracking the subsistence of the state through the channels of taxation. My argument will be that Mill's theory of property represents a turn away from the philosophy of improvement that had grounded the liberal critique of empire in the late eighteenth-century; in its place, he proposes a Ricardianized Oriental despotism. The organ of this transformation is the

[18] Padma Rangarajan, "History's Rank Stew: Walter Scott, James Mill, and the Politics of Time, *Romanticism* 21.1 (2015): 67.

new Company State, reconceived such that its function ceases to be merely the "protection of property" and becomes instead the universal landlord of colonial territory.

Mill's *History* is uniquely suited to consider the relation of property and dispossession, because it takes as its target a dispossessive paradigm of Company governance. Mill's denunciation of the East India Company's Indophilic administration found its legislative equivalent in his attack on the Act of Permanent Settlement, instituted by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 in an attempt to stabilize Indian property in accordance with ancient Hindu customs. The Act of Permanent Settlement was the culmination of the first major phase of British rule in India inaugurated by Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After assuming territorial governance of Bengal, the Company undertook a series of experiments with local property law that were as sweeping as they were haphazard. After the disaster of the Bengal Famine in 1770, Warren Hasting's administration determined that the only accurate way to measure the real value of the lands upon which the Company planned to levy its taxes would be to publicly auction estates on short-term leases. The ensuing land boom succeeded in turning Bengali's agricultural districts into means of enrichment for speculating revenue farmers, but because the latter had no interest in improving the lands, this "farming system" devastated rural lands and populations while utterly failing to generate the revenue expected by Company administrators.[19] In opposition to Hastings' system, his great antagonist (and his opposite in an infamous duel fought at Fort Williams) Sir Phillip Francis proposed an alternative program rooted in physiocratic theory. Francis' plan aimed to stabilize property and incentivize agricultural improvement by

[19] Robert Travers, "'The Real Value of the Lands': The *Nawabs*, the British, and the Land Tax in Eighteenth-Century Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 38.3 (2004), 517-558.

granting permanent ownership among Bengali zemindars (whom he deemed the "original proprietors of the soil"), at the same time curbing exploitation by fixing in perpetuity the tax rate to be collected on zemindar rents. Francis' plan laid the groundwork for what would eventually become Lord Cornwallis' Act of Permanent Settlement in 1793, which codified zemindar ownership and fixed the rent of their estates. While purportedly aimed at curbing the mass peasant dispossession of the Hastings years, The Permanent Settlement effectively transferred the country's agricultural land from local village structures to native elites sympathetic to Company interests. As Siraj Ahmed argues, the "fixing" of colonial property may have failed to make them more productive, but it nevertheless increased their worth as short-term collateral for the Company's ongoing debt-funded wars throughout the subcontinent, thus facilitating processes of dispossession even further.[20]

For all these reasons, the Permanent settlement has played an outsized role in histories of imperial accumulation and dispossession in British India. Although the economic and political effects of the Permanent settlement were wide-ranging, however, its influence as ideology and governmental strategy was short-lived. Almost immediately after its passage critics pointed to the disastrous effects of seeking to establish a "feudal system in India." And while the Bengal settlement was renewed following its first ten-year term in 1804, it was widely recognized as a failure and the Zemindari system was not extended into other Company territories by any succeeding administration. Instead officials such as Thomas Munro and Thomas Elphinstone opted for the "ryotwari system" in which proprietary rights were granted directly to small

[20] Siraj Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 186.

peasant proprietors ("ryots"), a program of mass re-possession that explicitly challenged the dispossessive regime of permanent settlement. While, Company officials produced the ryotwari, it was James Mill who provided its most influential justification. Mill's *History of British India* not only offers a rigorous critique of the dispossessive rule of property that was the Permanent settlement; it also establishes the theoretical and cultural logic of bare possession that ought to ground subsequent British rule in the subcontinent and beyond.

In his proto-subaltern studies account of the Permanent Settlement *A Rule of Property for Bengal,* Ranajit Guha emphasizes the physiocratic philosophy underpinning the law's framers, who rested the profitable administration of Bengal in a faith in the improving tendencies of secure landed property.[21] Lord Cornwallis defended the permanent settlement by invoking physiocratic common-sense: "where the landlord has a permanent property in the soil, it will be worth his while to encourage his tenant, who holds his farm in lease, to improve that property."[22] Mill's gloss on this belief in property's naturally improving tendency is caustic: "If the aristocracy was provided for, it appears to have been thought, as by English aristocrats it is apt to be thought, that every thing else would provide for itself" (3.273). Describing the permanent settlement as a catastrophe of "aristocratical prejudice," he categorically denies the claim that the zemindars were the genuine proprietors of the soil: they were in fact a class of hereditary tax collectors of the various districts of the Moghal empire. But the Company had viewed "Indian affairs with English eyes" and mistaken zemindars' collection of rents as indicating proprietary

[21] Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

[22] Quoted in Mill, *History of British India*, 3.295.

rights equivalent with the English gentry.[23] As for the peasants, the various entitlements and methods of collection across Bengal were too various to justify the trouble of a full assessment of their holdings: "The ryots were, therefore, handed over to the zemindars in gross. The zemindars were empowered to make with their ryots any settlements which they chose, under a mere general recommendation to be guided by the custom of the place" (273). The single provision made for ryots—the possessions and rents settled by the zemindar would be registered and made permanent—in fact made them incredibly vulnerable since the only way for them to raise rents on their land would be ruination or eviction: the zemindar's interest became, not the improvement, but the "ruin [of the] the ryot; that he may eject him from his right of occupancy, and put in some one else, on a raised rent; which will often be his interest, as the country thrives, and labour gets cheap."[24] Finally, because the Company dealt summarily with zemindars who fell behind in revenue payments while obliging zemindars to settle with their tenants through lengthy court procedures, the permanent settlement decimated the very class it sought to protect, "in the course of a few years, reduc[ing] most of the great zemindars in Bengal, to distress and beggary"—a turn that of course only redoubled the distress of Bengali peasants.

Mill's quarrel with Company orientalists was fought as much on the ground of their physiocratic political theory as that of their ethnic sympathies. Mill had already established himself as an opponent of physiocracy in his attack on William Spence in *Commerce*

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[23] Mill quotes from William Thackeray, *Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company* (House of Commons, 1812), 990; quoted in Mill, *History of British India* 3.295.

[24] Thackeray, *Fifth Report*, 990; quoted in Mill, *History of British India* 3.295.

Defended.[25] In *The History of British India,* his attack on physiocracy implies a reimagining of the conjectural history of property. Against the arguments of the orientalists, Mill's disquisition into the "real owners of the soil" turns not to empirical evidence (something his universal history has little use for), but to a conjectural history of property forms. In some ways, this history is familiar. In the early stages of society land is originally held in common; with the growth of mass agriculture, it becomes convenient to invent more permanent forms of property, providing owners an incentive to improve their lands. Because only certain members become property-owners in this arrangement, it becomes necessary to compensate the dispossessed: the solution that "appears to have been the most generally successful," Mill claims, "is to vest the sovereign, as the representative of society, with that property in the land which belongs to the society; and he parcels it out to individuals, with that permanence, and those of other powers of ownership, which are regarded as most favourable to the extraction from the land of those benefits which it is calculated to yield" (1.180). The sovereign ownership of the soil is thus an "expedient" suggested by the demands of the dispossessed.

Yet if this version of the emergence of property sounds a lot like common eighteenth-century accounts of sovereignty as rooted natural law, Mill is careful to distinguish his version of property's genesis. For Mill, there is nothing *natural* about property, whose existence in all stages and places is no more than a *fiction*. Mill repeatedly emphasizes the fictive quality of property rights:

[25] James Mill, *Commerce Defended: an Answer to the Arguments by which Mr Spence, Mr. Cobbett, and Others have Attempted to Prove that Commerce is not a Source of National Wealth*, (London: C. & R. Baldwin, 1808).

> if we examine the history of the different stages of society, we shall find, that at different times, very different rights and advantages are included under the idea of property … It is hardly necessary to add, that the different combinations of benefits which are included under the idea of property … are all *equally factitious: that they are all equally arbitrary; not the creation of nature, but the creatures of the will;* determined, and chosen by the society, as that arrangement with regard to useful objects which is, *or is pretended to be,* the best for all. (1.179)

Mill's assertion of the fictional basis of property is not stated in the mode of critique—its unreality is not an argument for its abolition. Indeed, it is of the utmost utility for land to be divided between individuals. But Mill does reserve special condemnation for those whose "affection" for property leads them to mistake their own entitlements to be rooted in nature rather than political convenience. The claim for the "natural" privileges of property, he tells us, have nothing to do with the wealth-generating capacity of the soil, but are simply the fabrication of aristocratic privilege and ignorance:

> In a state of society *resembling our own*, in which property is secure, and involves very extensive rights or privileges, the *affections towards it become so strong*, and these give such a force to the associations, by which the idea of it in our minds is compacted and formed, that in minds of little range whose habits are almost mechanical, and obstinate, the particulars which they have been accustomed to combine together under the idea of property, *appear to be connected by nature*; and such as cannot, without extreme injustice, be made to exist apart.

Here we see how Mill's attack on the Permanent settlement as the imposition of a "feudal system in India" overlaps with a critique of natural law as a fiction of a small-minded English provincialism. The problem with aristocracy for Mill is not simply a misguided attachment to burdensome traditions. It is rooted in a fiction of property in which the natural powers of the soil legitimate an aristocratic pretension to paternalistic ownership of common resources.

If, on the one hand, Mill dismisses this as a fiction, it is not to argue instead for a sharing of the land but rather to assert sovereign ownership as a *better* fiction. It is only by virtue of its status as "representative of the people" that the state lays claim to territorial ownership. (Indeed, to this extent Mill regards Europe as a glaring departure from rational universal principles of governance, citing the privatization of land by noble elites as an aberration specific to "gothic nations.") Even in asserting the sovereign's claim as the "real owner of the soil," Mill gives this "reality" the status of a regulative fiction: "From these facts only one conclusion can be drawn, that the property of the soil resided in the sovereign, for this reason, that if it did not reside in him, it will be impossible to show to whom it belonged." (1.186).

The fiction of sovereign ownership is the basis of Mill's claim for the "scientific" nature of Hindu taxation, and it legitimates his call in turn for East India Company's expanded taxation of Indian subjects under the ryotwari settlement. It is here too that Mill's distinction from previous framers of ryotwari settlement becomes clear. As Eric Stokes explains in his influential *The English Utilitarians and India,* Munro and Elphinstone's argument for ryotwari possession extended from a "romantic" sentimentality that shared with the likes of Wordsworth a belief in the simple nobility of peasant-cultivators. In expanding the possessions of ryots they were driven by what they described as their excessive taxation, and they adapted a flexible rule of collection (which was much abused in practice).[26] Mill of course shares none of this romantic sentiment; and rather than arguing for the alleviation of ryots' tax burden, finds in both Hindu law and Ricardian theory the scientific basis for a much more extensive taxation. What Mill likes about

[26] Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10-15.

Hindu law is less about those who own it than those who possess it: despotic ownership sustains the state by organizing a structure of possession that maximizes the extraction of rent. The possessive rights of the ryots extend no further than the realization of their labor: "[T]he cultivators were left a bare compensation, often not so much as a bare compensation, for the labor and cost of cultivation: they got the benefit of their labor: all the benefit of the land went to the king." For Mill, only the acknowledgement and enforcement of the state's (fictional) ownership of the land can establish the right system of compensations necessary to sustain the Company's colonial rule. This is, indeed, the scientific kernel of Hindu taxation that is shared by Ricardian economics, in which the "benefit of labor" continually approach a "bare compensation," a vital minimum ensuring an optimal ratio of population to capital. By pairing Ricardo with Manu, the excessive depredations of oriental government can be tempered and this bare compensation can be guaranteed to the land's possessors. For Mill, then, the goal of ryotwari settlement is not to re-establish the romanticized autonomy of noble peasant-cultivators, but to redraw the lines between ownership and the possession in order to maximize the efficiency of colonial land.

In a sense, Mill's claim for the fiction of sovereign ownership relies on an ecological argument: in addressing both the philosophical vacuity and political injustice of the Permanent Settlement, his overwhelming concern is to re-establish the metabolism of the state, its support in and of the materiality of its territory. Having identified India to have "never been anything but a burden," he seeks a way to fund Company rule without eviscerating its land and subject population.[27] His critique of zemindari ownership is at its core a critique of the Whig doctrine of

[27] Mill's 1810 essay "Affairs of India," published in the *Edinburgh Review* during the composition of *The History of British India,* explains his commitment to English rule in India

improvement: discarding the myth of the benign country gentleman whose demand for rent spurs the ever-increasing improvement of the country, Mill instead avers the implacable laws of population. In the previous chapter we saw that the fundamental novelty of Ricardo's theory of rent lay in a new awareness that the production of value presupposes the gradual deterioration of the land. For Mill, the Ricardian proof of what Foucault calls the "avarice of land" annuls not only the politics of aristocratic improvement, but also the romantic utopia of small peasant-holding which was the ideological kernel of the Company's first forays with ryotwari settlement: if improvement is another word for dispossession, that the restoration of land likewise fails to overcome the inexorable dynamics of population and rent. Mill's thoughts on India can be gleaned from his comments on ancient Rome in his essay on "Colony" for the supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: there, he comments on the foolishness of Rome's colonized subjects in demanding land of their own:

> the pity is, that they understood so little what was for their advantage. If, instead of demanding a portion of land, the benefit of which, at best, was only temporary, they had demanded good laws, and had obtained efficient securities for good government, securities against that prevalence of the interests of the few over the interests of the many which existed to so great an extent in the Roman government, as it has existed and still does exist in almost all other governments, they would have done themselves, and they would have done the human race, the greatest of all possible services.

(despite the necessary economic drain of colonization) on the grounds of the government's duty to protect the population: "If we wish for the prolongation of an English government in India, which we do most sincerely, it is for the sake of the natives, not of England. India has never been anything but a burden, and any thing but a burden, I am afraid, it cannot be rendered. But this English government in India, with all its vices, is a blessing unspeakable to the population of Hindustan." Quoted in Pitts, 106. Mill's claim here that India cannot be made to pay for the Company precedes his engagement with Ricardian theory, specifically the doctrine of rent he believed could be used to right the Company budget.

Possession is not the antidote to dispossession. Instead, the benefits of land—it's magical quality of producing more than what is required for the subsistence of those who work it—can only be turned to the advantage of "the many" by "good laws" that prevents its monopolization by "the few." Representative government alone is capable of preventing landlordism's parasitic consumption of the rent of a territory: in turn, by legitimating the taxation of the total land-rent, the fiction of state ownership could provide the material sustenance of necessary for representative government.

A funny argument to transpose to Britain's colonial territories in India, which of course had no use for "representation" of their subjects. Neither does Mill's *History*, whose salvaging of Hindu principles of taxation in the service of Company rule is based less on a prescription for representative government (India is apparently unworthy of it) than on a contrast between oriental despotism and feudal oligarchy. When rent is divided between the state and private individuals, says Mill, the order should be state first, individuals second: "The disposition, accordingly, which has been made of the benefits of the soil, over the greater part of the globe, has been first to supply … the demands of government, next to enrich the individual occupant." (1.196) Echoing Smith's account of Europe's perverse development, Mill blames the nations of modern Europe for disrupting the natural order of things by putting rent first into the hands of "the leading men," who succeeded in convincing Europe's sovereigns to leave the land untaxed—and thus introduced the original seed of the Act of Permanent Settlement. Discarding the enlightenment ideology of private property as the spring of value and political order, Mill instead models a despotic Company whose sustenance is rooted in the bare possession of peasant-proprietors. In his 1832 report to the Select Committee for reviewing the renewal of the Company's charter, Mill recommends assigning taxes for total rent of land (insofar as it could be

accurately determined).[28] In refashioning itself as the absolute landlord, the company state produces a capitalist utopia of total productivity. Marx writes that "the abolition of landed property in the Ricardian sense, that is its conversion into State property so that rent is paid to the State instead of the landlord, is the ideal, the heart's desire, which springs from the deepest, inmost essence of Capital."[29] Mill's "British India" is the imagined administrative space in which the pursuit of this ideal took form.

Of course, the payoff of ryotwari bare possession was not the productivist utopia of Ricardian dreams, but a continuation of the nightmare of debt-funded military expansion—with the important distinction, however, that obligation for Company debts were now effectively transferred to the possessors of Indian property. In 1834 the utilitarian reform of the Company was formalized with the expiration of its charter as a trading company and its transformation, as Mill had long advocated, into a strictly governmental body—with the important distinction that it maintained its obligation to pay dividends to its shareholders, which after the annulment of its commercial activities were by then almost entirely paid from its tax revenues. To refer again to Marx, now looking back to these reforms from the revolts of 1857-8: "The debt of the East India Company was, by a Parliamentary sleight of hand, changed into a debt of the Indian people."[30] Although the Company never raised taxes to quite the pitch Mill recommended (it proved too difficult and expensive to ascertain the various rents of Britain's vast territories with anything

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[28] "Observations on the Land Revenue in India," *Appendix to the Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons, on the Affairs of the East India Company, 16th August, 1832* (London: J. L. Cox and Son, 1833), 64-5.

[29] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 3 of 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 472.

[30] "The Approaching India Loan," *Dispatches for the New York* Tribune, Ed. James Ledbetter (New York: Penguin, 2007), 244.

like accuracy), they were much higher than the fixed rate established in the zemindar settlements (where, by the late 1820s, the Company was energetically pursuing a campaign of repossession, re-leasing foreclosed zemindar holdings to peasant families).[31] Mill's *History* undeniably had the effect of eliminating the Company's prior squeamishness about levying the high rents it required to fund its shareholders.[32] As the Company expanded its possessions northward from Bengal through the Gangetic Plains, high taxes, collected in cash rather than in kind, pushed peasants to rely increasingly on the credit of local moneylenders; this in turn enabled the Company to pressure them into producing cash crops for global markets rather than subsistence for their families and communities.[33] Local and regional structures of manufacture and exchange were disrupted and reoriented toward the cheap export of industrial raw materials and cash crops. The Company's sovereign ownership of the soil was thus a lynchpin in Britain's rise as the industrial center of its free-trade empire.

Despite Mill's claims that bare possession would restore the broken metabolism of the colonial state, the effect of his reforms was to facilitate what John Bellamy Foster and Mackenzie Wark call the "metabolic rift" of capitalism's global ecology. Ryotwari settlement facilitated the escape of the chemical and economic compounds of local diversity into the ether of an increasingly homogenous global system of production.[34] While it would be quite easy to

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[31] Mill, "Observations on the Land Revenue in India," 65.

[32] On this point see Stokes, 110.

[33] See Amitav Ghosh's masterful depiction of this process as a prelude to the Opium Wars in *Sea of Poppies* (New York: Picador, 2008).

[34] John Bellamy Foster, "Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature," *Monthly Review* 65.7 (2013); Mackenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London: Verso, 2015).

see this disparity between intension and effect as resulting from Mill's fundamental indifference to colonial subjects, it is also possible to locate it in a specific methodological failure. We saw earlier that in preparing the way to his *History*'s critique of mercantilist imperial policy, Mill's preface set out to correct a mercantilist orientation in the writing of colonial history, replacing the pursuit of historigraphic "treasures" with a productivist historicism rooted in the labor of the critical historian. But ultimately, Mill's model of cross-cultural comparison is not labor, but the rentier Company-State, for whom the possessions of its subjects are only a means to further territorial conquest and value-abstraction. To consider the historiographic ramifications of this this new global order of bare possession, it is not the writing of the utilitarian historian we should turn, but to the literary productions of an indentured writer. Walter Scott's 1827 *The Chronicles of the Canongate* gives us a glimpse into this world.

FROM "THE AUTHOR OF WAVERLEY" TO "WALTER SCOTT": BARE POSSESSION IN *CHRONICLES OF CANONGATE*

1826 opened sadly for Scott:

> January 1st. A year has passed, another has commenced. These solemn divisions of time influence our feelings as they recur. Yet there is nothing in it; for every day in the year closes a twelvemonth as well as the 31st of December. The latter is only a solemn pause, as when a guide, showing a wide and mountainous road, calls on a party to pause and look back on the scenes which they have just passed. To me this new year opens sadly. There are these troublesome pecuniary difficulties, which however, I think, this week should end. ... There is, besides, that ugly report of the 15th Hussars going to India. Walter, I suppose, will have some step in view, and will go, and I fear Jane will not dissuade him.[35]

[35] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott: From the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford*. Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890), 73.

Scott's reflections on the vacuity of such temporal measurements as New Year's Day recall James Chandler's influential reading of romanticism "as the period when the normative status of the period becomes a central and self-conscious aspect of historical reflection."[36] The journal entry both emblematizes and pressurizes the dynamics of historical nominalism which, Chandler argues, Scott made a hallmark of romantic fiction. Scott's conjuring the Highland guide rehearses one of the Author of Waverley's trademark tropes, in which the travels of an Edward Waverley or a Frank Osbaldistone through Scotland's inhospitable regions link unevenly distributed stages of national development within a single narrative form: the resulting cross-cultural and -historical comparisons reveal, as Scott put it in *Waverley*, the "passions common to men in all stages of society."[37] But the trope takes a peculiar turn in Scott's New Year's journal entry: for what is marked by the "solemn division of time" and the guide's rearward vision is not a stage of historical development moving inexorably and progressively toward commercial modernity, but the melancholy sense of time's passage itself. The contingency of time's measurement finds meaning, not as a marker of historical development (the guide and his party seem to learn little by their retrospective pause) but solely as a prompt to feeling. Unlike his imagined guide, Scott's own melancholy vision is forward rather than rearward facing, turned toward the opening year under the stress of the financial collapse of 1825 and his son's imminent trip to India. This was the beginning, as Claire Lamont notes, of "the most bitter period of Scott's

[36] James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 78.

[37] Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

life."[38] The novel that Scott wrote in response to these immediate circumstances, *The Chronicle of the Canongate*, registers a shift in his conception both of his own status as an author and of the form of historical fiction; a shift that modifies his novel's claims to represent and frame the common passions of men.

A few months later on May 12, 1826, Scott's publisher Robert Cadell received a letter explaining the intentions of "a certain person … the name a dead secret" to write "a small Eastern Tale." For Scott the intervening months had been hard. His wife's health had declined (Jane would die only three days later). His financial situation, far from resolving itself as he hoped, had turned for the worse. He had generously but perhaps unwisely paid to outfit his nephew to follow his son to India. More drastically, his publisher Archibald Constable & Co. (Cadell's firm) had gone bankrupt. So had James Ballantyne & Co., partly owned by Scott and the printer of most of his books. The result of these collapses was profound: proprietary rights to the Waverley Novels went to the creditors, and many of the author's personal assets had to be sold; he managed to hold onto his house at Abbotsford (deeply tied, financially and imaginatively, with his literary enterprises) by leasing his lands on behalf of his creditors. Scott narrowly avoided personal bankruptcy by giving up his title to all subsequent productions of "the Author of Waverley," at least until his debts were paid: from now on, the Waverley Novels were not the absolute property of Scott and his publisher but the securitized derivatives of their lenders, backed by the proceeds of his future writings. In his Journal, Scott recorded his plight through the metaphors of landed property that were so key to his novels. "I have walked my last

[38] Claire Lamont, "Essay on the Text," *Chronicles of the Canongate* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press), 291.

on the domains I have planted—sate the last time in the halls I have built." From proud planter Scott found himself turned indentured laborer, forced to write his way out of debt: "My own right hand shall do it."[39]

The first of these labors, the "small Eastern Tale" alluded to in Ballantyne's letter to Cadell, would become *The Chronicles of the Canongate* of 1827. In its subject matter and its form, this somewhat neglected work is perhaps the most cognizant of all of Scott's writings of the dispossessive conditions of the British Empire's global law of property. Whereas the Waverley Novels are famous for turning the memorialization of lost legitimacy into a technique of narrative resolution, *The Chronicles of the Canongate* turns away from this plot device and its faith in the restorative power of property (even of property lost): instead, it outlines a more resigned and less romantic social order premised in bare possession. This shifting view of property as a ground of moral sentiment can be traced to Scott's new conception of his authorial identity in the wake of his financial distress. Originally conceived as an anonymous two-volume work (a form, Scott initially hoped, that would enable him to keep the proceeds for himself rather than paying them to the new proprietors of past and future Waverley Novels), the final book was in fact a collection of three tales, two ("The Two Drovers" and "The Highland Widow") set in the borderlands and one ("The Surgeon's Daughter") between Scotland and India, threaded by the through-narrative of their fictional compiler (and Scott's authorial proxy) Chrystal Croftangry. It was also the first of Scott's novels to be published under his own name.[40] When, in

[39] Walter Scott, entry for January 22, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Edingburgh: David Douglas, 1981), 90.

[40] I refer to *Chronicles of the Canongate* as a novel rather than as a collection of tales to highlight the way this choice between generic tags was itself embroiled in the predicament of Scott's late fiction-making. Claire Lamont describes Scott's choice of the anonymous two-

the book's introduction, Scott compares his authorial persona to an unmasked harlequin, he makes it clear that the enigmatic allure of the "Author of Waverley" had always derived from the performance of disguise. For this reason, perhaps, readings of *The Chronicles of the Canongate* have had rather little to say about the thematic relevance of the name on the title page. But the influence of the condition of Scott's literary property on his authorial persona demands to be read in terms of the wider concerns of property and authority that run throughout his oeuvre.

On the one hand, Scott's claiming of his literary "paternity" in the Introduction has the superficial appearance of one of his novels' conclusions: the hero emerges from behind his mask and reclaim his ancestral property. On the other, Scott's claim to authorship hardly occurred under the triumphal conditions of restoration that characterize, say, Wilfred of Ivanhoe's restoration in *Ivanhoe* or Harry Bertram's return to Ellangowan in *Guy Mannering*. Rather, in putting his name to the Waverley Novels, Scott was not so much reclaiming his paternity as he was signing it away: his acknowledgement of authorial possession is a recognition of the claims of his creditors. As Scott admits, his step from behind the mask of anonymity—a "mask, like my Aunt Dinah's in Tristram Shandy, having begun to wax threadbare about the chin"—was necessitated by the transfer of his literary property: "the affairs of my publishers having unfortunately passed into the management different from their own, I had no right any longer to

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volume form to avoid mortgaging it along with his other works to his creditors: "That was the chief reason why *Chronicles of the Canongate*, a collection of tales, was described as a two-volume work from the outset (three volumes being usual for a novel)." (Lamont, Essay on the Text, 293). Ultimately, it became clear that without Scott's name, the book would hardly bring much profit anyway, and the scheme was abandoned. In preferring *novel*, I emphasize the way *Chronicles of the Canongate* draws its formal and thematic coherence from this legal-generic artifice, while also insisting on the continuity of the narrative that links the book's three principle tales.

rely upon secrecy from that quarter" (4). His signature must be read not as a mark of restoration, but of indenture—a possession held for the surplus of another.[41]

Scott's new conception of his authorial persona as a mode of bare possession is personified in the narrator of *The Chronicles of the Canongate*, Chrystal Croftangry, a Scottish landlord turned debt-prisoner turned professional man of letters. As John Gibson Lockhart notes in his *Narrative,* Croftangry's contrivance to take shelter from his creditors in the Holyroodhouse of Edinburgh's Canongate district was based on preparations Scott himself had made during this period but luckily avoided.[42] But if Croftangry thus refigures the biographical confluence of literary labor and financial indenture, readers have not always taken the novel's prompt to consider how this confluence is mapped in the tales themselves. What I hope to show in this section is that Scott's choice to explore this shifting conception of authorship as a form of bare possession through a narrative that positions Scotland within a nexus of global imperial reform is no accident: rather, Scott's shifting view of literary authority from the production of speculative

[41] Proper title and indenture are linked at the level of Scott's rhetoric, his assumption of authorial paternity entailing a responsibility for accumulated "debts": thus the majority of the introduction is spent listing the many sources and influences behind the Waverley Novels, which the exposed Scott declares himself now "bound to acknowledge" (4).

[42] Croftangry's account of his creditors certainly lacks the anti-Semitism with which Lockhart imbues Scott's: "He had, while toiling his life out for his creditors, received various threatenings of severe treatment from the London Jews formerly alluded to, Messrs. Abud & Co.; and, on at least one occasion, had made every preparation for taking shelter in the Sanctuary of Holyroodhouse. Although these people were well aware that at Christmas 1827 a very large dividend would be paid on the Ballantyne debt, they could not bring themselves to comprehend that their interest lay in allowing Scott the free use of his time; that by thwarting and harassing him personally nothing was likely to be achieved but the throwing up of the trust, and the settlement of the insolvent house's affairs on the usual terms of sequestration. The Jews would understand nothing, but that the very unanimity of the other creditors as to the propriety of being gentle with him rendered it likely that their own harshness might be rewarded by immediate payment of their whole demand." *Lockhart's Narrative of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (London: J.M Dent & Co., 1906), 554.

legitimacy to bare possession was only in keeping with a shifting locus of imperial sovereignty in India from commerce to land. If this seems to invert familiar accounts of modernization as a movement from away from landed property to commercial enterprise, it is because Scott is registering (as Mill had done) the central importance of British colonial possessions to the operation of capitalist production and exchange. While Scott's initial impulse to write an eastern tale suggests a desire to explore this imperial logic in an Indian setting, his eventual choice to embed this "The Surgeon's Daughter" within a much larger narrative set overwhelmingly in Scotland (but with its eye, in "The Highland Widow" and "The Two Drovers," on shifting boundaries with England and Americas as well) reveals his sense that the colonial situation could not be dealt with in isolation, but was rather one node of a complex network of bare possession and imperial rent.

Given Scott's attention to Indian affairs during this period and the novel's conceptual genesis as an eastern tale, it is intriguing to see Scott's situation in its structural similarity to those Indian peasants whose restored "paternity" to the land was granted only under the concomitant assumption of East India Company's debts. In both cases, ownership is itself configured as a modality of dispossession: the real owner of the soil and the real author of the Waverley Novels are subjects whose possessions guarantee no more, in Mill's words, than "bare compensation." Scott's journal's shift in authorial metaphor from proud planter to humble laborer chart a similar course to the transformation in Indian colonial governance from zemindari to ryotwari settlement, from an authority based on the "rule of property" to one of bare possession. My point is not that Scott identifies with colonial ryots (who feature nowhere in his writings) but rather that *The Chronicle of the Canongate*, in reflecting on the global conditions of Scott's own financial troubles, locates them through the same imperial transition (from property

to bare possession, from commerce to rent) that characterized the East India Company's contemporaneous reforms.

We have seen that India was prevalently represented during this period as a financial "burden" on England in the 1820s—a representation due in large part to Mill's *History* and other writings. It was during this period that, due again to the influence of Mill's policy recommendations, the Company succeeded in shifting both its mission and its revenue base from the import of colonial merchandise to the collection of territorial rents. While this transformation was not formally completed until the expiration of its charter in 1833, the collapse of the global financial markets in 1825 rattled public faith in commercial corporations' role as a as a public trust. It is thus telling that in 1826, for the first time, the Company did not import a single commodity from India to England.[43] Scott's depiction of his authorship follows a similar turn from commercial to rentership sovereignty. I noted earlier that authorship in Scott is often figuratively linked to monarchic sovereignty (his staging of King George's 1822 visit to Scotland)[44]: but it is just as often figured as a form of corporate personhood. Only one year before he began *The Chronicles of the Canongate,* his 1825 *The Betrothed* depicted the "Author of Waverley" not as an individual but as an incorporated joint-stock company: the Preface records the minutes of an unruly shareholders meeting whose members include Jonathan Oldbuck, Lawrence Templeton, and others from his legion of meta-fictional editors, while Scott

[43] Larry Neal, "The Financial Crisis of 1825 and the Restructuring of the British Financial System," *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 80.3 (1998), 58.

[44] See illuminating accounts by Duncan in *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: University of Princeton, 2008) 1-8 and Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 139-163.

assumes the spectral role of the "Eidolon … called to the chair." *The Betrothed*'s staging of "The Author of Waverley" as an corporate abstraction shows how much more is at stake in the figure than coy anonymity, playfully laying bare an author function that, like the Waverley Novels themselves, finds the speculative ground of national authority in the sentiments of commerce. *The Chronicles of the Canongate*'s regretful replacement of "The Author Waverley" for "Walter Scott" can be placed within a wider loss of confidence in commerce as a structure of social feeling, and a growing perception of political economy grounded not in the sentiments of property, but in the mass experience of bare subsistence as the condition of surplus wealth. I have argued that this turn was most dramatically evidenced in the reorganization of British imperial sovereignty in the years leading to 1833. This turn, I will now argue, is what Scott attempts to formalize in the interlinked narratives of *The Chronicles of the Canongate.*

Although Scott kept himself well apprised of problems of colonial governance during this period, the germinal eastern tale of *The Chronicles of the Canongate*, "The Surgeon's Daughter," does not deal directly with the agrarian reforms that were then changing the landscape of Britain's Indian territories. The tale's Indian episodes take place in a moment of colonial disorder and reform fifty-years since, during the very years of vitriolic debate between Hastings and Francis about the "real owners of the soil" and against the backdrop of inter-imperial war and usurpation.[45] It is possible to see in the tale's central love contest between Adam Hartley and

[45] "Our story took place at a period, when the Directors of the East India Company, with that hardy and persevering policy which has raised to such a height the British Empire in the East, had determined to send a large reinforcement of European troops to the support of their power in India, then threatened by the kingdom of Mysore, of which the celebrated Hyder Ali had usurped the government, after dethroning the master" (219). Lamont dates the action of the Indian scenes in the mid to late 1770s (449).

Richard Middlemas as dramatizing the Company's dispute over the ethical dimensions of two competing forms of landed property: Adam Hartley, the son of an English farmer, presents an even-tempered industriousness that contrasts sharply with the aristocratic pride of Richard Middlemas, the illegitimate son of a Northumbrian Jacobite. We have seen that these competing ideologies of property were at the core of the debate between advocates of zemindari and ryotwari possession. But in the "Surgeon's Daughter," the Indian setting is not so much the locus of debate over legitimate ownership as it is a space shaped by a widespread crisis of legitimacy in Britain, its global dominions, and beyond. When Richard fails to establish a legitimate claim to the wealth of his grandfather Mathias de Monçada, he finds in India a substitute for legitimate riches: "India must be my back-play" (243). Imagining India as a solution to delegitimation, Richard follows a course already traversed by his father, who we learn had enlisted with the East India Company under an assumed name to avoid persecution for his support of the "pretender" Charles Edward.[46]

If, on the one hand, India is presented rather conventionally as an exotic stage of illicit wealth, on the other hand Scott codes this space through a multilayered plot of illegitimacy and exile whose origins are not strictly Asian but global in character. This Orient is not the Saidian

[46] Even the Monçada fortune Middlemas fails to secure is linked to India as a topos of exile and illegitimacy. We are told little of the nature of this fortune other than that Monçada is "a Portuguese Jew of great wealth settled in London, in prosecution of his commerce" (238); but the combination of his vast wealth, combined with his relatively recent arrival in London makes it likely that he is a diamond merchant who has arrived from Madras, where many Sephardic Jews had taken up business in the diamond trade after the Portuguese Inquisition pushed them out of Goa in the mid-seventeenth century. In this light, Richard's jealous apostrophizing when he hears of Hartley's intentions to serve as a surgeon's mate in India—"Oh Delhi! oh, Golconda!" (198)—somewhat ironically codes as exotic the domestic inheritance he feels rightly should be his.

cipher for European difference that inevitably reaffirms the cultural supremacy of the West; instead, it is a space shaped by the breakdown of two dominant Western ideologies, aristocratic property and yeomanly industry. "The Surgeon's Daughter" conspicuously declines to repair this breakdown. The love contest arrives at its ludicrous conclusion when Richard is trampled by Haider Ali's elephant, Adam having thwarted Richard's scheme to smuggle his adoring Menie Grey into Tipu Sultan's harem. Rather than marrying Adam, Menie chooses instead to live out her days in her native Scottish village. When, two years later, he contracts a fever and dies working as a surgeon in Mysore, he bequeaths her a modest legacy, part of which (we have learned at the tale's outset) has passed to Fairscribe, who in turn has used it to rescue Croftangry from debt sanctuary: thus *The Chronicle of the Canongate* is itself funded by an interrupted lineage stemming from a disintegration of imperial property. This puts a rather different spin on Scott's well-known description of India as a "Corn Chest for Scotland, where we poor gentry must send our younger Sons as we send our black cattle to the south." In "The Surgeon's Daughter" colonial treasures offer no repair to Scottish property; on the contrary, what Croftangry's muse discovers in India is the conquest and usurpation that is the original essence of property.

If, in Fiona Robertson's words, "The Waverley Novels are literally stories of restored legitimacy,"[47] *The Chronicles of the Canongate* clearly represents a diversion in form. While its concluding Eastern Tale is the novel's most dramatic rendition of the breakdown of plots of legitimacy, the framing "narrative of Chrystal Croftangry" suggests a different narratological

[47] Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 8.

organization rooted in bare possession. Croftangry's narrative makes this shift explicit through a careful rewriting of one of the most influential progenitors to the Waverley Novel's romances of property restoration: Maria Edgeworth. *The Chronicles* replay *The Absentee's* plot of the prodigal landlord's incognito return to his estate, adapting key names and titles from *Ennui* (Glenthorn estate becomes Glentanner; Christy the blacksmith becomes Christie the innkeeper): in doing so, the opening chapters of "Chrystal Croftangry's narrative" set the stage for the book's ensuing tales by disavowing property restoration as a technique of narrative closure. Having shown in my first chapter how Edgeworth narrativizes a physiocratic theory of rent in order to imaginatively repair the abuses of Irish property, Scott's disillusionment with (what Smith called) the "natural order of things" is a fitting place to close this dissertation's final chapter. Whereas the dialectic of Glenthorn's restoration plot in Edgeworth's *Ennui* shifts the legitimate grounds of colonial property from legal inheritance to sentimental economics, "Chrystal Croftangry's Narrative" strips ownership of its sentimentality by revealing property itself to be a technology of dispossession.

Like *Ennui*'s Lord Glenthorn, Croftangry begins his narrative as a prodigal absentee landlord: "I thought little about my estate, while I possessed and was wasting it, unless as affording the rude materials out of which a certain inferior race of creatures, called tenants, were bound to produce (in a greater quantity than they actually did) a certain return called rent" (26). His reckless debts having long ago led to Glentanner's purchase by the capitalist mill owner Mr. Treddles, Chrystal emerges from sanctuary at Holyrood with the hope of repurchasing a small portion of his old estate (now once again in arrears under Treddles' son). In a stark depiction of the ecological damage implied by the demands of economic improvement, Chrystal travels in disguise to his ancient demesne to finds the forests felled, the house flattened, and the

monstrously lavish Castle-Treddles decaying in its place.[48] The new spatial economy of Glentanner is one that reduces the older marks of nobility (hunting woods, tasteful grounds) into instruments of abstract value. But though the decrepit state of the property under its new masters seems at first a clear indictment of the country's shift from paternalist-agrarian to capitalist modes of production, the scene yields no nostalgia, insisting that Chrystal's disappointment with the surroundings is the product of his own vanity. Not only does an old laborer's account of the younger Treddles' financial troubles echo Chrystal's own decline (and Scott's): "He incurred great expenses, amongst which this edifice was numbered. To support these he speculated boldly, and unfortunately, and thus the whole history is told, which may serve for more places than Glentanner" (33); more importantly, the scene's critique of economic nostalgia occurs through a shift to the perspective of economic reproduction, from which the distinction between aristocratic virtue and bourgeois vanity makes little difference: the only relevant factor is the subsistence of the community. From this point of view, Chrystal has little reason to "exult" in the face of his successor's failure: "this poor man's vanity gave at least bread to the labourer, peasant, and citizen; and his profuse expenditure, like water spilled on the ground, refreshed the lowly herbs and plants where it fell. But thou! whom hast thou enriched, during thy career of extravagance, save those brokers of the devil, vintners, panders, gamblers, and horse-jockeys?"

[48] It is worth noting that Scott's location for Castle Treddles would have brought readers to mind of Robert Owen's famed experiments in industrial reform at his plant in New Lanark. Mill, in his *Elements of Poltical Economy*, gave qualified approval of Owen's plan to rationally redistribute industrial profit into productive infrastructure. See Robert Owen, *An Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, on the First of January, 1816, at the Opening of an Institution Established for the Formation of Character* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), and James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824), 68. Treddles Castle is not exactly Owenite, but it does bear the marks of a certain stereotypical utilitarianism (see below).

(34). Anticipating the language of trickle-down economics, Chystal's self-excoriating reflects the novel's wider project to reframe the romance of restoration through the economics of barely-subsisting.

It is in the Edgeworthian scene in which the disguised Chrystal comes face to face with his mother's old body servant Christie that the novel's anti-nostalgic revision of the romance of restoration converges with the economics of subsistence. Whereas Edgeworth's Glenthorn returns to his estate only to have his dreams of feudal dominion dashed by his sly tenants, Croftangry's return to Glentanner is motivated with the kind of modest aspirations that characterize Edgeworth's reformed country gentleman: "I imagined myself settled in some detached farm of the estate of Glentanner … when I should have a cottage with a small library, a small cellar, a spare bed for a friend, and live more happy and more honoured than when I had the whole barony" (35). But rather than indicating the moral reform necessary to the romance of restoration, here the aspirations of the reformed country gentleman are themselves revealed as "Castles in the Air," as fictive as the legitimating grounds of the feudal lord they are meant to supplant. The scene takes place in Duntarkin, the very cottage that Chrystal is considering buying, and the one-time home of the family-genealogist whose family Chronicle gives the novel its name. Arriving there, he discovers it turned into an Inn call the Treddles Arms under Christie's management. More than a backdrop to Chrystal's moral reform, the Treddles Arms (both physically and in its punning title) bears the sediments of the estate's successive owners and their equally failed aspirations. With all its original furniture and fixtures gone to pay the creditors, the single remaining relic of the family legacy is a portrait of the family historian painted on the wall. The visage of this hyperbolic romancer of the Croftangry line looks on as Chystal's own romantic notions of his family's virtues are dashed: for not only is Christie coldly

unsentimental in her memories of the Croftangrys, but she defends their successors in the same utilitarian language of trickling economic reproduction.

Not unlike Scott's New Year's Day reflection on the melancholy of time's arbitrary measurement, this scene takes a skeptical view of Glentanner's supposed movement from an old to a new paradigm. The redoubled ruins of the Inn undercuts the apparent progress between feudal and capitalist political economies, instead linking absentee landlordism to industrial manufacture through a narrative of persistent decline. New boss, just as broke as the old boss. And yet Christie does admit a certain difference between the regimes of Glentanner and Treddle, one that has nothing to do with manners, moral virtues, or taste, but with a small difference in the capacity for subsistence. Prodded by Chrystal for fond memories of his family, Christie responds instead with a certain wistful recollection of the defunct mill: "the cotton mill was such a thing for the country! The mair bairns a cottar body had the better; they would make their awn keep frae the time they were five years auld. And a wido wi' three or four weans was a wealthy woman in the time of the Treddleses" (40). If Christie is at all nostalgic, it is not for the hospitality of the Croftangry's (clearly meager in the best of times) but for the marginally better subsistence provided by industrial child labor. Her focus on subsistence bursts the frame of the paternalist romance Croftangry thinks he is living, and she does so in explicitly utilitarian terms. When he asks whether the "health, education and religious instruction" were not better under the hospitable owners before the arrival of the cotton mill, Christie's response is Bentham and Mill in Scotch:

> For health … ye maun ken little of the warld, sir if ye dinna ken that the health of the puir man's body, as weel as his youth and his strength, are all at the command of the rich man's purse. There never was a trade so unhealthy yet, but men would fight to get wark at it for twa pennies a-day

> aboon the common wage. But the bairns were reasonably weel cared for in the way of air and exercise, and a very responsible youth heard them their carritch, and gied them lessons in Reediemadeasy. Now, what did they ever get before? Maybe on a winter day they wad be called out to beat the wood for cocks of siclike, and then the starving weans would maybe get a bite of broken bread, and maybe no, just as the butler was in humour—that wa a' they got. (40)

Refusing to be interpolated into Chrystal's romance, Christie prefers the utilitarian "vital minimum" afforded by an extractive millocracy, opposing her guest's paternalist nostalgia on the grounds that it does not offer even basic means of life.[49] Her comical vernacularization of *Reading Made Easy* champions the most rudimentary of educational forms against the promises of Chrystal's return. If the Treddles' sunk business affairs have rendered even this anti-romance of bare subsistence precarious, her words have their desired effect on the begrudging but sympathetic narrator: pace Edgeworth's protagonists Glenthorn and Clonbrony, he decides against his scheme of repatriation. It is this failure of restoration in the face of the insurmountable reality of debt and bare subsistence that sets the subsequent tales into motion. Disillusioned with the fiction of legitimacy, Chrystal returns to the fictive property identified by the family genealogist as the original Croftangry home, the Canongate in Edinburgh, one-time center of Scottish sovereignty turned haunt of debtors and exiles: it is here that the narrator had originally sought debt sanctuary and now seeks a living through a new (if also hereditary) occupation as a fabulist and chronicler. This is Scott's historical romance turned upside down:

[49] "Vital minimum" is Dana Simmons' shorthand for the basic necessities of life as first theorized in classical political economy and later by the modern welfare state. *Vital Minimum: Need, Science, and Politics in Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

rather than restored legitimacy serving as an imaginative consolation for mass poverty and displacement, the subsistence of the poor is revealed as the basis of political legitimacy.

The novel's implied comparison between Croftangry's writing and that of his ancestor is worth lingering on, since it illustrates the shift in Scott's fiction that I argue *the Chronicles of the Canongate* represents: from the plot of property restoration to that of bare possession. In the original chronicle that gives the book its title, Croftangry's ancestor incorrectly parses the family name as "*Croft-an-ri"* (23) or King's croft in order to claim hereditary ownership of the hills surrounding the Canongate.[50] Rangarajan emphasizes the Canongate's function as a "spatiotemporal matrix" of empire, binding the various spaces of the novel together into a "synthetic critique of British Imperial Consciousness" (63). For Rangarajan, the Canongate's palimpsestic condensation of imperial rise and decline focalizes and critiques the notion of civilizational progress that Mill had made key to imperial reform: if Mill's British India is a "quasi-fictional space" whose consistency is taken for granted by the writing of Universal history, the chronicle's "historical-geographical-fictional nexus of the falsely etymologized *Croft-an-Righ*" reveals the ideological process of place-making that conditions the narration of imperial time. But the Canongate is not the only locale in the novel through which Scott reflects on the sedimentation of empire and its mythologies. I have been arguing that *The Chronicle of the Canongate* offers more than a critique of the ideologies of empire, but rather an attempt to ground literary representation in the material conditions of imperial wealth: turning away from plots of speculative legitimacy, it instead seeks to ground both social order and narrative

[50] Lamont provides detailed notes on this false derivation of Croftangry in her edition of the novel, 389.

coherence in a global order of scarcity. If the Canongate is the locus through which Scott parodies the narrative and historiographic legitimacy of empire, it is ultimately in the rapidly industrializing landscape of agrarian Scotland that Scott ultimately finds the spatial metaphor he seeks for the literature of bare possession.

In the final pages of the novel, Scott shifts our attention back to the novel's opening landscape: a Scottish countryside rapidly being overtaken by cotton manufactures. Only this time it is not to the Lanark upon the Clyde but the town of Paisley on the outskirts of Glasgow. As Chrystal Croftangry concludes a reading of "The Surgeon's Daughter" for an assembly of friends, Miss Katie Fairscribe interrupts the group's saccharine praise to present "a disquisition upon shawls":

> she threw all other topics out of field, and from the genuine Indian, she made a digression to the imitation shawls now made at Paisley, out of real Thibet wool, not to be known from the actual Country shawl, except by some inimitable cross-stitch in the border. 'It is well,' said the old lady, wrapping herself up in a rich Kashmire, 'that there is some ways of knowing a thing that cost fifty guineas from an article that is sold for five; but I venture to say there are not one out of ten thousand that would understand the difference. (287)

Pedantically espousing her connoisseur's eye (and taking Croftangry down a notch as an imitation peddler), Miss Fairscribe positions herself as a distinguished guardian of taste and authenticity against a flattened commercialized modernity—even while she can find no better measure for authenticity than the difference between fifty guineas and five. Daniel White thus reads her comment as a lament for the erasure of cultural distinction by the circuits of

commodity exchange between Britain and India.[51] And yet, it is not really cross-border *exchange* of commodities that "the merciless old lady" takes aim at here, but rather the replacement of global exchange with domestic manufacture—a replacement, we should note, that corresponds to the late eighteenth-century inversion of the Britain-India balance of trade and the Company's related metamorphosis from a trading to a governing body. We gain a rather different view of the shawl as a figure of cultural authority if, instead of reading the flattening effect of modernity as arising from the general law of equivalence, we instead approach it through shifting structures of possession that organized the emergent global order of production. At the end of a novel that has shown us the illegitimate rule of property underpinning Company rule in India as well as the precarious life of Scotland's industrializing villages, the difference between the Kashmire and the Paisley cannot be reduced to either cross-stitch or price; rather, it reflects a movement from an empire of exotic commercial exchange to a world of subsistence labor and globally sourced raw materials. It is within this latter regime that Crystal locates his own vocation. When one guest asks him the question anticipated in the Preface to Mill's *History* ("How could you, Mr. Croftangry, collect all these hard words about India?—you were never there" [287]) his response is not to position himself as an expert consumer of foreign commodities, neither as a hobby orientalist nor a "judging historian," but rather as a subsistence worker of the materials of empire: "like the imitative operatives of Paisley, I have composed my shawl by incorporating into the woof a little Thibet wool, which my friend and neighbor, Colonel MacKerris … had the goodness to supply me with" (288). Insofar as Croftangry allegorizes his tale in the commercial

[51] Daniel White, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print, and Modernity in Early British India, 1793-1835* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 16, 186-7.

language of universal equivalence, it is not one that pertains between exoticized commodities but rather the labor and materials of their production.

The guest's question posed at the end of "the Surgeon's Daughter" returns us to the Mill's universalist/exclusionary "Preface" by way of Mr. Fairscribe's earlier imperative, "send [your Muse] to India." Just as Mill attacked the "collecting" historiography of a rapacious Company orientalism in favor of a more methodical judicial-historical labor, Croftangry is no collector, but an "operative." But whereas the representational vessel that transported Mill's universalist Muse to India was a fantasy of a rentier-state, Croftangry instead places his literary labor on the same level as those other imperial subjects whose bare possessions supply the rents of imperial wealth. His tale, he imagines, is something rendered from him, like the labor of those Highlanders pushed by recent clearances to sell their labor in the suburbs of Glasgow, or the Tibetan wools injected into British trade after the Gurkha Wars in Nepal in 1814-16. Clearances, conquests—waves of dispossession of the sort that had inspired the greatest works of the "Author of Waverley." But neither they, nor the fantasies of restored legitimacy they provoke, preoccupy the Muse of *Chronicles of Canongate.* Instead, "Walter Scott" charts the contours of a world in which the bare possession of life, as Christie says, "is at the command of a rich man's purse."

Coda

Romanticism, Rent, and Immaterial Labor

> Most developed economies make money from thin air: we produce nothing that can be weighed, touched, or easily measured ... Our children will not have to toil in dark factories, descend into pits, or suffocate in mills, to hew raw materials and turn them into manufactured products. They will make their livings through their creativity, ingenuity, and imagination.
>
> - Charles Leadbeater, *The Weightless Society*

> One parasite chases another out.
>
> - Michael Serres, *The Parasite*

What could be more romantic than the new digital economy prophesied in former Tony Blair advisor Charles Leadbeater's *The Weightless Society*?[1] In the high tide of the dot.com era it seemed as though value might have finally escaped the dark Satanic Mills of old, floating (with

[1] Charles Leadbeater, *The Weightless Society: Living in the New Economic Bubble* (London: Texere, 2000).

Wordsworth's Skylark) "up … into the clouds," sent there by half-creating, half-perceiving prosumers at their laptops, lonely as clouds, making memories, knowledge, images, and other content to be consumed on couches in vacant moods. O clouds unfold! But while the difficulty of measuring the digital economy has not become easier in the years since, we increasingly feel its weight. The materiality of the data storage centers that sustain "the cloud" has been well documented: according to a year-long study by the *New York Times* in 2012, "Worldwide, the digital warehouses use about 30 billion watts of electricity, roughly equivalent to the output of 30 nuclear power plants … Data centers in the United States account for one-quarter to one-third of that load, the estimates show."[2] Meanwhile, exploding digital consumerism in the overdeveloped world has intensified the bloody rush for coltan, cassiterite, tin, tungsten, and other minerals for consumer electronics in regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, where enslaved mining communities truly live (as another Leadbeater title goes) on little more than thin air.[3] In the British political context, Leadbeater's enthusiasm for the ecological and geopolitical benefits of digital capitalism authorized a push beyond the so-called era of the "safe job" into a world of universal entrepreneurship—a crucial element on the "New Labour" party-branding of the Blair

[2] James Glanz, "Power, Pollution, and the Internet," *New York Times* 22 Sept. 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/technology/data-centers-waste-vast-amounts-of-energy-belying-industry-image.html.

[3] Christian Fuchs' recent *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*—in which Congolese slave-miners constitute but one type in a variegated global typology of digital work—opens with the words of Muhanga Kawaya, a miner in North Kivu: "As you Crawl through the tiny hole, using your arms and fingers to scratch, there's not enought space to dig properly and you get badly grazed all over. And then, when you do finally come back out with the cassiterite, the soldiers are waiting to grab it at gunpoint. Which means you have nothing to buy food with. So we're always hungry." *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1. Leadbeater's other book is *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy* (London: Penguin, 2000).

years.[4] The policy advocates of frictionless capital as an antidote to material struggle evinced little cognitive dissonance against the backdrop of another Blair monument, the Iraq invasion, which betrayed a very different orchestration of global capital, the state, and the physical forms of energy that underlie the digital age. The new empire of intellectual production (or "immaterial labor" as theorists were beginning to call it[5]) has not saved us from the drudgery of work or ecological spoliation, any more than the promise of agricultural improvement in the late eighteenth-century succeeded in meliorating the excesses of Britain's colonial system. Now as then, a promise to break the chain linking the production of wealth to the exploitation of (human/natural) matter has coincided with a new phase of imperial expansion.

While it is easy to mock the pretensions of the "weightless society" in the voice of a certain clichéd romanticism, I would like to suggest that a more capacious account of romantic literature and its relation to the enlightenment project of improvement might offer conceptual resources to our own moment. The dual aspect of digital capitalism (on the one hand, an intellectual precariat whose contracts for "creativity, ingenuity, and imagination" bear increasingly marginal returns; on the other, widespread ecological devastation in pursuit of the material resources that fuel information's abstract movement) calls for something like a romantic theory of the imagination—not in order to supplement a lost harmony with nature with the Growth of the Poet's Mind, but to consider the conditions of intellectual labor in relation to the ecology of production. By way of conclusion, I would like to briefly speculate on how the

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[4] Francis Beckett, "Blair's Way," *Management Today* March 01, 2005. http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/news/463766/

[5] Most influentially, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt theorize immaterial labor in *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

romantic and classical political-economic question of the rents of empire looks from the perspective of post-Fordist work regimes. How might recent accounts of the relation between intellectual labor and rampant financialization help us to resituate the imaginative work of romantic poetry in its imperial contexts? Could it be that romanticism's attention to the natural, the agrarian, and the pastoral might have something to contribute to contemporary conjunction of digital finance, ecological devastation, and digital labor?

To begin to answer these questions we need to step away from a view of romanticism as a literary period stuck in the melancholy passage from a traditional subsistence economy in land to a modern industrialized world. I have found it useful to focus on the category of rent in part because literary and theoretical accounts of how surplus was generated from land made visible the ecological, geographical, and temporal complexity at the core of period's notions of historical development. As I have suggested throughout, The Scottish Enlightenment's influential "four stages" version of history was closely integrated with the early-modern project of agricultural improvement, which utilized the combined means of enclosure and colonization to turn nature directly into wealth. In this context a conceptual distinction emerged between the products of human industry and the ecological systems covering the surface of the globe. Whereas, it was said, the proceeds of trade and manufacturing would be split and consumed between the worker and the merchant, the free gift of natural abundance provided a genuine surplus whose contribution to the wealth of nations would come in the form of rent. My aim in this dissertation has been to trace the cultural and aesthetic dimension of rentier imperialism as limned in the works of such writers Maria Edgeworth, John Thelwall, Walter Scott, James Montgomery, Matthew Lewis, and others. These works show how the economic concerns of romantic writers were not limited (as the view of economic critics have tended to be) to the

formation of an industrial laboring classes, of the role of desire in the marketplace, or the representational and narrative functions of categories such as money, credit, and character; rather, they begin with the question of how imperial production participated in and disrupted the metabolism of nature and state. The physiocratic proposition that rent, as a surplus borne independently from the costs of wages and capital stock, might sustain not only the landowning class but the imperial state itself anticipates digital capitalism's dream of moving the production of value out of the realm of material manufacture, extracting value directly from the vectors of free information and communication.[6] Digital capitalism reinvents the eighteenth century's natural improvement as technological innovation (including through the biotechnological innovation of nature). Whereas the special status accorded to rent by enlightenment political economists was due to the foundational social role of agriculture, today information property is deemed "the key ingredient of our social organization": "flows of messages and images constitute the basic thread of our social existence."[7] There is a potent activist romanticism at work in such projects as the Creative Commons, CopyLeft, and net neutrality initiatives, whose just demands for free and open access to information face the problem that this very openness, when contributes to the rents of those who own the informational infrastructure and thus potentially entrenches the political division between digital rentiers on the one hand and the precarious class of information producer-consumers on the other.[8] That the contradictions

[6] I borrow the vocabulary of "vectors" from the provocative work of Mackenzie Wark. See for instance *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[7] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol. 1: The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 17, 477.

[8] For an overview of the limits of such projects from an autonomist Marxist perspective see Matteo Pasquinelli, "The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage," *Education*

implicit in such projects bear comparison with those of the utopian and (anti-utopian) projects of romanticism does not obviate their urgency, but it might occasion new ways of seeing the limits and demands of both.

For information theorists like Manuel Castells (whose *The Rise of Network Society* I quote above) as well as for Autonomist Marxists such as Paulo Virno, Carlo Vercellone, and Antonio Negri, the rise of "information society" or "cognitive capitalism" disrupts the labor theory of value that undergirded both the profits of industrialism and the conceptual terms if its Marxian critique. As Vercellone and others have argued, cognitive capitalism implies a return of rent as the principal axis of capital accumulation. Instead of creating surplus by extending of the working day, Google, Facebook, Apple, etc. derive revenue by monopolizing the streams of information made for little or nothing by their users. The organization of labor is increasingly "exteriorized" by the production of this surplus, existing largely outside the wage-relation and instead participating in an information commons that supplies the raw material of cognitive rent. In this sense, cognitive capitalism represents a new phase of the process Marx called primitive accumulation, which has always implied the mutual relation of rent and a commons external to the field of commodified labor: "Since its historical inception during the process of enclosures, capitalist rent has been the other face of the common."[9] If the factory regime that dominated

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in the Creative Economy: Knowledge and Learning in the Age of Innovation. Ed. Daniel Araya and Michael A. Peters (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 285-304.

[9] Carlo Vercellone, "Wages, Rent and Profit: The New Articulation of Wages, Rent and Profit in Cognitive Capitalism," Trans. Arianna Bove, *Generation Online* http://www.generation-online.org/c/fc_rent2.htm; see also "The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming Rent of Profit," *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*. Ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadro (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 85-118.

economic production from Marx's time to the 1970s made growth dependent on capital's ability to monitor and regulate labor towards greater productivity, the digital economy disrupts capital's twentieth-century compromises with trade unions and the like by finding a new source of surplus. Like the landlord who accrues a rent simply by owning the land where production occurs, the rents of tech accrue simply on the basis of the ownership of the digital infrastructures. Like the "immature" colonial economies I discuss throughout "Rendering Empire", cognitive rent draw from a digital landscape that is not fully integrated in the production and exchange of commodities, but is largely composed of information commons maintained by precarious immaterial labor.

In linking the extraction of cognitive rent to the process of land enclosure and colonial reform during the formation of Britain's liberal empire, Vercellone's writing offers a novel perspective on the literary-economic history I have charted in this dissertation—not simply because it demonstrates the continued relevance of an economic category long held marginal and outdated, but more particularly for showing how the situation of rentership capitalism burdens the intellectual labor of writing. This, it seems to me, is a core issue for romantic poetry, and nowhere more so than in the writing of William Wordsworth. Wordsworth's poetics lays out two conditions that are relevant here. First, he assiduously *places* the work of the poet in the interstices between the commodified world (centered in the city) and the not-yet commodified common spaces that organize its margins (for Wordsworth, the Lake District). Second, in this situation, poetic feeling organizes itself as an affective surplus along more-or-less physiocratic lines, as an "overflow" transferred via the poet from nature to society where it circulates in the form of literary pleasure. As Simon Jarvis writes, "The life of Wordsworth's imagination and the

life of Turgot's body politic alike, it appears, need a surplus that is the 'gift of Nature.'"[10] It is this gift, Wordsworth explains in his famous Preface, that regulates the linguistic distribution of excess pleasure that is poetry: "If Nature be thus cautious to preserve in a state of enjoyment a being so employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that, whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure."[11]

If we put these two conditions of Wordsworth's poetics together—its agrarian situation in a commons shaped by empire, and its affective apportionment of the free gifts of nature—the picture of poetic labor that emerges is not far off from Autonomist Marxism's account of immaterial labor. What they share is embeddedness in a situation where "profit becomes rent," (to use a formula from Marx's *Capital III* that has been influential for Vercellone and others); that is, where the social and economic pressures of capital accumulation find release by spilling outside the realm of production, reorganizing the distribution of common properties (earth, information, feeling) in the process.

Wordsworth's poetry presents us with an early nineteenth-century image of the forms of life and intellect that assemble in the space where profit becomes rent. Mackenzie Wark writes that the basic tendency of digital capitalism is "to reduce the paid labor force in the production of images as close as possible to zero and pay them only in the currency of recognition."[12] In

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[10] Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99.

[11] "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," *Selected Prose of William Wordsworth*, ed. John O. Hayden (New York: Penguin, 1988), 298.

[12] Mackenzie Wark, "Considerations on *A Hacker Manifesto,*" *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Schulz (London: Routledge, 2013), 71.

Wordsworth's poetics, the spectacle-network where such images are produced is not the internet but rather nature itself, a space simultaneously half-created and half-perceived by poetic labor yet alienated from the poet within a world of getting and spending: "Little we have in Nature that is ours."[13] This state of having without owning—the condition of the renter—is both central to Wordsworth's writing and historicized in its descriptions of a tension between the economies of nature and human empire. Again and again in his poetry and prose, human commerce disrupts the free exchange of natural forces (both within itself and with humanity) by subjecting land and its human inhabitants to the imperative for perpetual surplus extraction. This is what motivates Wordsworth's project to renovate poetic language's capacity to tune man's "essentia[l] adapt[ation]" to nature, rejecting poetry's debasement into "food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites" and enlisting it in the service of a human and extra-human community in the face of the expanding enclosure of land and culture alike. In this respect the Wordsworthian poet resembles the "hacker class" theorized by Wark: he lives by an intellectual labor that is not directly exploited by capital, but which rather shapes and is shaped by a "commons" at the frontiers of capitalist expansion.

It is in this light that we ought to view the agrarian characters favored in Wordsworth's poems: not simply as figures of a lost world the poet would seek to reclaim, but as agents caught within the transformation of profit into rent. The scene of this transformation, crucially, is not the enclosure, but the common itself—a word that features in his poems not only in reference to unenclosed fields and forests granted for public use ("the bare wide Common" of *The Ruined*

[13] William Wordsworth, "The World is Too Much With Us," *The Major Works Including the Prelude* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Cottage) but to unappropriated powers of nature, as in the "common air" that fills the shepherd's lungs in *Michael*.[14] The commons of Wordsworth's poetry are characterized not so much by a vulnerability to enclosure as by their strained precarious capacity to sustain life as a result of their adjacency to the world of property. Much of the drama of *Michael* is lost if we view the poem strictly in terms of the irretrievability of the shepherd's ancient paternalism: what we miss is the way in which his mode of life in the "common air" is transformed as his land becomes the place where profit becomes rent. When Michael's property is indemnified to pay the debts of his capitalist nephew ("a man / Of an industrious life, and ample means" [221-2]), a point of contact is established between the pastoral situation and capital accumulation. The result is that pastoral labor loses its economic and social coherence: Michael's son Luke is sent to the city in a vain attempt to supply the forfeiture by his wages, while Michael's efforts to build a new sheepfold, bereft of the intergenerational ties that both sustain agrarian labor and link it to the economy of nature, produces nothing but the "straggling heap of unhewn stones" (l.17) which provides the poem's introductory focal point.

We are too quick to identify the vulnerability of this world as a sign of its residual character, on the verge of subsumption into the universe of complete commodification. This is a perspective shaped by a Victorian historiography in which industrialization supplies the *telos* of history. We can approach a different view of Wordsworth's precarious agrarian scenes if instead we follow Vercellone and others in regarding industrialization as a transitional phase in property's progressive movement toward new spheres of monopolization. Crucially,

[14] "Michael," *The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), l. 66. Subsequent line numbers cited in text.

Wordsworth's fascination with Michael's pile of stones ties poetry to agrarian labor not in its traditional (i.e., mythical) unity with nature, but at the moment in which this activity ceases to sustain life and becomes strictly a labor of love ("There is a comfort in the strength of love; / Twill make a thing endurable" [457-8]). This is the moment, that is, in which the sustaining powers of the soil are captured by commercial debt, and profit becomes rent. The heap of stones is a very different political artifact than the ploughed ground where Michael's cottage stood, which along with the other "great changes …/ In all the neighborhood" represents the more familiar subjection of the land to improving capital investment. If profit thus seems to succeed rent in the poem's conclusion, Luke's flight to the colonies should remind us that it is the obverse movement that was giving shape to Britain's global frontiers, linking the production of liberal imperialism to the rentier wealth of our own postfordist empire.

The point I would like to emphasize is not just that Wordsworth's poetry diagnoses a particular political and economic situation in the not-yet improved landscape of the Lake District, but that this situation is the essential scene out of which Wordsworth's conception of poetic labor emerges. However problematic, Wordsworth's identification with rustic laborers tends to usher meditation on the labor of poetry and its place in the complex economic relation between nature and empire. Poetry shares with digital labor the creation and consumption of a commons that is simultaneously the scene of rentier exploitation. But whereas this scene's ecological dimension is obscured in our age of the colonization of the general intellect, Wordsworth offers an ecological conception of intellectual labor that might help us along to a richer conception of the divisions that organize contemporary digital work.[15] Wordsworth'

[15] It would be intriguing to develop this line of thought by considering how this setting of poetic labor in Wordsworth intersects with his ongoing preoccupation with intellectual property and

poetry shows us that the space of becoming-rent does not recognize the political economic rule that the payment of labor covers (at a minimum) the cost of subsistence: like Wark's hacker, Michael is paid for his final labors only in a "currency of recognition" provided by Wordsworth's poem itself. But whereas the compensations of this currency to the poet remains mostly unexamined in "Michael," which refrains from inserting the figure of the poet into the narrative, "Resolution and Independence" takes the poet's relation to the eviscerated commons as an occasion to reconsider the economic and ecological preconditions of Wordsworth's poetics.

In its famous description of the meeting between a poet-traveler and an old man gathering leeches in the moor ponds, we might say that "Resolution and Independence" narrates an encounter between material and immaterial labor. Indeed, the poem seems at first designed to undermine this very distinction. As the Traveler is walking along worrying about the material security of his vocation (he is like "the Sky-lark singing in the sky," yet "there may come another day for me, / Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" [29, 34-5]), he comes face to face with what Jonathan Wordsworth calls the "obdurate physicality" of the leech-gatherer. And although initially such "intrusive physical presence" blocks the Traveler's capacity for sympathetic conversation, the slow discovery of the Old Man's "stately" manner and "firm … mind" ultimately restores the Traveler's confidence in the sustaining power of intellect. But if the poem thus finds in the rustic mind a comforting ground for the poet's immaterial work (after

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copyright law—a topic on which Wordsworth composed sonnets later in his life. See Mark Schoenfield, *The Professional Wordsworth: Law, Labour, & the Poet's Contract* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1996); William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43; and Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 165-173.

all, as Dorothy Wordsworth's journal reminds us, the old man too is an intellectual, a seller of "godly books"), the poem does not on that account endorse intellectual labor as a universal human condition. "All men are intellectuals, but not all men fulfill the function of the intellectual," as Gramsci says; the question Wordsworth asks is what are the conditions under which intellectual labor becomes analogous to the gathering of leeches?

When we read the poem with this question in mind, it becomes clear that Wordsworth's aim is not merely to assert universal intellect but to chart its particular transformation in a commons carved at the intersection of nature and empire. Attending to the Traveler's reflections on the economic relation between intellectual and natural activity allows us to see how the poem works not simply to expose a similarity between mental and menial life, but to clarify two theories of value, which we can call providential and parasitic. The providential theory of value underlies the anxious musings of the Traveler in the first half of the poem, voicing Wordsworth's personal concern that his chosen occupation might fail to sustain himself and his family.[16] Prompted by the first stanza's turn in fortune from stormy night to sunny morning, his worried anticipation of future poverty retraces a question foundational economic thought: how best to manage and preserve the surplus of the present against the unpredictable certainty of future calamity. In the register of Wordsworth's poetics, this question and its solution are posed in terms of the poet's capacity to preserve the fleeting gifts of nature by storing them in memory,

[16] "Wordsworth was deeply concerned that the occupation he had chosen for Himself would not support his growing household and worrisome financial responsibilities: the Calvert Legacy, the Lowther debt, his impending marriage, his concern for Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline, his difficult partnership with Coleridge, and the clamourings of his publishers." Alex J. Dick, "Poverty, Charity, Poetry: The Unproductive Labors of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 39.3 (Fall 2000).

transforming "powerful feeling" into sustaining recollection, as when in *Tintern Abbey* the mature poet is stands apart from his younger self "not only with the sense / Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / for future years" (63-66). Turning (material) surplus into (immaterial) value, Wordsworth's poet does for the mind what political economy's spectral statesman does for national wealth, protecting against providential swings of fortune by storing and distributing present surplus for future use. The Traveler's identification as "a happy Child of earth" akin to hare or skylark ("Even as these blissful Creatures do I fare" [32]) marks him within this providential schema of poetic economy: his overwhelming concern is how to derive lasting value from the overplus of a sunny morning, when "All things that love the sun are out of doors." But if providential economy (and the philosophy of natural law that belongs to it) imagines value to have its origin in this gift of solar superabundance, the Traveler soon comes upon a very different orchestration of nature and value. The leeches gathered by the Old Man are not among "the things that love the sun": their health (and so too that of the gatherer) depends on stormy weather,[17] and the value-form that they belong too is one based not in fertile excess but scarcity and tendential decline.[18] This is not

[17] Leeches are famous barometers, rising to the surface of ponds in anticipation of rain and storm. Robert Essick notes the weather-predicting capacity of leeches in his essay "Wordsworth and Leech-Lore" (*The Wordsworth Circle* 12.2 [Spring 1981]), although he unaccountably asserts that rather than bringing the leeches to the surface, "the previous night's tempest must have cooled the water and driven [the leeches] to the depths" (100). Whereas Essick offers a biological reason for the leech-gatherer's slim catch, the old man himself (at least in Dorothy Wordsworth's record) gives a socio-historical explanation—see below.

[18] Hence the thoughtlessness of the Traveler's well-meant greeting, "This morning gives us promise of a glorious day," which anticipates the poet's ultimate resolution against his fear of poverty while at the same time casually prophesying weather conditions detrimental to the old man's livelihood.

a merely symmetrical opposition: it figures an entirely different regime of value, labor and subsistence.

The introduction of the leech gatherer moves the poem from providential to parasitic economy. This is an economy that does not guard against calamity, but rather feeds upon it; its peculiar situation is not the enclosed scene of agricultural improvement, but a commons made destitute by its proximity to empire. The Lake District remained largely untouched by Parliamentary enclosure in the early nineteenth century;[19] but it is not as though their commons and wastes did not feel the effects of regional and global dispossession until, one day, they did. Wordsworth's tale of the indigent old Scotsman who, despite his apparent education and polished manner, ekes out a living from the free produce of the moor presents a scene of human migration and ecological change that is representative of (rather than simply anterior to) imperial modernity. Leeches have grown scarce on the moor, the Old Man tells us: "Once I could meet with them on every side; / But they have dwindled long by slow decay; / Yet still I persevere and find them where I may." (131-3). Like Michael's heaping of stones, this is a labor that has lost its economic efficacy. But the good old times of leech-infested ponds lack the nostalgic pull of the sheepfold, making it somewhat easier to see that we are not dealing with a standard lament for the pastoral past. We gain a somewhat richer sense of the conditions of the Old Man's labor in Dorothy Wordsworth's record of the encounter that inspired the poem:

> His trade was to gather leeches but now leeches are scarce & he had not strength for it—he lived by begging and was on his way to Carlisle where he should by a few godly books to sell. He said leeches were very scarce

[19] As Ian Whyte explains "in the early nineteenth century Parliamentary enclosure affected mainly the fringes, not the heart, of the Lake District." *Landscape and History Since 1500* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 106.

> partly owing to this dry season, but many years they have been scarce—he supposed it owing to their being much sought after, that they did not breed fast, & were of slow growth.[20]

To explain the scarcity of leeches by economic demand is to extrapolate their supply by an abundance of men like this one, who have scoured the ponds almost to the point of extinction. Dorothy's journal shows how the ecology of the free and common moor is marked by the horizon of enclosure, displacement, and war (the old man was born in the army); it is "exteriorized" from the market logic of production and exchange. While the decline of leech populations corresponds to a rise in price ("Leeches were formerly 2s. 6d. per 100; they are now 30s"), the levers of supply and demand clearly have failed to equalize the leech-gatherer's income; hence he asks Dorothy and William for alms on his way "to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell." This is a very different take on the modern condition than that associated with the alienation of city life and the reign of the commodity fetish. Here instead we find the profound intimacy of the parasite, whose non-commodified relation to the land (and perhaps to the knowledge economy of "godly books" as well) has nearly lost its capacity to sustain a life.

We are now in a better position to consider the relation established between poetic labor and leech-gathering in "Resolution and Independence," a relation that is neither metaphorical equivalence nor sympathetic exchange but rather something like parasitic abstraction. Wordsworth omits the details of the leech trade, merely gestures to its geopolitical context, (the

[20] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals,* Ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 24.

old man's "stately speech; / Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use"), opting instead to collapse the old man's two kinds of merchandise by describing leech-hunting as a mode of philology: "he the pond / Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look / Upon the muddy water, which he conned, / As if he had been reading in a book." This passage has led a great many critics to see in the leech-gatherer a model of the Wordsworthian poet. As Robert Essick notes, when the traveler observes the Old Man "stirring thus about his feet / The waters of the pools," he accurately describes what was the favored hunting method: to wade in the shallows "until the leeches affix themselves to one's feet and lower legs. The fisherman finds his prey by offering his own body as bait."[21] If for Essick this "Employment hazardous and wearisome" resembles the debilitating mental drain Wordsworth experienced in leeching of his own memories for poetic material, it also puts a new twist on what I above described as Wordsworth's prosumer poetics: here it is not just a case of jointly creating and consuming one's produce, but of being consumed by it.

But while the trope of parasitism establishes a certain resemblance between poetry and leech-hunting, it also thwarts the logic of equivalence and exchange that would allow us to posit an identity between these vocations. What is most memorable in William's version of the encounter, in contrast to the conversation recorded in Dorothy's journal, is the failure of recognition and exchange. Famously, the Traveler lacks the attention-span to hear the Old Man's response to his repeated question, "What kind of work is that which you pursue?": his speech is incomprehensible, "like a stream / Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide" (114-5). Instead of a rational traffic or sympathetic reciprocity we get a relation of communication that only moves in one direction. And yet at the same time that the poem depicts a breakdown of the

[21] Essick, "Wordsworth and Leech-Lore," 100.

sort of exchange that would fulfill the object of the poem (that is, to quiet the Traveler's fear that his intellectual labor might go uncompensated), he ultimately *takes* from the leech-gatherer a memory that does just that: "'God,' said I, 'be my help and stay secure; / I'll think of the Leech-gatherer upon the lonely moor." (146-7). What is surprising about the poem's conclusion is not only that it discovers (however unreliably) an intellectual comfort in a person who embodies the very poverty and indigence the poet fears, but that this comfort comes by turning the work of poetry into a form of parasitic attachment—not, as conventionally, to rich patrons of the arts, but rather to the poor and displaced. The poet / leech-gatherer relation can thus be situated in a hierarchy of parasitic relations between overlapping systems (leech, pond, moor, community, state, empire market, currency, poem...).

In his book *The Parasite* (1980), written at the moment of digital capitalism's rapid acceleration, Michel Serres reflects on the primacy of the parasitic relation in all systems of communication: "The parasitic relation precedes exchange in general...the exchanged thing always travels in a channel that is already parasited."[22] Wordsworth's leech-gatherer anticipates Serres' insights in a context in which the logic of exchange had achieved a powerfully influential expression in the new science of political economy.[23] The liberal transformation of the British Empire at the end of the nineteenth century was an attempt to put the parasitic economy of mercantilism to rest, to rebuild an empire on the basis of the free gifts of nature: the

[22] Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence Schehr (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 80.

[23] Robert Mitchell offers a rather different set of reflections on Wordsworth's parasitic poetics in light of Serres in *Sympathy and the State in the Romantic Era: Systems, State Finance, and the Shadows of Futurity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 121-162. Mitchell's emphasis is on the way Wordsworth's poetics participated in the debates about commercial credit and state debt while parasitically drawing on tropes of financial parasitism.

rationalization of agriculture, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, the expansion and often violent enforcement of free trade, the suppression of local traditions and crafts, and the development of new administrative bureaucracies all derived theoretical legitimacy from the new science of political economy and its mandate to thwart scarcity via rationalization and productivity: the mandate of an empire without parasites. What Wordsworth lets us see from the vantage of the lonely moor is not simply the lingering parasitism of this project, but the possibility of new forms of life and narrative that organize themselves in the waste spaces of such an empire.

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