CORPORATE CHRISTIANS AND TERRIBLE TURKS: AESTHETICS, ECONOMICS, AND EMPIRE IN THE EARLY BRITISH TRAVEL NARRATIVE, 1630-1780

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This dissertation examines the evolution of the early English travel narrative as it relates to the development and application of mercantilist economic practices, theories of aesthetic representation, and discourses of gender and narrative authority. I attempt to redress an imbalance in critical work on pre-colonialism and colonialism, which has tended to focus either on the Renaissance, as exemplified by the works of critics such as Stephen Greenblatt and John Gillies, or on the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as in the work of scholars such as Srinivas Aravamudan and Edward Said. This critical gap has left early travel narratives by Sir Francis Moore, Jonathan Harris, Penelope Aubin, and others largely neglected. These early writers, I argue, adapted the conventions of the travel narrative while relying on the authority of contemporary commercial practices. The early English travelers modified contemporary conventions of aesthetic representation by formulating their descriptions of non-European cultures in terms of the economic and political conventions and rivalries of the early eighteenth century. Early English travel literature, I demonstrate, functioned as a politically motivated medium that served both as a marker of authenticity, justifying the colonial and imperial ventures that would flourish in the nineteenth century, and as a forum for experimentation with English notions of gender and narrative authority.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Curiosity is seldom so powerfully excited, or so amply gratified, as by faithful Relations of Voyages and Travels. The different appearances of Nature, and the various Customs of Men, the gradual Discovery of the World, and the Accidents and Hardships of a naval Life, all concur to fill the Mind with Expectation and with Wonder.

—Samuel Johnson, Advertisement to John Newberry’s *The World Display’d* (1759)

The proliferation of travel writing in the early eighteenth century suggests that travel writing was a socially and politically motivated medium that became a forum for experimentation with literary form and social analysis. As England empirically and imperially explored the non-European world, travelers and travel writers experimented with new modes of cultural, social, economic, and textual representation. These early accounts were either individually subjective, in that they relied upon an individual desire for self-promotion, or socially subjective, in that they depended upon the subjectivity of a nation that was seeking advancement in both trade and power. While not an entirely new or unique genre, travel writing acquired new roles and forms during the early eighteenth century, ranging from the economic treatise to the epistolary travelogue to the amatory adventure novel.

The English reader played a significant role in fashioning early travel writing. While the eighteenth century was a period of geographical exploration and international trade systems that marked the beginning of imperial expansion, it was also a period of very limited knowledge of extra-European geography and culture. The English reading public could not, in most cases, verify the places and events present in these narratives; early travel literature had to be taken on trust. The authority of the travel narrative was abstract because it was based on faith. As this was a genre whose popularity relied on the establishment of narratological reliability, travelers and
travel writers associated their works with various sources of textual authority. Early travel writers frequently achieved credibility by associating their works with the authority of the religiously abstract, comparing their adventures and travels to theological circumstances and ideals.\(^1\) Travel writers thereby evaded accusations of falsehood by creating a divinely sanctioned narratological role for their voyages and their writings.

Travel writers also achieved narrative legitimacy by combining the divine sanction of their narrations with nationalistic responsibility. The religious justification for much pre-imperial travel and exploration relied on assumptions of national and regional superiority. Travel writers employed rhetorical forms that combined the belief in inherent English superiority with a supposed religious responsibility toward the non-European world, exhibiting a “desire to grasp the totality of England’s territorial expansion and providential future.”\(^2\) In doing so, these early travelers established and concretized stereotypical cultural constructions that would become markers of authenticity, both justifying and explaining the colonial and imperial ventures that would flourish in the nineteenth century.

In order further to authenticate these stereotypical representations, travel writers relied on a rhetoric of aesthetic acquisition to connect and corroborate the economic, imperialistic, and religious aspects of pre-colonial travel. These early travelers and travel writers employed the bases of aestheticism—the premises for the determination of aesthetic value and artistic merit—to establish a hierarchy of cultural, religious, and national existence. Sublimity, taste, and beauty became the markers of both social refinement and cultural differentiation. Early English travelers, usually representatives of large trading companies, modified contemporary conventions of aesthetic representation by formulating their descriptions of non-European
cultures in terms of the economic and political conventions and rivalries of the early eighteenth century.

This dissertation examines the various roles that the early eighteenth-century travel narrative played in the construction of English national and cultural identity, adapting the conventions of traditional travel narration, aesthetic premises, and contemporary commercial strategies. I demonstrate that early travelers and travel writers created a stereotypical framework of extra-European cultural representation that both concretized notions of English superiority and facilitated the budding imperialist project.

The first chapter, *Daniel Defoe and the Economic Production of Empire*, introduces the socio-economic context for the subsequent texts I will discuss. I examine three of Defoe’s most influential economic treatises, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727), *A Brief Account of the Present State of the African Trade* (1713), and *The Trade to India Critically and Calmly Consider’d* (1720). While not travel narratives themselves, these works provide the economic and aesthetic premises that governed much of the travel and, subsequently, the travel writing of the early eighteenth century. These economic treatises posited a mercantile system governed by a prominent middle class whose social status depended upon the English socio-economic ideals that Defoe designated as essential to English economic and political ascendancy.

The prominence of the mercantile middle class relied on regional and international travel to increase and maintain English economic prowess. By 1600, trade organizations such as the East India Company, the Levant Company, the Newfoundland fisheries, the Virginia Company, and the Merchant Adventurers had appeared, establishing the expansionist character of English economy. The abstract notions of state, power, and social class became linked to the various methods of successful commercial development. In his *Complete English Tradesman*, a conduct
manual for the mercantile trader, Defoe presents what he considered the proper means of creating and maintaining English commercial ascendancy over both its European rivals and its non-European markets. By applying a jingoist sentiment to trade, Defoe suggested that acquiring overseas markets would secure corporate Christian welfare abroad. He justified the one-way international trade that resulted with the “zealous internationalism to spread the bounty of England’s innate liberty and enlightening trade practices.” 4 The ideal mercantile traveler whom Defoe describes, I argue, continually appears—as narrator, philosopher, traveler, scientist—in the travel literature of the early part of the eighteenth century. Defoe’s traveler-adventurer becomes the focus of these early travelogues, the various forms of his representation addressing and combining such issues as pre-imperial cultural differentiation, morality and virtue, aesthetic worth, and gender distinction.

In the second chapter, *Imaginative Geographies and the Commercial Gaze: The Aesthetic Representation of Empire*, I examine two early texts that employ, antithetically, the extremes of Defoe’s merchant traveler. Sir Francis Moore’s *Travels into Inland Parts of Africa* (1730) and Samuel Johnson’s *The History of Rasselas* (1759) construct English economic and cultural identity through contrasting representations of Occident and Orient. Moore’s *Travels*—the account of an agent of the Royal African Company—documents his voyages through Africa’s interior. Moore is Defoe’s ideal English tradesman; he adheres to the rules of English commerce, upholding notions of regional and international supremacy while creating an aestheticized ethnographic account of the peoples and locales he encounters. Moore combines the economic and the aesthetic by couching the fiscal nature of his journey in artistic descriptions and analyses of foreign peoples, landscapes, and cultures. He creates a series of stereotypical cultural distinctions that derive legitimacy from the complementarity of ethnography, aesthetics, and
economics. His work, I demonstrate, relies on the asymptotic relationship between aesthetics and economics, assuming an English right to international resources based on abstract, Western notions of artistic appreciation.

*Rasselas*, while adhering to the cultural assumptions advanced by Defoe and enacted by Moore, challenges the expansionist drive of pre-imperial England. Through the character of Imlac, the intellectual center of the narration, Johnson advances a strong criticism of territorial and economic expansion. He does so, I submit, by associating the arguments and actions of mercantile travelers such as Moore with a misapprehension and misapplication of aesthetic value. Attempting to dismantle the image of colonial territory as utopia, Johnson modifies the conventions of the traditional Oriental travel adventure tale, rendering the East mundane and boring. I demonstrate that Johnson’s Orientalist revision, through limiting the non-European world to a literary forum, disembodies the Orient, stripping it of representative agency. Johnson’s narrative asserts the same notions of English divine legitimacy present in both Defoe’s and Moore’s texts. He merely shifts the possessor of this legitimacy to the civic humanist who, through the proper application of aesthetic theory and the avoidance of vanity, possesses the knowledge necessary to accurately represent the non-European world.

The third chapter, *Feminine Enclosures: The Domestic Aesthetic in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s* Turkish Embassy Letters, analyzes Montagu’s manipulation of existing representational strategies and her establishment of uniquely female aesthetic discourses. Works such as those by Moore and Johnson had textually marked the practice of aesthetic contemplation as a masculine activity closely associated with the economic endeavors of pre-imperial England. These strategies excluded the female, except as a symbolic manifestation of property and acquisition, denying her the ability to engage in the construction of the perceived
outer world. This traditionally passive construct of femininity seemingly negated the English female traveler’s textual agency. Early female travelers such as Montagu had to negotiate these masculine strategies of representation in order to create and maintain female narrative authority. As Elizabeth Bohls argues, women travelers found “various ways of exposing the flawed logic” behind the exclusionary constructions established by the masculine travel narration. Montagu’s *Letters* engage in the establishment of female narrative authority from within the accepted traditions of English femininity. Montagu creates a uniquely female genre of aesthetic discourse that derives authority from the cultural representations that had traditionally marked the female as the object, rather than the subject, of aesthetic contemplation. Using her gender as a means of gaining access to previously inaccessible parts of the Orient such as the Turkish baths, Montagu elevates her work above that of male travelers, citing her observations as evidence of her credibility.

Chapter four, *Sovereign Fantasies: Defensive Self-Fashioning in Penelope Aubin’s “The Strange Adventures of the Count De Vinevil and His Family,”* explores Aubin’s creation of female narrative authority in the travel-adventure novel. Aubin combines traditionally masculine forms of representation with the traditions of feminine narration. She modifies the focus of the travel narrative from descriptions of economic exchange and the triumph of male mercantile heroes to the creation of independent female heroines. While venturing beyond the limitations of traditional feminine narration, Aubin is careful not to transgress too far into the realm of masculine discourse. The gendered transgressions in *De Vinevil* function within a framework of defensive self-fashioning that allows the female heroine to defend the tenets of European civilization, both preserving feminine virtue and exploring individual agency.
While works such as Montagu’s *Letters* and Aubin’s *De Vinevil* experiment with feminine narrative authority, they functioned within an exploitatively Orientalist framework of objectification. Female writers could exercise more flexible aesthetic liberties in non-European territories—geographical and literary—that had not been clearly situated within the framework of English life. Female travel writers constructed narrative authority through a defensive self-fashioning that depended upon the exploitation of the Oriental object of aesthetic gaze.

The travel narrative served to create a basis for the English imperialist project. The narratives I discuss in this dissertation created a framework of representation that established the Oriental stereotypes that later became markers of imperial authenticity. The gendered implications of eighteenth-century England problematize these representations through the struggle for autonomy and independent representation on the part of the female travel writers of the period. Due to this inherent struggle and the various modes of aesthetic description employed in narrating it, the travel narratives of the early eighteenth century created an expansive repertoire of symbolic imaginative imagery that came to represent the ‘Orient’ and, ultimately, to justify its subjection and exploitation at the hands of its Western observers.
NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1 Roxann Wheeler demonstrates that the travel narrative was second in popularity only to theological texts in the eighteenth century. See, “Limited Visions of Africa: Geographies of Savagery and Civility in Early Eighteenth-Century Narratives,” in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, eds. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999) 15.


3 See Bruce McLeod’s *The Geography of Empire in English Literature, 1580-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) for a more elaborate analysis of pre-imperial English trade.

4 McLeod, 17.

The economic expansion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries naturally affected the structure and subject matter of English travel literature. The resurgence of an English merchant class that struggled to prove its legitimacy within the established social structure contributed to the modification and evolution of the English travel narrative’s aesthetic form. While not an entirely new literary genre, the travel narrative that emerged in the early eighteenth century was innovative in that it depended primarily upon the authority of contemporary economic practices, the premises of which had promised to concretize the national and natural superiority of the English.¹

This chapter will analyze Daniel Defoe’s role in the socio-economic debate that defined the identity politics of the early eighteenth century. Defoe’s writings on foreign and domestic trade, regional and international mercantile rivalries, and economic theory reflect many of the commercial and political practices that contributed to the evolution of the English travel narrative. Defoe’s political and economic writings effectively created some of the first stereotyped, imperialistic representations of the East that later appeared as part of the English justification for colonial rule. These representations, I will argue, serve as a framework for the aesthetic and economic representation of the non-European world as it is described in the travel narratives of the early eighteenth century.
Defoe’s *Complete English Tradesman* (1727), a conduct manual for the English merchant, clearly delineates what Defoe considers the proper means of establishing and maintaining English commercial ascendency. The jingoism that Defoe expresses in this work is, in many respects, a result of the regional financial rivalries that occasioned the Western race for colonial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of Defoe’s trade pamphlets and other commercial writings identify the predominant economic practices in relation to the inhabitants and commercial traditions of the non-European countries involved, primarily West Africa and the East Indies. *A Brief Account of the Present State of the African Trade* (1713) and *The Trade to India Critically and Calmly Consider’d* (1720) demonstrate the complex machinations of English industry and trade, and illustrate the beginnings of English imperial practices.

The commercial expansion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries revolutionized and reformulated earlier economic theories and practices. The primacy of mercantilist policies in England created a skilled industrial population and a large shipping industry that rivaled those of the Dutch. The relationship between the English and the Dutch was a tentative one, initially based on emulation. As Bruce Carruthers notes, the English “learned most of their financial techniques from the Dutch,” who had followed an intensive path of capital-based state formation patterned on regional indifference and a reluctance to let politics interfere with trade. K.N. Chadhuri explains that the commercial prosperity of the Dutch rested on “a world-wide carrying trade and a massive concentration of marketing and stapling functions in Amsterdam.” The establishment in 1609 of the *Wisselbank*, Amsterdam’s exchange bank, predated the establishment of the Bank of England by nearly a century and implied a “relative English backwardness in financial matters.” Moreover, the financial techniques the Dutch had
developed—primarily their systematized public credit system—funded a substantial and ongoing military effort that, despite the decentralized Dutch polity, ensured economic dominance until the end of the seventeenth century when debilitating national debt forced the Dutch into a passive and pacifist stance that facilitated the rise of the English fiscal-military state.

John McVeagh points out that “the impact of these [economic] changes [was so vast] that some historians have spoken of a commercial and financial ‘revolution’ taking place in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.”6 This financial revolution first began to take shape with the Navigation Acts of 1650, later re-enacted at the Restoration in 1660 and again in 1696, that precipitated the Anglo-Dutch wars of 1652-54, 1664-67, and 1672-78. The basic principle of these Acts was the exclusion of the Dutch from all English trade profits, thereby ending Dutch economic dominance in the region in addition to creating a sizeable “native merchant fleet, a source on which the navy could then draw in wartime both for men and ships.”7 The Navigation Acts, specifically the Act modified by Sir George Downing and passed at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, created an “aggressive patriotic spirit”8 that increased the nationalistic drive to transform English trade into a world-dominating force while simultaneously representing a move to secure English national and regional power over its European trade rivals.

The terms of the Navigation Acts relied on a rigorous belief in an inherent English superiority that endorsed a natural right to advance economically by attempting to rule out all European rivals. In the Act of 1660, Downing added two extra enactments that served as a declaration of commercial war by categorically discounting all other European nations’ right to participate in the seemingly boundless profit to be had from international and colonial trade. Under the first of these added enactments, Parliament declared that:
Trade, as determined by the Navigation Acts and the subsequent Anglo-Dutch wars, became closely linked to highly politicized military endeavors—both regional and international. Unlike the Dutch’s regional indifference in matters of trade, the English, through the Navigation Acts, openly declared a national desire not only to turn a profit but also to ensure regional political ascendancy. In order to secure international trade routes, England needed to establish an indisputable military presence that could support the antagonistic Navigation Acts and the mercantile principles upon which they were based. According to dominant mercantilist policies, in order to serve national wealth and power a nation must increase exports and, in turn, collect precious metals, primarily bullion. As a result, the English mercantilist’s primary concern became the solidification and monopolization of foreign, colonial trade. Colonial expansion thus became of utmost importance to England as colonial raw goods (primarily precious metals) were essential to the bullionist argument that stressed the importance of making the home country
richer than its competitors. Colonies, therefore, ceased to be countries in their own right. Rather, they became possessions of the home country that functioned primarily as storage facilities for the precious metals, raw materials, and slaves that served as the material proof of English regional superiority. The bullionist, mercantile argument “assumed a built-in rivalry between all trading nations.”11 This assumption naturally made its way into English trade documents of the period as the prime objective of English traders and trade institutions focused on establishing the primacy of English commerce within this European rivalry.

In *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727),12 Defoe asserts his belief in English regional superiority in addition to delineating how to go about maintaining this cultural advantage. In Letter XXII, “Of the Dignity of Trade in England more than in other Countries,” Defoe states what he believes to be the reasons for English mercantile superiority. He attributes this supremacy to the great “exportation of the growth and product of our land” (305), England’s “best and most agreeable” (305) climate, and the physical prowess of English men, whom he describes thus:

…the *stoutest* and *best*, because strip them naked from the wast upwards, and give them no weapons at all but their Hands and Heels, and turn them into a room, or stage, and lock them in with the like number of other men of any nation, man for man, and they shall beat the best men you shall find in the world. (305)

Defoe here attributes English mercantile advancement to a natural, inherent national superiority. God and nature have endowed the British people with the means and the justification for a monopolized economic advancement that entails both regional and international antagonism. According to Defoe, the antagonism, though expected, should not be a matter of great concern for the English merchant who is naturally prepared for and predisposed to the aggressive
reactions of both his rivals on the Continent and his colonial acquisitions. Incorporating the jingoist sentiments attached to trade, Defoe illustrates the nature of England’s foreign trade relations, specifically in relation to the Dutch:

…the Dutch are our Friends in the War, but I never heard any Body say, the Dutch are our Friends in the Trade, no, nor we theirs—We will Fight hand in hand, and back to back, against France, against Tyranny, against Popery; but we fight Hand to Hand, and Face to Face in our Trade, in all Parts of the World, where our Trading Interests Clash; nor is it any Breach of our Alliance in other Things.13

Defoe thus distinguishes among the need to create stabilized European power structures, a means of creating and maintaining the supremacy of the entire region over remote parts of the world, and the desire for a national advancement that is attributable to the monopolized expansion of English trade. The English behaviors Defoe describes parallel Dutch political strategies in that the Dutch had based their commercial activity on the premise that those who were most indifferent in trade, overlooking political prejudices, would inevitably be more financially successful:

Not only would the Dutch happily loan money to governments at war with each other, thus making money on both sides of a conflict, but, even more impressive, the Dutch were willing to trade with their own enemies, even as war raged.14

Defoe’s analyses of regional commercial relations modify Dutch policy in certain respects. English regional indifference in trade, similar to Dutch commercial indifference, was significantly limited by English foreign policy. The Dutch, while perhaps serving a relatively important regional purpose, such as fighting Catholicism and the French, were not to be
considered allies in international trade, as such an alliance could hinder England’s ability to maintain its newly acquired positions of political and financial power. Unlike the Dutch, therefore, the English were not reluctant to combine politics with economics. While the relationship between politics and economics is not a unilateral one, English tradesmen and policy makers took advantage of the interdependency of the government and the marketplace. This interdependency placed the success of the English nation in the hands of the relatively new merchant class. England was now in need of merchants who would be capable of upholding a uniquely English ethos while successfully conducting business.

Defoe’s primary concern was the fact that the merchant class lacked a definitive, organized code of behavior and business. This, he believed, seriously threatened England’s chances for political and economic domination. Defoe worried that English natural superiority could be lost if it were not organized and maintained through effective economic practices. In the letters of *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe attempts to provide the mercantile class a set of rules and values that would ensure not only individual success but also national triumph. As he states, the merchant is relatively new to English society and, as such, should not be above receiving “advice from those who have gone before him” lest he end up “like a horse that rushes into the battle, [who] is only fearless of danger because he does not understand it” (v). The main purpose of *The Complete English Tradesman* was to prescribe rules and guidelines that would ensure the creation of a credible, competent, and lasting merchant force.

Defoe begins Letter XXII by noting a connection between the nobility and the merchant class. In doing so, he bridges the gap between landed gentry and monied merchants. The English government was deeply concerned about the dedication and nationalism of English traders in that merchants did not necessarily have a landed interest in England as a nation. As Catherine
Ingrassia notes, “paper credit and the mechanisms of speculative investment shifted the nature of property from a material, immovable, and stable form such as land to fluid, immaterial, and multiple ones.”

Unlike traditional nobility, the merchant class based its wealth and status on liquid assets, not on land. The concern that emerged as a result of the lack of a physical bond between merchant and nation led to the exclusion of merchants from governmental appointments. Defoe attempts to prove that the concerns regarding the merchant’s physical bond to the nation are unfounded by pointing out the importance of the new trade to the English nation. He states that “the wealth of the nation…undoubtedly lies chiefly among the trading part of the people” (307). Defoe further illustrates that “our Tradesmen in England are not, as it generally is in other countries, always of the meanest of our people.” He indicates that

Trade and Learning has been the two chief steps, by which our gentlemen have rais’d their relations, and have built their fortunes; and from which they have ascended up to the prodigious height, born in wealth and number, which we see them now risen to. (306)

By describing the English merchant class in this manner, Defoe establishes a much more powerful national bond than that traditionally attributed to the nobility. English merchants were not only members of society, people who considered themselves to be English, but they were also, more significantly, the driving fiscal force of the nation as a whole. Defoe transformed his defense of the English merchant into an argument for considering the mercantile class to be the new nobility, an argument that frequently devolved into a biting, antagonistic evaluation of the landed gentry:
Having thus done a particular piece of justice to ourselves, in the value we put upon trade and tradesmen in England, it reflects very much upon the understandings of those refin’d heads, who pretend to depreciate that part of the nation, which is so infinitely superior in number and in wealth to the families who call themselves gentry, and so infinitely more numerous. (307)

Defoe’s views are clear. The merchant class is a loyal, nationalistic, valuable part of English society, as well as a replacement for—an improvement upon—traditional nobility. Defoe points out that English gentry is now both outdated and burdensome. Its “excessive high living” that promised no profitable return had “of late grown so much into a disease” (308). Indeed, according to Defoe, nobility had become an indicator of mismanaged funds and idle men. While nobility itself may not have been attainable outside of the traditional bounds of heredity, Defoe is quick to argue that worldly knowledge, imperative in securing personal and national wealth, was easily acquired by all:

…many of our trading gentleman at this time refuse to be Ennobled, scorn being knighted, and content themselves with being known to be rated among the richest Commoners in the nation: and it must be acknowledg’d, that whatever they be as to court-breeding, and to manners, they, generally speaking, come behind none of the gentry in knowledge of the world. (308)

Nobility, according to Defoe, had taken on a new form that all but discarded notions of birth-right and hereditary gentility. Trade makes the gentleman by creating new noble families that did not previously exist. Defoe gives the hypothetical example of a “certain Tradesman of London” who could not find, when tracing the genealogy of his family, an “ancient race of Gentlemen” to which he belonged. Defoe’s ideal tradesman, however, takes comfort in the fact that he will
“begin a new race, who should be as good Gentlemen as any that went before them” (311).

Defoe would revitalize English society with a unique, near-revolutionary new class. England’s fiscal and political rebirth would, then, be facilitated by a new generation of self-made nobles:

The word *Tradesman* in *England* does not sound so harsh, as it does in other countries; and to say a Gentleman-tradesman is not so much nonsense, as some people would persuade us to reckon it; and indeed, as trade is now flourishing in *England*, and encreasing, and the wealth of our tradesmen is already so great; ’tis very probable, a few years will shew us still a greater race of trade-bred Gentlemen, than ever *England* yet had. (313)

Having thus been responsible for the creation of a powerful, active, and resourceful new social class, trade was also responsible, according to Defoe, for England’s international expansion. Defoe states that this expansion was beneficial both to England and to her colonies. He further argues that trade had peopled far-off nations with English colonists, allowing for the formation of “civilized” governments in uninhabited islands and thereby raising “them [the natives] also to a prodigy of Wealth and Opulence” (316). Sixteen years prior to the publication of *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe described what he viewed as the inherent benevolence of English colonial trade in his *Review*. Defoe comes to following conclusions regarding colonial trade and its relationship to the value of land:

’Tis from trade as the magazine that land receives its value and life. Land is a fund of wealth, that’s true; but trade is the fund of land, from your trade springs your land’s wealth. Let such men [the landed gentry] but view the land in other countries. What was the land in Barbadoes good for when the island was unpossessed by us? It was as rich as now, the fund there—but that trade gave that
fund a value. It was a fund and no fund—a fund of nothing; and take trade from that island now, with all its wealth, and what will it be good for still? Will it feed and employ 60,000 Negroes, &c., in a place of but 25 leagues round? (Review no. 54, Sat. 3 Feb., 1713)\textsuperscript{16}

In his attempt to prove the worth of trade and tradesmen to English nobility, Defoe employs what would become one of the most common rhetorical strategies of nineteenth-century imperialism. English colonial endeavors, as Defoe argues, are inherently benevolent. They represent an English responsibility not only to the citizens of England but also to those unfortunate inhabitants of the non-European world. Defoe goes so far in his defense of English merchants to the landed gentry as to champion the slave trade as an institution that “feed[s] and employ[s] 60,000 Negroes” in the Barbadoes alone. But these seemingly benevolent trade systems are undercut by a rather revealing passage in which Defoe describes how and with whom business is conducted in the English colonies:

We have not encreased our power, or the number of our subjects, by subduing the nations which possess’d those countries, and incorporating them into our own; but have entirely planted our colonies, and peopled the countries with our own subjects, natives of this island; and, excepting the negroes, which we transport from \textit{Africa} to \textit{America}, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations; all our Colonies, as well in the islands as on the continent of \textit{America}, are entirely peopled from \textit{Great Britain} and \textit{Ireland}, and chiefly the former; the natives having either removed farther up into the country, or by their own folly and treachery raising war against us, been destroy’d and cut off. (\textit{The Complete English Tradesman}, 316)
Defoe here reveals the imperialistic nature of English trade as he gives voice to a nationally and regionally accepted state of foreign affairs. He describes the colonies, not as nations or countries in their own right, but rather in terms of their usefulness and efficacy within the trade system. Defoe mentions these colonies only insomuch as they facilitate English national and regional wealth, describing them as fertile regions in which sugar and tobacco can easily be harvested or as places to “send away thither all our petty offenders, and all the criminals that we think fit to spare from the Gallows” (317). He only touches upon the existence of the native inhabitants of these regions when describing them as hindrances to trade, as people who either think wisely and remove themselves from the path of English trade and industry or are “destroy’d and cut off” by “their own folly.” Moreover, Defoe trades in the imperialistic apologia that viewed the world peripheral to Europe as an empty canvas, as a collection of enclosed spaces on a map that were to be filled by industrious, therefore virtuous, English traders and colonists. He states that “trade alone has peopled these countries,” an event that serves the purposes of the home country as well as, in anticipation of the “White Man’s Burden” of the nineteenth century, beneficially serving the few indigenous people that do inhabit these colonies by allowing “the ordinary planters at Jamaica and Barbadoes [to] rise to immense estates, riding in their coaches and six” (316).

Defoe attempts to quell English fears of losing its newly established merchant class to the colonial marketplace. If settling an otherwise unoccupied land, fertile and profitable, were such an easy, indeed, logical step for the English tradesman, then what was to prevent a mass migration of English men and women, ultimately leaving the British Isles in disarray? Defoe believed that the existence of the colonies would serve to keep “our people at home” (316). The assumption was that the increase of colonial trade, facilitated by monopolized triangular trade routes, may lead to a parallel and proportionate increase in “inland trade” (316). Defoe
contended this increase in trade would ensure the prosperity of English merchants at home while simultaneously creating a profitable environment for the English lower classes. Defoe asks:

What is it but trade? the encrease of business at home, and the employment of the poor in the business and manufactures of this kingdom, by which the poor get so good wages, and live so well, that they will not list for soldiers; and have so good pay in the merchants service, that they will not serve on board the ships of war, unless they are forced to do it? (317)

In addition to facilitating inland trade, colonial endeavors would solve English poverty. According to Defoe, the English poor were far better off than the poor in other European countries because they were fortunate enough to be employed by colonial and inland merchants. Defoe states that the increase in overall national wealth would inevitably lead to an increase of “Gentlemen’s estates” which in turn would cause an increase in the number of the working poor—in positions such as “husbandry of the land, breeding and feeding of cattle, etc” (318). In a passage similar to the one in which he compares the physical prowess of English tradesmen to other European tradesmen, Defoe sets up the English poor as warmer and less hungry than the rest of Europe’s poor:

The same trade that keeps our people at home, is the cause of the well living of the people here; for as frugality is not the national virtue of England, so the people that get much spend much; and as they work hard, so they live well, eat and drink well, cloath warm, and lodge soft; in a word, the working manufacturing people of England eat the fat, drink the sweet, live better, and fare better, than the working poor of any other nation in Europe; they make better
wages of their work, and spend more of the money upon their Backs and Bellies, than in any other country. (318)

Defoe ends Letter XXII by reiterating what he sees as the glory of English trade, comparing London to the biblical city of Tyre and thereby establishing divine sanction for English colonial endeavors. Defoe indicates that Tyre had been “the great Port or Emporium of the world for foreign commerce, from whence all the silks and fine manufactures of Persia and India were exported all over the Western world” (319), a role that London was now undertaking. With this, Defoe endows London with a religious, divine quality that is difficult to discredit within the Christian context of the early eighteenth century.

Prior to the publication of *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe had discussed the established trade with both Africa and India. In 1713, he published *A Brief Account of the Present State of the African Trade*, a pamphlet in which he strongly stated his support of England’s trade relations with Africa. African trade was essential to British economic interests “because of its lynchpin role in the three-way commerce involving British woollens, negro slaves, and new world treasure.”17 Defoe combined his defense of the African trade with invocations of national welfare, linking patriotism to the Royal African Company and to the mercantilist theories upon which it was based:

If the General Interest of Trade, if the Prosperity of the British Colonies, if the Export and Consumption of Woollen Manufactures, if the Return of Gold in Specie, if a Trade that brings in the richest Import for the meanest export, be worth preserving and encouraging, the Government cannot but value and protect the African Trade.18
The nature of the English economic endeavors in Africa led Defoe to argue against free trade. He believed that the Royal African Company should have the monopoly of the African leg of triangular trade, excluding “interlopers” who placed English trade as a whole in a vulnerable position that would only encourage rebellion, insurrection, and significant monetary loss.

The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa, established in 1660 with the declared intention of finding gold that could be carried back to England, soon discovered a more profitable venture in the African slave trade. The beginning years of the Royal African Company’s trade were extremely successful. Between 1680 and 1686, the Company transported an average of 5,000 slaves a year; it sponsored 249 voyages to Africa between 1680 and 1688. Due in large part to its successful beginning, the Company came under attack by independent traders who objected to the Company’s monopoly of African trade. The independent traders were eventually able to convince Parliament that opening up African trade to all English merchants would be more profitable and useful to British economy than setting up a single company to handle all ventures to and from Africa. In 1697, Parliament repealed the monopoly of the Royal African Company and opened up the trade, an event that Defoe considered unwise. The Act of 1697 expired thirteen years later, on 8 July 1712, one year before the publication of Defoe’s pamphlet.

Defoe’s pamphlet is an attempt to prevent the renewal this Act. According to Defoe, the economic difficulties that appeared before and after the enactment of free trade to Africa were a result, not of the faults or misjudgments of the Company but, rather, of the greedy interjections of “interlopers” and “Clandestine Traders” (60). The presence of these traders undermined the authority and position of the Company, undercutting its economic success. Defoe attributes what
he sees as nearly irrecoverable financial losses to the acts of these clandestine traders. He makes the following observations with regard to what he considers the detriment of free trade to Africa:

I. In depriving them [the Company] of their Trade in general, supplying the Coasts of Africa with Goods, which Coast was properly the Companies Market, and supplying the Colonies with Negroes, which was also the only Vent the Company had for their own.

II. In acquainting the Natives of the Coast with the Customs and Usage of Commerce, the Value and Price of English Goods, and the Want we stood in of Negroes, by which they lessen’d the usual Profits of the Trade itself, taught the Natives how to Trade, beat down the English Goods, and rais’d the Price of Negroes. (60)

Defoe’s first observation is strictly economic—by cutting in on the Company’s market, independent traders created an alternate market that threatened the existence of the Company. This observation, however, would sway neither government officials nor common tradesmen in that the independent traders’ tactics were no more than testaments to their business acumen. His second observation, however, appeals to a nationalistic, patriotic sense of responsibility. The practices of these independent businessmen infringe upon what Defoe sees as the natural progression of mercantilist trade, while also risking a complete loss of trading privileges in Africa by teaching African natives the rules of Western commerce. According to Defoe, this was the ultimate betrayal of English commercial ideals. Africans, along with all native inhabitants of English colonies, were not England’s partners in trade. They functioned either as economic tools, facilitating successful commercial strategies, or as commodities of exchange. Bringing the “Negroes” into the fold of European trade was an unwise commercial strategy that also tacitly
declared a racial equality that undermined the legitimacy of the slave trade. Viewed in this light, the “interlopers” had caused the fall of a national trading company while simultaneously betraying the ideals and governing premises of England as a nation.

By educating the Africans in Western commerce, independent traders destabilized English (and European) notions of national differentiation. The differentiation between Europe and Africa had been traditionally determined in terms of human exercises of reason. “Negroes” participating in Western trade undercut the binarized cultural constructions that had emerged during the Enlightenment. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that Enlightenment thought presupposed the stable existence of categorical distinctions between West and East in which the East occupied an inferior, less valuable position, or link, in the Great Chain of Being. Africa and the Orient, according to this presupposition, were relegated to the non-reason based function of providing raw materials that would allow Europe, generally, and England, specifically, to increase and develop its “manufactures, arts, or sciences.” Horkheimer and Adorno further indicate that the impetus for European expansion in trade and territory can be reduced to a single overriding principle of Enlightenment thought: “What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men.” To permit native inhabitants of British colonies to function according to the rationally driven premises of Western trade is a betrayal of this principle that threatens to weaken, if not to destroy, the supposed fixity and stability of the governing cultural assumptions of contemporary England. The threat posed by independent traders was not one that simply undermined the monopoly of the Royal African Company but rather was one that jeopardized the sanctity and security of the English nation through a betrayal of the principles of the relatively new English trading empire.
Defoe relies on images of struggle and nationalistic stoicism in his description of the Royal African Company during this period of open trade to Africa. He states that the Company “languish’d under…Persecutions” that caused “thinking Men to fear its being quite lost to the Nation” (61). Defoe here attempts to appeal to a collective sense of national pride while strongly implying that knowledgeable, wise, “thinking” men must be advocates of mercantilist trade as represented by the Royal African Company, thereby relegating free traders and their supporters to a state of unenlightened malice. Colonial trade became, according to this implied categorization, essential to national identification. Moreover, the possible failure of mercantilist, imperial trade as described by Defoe denoted a crisis of colonial representation, binarized categorization, and national identification. Defoe describes the chaos that he believed was a direct result of the free traders’ destabilization of the mercantilist economy:

The Coast of Afric was made a meer Common Fair, where every Ship’s Company endeavouring to circumvent and undersell one another: The Negroes, who were before made to give our own Prices for Goods, were taught to be Hucksters and Brokers for one another; the whole Scale of the Trade was turned, and instead of putting our Price upon them, they learnt now to put their Price upon the English, as well of what they Bought, as of what they Sold; and the Trade by this Means was reduced to so small a Profit that it was scarce possible for the Company to subsist, the Expence of they were at being considered, no, tho’ they had the whole Profits of the Trade. (62)

In addition to stating that free trade, by eliminating definite racial and cultural categories, damaged English commerce, Defoe also emphasizes the growing threat from the Continent—primarily the Netherlands and France. Trading in images of war and destruction,
Defoe points out that as a result of free trade the African coast lacked a strong, solid English presence. This caused England’s African settlements to become “a daily Prey to the Enemy…not only plundered and destroyed by the French, but deserted by those who were entrusted to defend ’em, they being intimidated by the Separate Traders” (62).

By victimizing the Royal African Company, Defoe legitimates his mercantilist argument. He extends his description of the Company to include its harsh native reception, stating that it had been “kept languishing…under the Attacks of these People at Home, I mean in Parliament” (63). Moreover, the Company traders suffered what Defoe describes as humiliating public attacks:

Nor were the Separate Traders content with the Persecution of the Company in Parliament, and with the destroying their Trade in Africa, but attack’d them every Day with Universal Clamour and Reproach; vilifying and insulting them in Publick, in Print, and otherwise, in order, as they effectually brought to pass, to ruin their Credit, and torture them with innumerable Prosecutions for their Debts upon Bond. (63)

Rhetorically, Defoe succeeds in creating a persecuted, victimized Royal African Company whose representation can easily be extended to include the growing British Empire. In so doing, he justifies the Company’s economic principles and endeavors while constructing a public sense of responsibility with regard to securing the Company’s salvation. In what may be Defoe’s strongest rhetorical strategy in this pamphlet, he provides the Company with divine sanction, undermining opposing arguments with comparisons of godly justice:

\[ \text{THESE (The Company) in all their Management had a View, and that management a Tendency, to preserve the Trade, \textit{THOSE} (the Separate Men) to} \]

27
In short, THESE, like Solomon’s true Mother, were for preserving the Life of the Child, (the Trade,) whoever was to have the Possession of it; THOSE, like the hard Hearted Whore, on the other Hand, who having no true natural Affection to the Child, (Trade,) as its true Parent, could stand and see it cut in pieces by the Strife, so she might but rob the right Owner of the Enjoyment of it.

(71-72)

Defoe creates an argument that authorizes English economic activity in Africa while never referring to Africans except to categorize them as a form of exchangeable currency. At the root of Defoe’s argument against free trade lies his fear of the economic risk involved in allowing native Africans to inhabit roles other than those of objectified, commodified tools of trade. He makes no pretences to amicable, equal commercial exchange with Africa. Underlying his case for the divine legitimacy of mercantilism is the commercial and cultural exploitation of an entire people that would become the governing principle of many English socio-political and foreign endeavors over the following two centuries.

The commercial exploitation that Defoe advocates takes on a slightly modified form when applied to the East Indian trade. In “The Trade to India: Critically and Calmly Consider’d” (1720), while still appealing to a collective national identity that he defines primarily through the trade relations England establishes with its colonies, Defoe argues against English trade with the East Indies, regarding it as economic suicide. Despite the East India Company’s ultimate role in establishing a strong commercial and military presence in India, and Defoe’s belief in the efficacy of the monopolized system that the Company embodied, he reveals in this work the economic detriment that he believed the Company’s trading practices had incurred upon the
domestic development of Britain. The expansion of trade with India had led to what Defoe saw as an error in economic judgment.

Elizabeth I had granted the East India Company its first charter in 1600. British presence (economic and subsequently military) began in India and the Far East two years later when “four English ships arrived in the Javanese port of Bantam” and later formed a permanent trading post there before returning home laden with a cargo of pepper. Unlike the relatively limited trade practices of Western Africa, the practices of Indian trade—manifested in the establishment of elaborate trade routes through the Middle and Far East, the creation of credit systems, insurance, and cartels—were successful, effective, and much more difficult to incorporate forcibly into English economic power structures.

The commercial success of the United East India Company of the Netherlands further complicated English plans for economic conquest over India and the Far East. The Dutch had based their organization of the East India trade on a separation of functions between merchants and industrial producers, thus enabling them to control successfully both the production process and its profits. This financial and political ideology was equally admired and envied by the Dutch Company’s English counterpart. As Chadhuri notes,

when the group of London merchants who were to promote the first English voyage to the East Indies petitioned the Privy Council for formal permission, they stated officially that the recent Dutch success in reaching the spice markets of Asia had stirred them up ‘with no less affection to advance the trade of their native country than the Dutch merchants were to benefit their Commonwealth.’

The early British traders involved in these new markets were not, due to Dutch economic predominance, in a position to dictate any specific mercantile terms to the markets of the East
Indies, as many of the local rulers and merchants had already established firm trade relations with the Dutch company. As a result, the English East India Company had to seek certain concessions, addressing the locals participating in the trade as economic and political equals by offering them appealing financial benefits as trade incentives. Moreover, India refused to accept anything but silver or gold in return for the products it exported to the West, undermining the bullionist ideals upon which English mercantilism was based. Another troubling feature of this trade was the fact that England’s most popular export to Continental Europe—British broadcloth—had no market in India. The English had “arrived without much that the complex and sophisticated trading system of the Indian Ocean wanted,” a fact that led to the English reliance on military presence and prowess in enforcing the economic and political limitations it desired upon this region.

Defoe’s argument against the East India trade stemmed from his concern regarding the depletion of English bullion that he considered an essential factor in determining regional, political, and economic ascendancy. He analyzes the Company’s imports and exports, positing discrepancies and miscalculations that support his claims with regard to trade in the Indies. His primary concern, as he states early in the pamphlet, is to determine “whether the Trade, as now carry’d on to India, or to the East Indies, is profitable to the Nation, or whether it is not” (86). He distinguishes his argument against trade with India, however, from his considerations of the East India Company itself:

I say, we must distinguish here between the East India COMPANY and the East India TRADE: The Mistake here is the Foundation of all that Cavil and Talk, to little Purpose, which we have had on this Occasion; the Difference is plain; the
East India TRADE is one Thing, the East India COMPANY tradeing is another.

(86)

The East India Company, as a mercantilist institution enjoying a monopoly chartered by the government, is in agreement with the economic ideals in which Defoe believes. The problem that Defoe sees is one that he does not blame on the trade practices of the English. Rather, he traces this problem to the mediocrity and incivility of East Indian trade. Much as the trade to Africa had suffered once free tradesmen had begun to instruct native “savages” in the traditions of Western trade, the trade to the Indies likewise suffered as a result of a native (East Indian) awareness of commercial strategies that could undermine the English quest for regional and international primacy. It was this native awareness that led Defoe to question the legitimacy of the East Indian trade while adhering to and championing the mercantilist ideologies he considered essential to English economic survival:

I grant what was formerly voted by the House of Commons in 1694, That it is most for our Interest that the Trade to the East Indies be carry’d on by an exclusive Company: But this has no Relation to the main Question, viz. Whether Trade itself, whether with a Company or without a Company, is an advantageous Trade? (86-87)

The calico controversy fueled much of the debate regarding the East India trade at the time Defoe was writing. There was practically no market for British broadcloth in the Indies, and the popularity of Indian textiles among the bourgeoisie in England further threatened the success of the English textile industry. This threat had been in question for some time before the publication of Defoe’s pamphlet. This was a matter that deeply concerned Defoe as he considered the
English response to the controversy ineffective. The official response to the calico controversy had been an attempt to ban the use of East Indian textile:

...the total Prohibiting the Wearing and Using of Printed or Painted Callicoes in Great Britain, is not ruinous to or inconsistent with the Prosperity of the East India Trade; or, to put it into an Affirmative, that may be more capable of Evidence, the East India Trade may and would remain in a very thriving and flourishing Condition, and be carry'd onto the Profit and Advantage of the Adventurers, tho’ all the Subjects of Great Britain and of Ireland were effectually limited from and prohibited the Wearing and Using of Printed and Painted Callicoes. (86)

Defoe, while agreeing that “the Callicoes are destructive to our Woollen and Silk Manufactures” (87), believed that the official response disregarded what he saw as the root of the commercial problem—the trade to India: “’tis the Trade to India in general, not the Callicoes, that is now the Question, and whether it may pass under that Title of beneficial Trade to the nation, or not” (87).

Defoe provides his readers with two qualifications for what he considers, and what he believes the nation should consider, gainful trade: “I. That it exports that which it is the Advantage of the Kingdom to export.  II. That it returns, or imports, something of which we consume little at Home, and export much” (87). Neither of these qualifications applies to trade with India, as English exports to India were minimal in terms of already processed materials (its exportation of bullion as payment was significant) and its importation of goods was considerable. Moreover, Defoe did not consider the goods imported from the Indies advantageous as they consisted mostly of spices and textiles—expendables that generated no national wealth. This was a consideration that, in Defoe’s opinion, justified a boycott of Indian trade.
Defoe creates a distinctly cultural division between East and West. Calling for a collective European solidarity, Defoe creates a menacing East that stands in opposition to the enlightened and therefore virtuous West:

…you must consider *Europe* as one Body, one Nation, or one general Interest in Trade, and set the *East India* Trade against it as another. The *East India* Trade exhausts the whole Treasure of *Europe*, and destroys thereby their Trade; carrying every Year such immense Sums of Money in Specie out of *Europe* into *India*, that the whole Body feels the want of it very sensibly. In Return of which, they bring their chief Manufactures and their Growth, and fill these Parts of the World with Gaiety and Trifles, and rob them a second Time of the Employment of their People. (100)

Defoe here anticipates the governing attitudes of the British Empire. While having previously discounted the reliability of England’s European rivals in trade, Defoe indicates that a cultural link between European nations places the entire region above the East both culturally and economically. Comparing Europe to a human body, Defoe creates a notion of Western solidarity that is excessively fragile and susceptible to foreign attack unless it acts with the strength of a unified being created in the image of God. India, by contrast, is a destructive, diseased force whose purpose seems to be the destruction of Europe. The East is a menacing, deleterious entity that forces its trivialities and savagery upon the otherwise civilized European nations. Having created this exaggerated cultural distinction, Defoe indicates the folly of exercising trade with India:

Thus, in a Word, *Europe*, like a Body in a warm Bath, with its Veins open’d, lies bleeding to Death; and her Bullion, which is the Life and Blood of her Trade,
Defoe here extends his cultural distinction to include a religious one, once again providing his argument with divine sanction. This trade funnels Christian funds to “Heathens,” causing the virtuous, Christian Europe to commit economic suicide—an act that is a clear betrayal of Christian ideals, placing Europe among the ranks of the Indian “Heathens.”

Defoe successfully created an India that “like the Grave, swallows up all, and makes no Return” (101) in an effort to decrease the attractiveness of Indian trade to English merchants—both East India Company merchants and free traders. He realized that more likely than not his desire for a boycott of East Indian trade would not be enacted. As a result, he resigned himself to the suggested ban on Indian textile, hoping that “what no Body can wear or use, no Body will buy; what no Body will buy, no Body will bring to market; what no Body will bring to Market, no Body will fetch from Abroad. And thus the Trade will be at a full Stop at once” (102-3). Regardless of his views on the outcome of Indian trade, Defoe effectively contributed to the creation of one of the first of a series of stereotypical, imperialistic representations of the East that later served as the argumentative basis for colonial rule. By separating the East from Europe culturally, politically, economically, religiously, and corporeally, Defoe helped set the stage for the successful imperial domination of the nineteenth century.

The cultural and economic views expressed by Defoe in these works also represent the dominant attitudes of early eighteenth-century travelers. Usually representatives of trading companies or political bodies, late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English travelers couched their descriptions of Africa and the Orient in terms of the predominant socio-economic
attitudes. The travelers analyzed in the following chapters formulated their works in accordance with these regional rivalries and cultural distinctions. In doing so, early eighteenth-century travel writers created a literary genre that, while chronicling the exploration of the non-European world, employed the imperial notions attached to English national identification and commercial prosperity expressed by Defoe.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1 See Margaret Hunt, “Racism, Imperialism, and the Traveler’s Gaze in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies* 32.4 (Oct. 1993): 333-57. Hunt argues that the early eighteenth-century travel narrative was “extremely derivative” due to its tendency to “reconfirm received stereotypes about the people…encounter[ed]” (339). It is my contention that, while following fairly derivative patterns, the eighteenth-century travel narrative also modified the already established modes of aesthetic description, generating narrative structures wherein new stereotypes could be established and concretized.

2 See Geoffrey Holmes, *The Making of a Great Power: Late Stuart and early Georgian Britain 1660-1722* (London: Longman, 1993) 58-68. Holmes notes in this chapter that the Dutch had established a substantial “dominance…since 1600 over the world’s carrying trade” (58). English emulation of Dutch trade practices ultimately resulted in London’s replacement of Amsterdam as the entrepôt of Europe, planting what Holmes describes as the “earliest seeds of the late-seventeenth-century ‘Commercial Revolution’” (61).


5 Chadhuri, 411.


7 Holmes, 58.

8 McVeagh, 3.

10 See Holmes, 58-68.

11 McVeagh, 14.


13 Qtd. in McVeagh, 20.

14 Carruthers, 23.


17 McVeagh, 21.


19 In 1670, the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa was liquidated. It was replaced by the Royal African Company on 27 September, 1672.


23 Chadhuri, 7.

24 Chadhuri, 6.

25 Farrington, 40.
CHAPTER 3

IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHIES AND THE COMMERCIAL GAZE

THE AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION OF EMPIRE

A great traveller, ’tho in the same chamber, will pass for a very extraordinary person; as a Greek medal, even in our cabinet, is always esteem’d a valuable curiosity. 

_David Hume, Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40)_

The English traveler’s drive to venture into the ‘exotic’ worlds of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia increased along with England’s expansion in economic and political power. This drive, while linked to the principles of the English trading empire, relied almost entirely on empirical observation rather than on the authority of ancient texts. Travel writing emerged as one of “the early modern period’s most popular and flexible genres”¹ capable of metamorphosing in accordance with individual observations, varying rhetorical representations of overseas experiences, and the reception of the literary marketplace.

Francis Bacon was one of the earliest philosophers to associate the authority of individual experience—and its documentation—with the idea of scientific representation. In his essay Of Travel (1625), Bacon advises: “Let diaries…be brought in use”² as a means of ensuring a scientifically precise representation of various locales. For Bacon, the travelers of the Renaissance had discovered truths that provided “the vehicle for the conveyance of the information which laid the foundations for the scientific and philosophical revolutions of the seventeenth century.”³ In creating pseudo-scientific accounts, travel writers constructed geographical and ethnographical realities that could be incorporated into their already existing cultural and social paradigms. The sensory perception of foreign places, and the documentation
of these perceptions, thus gave early travel accounts scientific credibility. This placed travel narration in the philosophical and empirical debates that arose during the seventeenth century with regard to the perception and construction of reality. John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and its espousal of a *tabula rasa* of human consciousness held that all knowledge was produced from the impressions drawn in through the five senses.4 Travel writing, rooted as it was in sensory experience and empirical perception, thus grew in importance and relevance to the early English readership.

A pattern of aesthetic acquisition complemented many of the scientific representations, both in their fictional and factual forms, of these external realities. The travel narrative became a means of acquiring not only the knowledge of distant lands, but also those lands themselves. As Joseph Addison points out in the *Spectator* when describing the “Man of a Polite Imagination,” the ability to appreciate and to describe in an aesthetically acceptable fashion endowed the gentleman observer with a passive power of acquisition:

> A Man of a Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue…It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind. 5

The aesthetic experience granted the English observer authority over his aesthetic object. Edmund Burke described the aesthetic experience later in the century in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), establishing that
this type of experience was not a matter of “making intellectual judgments (of proportion and symmetry, for example), but a matter of basic human instincts: the gentle curves, the soft and unthreatening contours…found in beauty.” These instincts, as Addison implied, were found exclusively in the English (and, perhaps, the more refined European) “Man of a Polite Imagination.” They could not be shared, learned, or acquired by the objects of aesthetic observation. The experience of beauty and, subsequently, the right to own this beauty (of both individuals and landscapes) belonged exclusively to the English male traveler and observer.

The relation between the aesthetic representation of the non-European world and the principles of the English trading empire relies on this notion of aesthetic acquisition. Aestheticism and economics came to form a complementary body that determined the nature of imperialistic representation. By analyzing two early texts that employ, antithetically, Defoe’s representations of the merchant traveler, I will explore the asymptotic relationship between the aesthetic documentation of English travel and exploration and the principles of English commerce and empire. Sir Francis Moore, an agent of the Royal African Company, in his *Travels into Inland Parts of Africa* (1738), creates an aestheticized ethnography while upholding notions of regional and international supremacy. Moore combines the economic and the literary by couching his descriptions and analyses of peoples, landscapes, and cultures in the overarching fiscal premises of his journey. He creates a series of stereotypical cultural distinctions that derive legitimacy from the complementarity of ethnography, aesthetics, and economics. Also, in keeping with Defoe’s notion of the contributive mercantilist consumer, Moore grants his readership a vicarious role in the construction and consolidation of empire, implying a shared responsibility in the aesthetic and economic representation of the non-European world.
Samuel Johnson’s History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia (1759), while encoding “inevitable ideological aspects: spiritual pilgrimage, mercantile prospectus…colonial expedition,” moves away from the strict ethnographical discourse found in early travel narratives. Johnson’s tale attempts to demystify the Orient by creating a narrative of counter-aestheticism. Through representing the Orient as mundane and uninteresting, Johnson endeavors to remove the power of aestheticism from economic exploits and to place it with literary representation. Redacting the non-European world into a literary forum, while seemingly dismantling the imperialistic representation of the colonial world, achieves an end very similar to that found in the works of mercantile travelers and travel writers such as Moore and Defoe. Rather than de-exoticizing the non-European world, Johnson’s demystification of English colonial acquisitions effectively strips the Orient of representative agency, creating a world that exists only in aesthetic, literary terms. The non-European world becomes a curiosity, a work of art to be created and collected by refined European men of taste.

In 1730, Moore was appointed by the Royal African Company of England as a writer at James Fort on James Island in the River Gambia. As part of this appointment, Moore traveled five hundred miles inland, documenting his observations. He left Africa in 1735 and in 1738, published the journals of his travels, Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa. These journals, while documenting the Company’s activities in the region, reflected the shift in the “early modern period from chivalric adventure to venture capitalism.” Like most early English travel, Moore’s voyages were carried out in the name of trade; he was sent to find, establish, and assist in maintaining new markets. In addition to advocating a clear economic focus, Moore makes a point of establishing himself as a reliable narrator by exploiting the “uncertain boundary between
travel writing and the fiction which copied its form.”¹⁰ He spends much of his Preface establishing the veracity of his narration:

I have not attempted to embellish the Work, since I am persuaded that Readers will make Allowances for the Age of the Journalist, and will rather chuse to read real Facts told in the plainest way, than beautiful Works of Imagination. Since my coming to England, I was prevailed upon to publish this Journal, because it gives an Account of the inland Parts of Africa, to know which the World was very curious, and of which few Accounts have been hitherto published, and those either very ancient, or stuffed with fables.¹¹

Moore immediately distances himself from travel adventure writers. His is a narrative of credibility and authenticity; part of its goal is to replace extant, and according to Moore, deficient accounts of Africa. As Roxann Wheeler points out,

the ordinary range of knowledge about Africa and Africans in the early eighteenth century was a combination of doubt and conviction, fact and fantasy. Although geographies were common in the libraries of the educated, it was through travel writing that most Britons gained their ideas about Africans and Africa.¹²

Moore’s work abandons its narrow commercial focus to become “an entire treatise, roughly systematic, on a country and its inhabitants.”¹³ Moore considered his journal to be a contribution to the documentation of English history and its relationship to ethnography and science. Indeed, he represents himself as an authority who is qualified—based solely on the personal experience of travel—to fill in the geographical, historical, and economic gaps that had hitherto existed with regard to the Western portrayal of Africa:
I have perused the Journal, and other Pieces, in the following Book: They will give great Light into what the curious World has long desired to know, *The Inside of Africa*; for tho’ that Country is famous in History form the antientest Times, yet the Inland Parts of it are to this Hour Unknown to the People of Europe. (1)

Moore’s construction of reliability caters in large part to his English readership. Moore was relegating the world to paper for the new print marketplace at home. This was a marketplace that quickly learned to “write and read the world in books—with surprising speed and sophistication.” Establishing the veracity of his work was both a legitimation of his narrative and an economic strategy that contributed to the stability of the literary marketplace. If Moore could convince his audience that he was not deceiving them, then his work would find valid economic backing; he would ensure his work’s profit potential. Moore rhetorically includes his readership in the establishment of his narrative, endowing them with a vicarious role in the creation of Africa:

The Book consists of several Pieces, which are necessary to give the Reader a true Notion of *Africa*. The Author, who hath compiled it, hath not alter’d the Tracts which he hath quoted, but given them as they were wrote, tho’ they sometimes contradict each other: By which means the Reader may form a better Judgment of the Truth, than if he was to rely upon a single Traveller. (xi).

Moore associates his first-hand aesthetic observation of Africa with the basic principles of economic exchange. In return for the purchase of his work, Moore offers his readership the opportunity to participate vicariously in the English colonial endeavor. His readers were partially responsible for building a coherent, cohesive representation of Africa, as Moore had deliberately collapsed the difference between writer and reader.
Moore continues to authenticate his narrative in a lengthy letter to the publisher. Here, Moore debunks ancient renderings of Africa, placing himself within the ranks of the established scientists, ethnographers, and geographers of the period:

The Bounds of [Africa] have been often changed; the Antients reckoning AEgypt no part of Africa, The present Geographers divide the Word into Four Parts: They account Africa, including AEgypt, as One. It is a vast Peninsula, joined to Asia by an Isthmus, or Neck of Land, which separates the Red Sea from the Mediterranean, and borders upon Judea and Arabia. (xi)

Moore also lists and describes the “Fifteen Kingdoms of the Negroes” (iii), briefly categorizing and delineating the peoples and governments of the regions that he has traversed. To further ensure his reliability as narrator, Moore moves here to establish his legitimacy as geographer and ethnographer. He provides detailed geographical statistics, listing mountain ranges and city structures; he describes groupings of individuals and social entities, religions, conquerors, and rulers in a fashion he believes will not “be disagreeable to the reader” (ix).

Combining scientific, economic, and literary strategies, Moore intersperses his descriptions of landscapes, raw materials, and indigenous peoples with selections from classical poets and writers such as Homer and Cato. The legitimacy of Moore’s scientific narrative is enhanced by his appreciation of the classical renderings of the region:

To the South of the Land of Palms lye the Libyan Desarts, one wide-extended Waste of Sand, boundless, and level to the Eye, as the Sea; and when the Wind blows, agitated by it, which is finely described in Cato;

So, where our wide Numidian Wastes extend,
Sudden th’ impetuous Hurricanes descend,
Wheel thro’ the Air, in circling Eddies play,
Tear up the Sands, and sweep whole Plains away.
The helpless Traveller, with wild Surprize,
Sees the dry Desart all around him rise,
And, smother’d in the dusty Whirlwind, dies. (x)

Couched in this aesthetic appreciation is, of course, Moore’s (and by extension the Royal African Company’s) economic and imperialistic evaluation of the region. Moore emphasizes the fertility of the various landscapes, the type of produce they yield, and the climate (and the European ability—or inability—to adapt to it). He mentions the peoples of these regions briefly, usually in order to point out awe-inspiring differences between them and the people of Europe or merely to add them to the list of exchangeable commodities available to English traders in Africa:

The Land between those Mountains and the Sea is extreamly fertile, yielding Whet, Olives, Cattle, &c. The Tops of the Mountains are cover’d with perpetual Snow. The sides are cloathed with Woods, and in their Valleys rise those clear cool Streams that render Mauritania, now call’d the Kingdom of Morocco, fertile. To the South of Mount Atlas, extending from the Ocean to the Nile, parallel to the Mediterranean Sea, is the Land of Dates: This is a steril Country, full of sandy Desarts, producing no Corn; yet not quite so barren, but that in many Places the Palm-Trees grow, and the Fruits which they yield, call’d Dates, supply the Natives instead of Bread, and serve their Food the Inhabitants of the Desarts. (ix)
Moore sometimes expresses astonishment at the fact that anyone lives in these regions at all. He states with confusion, “Even these miserable Countries are inhabited: The Arabians dwell with pleasure amongst the Sands” (x). He describes the Arabs and their existence in these areas concomitantly with other novelties such as ostriches and camels, rendering the indigenous peoples of these areas curiosities worthy of aesthetic appreciation and acquisition. This becomes even more pronounced when Moore describes “the Negroes”:

All the Lands that these Rivers water or overflow are fertile; for all that is not cultivated bears Wood, and what is cultivated produces such Corn as grows in warm Countries, and plenty of Pasture for Cattle. This is inhabited by the Negroes, a Race of People who appear to be different from the rest of Mankind; their Hair being woolly, and their Colour black; their Noses flat, and their Lips large; but whether these are an original Race, or whether the Difference arises from the Climate, the Vapours of that particular Soil, the Manner of breeding their Children, and from the Mothers forming of their Features, is not here determined, tho’ there are some curious Facts relating to it mention’d in the Journal. (xi)

Moore does not describe “the Negroes” in terms of their social and cultural organizations; he does not refer to their cultivation of these lands, the use that they make of the fertility of the region. He, rather, renders them passive objects of observation. The native inhabitants have no representative agency; their representation is, indeed, something that Moore, and by extension England, has co-opted. Moore here reduces an entire race to the status of collectible artifacts. Moore can, and indeed does, carry his representation of these peoples home with him, simultaneously justifying and exercising aesthetic acquisition. As Nigel Leask explains:
…the traveller will gain an advantage over the native peoples he meets if he is able to bring back information and objects which will allow them to be seen for the first time…The power of the centre to act at a distance upon unfamiliar events, places, and peoples lies in its prior ability to bring them back home. Distinct places, events and objects must be rendered mobile, stable (so that they can be moved back and forth without decay or distortion resulting from decontextualization), and combinable.  

Moore renders these indigenous people “mobile,” making it possible to combine them with the remainder of the objects he (and other traveler-tradesmen) have brought home—objects such as rocks, birds, plants, artifacts, and maps. This network of accumulation made possible the reconstruction of the distant world in the home metropolis—a position of security and power. The security and power of the home metropolis are to a certain extent indicators of the success of the economic, pre-imperialistic endeavors of such organizations as the Royal African Company. Moore’s role in the Company was one of national importance. As one of the first European explorers to travel far into the African interior, Moore effectively combined the notions of national heroism and sound economics. In an assertion of English superiority, Moore describes James Island:

The Fort is called James Fort, and is the chief Settlement that the Royal African Company have in this River. This Fort keeps the Right of Trading to the River Gambia for the Company, and consequently, for the Subjects of England. (17)

Moore indicates that the English ownership of this region has created and maintained the success of the economic endeavors there. He compares the trade practices of the English with those of the French, pointing out what he considers to be the folly of French mercantile behavior abroad.
The mistakes Moore saw were based on European regional competition; the French frequently
excluded the Royal African Company from trading with French colonies and trading stations.
Moore speculates what the situation would have been like had the French gained ownership of
James Island:

Were this once in the Hands of the *French*, who, I am very well inform’d, in the
Year 1719 would have purchas’d it for the *Mississippi* Company, could they have
obtained Leave for the so doing, they would then exclude not only the Company,
but all other Nations, from Trading hither, as they already have from the Coast of
*Senegal*, where they maintain an exclusive Trade by Force, and take all Ships.

(17)

In addition to posing as a reliable narrator, Moore now becomes what Defoe had
described as an English mercantile hero. He adds himself to the ranks of the travel adventure
heroes, carefully treading the line between precise historian and daring explorer. Carrying
regional rivalries with him into the unexplored interior of Africa, Moore sustains the jingoist
sentiment attached to trade. He braves the unknown, risking his life and the lives of his men, in
order to uphold English economic supremacy. He describes the English-French rivalry over the
African slave trade in great detail, citing contracts drawn up between them and the respective
markets of each:

…there were no less than three *Liverpool* Vessels trading about a Mile above the
*French*, at the Port of *Gillyfree*, who gave Seventy or Eighty Barrs per *Head*, and
yet were not able to purchase near the Number of Slaves which the *French* did. In
the Year 1724 there was a Contract made between the *French* Agents at *Goree*
and the *English* at *James* Fort, that the *French* should settle a Factory in the River
Gambia below James Fort, in order to make what Trade they could; and altho’ the English Company’s Stock was then at the lowest Ebb...yet is it to be observed, that the Royal African Company, in lieu of the French having a single Settlement in Gambia, obtained Leave to send Vessels when they pleas’d. (58)

Moore claims that the “French [were] controll’d by the English,” stating that the French tradesmen who desired to travel above James Fort were “obliged to ask Leave of our Governor” who “puts a Man on Board [the French ships] to see that they do not make any Trade” (59). Moore and the Englishmen at James Fort were national heroes. They had, in Moore’s narrative at least, subdued both the French traders and the independent traders who had threatened the legitimacy and success of the Royal African Company’s monopoly, while maintaining a unique English presence. All this, of course, was carried out under the overarchingly threat posed by Africa itself. The fact that Moore and his brave, English men could focus on, and succeed in, outdoing the French economically, indicates that the English had met with considerable success in overcoming the hazards that had supposedly manifested themselves in Africa. As Tim Youngs indicates, “Difficult terrain, illness, and native resistance created an image of heroic—usually masculine—and sometimes tragic endeavour to penetrate into Africa’s interior.”18

Moore goes to great lengths to describe the perils that he and most of his men had to overcome while working to expand England’s economic, political, and cultural supremacy. His account of the “Rainy Season” is charged both with the language of English heroism and with that of African animosity. In what sounds like the opening of an early adventure novel, Moore describes the beginning of the rain:

The wind comes first, and blows excessive hard, for the Space of half an Hour or more, before any Rain falls, insomuch that a Vessel may be suddenly surprised
and overset by it; but then a Person may see it a good while before it comes, for it looks dismal and very black, and the Lightnings breaking out of the black Clouds, as they move slowly towards you, makes it appear very awful. Both Thunder and Lightning are very dreadful, the one flashing so quick, makes it continually light, and the other shakes the very Ground under you. (134)

Moore treads the line between objective observer and travel-adventure writer. He earns credibility in sections such as this in that he adds a sense of aesthetic appreciation to the scene. Moore’s text is not merely a series of empirical observations; it is a combination of the chronological account of movements and events, ethnographic observation, and aesthetic appreciation. In his accounts of the various dangers of Africa, Moore addresses the “agreeable horror” of the sublime that Burke later discusses in his *Philosophical Enquiry*.

Whilst it rains it is generally pretty cool, but when the Shower is over, the Sun breaks out excessive hot, which induces some Persons to cast off their Cloaths, and lie down to sleep, but before they awake, perhaps, comes another Tornado, and the Cold strikes into their Bones, and gives them Fits of Illness, which to a great many are very fatal, I mean to White Men, for the Natives are not liable to catch Cold so easily…Four Months in the Year are unhealthy, and very tedious to those who are come out of a colder Climate. (135)

Articulated, systematic empiricism was not enough to transfer the experience of travel to the home audience. Moore’s heroic, harrowing travels into the heart of a threatening Africa appealed to basic human instincts rather than to stark intellectual judgments. Burke contended that beauty appealed “to the male sexual desire that drove the species to reproduce itself,” a notion that parallels the imperialistic drive to expand territorially and economically. Moore’s use of the
“agreeable horror” of the sublime includes his readers in this expansionist narrative. By creating a narrative that challenges the line between fact and fiction while invoking the onset of the sublime, Moore addresses his readers’ “impulse toward self preservation” and affords them “the frisson of contemplating terrifying things from a position of safety.” 19

Moore’s descriptions create a dialogue between “scientific and aesthetic interpretations of exotic nature.” 20 Moore creates a series of pseudo-scientific representations of Africa’s native inhabitants cotermiously with his aesthetic renderings of the continent. The descriptions of physical traits and of social organizations, while romanticized at times, stress the cultural incommensurability of East and West. The horrifying sublime thus gave way to the pseudo-scientific, pre-imperialistic charting of nations and peoples in need of English cultural, religious, and economic care. Despite his claims of precision and objective, scientific representation, Moore’s rhetorical strategies and scientific claims were frequently conditioned by the economic, ideological, and imperialistic debates of the time. The quality of his ethnographic research remained variable. The discrepancies of representation present in Moore’s narrative, while apparently working against common sense, produced an image of native peoples as blithe, puerile savages:

The Natives, really, are not so disagreeable in their Behaviour as we are apt to imagine; for when I went thro’ any of their Towns, they almost all came to shake Hands with me, except some of the Women, who having never seen any White Men, ran away from me as fast as they could, and would not by any Means be perswaded to come near me. Some of them invited me to their Houses, and brought their Wives and Daughters to salute me, and sit down by me, always finding things about me to gape at and admire, such as Boots, Spurs, Gloves,
Clothes or Wig, each of them being to then Subjects of Discourse and
Admiration. (120-21)

There is nothing terrifying about these people. Quaint and harmless, Moore’s natives
invoke a sense of pity and perhaps a benevolent desire to lend them some sort of support or
assistance. The Western presence in Africa would ensure that these people become familiar with
the accoutrements of civilized European society: boots, spurs, gloves, clothes, and wigs. Africans
could then be elevated to the level of social awareness enjoyed by Europeans. The ethnographic
classification of the people of Africa would prevent this theoretical elevation from ever being
actualized, or even seriously considered from a European standpoint. The pseudo-scientific
representations of the “the Negroes” formed an insurmountable biological barrier that
determined the native African’s place within the European notion of the hierarchy of existence.
In one of the most striking passages in his journals, Moore describes the natives’ “Way of
treating new-born Infants,” and reveals his empirical explanations of the facial differences
between the African and the White Man:

When a Child is new born they dip him over Head and Ears, in cold Water, three
or four Times in a Day, and as soon as they are dry, they rub them over with Palm
Oyl, particularly the Back-Bone, Small of the Back, Elbows, Neck, Knees, and
Hips. When they are born they are of an Olive Colour, and sometimes do not turn
black for a Month or two.

I Do not find that they are born with flat Noses, but if it is the Mother’s Fancy to
have it so, she will, when she washes the Child, pinch and press down the upper
Part of its Nose. (131)
The aberrant behavior of the African parents is indicative of the general aberrancy of the populace. The near-barbaric ritual of dipping the newborn infant in cold water several times a day tags the adults as incapable savages. Moreover, Moore’s claim that the mothers were generally responsible for the “flat Noses” of the “Negroes,” suggests that the Africans exhibited an anomalous sense of physical beauty. Unlike the English “Man of a Polite Imagination,” the “Negro” was incapable of properly attaining, maintaining, or appreciating aesthetic worth. Moore’s pseudo-empirical observation therefore suggests an ethnographical distinction between Africa and England based on the ability, or lack thereof, to discern and appreciate European, specifically English, models of physical and natural beauty. The “Negroes” failure to perceive English paradigms of beauty further legitimated the Western exploitation of the continent.

Moore alters his native representations once he turns his attention to the economic focus of his journey. The natives’ inability to view and to appreciate the world aesthetically—in English and European terms—denies them any representative agency they may have had otherwise. In other words, native inhabitants of the non-European world, specifically Africa, are stripped of representative power; they are relegated to the objective position of aesthetic-economic acquisition. The endeavors of the Royal African Company are not, according to Moore, abominations or anti-aesthetic betrayals of humanity. Rather, the Company’s actions are economically sound endeavors based upon the legitimate accumulation and development of an undeveloped species. Much like the cultivation of land to benefit humanity, marketing non-European peoples for the sake of European advancement supposedly served a beneficent purpose. Moreover, the slaves’ inability to appreciate beauty made it impossible for them to recognize the injustices of the institution of slavery. They cannot appreciate beauty; therefore, they must not be able to recognize its absence.
When Moore describes the economic nature of the slave trade, he adds African slaves to the list of exchangeable commodities available to the English merchant: “The chief Trade of this Country is Gold, Slaves, Elephants Teeth, and Bees-Wax” (40). Slaves are second only to gold in economic consideration—a very important observation when considered alongside the strict mercantilist policies exercised by the Company. Moore continues to describe the transportation, maintenance, and cost of these commodities. He even offers bartering advice to his readers:

When you agree with the Merchants for Slaves, you always agree how many of the Heads of the Goods you shall give him upon each Slave, which is three or four, if Slaves are worth forty or fifty; but when Slaves are dearer, as they oftentimes are, at eight Barrs²¹ per Head, then you must give five, and sometimes six of the Heads upon every Slave; and there is an Affortment made of the Goods, by Barrs of different Species, which come out to the Price of the Slaves. (45)

The dehumanization of the African is striking. Moore’s rhetoric has shifted from one of ethnographic observation to mercantile economics. His cultural observations have granted him the power of both aesthetic and physical acquisition. The representations of Africa and its inhabitants, both created and recorded by Moore, have allowed for the objectification of the entire continent. When Moore describes the slaves themselves, they appear as nothing more than commodities of exchange. Indeed, the inconvenience of supply and demand economics overshadows the horrors of the dehumanization inherent to the institution of slavery:

The Men and Women used to be much dearer than Boys and Girls; but there have been so many Vessels for young Slaves, to carry to Cadiz and Lisbon, that there is scarce any Difference between the Prices of young Slaves and grown ones. (45)
Moore’s voyage was a successful one in that Moore contributed to the creation of the pre-imperialistic English nation. By combining the notions of aesthetic appreciation, economic perspicacity, and nationalistic heroism Moore established a series of interdependent narratives that project the course of English colonial endeavors. At the close of his narrative, Moore relates his return to English soil as one would relate the return of a hero:

I received a kind Letter from my Mother, expressing the Joy and Satisfaction she received by hearing of the Return of her Son, whom she had for four or five Years past never expected to see again; and in the same Letter she sent me the melancholy Account of my Father’s Death, as likewise of two Brothers and a Sister…of which I never before had received the least Account. (233-34)

Moore had survived the perils of Africa’s interior. His heroic sacrifice lies in his having being absent for the deaths of several of his close family members. Moore’s readers are now aware of the lengths to which he had gone for the sake of maintaining England’s regional and national superiority. Moore did receive his recompense, as he was the embodiment of the mercantile hero:

I waited upon the Company, who were very well pleas’d with my Behaviour whilst in their Service; they paid me what Money was due to me, and in the Month of September following I set out for the City of Worcester, where I was kindly received by my old Acquaintance, and returned GOD Thanks, who thro’ many Dangers had brought me back in Safety to my Friends, Relations, and native Country. (234)

In the final lines of his work, Moore grants his endeavors, and those of the Company, divine sanction. God has overseen Moore’s work and, in apparent approval, has returned him safely to
his “native Country” and has ensured that he has been paid well for his pilgrimage into Africa’s interior.

Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759) resists reduction to simple relations of cultural subordination and domination. This humanist text is, in part, a reaction to English politics of empire and the logic of mercantilism expressed in works such as Moore’s *Travels* and Defoe’s *Tradesman*. In an era of political projection where “visions of comfort and wealth at home as well as in remote regions filled the British imagination,”22 Johnson created a travel narrative that discouraged expansionist travel; he attempted to establish a world that would dismantle the image of colonial territory as utopia. Johnson modified the conventional means of expressing English ascendancy. Rather than resorting to the traditional formula for the oriental tale, exoticizing the Orient in order to discredit it, Johnson demystified these far-off lands and rendered them mundane, unsatisfying, and boring. Johnson confronts his readers with the disillusionment of Prince Rasselas and the skepticism of the anti-tradesman, Imlac. Rasselas’s quest for happiness ends in failure as he commits the mistake that Johnson believes the expansionist English nation is committing: he has fallen prey to a faulty understanding and application of aesthetic power.

Johnson’s tale begins with a warning of sorts. It asks its readership to learn from the tale of Rasselas:

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and peruse with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abyssinia.23
Johnson addresses the print culture, the same readership that Moore had indirectly included in the construction of Africa. Johnson regards these readers as people who have invested too much energy in the vicarious expansion of England. According to Johnson, travel narratives such as Moore’s do nothing but create restlessness and a curiosity that cannot be fulfilled without negatively affecting the English nation. Johnson had expressed his concerns regarding this type of expansionist travel earlier in his career in “The Vanity of Human Wishes” (1749). Expansionism, as he saw it, created false hopes and resulted in wasted potentials. The narrator of “Vanity” warns the “wav’ring Man, betray’d by vent’rous Pride” (7) that he will be deluded by “treach’rous Phantoms in the Mist” (9). Johnson’s narrator explains that this man, the “needy Traveller,” (37) is rarely guided by reason and that his actions, rather, depend upon greed and vanity. In Rasselas, Johnson presents this “needy Traveller” in the character of the prince. In doing so, Johnson opposes the precepts of mercantilist expansionism in that he undermines the validity of the mercantilist claim to comfort and happiness through expansion and change.

As a prince in the Happy Valley, Rasselas lacks nothing. Despite this, he is discontented and unhappy. He contemplates the human condition, attempting to discern why it is that he lacks the perfection of a happy existence. He states revealingly, “I am not at rest; I am…pained with want, but am not…satisfied with fulness” (Rasselas, 16). This is the very condition against which Johnson warns. It is a condition that should be regulated else it leads to a destructive inquisitiveness that cannot be quenched.

Johnson does not condemn the curiosity that fuels Rasselas’s desire to leave the Happy Valley. Rather, what Johnson objects to is an undiscriminating curiosity that does not consider intellect and knowledge. He objects to the overwhelming vanity that he sees governing the
expansionist drive manifest in English mercantilist tactics. Rasselas, echoing early expansionist rhetoric, pleads with his instructor for the opportunity to experience something “new”:

…I fancy that I should be happy if I had something to persue. But, possessing all that I can want, I find one day and one hour exactly like another, except that the latter is still more tedious than the former. Let your experience inform me how the day may now seem as short as in my childhood, while nature was yet fresh, and every moment shewed me what I never had observed before. I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire. (16)

Rasselas’s curiosity is irrational. He wishes to leave the Valley not in pursuit of knowledge or intellect but rather for the novelty of experience—a childish and fruitless endeavor. The puerility of his desires exposes a failure to distinguish fully between fiction and truth. As Johnson indicates, Rasselas’s “chief amusement” was to place himself in fanciful situations; he liked to “picture to himself that world which he had never seen; to place himself in various conditions; to be entangled in imaginary difficulties, and to be engaged in wild adventures” (17-18). Rasselas’s dependence upon the construction of fantasy imitates the vicarious role that the English readership supposedly played in the construction and consolidation of empire. Johnson implies that the pseudo-economic relationships of aesthetic power—such as those promised by Moore—are futile. The promises of vicarious expansion are misapprehensions and misapplications of aesthetic value that will ultimately amount to a waste of time and a misdirection of legitimate curiosity.

Johnson’s characterization of Imlac, the “man of learning” whom Rasselas finds in the Happy Valley, presents a realization of the inadequacies of expansionist, mercantilist travel. Imlac, the mediating force of the narrative, has traveled extensively; he has seen those areas that
Rasselas has not; he has learned those sciences to which Rasselas craves to be exposed. His experiences, however, unlike the ones for which Rasselas yearns, reveal the wisdom of one who has abandoned the vanity of the human expansionist desire. Imlac tells Rasselas early on that his history will not be long:

the life that is devoted to knowledge passes silently away, and is very little diversified by events. To talk in publick, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire, to answer inquiries, is the business of a scholar. He wanders the world without pomp or terreur, and is neither known nor valued but by men like himself.

(31)

Imlac here reveals the legitimate nature of travel. Acceptable forms of travel necessarily entail a search for knowledge. The life of the scholar, as described by Imlac, accounts for the voracious nature of human curiosity without threatening the worth of human life. This life opposes the aggrandizement of English mercantilist endeavors, however, in that it does not cater to the self-glorification of imperial tactics.

Imlac continues the description of his thirst for knowledge by separating himself from the image of the merchant, problematizing the influential role of the merchant in English society. In opposition to the nationalistic image of the powerful, aesthetic observer-merchant present in the works of writers such as Moore and Defoe, Johnson creates an aesthete, appreciative of nature and art, who detaches himself from the notion of trade. The strong link between the expansionist merchant and Addison’s aesthetic “Man of a Polite Imagination” is severed in descriptions such as the following:

My father, proceeded Imlac, originally intended that I should have no other education, than such as might qualify me for commerce…With this hope…he sent
me to school; but when I had once found the delight of knowledge, and felt the
pleasure of intelligence and the pride of invention, I began silently to despise
riches, and determined to disappoint the purpose of my father, whose grossness of
conception raised my pity. (33)

Imlac separates knowledge and trade. The drive to accumulate wealth subverts the intellect;
Imlac feels pity for his father’s “grossness of perception.”

The separation between the pursuits of knowledge and commercial advancement
increases in the following section as Imlac describes his experiences on his first sea voyage.
Rejecting the idea of commercialized travel and discrediting the image of the capitalist hero,
Imlac abandons his father’s plan for him to become a merchant and acquaints himself with “the
mast of some ship” in order to gain passage into “some other country.” Imlac’s only desire is to
“see a country which I had not seen before” (35). Once he embarks on his sea voyage, Imlac
embodies the characteristics of the ideal aesthetic observer:

When I first entered upon the world of waters, and lost sight of land, I looked
round about me with pleasing terreur, and thinking my soul enlarged by the
boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety; but,
in a short time, I grew weary of looking on barren uniformity, where I could only
see again what I had seen. (35)

Imlac, in his appreciation of the sublime yet terrifying beauty of the sea, becomes Addison’s
“Man of a Polite Imagination.” However, Johnson’s version of this aesthete-observer recognizes
the limitations of human psychology; Imlac quickly determines that he cannot achieve a
“Property” in everything he sees and appreciates. Moreover, Imlac knows that attempting to
quantify and acquire the sublime through aesthetic acquisition or commercial expansion will
only lead to individual dissatisfaction and an endless drive to increase in wealth and power, disregarding both knowledge and intellect.

The only valid aesthetic accumulation is that which contributes to the artistic representation of nature and experience. In Imlac’s “Dissertation upon Poetry,” Johnson proposes a supposedly legitimate means of benefiting from travel. Imlac, resolved to become a poet after learning of the poetical traditions of the Arabs, describes his detailed observation of nature as he concludes that “To a poet nothing can be useless.” Participating in neo-classical traditions, Imlac’s observations indicate that the role of the artist, the poet specifically, is to render nature and experience useful. Travel must contribute to art, to the creation of a valid aesthetic experience. Indeed, the only power Imlac considers attainable through travel is that of artistic prowess—expansion and acquisition, unless contributors to this prowess, have no legitimate role:

Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to [the poet’s] imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little…every idea is useful for the inforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he, who knows most, will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction. (42-43)

The expression of truth and the instruction of a readership through this expression are what determine the legitimacy of travel. Johnson creates an idealized image of the traveler-observer, delineating what he considers to be the nature of truth and beauty as they relate to human experience.
Johnson’s characters move into a discussion of European countries—the first direct use of cultural contrast in the narrative. Imlac, during his stay in Palestine, came into contact with “great numbers of the northern and western nations of Europe; the nations which are now in possession of all power and all knowledge.” Imlac reports that in comparison with the Abyssinians and their neighbors, the Europeans “appeared almost another order of beings” (46). The cultural separation is clear; Johnson is writing from within the same tradition that produced writers such as Defoe and Moore. Indeed, in Imlac’s response to Rasselas’s inquiry into the source of European power, a firm hierarchy of cultural existence whose rhetoric could be applied to the expansionist texts of the period emerges:

They are more powerful, Sir, than we…because they are wiser; knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals. But why their knowledge is more than ours, I know not what reason can be given, but the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being. (47)

According to this distinction, Europe has been granted divine supremacy over the non-European world. The will of Providence has placed Europe in a legitimately superior position. Europe owes its power to God. Johnson employs this notion of supremacy to subvert the idea of expansion. Although traditionally used as justification for imperialistic conquests—proof of divine sanction—Johnson uses this as evidence of the unnecessary nature of travel. If, indeed, Providence has placed Europe in a position of superior knowledge, then the need to search for happiness elsewhere becomes redundant.

Long journeys in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought. Change of place is no natural cause of the increase of piety, for it inevitably produces
dissipation of mind...He who supposes that his vices may be more successfully combated in [far-off lands], will, perhaps, find himself mistaken, yet he may go thither without folly: he who thinks they will be more freely pardoned, dishonours at once his reason and religion. (48)

But Johnson does not claim that Europe has successfully achieved a perfected happiness. Imlac explains that the Europeans are “less unhappy” than the Abyssinians, but they are, indeed, unhappy. Throughout the text, Imlac “enforces the Johnsonian dictum that no political institution can achieve perfection.” What Johnson suggests as the proper means of handling this perpetual unhappiness is an acceptance of the limitations of humanity, an abandonment of the vanity of expansionist rhetoric, and a quest to combine effectively the notions of beauty, truth, and experience.

Johnson’s dystopian vision is interrupted by an Oriental captivity narrative. Pekuah, Nekayah’s lady-in-waiting, is abducted by a “troop of Arabs” while waiting for Rasselas, Nekayah, and Imlac to emerge from a pyramid. The tale of Pekuah’s abduction appears to depart from the prevalent ideas of the overall narrative; however, it does serve to elaborate further upon the concepts of anti-expansionism and the limitations of human experience. Upon first hearing of her abduction, Rasselas is quick to declare the need to pursue the Bedouins in order to retrieve Pekuah. Imlac discourages this, suggesting rather a negotiation of ransom. Pekuah is then quietly returned to the group. Johnson thus moves his narrative away from the sensationalism and high adventure of traditional Oriental captivity narratives. Indeed, Johnson criticizes this type of tale in the Rambler, describing it as a narrative that is “produced without fear of criticism, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life.” Johnson’s narrative, in contrast, aims to “serve as [a] lecture of conduct, and [an] introduction into life” (11)
Pekuah’s listeners, and Johnson’s readers, quickly learn that there had been “no danger of violence to [Pekuah and the other captives’] lives” (*Rasselas*, 132). Pekuah’s description of her Arab captor associates him with Imlac’s neo-classical description of the poet as imaginative and intellectual giant:

> The chief of the band was a man far from illiterate: he was able to travel by the stars or by the compass, and had marked in his erratick expeditions such places as are most worthy the notice of a passenger. (135)

Pekuah eludes danger by attending to the intellectual propensities of her captor. They discuss “celestial observations” and he endeavors to “teach [her] the names and courses of the stars” (138). The Bedouin chief, though a thief and an abductor, is not “a swarthy villain, but polite and well-behaved, instead of ravishing his virgin captive, he treats her respectfully, teaches her astronomy, and enjoys her company.”

The fortress seraglio of this Bedouin captor further removes Johnson’s narrative from traditional travel-adventure tales. Johnson de-exoticizes and de-sexualizes the harem by presenting the women as simple, puerile creatures, undiscerning and unintelligent. Unlike the conventional tales of high passion and hedonism, Johnson’s tale introduces an unattractive and uninteresting Orient, one that does not lead to physical happiness, even for the Oriental man. The Arab’s dissatisfaction with his harem allows Johnson the opportunity to destroy the hedonistic, romantic notion of the voluptuous lives led by Arab men. It affords him the chance to prove, yet again, that the hedonistic accumulation of beauty and wealth, as manifested in the image of the harem, does not lead to happiness.

Following Pekuah’s safe return and the relation of her non-traditional tale of captivity, Johnson presents an interchange between his travelers and an astronomer, revealing the dangers
of indulging the imagination. Johnson’s astronomer has come to the irrational conclusion that he
can control the weather. His excessive observation of the heavens, his misapprehension of them,
and his misinterpretation of his power and knowledge have led to delusions of happiness,
success, and grandeur. This false sense of happiness and grandeur, as Johnson explains through
Imlac, is the result of the misunderstanding of fantasy. Coming on the heels of Pekuah’s
narrative, Imlac’s observations regarding the ill effects of the overindulgence in fantasy serve
further to criticize traditional travel-adventure tales. Conventional travel-adventure narratives
with plots based on captivity by another culture were “inflated myth[s], the stuff of romance and
escape fiction.” The effective narrative was one that educated the domestic readership; it was a
narrative that revealed that “the greatest threat of captivity came from the weakness of the human
mind.”
Imlac reveals this internal threat to Rasselas:

Disorders of intellect…happen much more often than superficial observers will
easily believe. Perhaps, if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in
its right state. There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes
predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will,
and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in
whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannise, and force him to hope or
fear beyond the limits of sober probability. (150)

The inability to control one’s appreciation of fantasy leads to madness. While powerful, fiction
should no be allowed to exercise actual control over its readers. Johnson implies here that the
domestic audience that engaged in a supposedly vicarious creation of the extra-domestic world,
was, indeed, trapped in a cycle of delusion and near-madness. In accordance with this view,
expansionist travel, as it encourages “send[ing] imagination out upon the wing” (151) is
detrimental; it is a human activity whose limits should be controlled and whose representation should be checked.

Johnson’s characters remain unresolved. His narrative ends with “The Conclusion, in which Nothing is Concluded.” Having successfully created a narrative of dystopia, Johnson moves his characters from a “false liberty-in-confinement to a sort of confinement-in-liberty.” Each of the characters proclaims specific intents and goals now that they have seemingly realized the limitations of humanity. But Johnson is quick to illustrate the futility of their desires: “Of these wishes that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained” (176). Johnson offers no solution to the problem of human desire. Rather, he provides a strong criticism of expansion and the accompanying misapprehension of aesthetic value through an intellectual revision of Orientalist tales. This revision, however, while demystifying the Orient and discouraging mercantile expansion, redacts the non-European world to a literary forum, disembodying the region and granting representative agency only to the European, civic humanist who, according to divine decree, possesses the knowledge necessary to depict the world and its inhabitants in a legitimate and appropriate fashion.

Moore’s Travels and Johnson’s Rasselas illustrate the extremes of non-European textual representation. Mercantilism, expansion, and aesthetics served as the framework within which Africa and the Orient came to be produced for the English reading public. Early travel narratives combined the ideologies of cultural and economic representation posited by writers such as Defoe, effectively stripping the non-European world of the power of self-characterization and demarcation. In the following chapters, I will explore how female travelers and travel writers exploited this Western usurpation of narrative authority, creating a female-gendered aesthetic genre, further distancing Africa and the Orient from the “civilized” European world.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3


2 Francis Bacon, “Of Travel,” in *Essays and New Atlantis* (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1942) 74. All subsequent references to this text will be parenthetical.


4 John Locke owned a vast collection of travel writing on which his philosophical texts regularly drew.


8 In October of 1735, after his return to England, Moore was engaged by the trustees for establishing the colony of Georgia in America as storekeeper, and accompanied James Oglethorpe there, staying until July of 1736. He made another voyage to Georgia in 1738, and remained until 1743, witnessing the siege of Saint Augustine in 1740 and the Spanish invasion of Georgia in 1742. He published *A Voyage to Georgia ... containing an account of the settling the town of Frederica...also a description of... Savannah* in 1744.


11 Sir Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738) vi. All subsequent references to this text will be parenthetical.


15 Moore’s journals did prove to be quite popular. After appearing initially in 1738, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* was published a second time in 1740. It also appeared in several compilations of travel literature throughout the century. In 1745, it appeared in *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*; in 1747, it appeared in J. J. Schwabe’s *Allgemeine Historie der Reisen*; in 1774, it appeared in *The World Display’d*.

It is interesting to note that the English property described in Moore’s journals includes forts, trading bases, storage facilities, etc. There is no stated English claim on entire countries or regions. Trade, as employed by organizations such as the Royal African Company facilitated later colonial endeavors by establishing a substantial English presence in the area.


Moore defines a “Barr” as “a Denomination given to a certain Quantity of Goods of any Kind, which Quantity was of equal Value among the Natives to a Barr of Iron…”


26 Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4, *Essays from the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler*, ed. W. J. Bate (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968) 10. All subsequent references to this text will be parenthetical.


29 Snader, 272.
CHAPTER 4

FEMININE ENCLOSURES: THE DOMESTIC AESTHETIC

IN LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU'S TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS

I confess I am malicious enough to desire that the World shou'd see how much better purpose the LADYS Travel than their LORDS, and that whilst it is surfeited with Male Travels, all in the same Tone and stuff with the same Trifles, a Lady has the skill to strike out a New Path and to embellish a worn-out Subject with variety of fresh and elegant Entertainment

_Mary Astell, Preface to The Embassy Letters, 1724.

The territorial expansion of eighteenth-century England attests to the success of the strategies of aesthetic observation and acquisition discussed in earlier chapters. These strategies of observation and acquisition marked the practice of aesthetic contemplation as a predominantly masculine activity. Male travelers and travel writers such as Daniel Defoe, Sir Francis Moore, and Samuel Johnson employed the image of the female only as a symbolic manifestation of property and acquisition and as a figurative paragon of European beauty and virtue. As such, the female became a tool for the aesthetic rendering of the non-European world. In many cases, such as Moore’s narrative, the land itself was figured as feminine, eroticizing and sexualizing the colonial encounter. This gendered association transformed non-European lands into easily accessible, justifiably controllable, and highly desirable locations.

Male travel writers’ use of the image of the female established femininity as strictly passive. Femininity was the object of aesthetic contemplation at home—the woman was England’s internal other—or as the measure of aesthetic contemplation abroad—Africa and the Orient were presented as female spaces penetrated by the economic and cultural gaze of England. This delineation of femininity seemingly negated the English female traveler’s textual agency. Delimited by the domesticity of traditional femininity, English female travelers such as
Katherine Evans (d. 1692), Celia Fiennes (1662-1741), Elizabeth Justice (1703-1752), and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) had to negotiate the existing rhetorical and economic strategies of representation, manipulating the precepts of trade and empire that denied them the ability to engage in the construction of the perceived outer world.

The interiority of feminine representation afforded female writers the opportunity to create their own aesthetic and academic discourses. Female travel writers who engaged in the establishment of authoritative female narrators did so not only within this theoretical delineation but also in, and throughout, the expansive geographical spaces of early colonial travel. Primary among these female travel writers was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) experiments with the premises of cultural representation and narrative authority. In this chapter, I will argue that Montagu develops a uniquely female discourse. Her *Letters* constructs its narrative authority by manipulating the cultural representations that had traditionally marked femininity as the object, rather than the subject, of aesthetic observation.

The experimental narrative Montagu creates allowed for the development of the individual female self, both as independent, mobile woman and as articulate, aesthetic subject. Through her tentative rhetoric of description and evaluation, Montagu establishes the travel narrative as a means of defensive self-fashioning, an exploration of femininity outside the boundaries and modalities of early English society.

Montagu challenged established masculine discourses by appropriating the language of aesthetics while carefully avoiding cultural transgression. Elizabeth Bohls points out that female travel writers such as Montagu created a completely new aesthetic genre:

They [female writers] did not do this cultural work in the usual genres of aesthetic theory—the discourse, treatise, or inquiry—but instead chose genres more
accessible to women, travel writing and the novel, in a period when writing and publishing posed particular difficulties for women. Their critiques of aesthetics, for the most part, are not laid out as argument, but rather emerge from the subtly or blatantly unconventional ways in which they apply the language of aesthetics.¹ Montagu’s work, and the work of subsequent female travelers, engaged in a philosophical and aesthetic discourse without trespassing on the forbidding territories of masculine rhetoric. This separate genre afforded the female writer the opportunity to challenge masculinist narratives and, by extension, patriarchal delineations of femininity. Mary Astell, in her preface to Montagu’s Embassy Letters, written when Montagu loaned her the manuscript in 1724, describes this separate aesthetic genre, separating it from travel narratives written by men:

I confess I am malicious enough to desire that the World shou’d see to how much better purpose the LADYS Travel than their LORDS, and that whilst it is surfeited with Male Travels, all in the same Tone and stufit with the same Trifles, a Lady has the skill to strike out a New Path and to embellish a worn-out Subject with variety of fresh and elegant Entertainment.²

Montagu’s embassy letters, fifty-two in all, are an elaborate epistolary performance. The extant letters are not the letters she sent—if she actually sent these letters at all—but are a “compilation carefully preserved in her own autograph and copied into two small albums.”³ While not published during her lifetime, Montagu’s letters comment on the trade practices associated with travel writing and its publication. In a letter to Lady Bute in 1754, Montagu explains her distaste for the trade practices associated with publication:

The Press is loaded by the servile Flock of Imitators…The Greatest Virtue, Justice, and the most distinguishing prerogative of Mankind, writeing, when duly
executed does Honor to Human nature, but when degenerated into Trades are the most contemptible ways of getting Bread.⁴

Montagu’s letters re-order the hierarchy of literary representation by removing economics and trade as the focus of, or impetus for, travel literature. Montagu, much like Johnson’s Imlac, criticizes merchant travelers, proposing that they lacked the motivation or talent to accurately represent the perceived outer world:

‘Tis certain we have but very imperfect relations of the manners and Religion of these people, this part of the World being seldom visited but by merchants who mind little but their own Affairs, or Travelers who make too short a stay to be able to report any thing exactly of their own knowledge. (I: 315)

Montagu exploits the distance of her manuscript from the commercialized, popularized narratives written by men of the period. Despite this distance, her Embassy Letters are a rhetorical manipulation of the status quo. Montagu uses the enforced boundaries of femininity as a shield for the literary cultivation of aesthetic power. As Elizabeth Bohls asserts, Montagu’s use of “stereotypical feminine ignorance or superficiality becomes a tongue-in-cheek pretext for suggesting a new perspective.”⁵

Montagu is careful to establish the legitimacy of her narrative by stating her authority as aesthetic subject, proclaiming the novelty of her experiences, or by verifying her information with empirical data. In a letter to the Princess of Wales, Montagu establishes—in the first few lines—the uniqueness of her experience: “I have now, Madame, past a Journey that has not been undertaken by any Christian since the Time of the Greek Emperours” (I: 310). Here, Montagu narrates her journey to a strictly female audience. In addition to this gendered relation of experience, Montagu chooses, in this particular letter, to address a female figure who holds a
symbolic position of cultural and political authority. The work, then, seeks legitimacy via affiliation from its audience. Lady Mary is capable of maintaining the traditional community of delimited femininity while establishing an authority that supersedes that of male travelers. She is at once a subdued member of English womanhood and a mobile, active, observer of the non-English world. The novelty of her experience grants her an agency that moves beyond stereotypical representation while creating the illusion of cultural conformity.

The remainder of Montagu's letter to the Princess subtly, yet persistently, appropriates the language of the aesthetic in her descriptions of landscapes and peoples. The soils are “fruitfull,” the beautiful plains are surrounded by snowcapped mountains. Montagu ends her letter with an assertion of nationalistic identity, ensuring that her near-transgression into the realm of the authoritative male traveler does not negate her narratological autonomy by excluding her from English identification:

Vines grow wild on all the Hills, and the perpetual Spring they enjoy makes every thing look gay and flourishing, but this Climate, as happy as it seems, can never be prefer’d to England with all its Snows and frosts, while we are bless’d with an easy Government under a King who makes his own Happyness consist in the Liberty of his people, and chooses rather to be look’d upon as their Father than their Master. (I: 311-12)

Montagu both asserts her internal social difference by using her othered status to create narrative legitimacy and re-associates herself and her work with English national identification. Her preference for England seems to contradict her descriptions of the transcendence of the Orient. The choice of England over the East is not based on aesthetic predominance; it depends on what Montagu considers the superiority of English government. Creating an image of familial loyalty,
implying the solidity and sanctity of English monarchy, Montagu establishes the superiority of English society and government. This strategy, though narratologically different, parallels the rhetoric of Addison’s “Man of a Polite Imagination” in that it implies a cultural superiority that allows for the acquisition of the aesthetically superior Orient.

In a letter to the Abbé Conti, Montagu continues her assertion of authorial agency. She begins with a description of European merchants that categorizes them as incapable conveyors of accurate aesthetic descriptions in that they lack both the talent and the motivation for literary representation. She continues to point out that the Turks do not favor these European merchants:

The Turks are too proud to converse familiarly with merchants etc., who can only pick up some confus’d informations which are generally false, and they can give no better an Account of the ways here than a French refugée lodging in a Garret in Greek street could write of the Court of England. (I: 316)

Montagu legitimates her work by asserting her more refined, therefore more accurate, access to Turkish society. As a member of a higher social class than English merchants, Montagu claims to have access to the “proud” Turks. Moreover, she has the added advantage of gender—her pseudo-exclusion from European knowledge and power allows her the freedom to observe, interact with, and document the Oriental knowledge and power denied these merchant travelers. As an upper-class female, Montagu could observe and document the intricacies of Turkish domesticity; she could enter harems and seraglios from which male travelers were banned, she could use the religious garb of the Oriental woman to observe, undetected, the various cultural and economic interactions Montagu did not believe the male traveler could accurately document.

In this same letter, Montagu relates her experiences with a Turkish scholar, further distancing herself and her work from the mercantile and the mundane. Much like the intellectual
relationship of Pekuah and her Arab abductor in Johnson’s *Rasselas*, the friendship that Montagu establishes with the “principal Effendi, that is to say, a Scholar,” grants Montagu access to philosophical enquiry and religious scholarship. Her pedantic findings legitimate her narrative once again, allowing her to develop a female agency while carefully retaining the bases of an Orientalist framework of colonial representation:

I was going to tell you that an intimate daily conversation with the Effendi Achmet-Beg gave me opportunity of knowing their Religion and morals in a more particular manner than perhaps any Christian ever did. (I: 317)

Montagu describes the precepts of “Mahometism” in this letter, comparing them to those of Christianity. She states, when describing the Koran, that it is “so far from the nonsense we charge it with, tis the purest morality deliver’d in the very best Language” (I: 318), discrediting the existing translations and interpretations of the text. While challenging the representational rhetoric of colonial domination, appearing to suggest an inherent equality—philosophical and religious, at least—between Europe and the Orient, Montagu still carefully adheres to the notions of English supremacy. Bohls suggests that the importance of Montagu’s letters lies in their “attempt…at actual cultural exchange [as] a condition of intersubjectivity whose precondition is acceptance of the other as an intelligent, sensitive, acting self.”\(^6\) While this may appear to be the case, Montagu’s authorial legitimacy, though significant, does not afford her such representational freedoms. Montagu must adhere to the stereotypical portrayals of the external cultural other in order to maintain the agentive aesthetic gaze that she has created. In keeping with this, Montagu couches her favorable, objective descriptions of the Turkish scholar and his religion in carefully constructed assertions of religious, philosophical, and cultural ascendancy.
Upon comparing our Creeds together, I am convinc’d that if our freind Dr. [Clarke] had free Liberty preaching here, it would be very easy to perswade the Generallity to Christianity, whose Notions are allready little different from his. (I: 317)

This statement, while suggesting the inherent similarities between Christianity and Islam, relegates Islam to a secondary, inferior position. Montagu goes on to suggest, in support of the above claim, that Islam is “plain Deism.” Lady Mary thus separates Islam from its misrepresentations in most early travel literature. However, she is careful not to grant Islam credence as a separate, authentic religion. Islam is comparable not to Christianity, but rather to certain sects and practices within Christianity. According to this distinction, Christianity enjoys an overarching, all-encompassing benevolence that, if preached freely in the Orient, would easily “perswade the Generallity” to convert. What Montagu achieves here, then, is an unquestionable narrative authority that elevates her credibility above that of male travelers. Montagu also asserts Western ascendancy that realigns herself and her work with the principles of those narratives she had claimed to challenge.

Most of Montagu’s letters focus on the domestic interiors of Turkish life. Feminine domesticity grants Montagu power over her male counterparts in that, unlike the men, she can freely explore these female places and interact with their inhabitants. She notes the following at the end of her most well-known letter, the Bathhouse letter:

Adieu, Madam. I am sure I have not entertaind you with an Account of such a sight as you never saw in your Life and what no book of travells could inform you of. ’Tis no less than Death for a Man to be found in one of these places. (I: 315)
Lady Mary’s gender is her greatest asset here. She is able to access, explore, and evaluate the domestic interiors of Turkish life with impunity. Despite the fact that Turkish domesticity does not directly affect the colonial projects of imperial England, it dominated Western representations of the Orient. Montagu challenges earlier descriptions of Turkish women as “oversexed houris,” citing her observations as legitimation for overturning the prevalent sexualized renderings of Oriental femininity.

Cynthia Lowenthal points out that Montagu derived the premises of her epistolary narratives from the theater. Montagu, indeed, uses the delimitations of English femininity as a form of masquerade. Her class and gender became disguises that granted her access to parts of the Orient that were inaccessible by the male traveler. Montagu exacerbates the masquerade of English womanliness by combining it with the disguise of Turkish domesticity. In a letter to Lady Mar, Montagu expresses her fascination with the Turkish women’s dress and her adoption of it as a means of agentive self-fashioning:

I will try to awaken your Gratitude by giving you a full and true Relation of the Novelty of this Place, none of which would surprize you more than a sight of my person as I am now in my Turkish habit, tho I believe you would be of my Opinion that ’tis admirably becoming. I intend to send you my Picture; in the mean time accept of it here. (I: 326)

Montagu, like Defoe’s *Roxana*, adopts the Turkish dress as a disguise. Already the object of internal aesthetic gaze, Montagu, by adopting the “Turkish habit,” also occupies the role of the external, colonial object of observation. She does so with impunity, however, safely moving between her objectified statuses, asserting a masked performativity that grants her representative and aesthetic agency.
Montagu continues in this letter to describe her “Turkish habit.” She goes into great
detail, representing everything from undergarments to diamond encrusted headdresses. Her
careful rendition of Turkish attire as aesthetic curiosity is followed immediately by a description
of the Turkish women themselves. Montagu thus aestheticizes the Turkish women from within
their own domestic sphere:

I never saw in my Life so many fine heads of hair. I have counted 110 of these
tresses of one Ladys, all natural; but it must be own’d that every Beauty is more
common here than with us.

Montagu here fragments her representation of the Turkish female, focusing in this instance on
the beauty of her hair. This fragmentation renders the women accessible and divisible. The
Turkish women become curiosities. By disguising herself as a Turkish woman, Montagu is
capable of aestheticizing Oriental women, quantifying their physicalities and surroundings
through an Occidental imperial gaze. Montagu shifts the representation of the Oriental female
from one of speculative eroticism to one of empirical observation.

Montagu’s evaluation of the social conditions of Turkish women focuses primarily on her
female emancipatory vision. She declares, in opposition to the “Stupidity of all the writers that
have given accounts of” these women, her belief that Turkish women enjoy near unlimited
freedoms. She credits this freedom to the manner of Turkish dress, confining her representation
of female emancipation to the gendered classifications of fashion. Montagu evaluates the
liberties of the Turkish woman:

Tis very easy to see why they have more Liberty than we have, no Woman of
what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without 2 muslins, one that
covers her face all but her Eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head
and hangs halfe way down her back; and their Shapes are wholly conceal’d…You may guess how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great Lady from her Slave, and ’tis impossible for the most jealous Husband to know his Wife when he meets her, and no Man dare either touch or follow a Woman in the Street. (I: 328)

Montagu considers the patriarchally imposed mandatory concealment of the female figure to be a “perpetual Masquerade” that creates the opportunity for female agency (I: 328). The artifice of femininity becomes a means of moving beyond patriarchal demarcations of gendered representations. As Srinivas Aravamudan explains,

Masquerade comes to be the “perpetual practise” that suggests a mode of female agency for Montagu, one that is structurally related to a freedom that suspends truth. It is this paradoxical truth, the permanent possibility of fiction, that Lady Mary envisages identifying and possessing. The interplay between nudity and masking fascinates her, especially because it provides…Turkish women—and ought, she thinks, to provide all women—with an escape from social ties by means of negativity and anonymity.¹⁰

This dissimulated femininity serves a dual function when considered alongside Montagu’s evaluation of Turkish attire. On the one hand, it functions as an equalizer of women, creating a gendered community that does not depend on patriarchal social demarcations. On the other hand, the reduction of womanliness to masquerade places the female in a position of metanarratological agency. Montagu explains that Turkish women are capable of constructing amatory metanarratives, adventurously exploring their sexualities with impunity:
This perpetual Masquerade gives them entire Liberty of following their
Inclinations without danger of Discovery…The Great Ladys seldom let their
Gallants know who they are, and ’tis so difficult to find it out that they can very
seldom guess at her name they have corresponded with above halfe a year
together. (I: 328)

The “permanent possibility of fiction” that Aravamudan has described becomes clear in this
passage. Montagu’s fascination with Turkish femininity derives from its apparent ability to
create, participate, and fashion her narrative realities. These narratives, however, relied on the
obfuscation of their female agents; the female, through her “Masquerade,” employs a negative
power of agency based on anonymity and absence. This anonymity allows for a multiplicity of
representational renderings as the female metanarrator can create and recreate herself with
relative autonomy.

Montagu reenters the masquerade of Oriental femininity at the close of her letter to Lady
Mar. Having described the authority of the Turkish female narrator, Montagu creates a similar
narratological role for herself in the last few lines to her sister:

Thus you see, dear Sister, the manners of Mankind doe not differ so widely as our
voyage Writers would make us believe. Perhaps it would be more entertaining to
add a few surprizing customs of my own Invention, but nothing seems to me so
agreeable as truth, and I beleive nothing so acceptable to you. I conclude with
repeating the great Truth of my being, Dear Sister, etc. (I: 330)

Montagu here dismisses her male counterparts as storytellers and inaccurate observers of the
non-European world. In contrast, she asserts her devotion to truthful, empirical observation and
description. It becomes difficult to ascertain the veracity of Montagu’s narration when
considered alongside the metafictional realities of the Turkish women. Just as the Turkish lovers fail to identify their female correspondents, Montagu’s readers fail to determine her narratological role. The anonymity that Montagu lauds in the Turkish women therefore becomes a tool for the creation of a narrative agency that may or may not be based on astute empirical observations of the Orient. Montagu’s letters are, in this regard, yet another aspect of her personal masquerade. Regardless of the veracity of her narration, Montagu succeeds in creating an emancipatory female subjectivity that allows her, through negation and absence, to acquire representational control of her narrative.

In the most well-known of the Embassy letters, the Bathhouse letter, Montagu successfully negotiates the duality of her masquerade—her seeming adherence to the patriarchal demarcations of English femininity and her adoption of the “Turkish habit” to gain access to the women’s baths. Montagu addresses this letter to a nameless lady, incorporating the epistolary form itself into the network of agency through anonymity and disguise. By not naming the letter’s addressee, Montagu generalizes her audience, expanding it to include all her potential female readers. In so doing, Montagu commodifies her experience in the baths, inadvertently affording her female readership a vicarious role in the aesthetic appreciation and consumption of the scene.

Montagu opens the letter by expressing the novelty of her experiences in the Orient. She is in a “new World where every thing [she sees] appears…a change of Scene” (I: 312). She states, however, that she will not describe her journey, but will rather focus on describing her visit to a Turkish bath. Deviating from the form of the traditional travel narrative, Montagu reduces her experience to a single encounter. This reduction, however, legitimates her narration in that the encounter she chooses to relate is one that no previous traveler has been able to
experience and, in turn, to represent in a literary forum. Montagu further legitimates her narrative
by explaining that she had gone to the baths “incognito”—in a Turkish coach. Her ability to
mold herself to fit the aesthetic scene she is about to describe and analyze authenticates her
narrative agency in that she simultaneously takes on the roles of aesthetic subject and object. Her
experience in the baths is authentic because her imperial gaze as Western female is one that is
disguised in Oriental tradition, blending in with her observed surroundings, attempting not to
tamper with the progress of events.

After noting the architecture of the bathhouse, Montagu introduces her reader to the
women in the bath, describing their reaction to her:

I was in my travelling Habit, which is a rideing dress, and certainly appear’d very
extrodinary to them, yet there was not one of ’em that shew’d the least surprize or
impertinent Curiosity, but receiv’d me with all the obliging civillity possible.

Montagu’s initial description of the Turkish women demystifies them. Her first-hand experience
of the bath contradicts the existing descriptions by male travelers in that it, rather than creating
an image of lascivious, “oversexed” houris, suggests a community of well-bred, polite women.
Bohls argues that the Bathhouse letter serves primarily as a response to “crude stereotypes of
Turkish women.”11 This is accurate, to the extent that Montagu’s work served as a challenge to
male travel writers who had constructed an Orient based on eroticized speculation. However, it
remains that Montagu’s interaction with these women is not based on a desire for or an
expression of equality or legitimate cultural exchange. Her physical description of the women
reestablishes her role as imperial observer. They were all, she states,

in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any Beauty or
defect conceal’d, yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest Gesture
amongst ’em. They Walk’d and mov’d with the same majestic Grace which Milton describes of our General Mother. There were many amongst them as exactly proportion’d as ever any Goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shineingly white, only adorn’d by their Beautifull Hair divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or riband, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces. (I: 313-14)

Montagu’s description of the Turkish women seemingly dignifies them. However, her association of the bathers with European works of art pulls them into existing aesthetic rhetoric, creating a familiar exotic that is palatable to an English audience. Montagu’s bathers do not exercise any legitimate cultural agency. Rather, Lady Mary’s descriptions relegate these women to the realm of the familiar aesthetic. The Turkish women become Montagu’s artistic creations, regardless of the accuracy of her narration. They are silent, beautiful, and harmless images of familiar exoticism that Lady Mary creates, at once exploiting and transcending her role as internal social other.

Montagu experiments with Turkish domesticity only as a means of acquiring aesthetic authority. She successfully attains this authority by occupying the roles of both aesthetic subject and object, relying heavily on the notion of womanliness as masquerade. In the Bathhouse letter, Montagu makes it clear that she has not and will not cross the cultural barrier between Occident and Orient:

The Lady that seem’d the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her and would fain have undress’d me for the bath. I excus’d myself with some difficulty they being all so earnest in perswading me. I was at last forc’d to open my skirt and shew them my stays, which satisfy’d ’em very well, for I saw they
beleive’d I was so lock’d up in that machine that it was not in my won power to
open it, which contrivance they attributed to my Husband. (I: 314)

Lady Mary refuses to undress, standing out as the only clothed female in the bathhouse.
Moreover, she was clothed in English attire. Her refusal serves as an implicit rejection of the role
of aesthetic object within the framework of pre-imperial objectification. Montagu inhabits that
role only inasmuch as it grants her access to the otherwise inaccessible objects of imperial gaze.
She is not part of the paintings she describes as potentially housing these women. The only
concession Montagu makes with regard to undressing is to open her skirt, revealing her stays.
The bathers’ puerile reaction solidifies and reestablishes the cultural contrast Montagu implies.
These harmless creatures, distanced from English culture through Lady Mary’s aesthetic
renderings of them, naïvely interpret Montagu’s undergarments as a tool of patriarchal
constraint. The bathers’ reaction concretizes the distinction between Occident and Orient,
demarcating the Turkish bathers as ignorant beauties lacking the accoutrements of the
supposedly civilized world.

Montagu closes her letter with a reassertion of her authority as narrator:

Adeiu, Madam. I am sure I have now entertaind you with an Account of such a
sight as you never saw in your Life and what no book of travells could inform you
of. ’Tis no less than Death for a Man to be found in one of these places. (I: 315)

Montagu overcomes the constraints of gender and geography. She elevates her work above that
of male travelers, citing her empirical observations of the private enclosures of Oriental
femininity as evidence of her credibility. The novelty of her experience allows her to cultivate a
narrative authority that, for the most part, cannot be challenged by her male counterparts. This
narrative impunity, moreover, instrumentalizes her Oriental encounters, “marketing [them] aggressively for vicarious consumption.”

Despite the fact that travel writing allowed for feminine narrative experimentation, it functioned primarily within an exploitatively Orientalist framework of objectification. In that the possibility of creating a female aesthetic subject within the social framework of eighteenth-century England was limited, female travel writers such as Montagu sought artistic individuality through inhabiting a position of colonial domination over their non-European objects of observation. The unexplored regions of the world were open domains that had not been clearly situated within the framework of eighteenth-century English life. Female writers could exercise more flexible aesthetic liberties there. Female travel writers twice removed their objects of aesthetic contemplation from English society—filtering the non-English world through England’s internal social other and creating a familiar, non-threatening, commodified Orient.

The rhetorical double-distancing of the pre-colonial world reduces reduction to the binary representations of “self” and “other” common to Orientalist discourse. Montagu’s work thus problematizes Orientalist representations in that it disorders and, to a certain extent, challenges the binarized constructions found in travel narratives written by men. The description of a colonial other by an internal social other—the English female—creates a multifaceted representation that restructures the duality of Orientalist discourse, blurring “the line separating Occident from Orient.”

The Oriental object of observation became a tool for the establishment of the authoritative English female. The following chapter explores Penelope Aubin’s application of narrative agency through Oriental representation. She follows Montagu’s example, constructing
authority through a defensive self-fashioning that depends on the exploitation of the Oriental object of aesthetic gaze.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 4


6 Bohls, 42.

7 Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) was the most important British philosopher in the generation between Locke and Berkeley, and a leading figure in Newton’s circle. His philosophical interests were mostly in theology, metaphysics, and marginally in ethics. His philosophical vocabulary and some of his metaphysical ideas were influenced by Descartes, whom he followed in holding that the world contains two types of substance, mind and matter, the combination of which constitutes humans. Clarke attracted great controversy with his religious views having few supporters. However, he became rector of Westminster, London and chaplain to Queen Anne. After the death of Queen Anne, he became a close advisor to the
Princess of Wales, who was later to become Queen Caroline. He had weekly meetings with her and at her request he entered into dispute with Leibniz over the nature of space and time.

8 Bohls, 34.


CHAPTER 5:
SOVEREIGN FANTASIES:
DEFENSIVE SELF-FASHIONING IN PENEOPE AUBIN’S THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF THE COUNT DE VINEVIL AND HIS FAMILY

In our nation, where the Subjects are born free, where Liberty and Property is so preserv’d to us by laws, that no Prince can enslave us, the Notion of Slavery is a perfect Stranger. We cannot think without Horror, of the Miseries that attend those, who, in Countries where the Monarchs are absolute, and standing armies awe the People, are made Slaves to others. The Turks and Moors have been ever famous for these Cruelties.

_Penelope Aubin, The Noble Slaves, 1722

The creation of an authoritative female narrator, as advanced by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her Embassy Letters, serves as an example of the broad experimentation with literary genre that occurred in the mid-eighteenth century. Female authors of fictional travel-adventure narratives employed many of the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies seen in Montagu’s work, combining traditionally masculine forms of representation with the precepts of feminine, amatory narrations. These female authors adopted and adapted the travel narrative, modifying its focus from descriptions of economic exchange and the individual, mercantile triumph of English male travelers to the creation of female heroines capable of recognizing, altering, and solidifying their own identities. This shift in narrative focus incorporated the heroines of these tales into the narrative structure established by male authors—a narrative structure that involved mercantile trade, shipwrecks, pirate attacks, and slavery to foreign masters—while also adding events and subjects left unaddressed by male authors inasmuch as they were events that belonged to the domestic delimitations of femininity.

The heroism of these female characters emerges from the multifaceted representations of issues such as the threat of sexual violation, companionate marriage, and collective motherhood.
While employing and combining traditions of masquerade and aesthetic observation to achieve narrative agency and empowerment, these female authors were careful not to trespass too far into the realm of masculine discourse. Their characters, and the situations in which they found themselves, usually relied on the presupposed delineations of accepted gender roles. Moreover, the gendered transgressions in these works function within a framework of defensive self-fashioning that allowed the female heroine to defend the tenets of European civilization, preserving female virtue as a measure of masculine worth and honor while exploring individual agency by taking on the role of male hero and defender of faith.

The narratological—and metanarratological—empowerment of these female characters and authors, however, comes at the expense of the Orient and its inhabitants. Much like Montagu’s work—and the work of male authors such as Moore and Johnson—these fictional narratives define the European female traveler as aesthetic, moralistic observer. In this chapter, I will explore the first of Penelope Aubin’s travel-adventure novels, *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and his Family* (1721), illustrating Aubin’s use of narratological transgressions to challenge the gendered categories of English society. Here, Aubin creates contexts of intrigue and danger that afford her female characters the opportunity to explore and create innovative cultural identities. Moreover, these narrative contexts assume a moral didacticism based on a Christian and nationalistic framework of representation that establishes a clear division between European “self” and Oriental “other.” Her novel sets up a structure of religious, moralistic superiority wherein she establishes the aesthetic boundaries between Occident and Orient while creating an independent, mobile female self.

Aubin’s astute evaluation of the English literary market may explain her adoption of the travel-adventure narrative. Following a popular narrative trend, she published, in 1721, *The
Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil. Aubin’s apparent awareness of the logistics of literary composition and dissemination tentatively places her among the ranks of overtly mercantilist writers of the period such as Daniel Defoe and Sir Francis Moore in that she addresses the English mercantile desire for individual economic advancement. Much like Montagu’s letters—written at approximately the same time as Aubin’s early novels—Aubin’s work capitalizes on the discourses of trade and their relation to the craft of writing as a means of recreating the female authorial self. Aubin combined the principles of factual travel narration and popular amatory fiction, responding to the increased popularity of both genres. This combination allowed for the creation of an innovative and mobile female heroine. Aubin’s heroines constructed interchangeable identities that garnered legitimacy from both masculine and feminine modes of discourse.

Joe Snader’s study of British captivity narratives notes the popularity of the genre and its amalgamation of different literary forms:

In the eighteenth century, British authors created a substantial tradition of fictional captivity narratives, texts that mixed the narrative patterns and imagery of the factual accounts with fictional protagonists and plotlines. Experimentation with fictional captivity narratives was especially prominent in the 1720s, a crucial decade for the development of the English novel. Throughout a century when British readers turned first to travel narratives and then also to novels on an unprecedented scale, the specialized subgenre of the captivity narrative was an important conduit for the expansion of both these larger genres. Aubin’s fictions, as Snader indicates, responded to the various trends in the English literary community. She created, in effect, a literary model that combined several of the developing
literary genres of her time, exploring the dialogics of gendered representation through authorial experimentation with form.

*Count de Vinevil* opens with a “Preface to the Reader” in which Aubin addresses concerns regarding the nature of literary dissemination and authorial reliability. Like Montagu, Aubin is disturbed by what she sees as the “nonsense” that is being produced by the English literary marketplace. Her own work, she claimed, proposed to combine moral didacticism with popular entertainment. The legitimacy of her work depends upon the moral and religious awareness of the characters that she presents as examples to her readers, placing her audience in the role of metafictional observer:

…) in [this book] you will find a story where Divine Providence manifests itself in every transaction, where virtue is tried with misfortunes, and rewarded with blessings. In fine, where men behave themselves like Christians, and women are really virtuous, and such as we ought to imitate. (114)

The distinction that Aubin draws between her male and female characters is not gender-based. Rather, she depends on modalities of moral characterization to establish heroism. The absence of definite categories of gender allows the female characters to create narratological agency. This feminine agency avoids overt transgression, however, in that it is based on the definite Christian role of the English female. Aubin’s heroines cannot be condemned for falling outside the accepted boundaries of traditional female experience in that they do so only as a means of upholding traditional Christian morality. Moreover, Aubin states that her male characters “behave themselves like Christians,” effectively placing them within the same network of morality and virtue that determines the heroism of her female characters. In so doing, Aubin creates female authority that cannot be challenged by traditional patriarchal structures as it is an
authority that belongs to “really virtuous” women who transgress only in order to uphold traditional Christian morality. By relying on the neo-classical assumption that her readers “ought to imitate” these moralistic characters, Aubin integrates and implicates her audience in the dialogics of power and morality that she establishes. Accepting the heroic morality of her female characters, while a manifestation of vicarious literary consumption, is therefore also an implicit popular acceptance of the modified structures of behavior and agency present in her work.

After thus implicating her readers in the agency-building of her work, Aubin proceeds to legitimate her narration:

As far as the truth of what this narrative contains, since Robinson Crusoe has been so well received, which is more improbable, I know no reason why this should be thought a fiction. (115)

Aubin associates herself, once again, with masculinist discourse. She compares her novel to *Robinson Crusoe*, simultaneously aligning herself with the popular travel-adventure narrative and with accepted male renderings of expansion and identity formation. Moreover, she subtly challenges these works by stating that her novel is more probable than *Crusoe*, which was “well received.” This, according to Aubin’s evaluation, is legitimation enough for her narration; it is enough, indeed, to ensure the novel’s favorable reception. Still involving her reader in the evaluation of her work, Aubin states that popular judgment has determined the authenticity of Defoe’s work. Her work, more probable in her estimation than Defoe’s, should therefore be received equally well by the public. Inasmuch, Aubin challenges the authority of her audience, implying that their worth as people of sound judgment relies upon their positive reception of her novel.
Aubin associates her subtle challenge to masculinist narrative authority with the moralistic framework she had referenced earlier in the Preface. She also combines her hopes for moral transcendence—both in her characters and in her audience—with the jingoist sentiments associated with traditional travel narration:

Would men trust in Providence and act according to reason and common justice, they need not to fear any thing; but whilst they defy God and wrong others they must be cowards, and their ends such as they deserve, surprising and infamous. I heartily wish prosperity to my country and that the English would be again (as they were heretofore) remarkable for virtue and bravery, and our nobility make themselves distinguished from the crowd by shining qualities for which their ancestors became so honored and for reward of which obtained those titles they inherit. (115)

The favorable reception of her work, therefore, becomes not merely a logical acceptance of comparative verisimilitude, but a social and moral responsibility. The vicarious consumption of Aubin’s novel is, in this sense, an assertion of the inherent nobility of the English. Moreover, she claims that following the example of her characters would concretize English national superiority. Aubin nationalizes her work, transcending the fictional realms it describes. Accepting the legitimacy of her work is not, therefore, merely an acceptance of feminine narratological agency; it is a national responsibility.

Aubin begins her narrative with a description of its European protagonists. She introduces a French family, the De Vinevils, describing the circumstances surrounding their departure from France:
In the year 1702, the Count de Vinevil, a native of France born of one of the
noblest families in Picardy, where he had long lived possessed of a plentiful
estate, being a widower and having no child but the beautiful Ardelisa, his only
daughter, finding his estate impoverished by continued taxations, and himself
neglected by his sovereign and no ways advanced, whilst others less worthy were
put into places of trust and power, resolved to dispose of his estate, purchase and
freight a ship, sail for Turkey, and there settle at Constantinople to trade. (115)

Aubin advances several of the representational oppositions that characterize her novel. The
virtuous European protagonists are about to travel to Turkey, a locale that, as described later in
the century in works by authors such as Johnson and Montagu, stands in opposition to the West.
Her novel thus promises “unmediated access to cultures outside the usual run of Western
knowledge,” while treating these cultures “according to a common set of expectations about
foreigners.”3 These common expectations, moreover, depend upon mercantilist interaction, as
her characters’ decision to travel to the Orient is one that is associated primarily with European
trade practices. As such, Aubin carefully dissociates her characters from the implication of cross-
cultural interaction separate from the desire for economic profit.

When considering this passage in the nationalistic context of Aubin’s Preface, a regional
opposition also emerges. Despite her declared interest in creating and maintaining English
national and moral supremacy, Aubin does not include any English characters in her text. While
the rhetoric of presence expresses the domination of European over Turk, the rhetoric of absence
expresses the domination of English over French (or non-English European in general). The
choice to exclude English characters from her novel is not an arbitrary or unique one, in that it
absolves her and her readership from the notion of immoral subversion. As her narrative
illustrates, the decision to travel to these far-off lands is one that endangers the purity and
dominance of European culture—despite her characters’ ultimate triumph. Moreover, Aubin
subtly addresses contemporary views regarding female travel. English women who traveled were
subversive “both to English patriarchy and to a masculine imperialism,” and “to be oppositional
to the patriarchy…was to be in opposition to imperialism.” Aubin distances herself and her
English readership from the supposed immoralities and impurities of the Orient, implying that
English women do not transgress into the masculine arena of imperial travel, or that if they did
so it was not in opposition to colonial projects. Moreover, the decision of the Count de Vinevil to
take his daughter, a representative of purity and virtue, to the Orient is a decision to expose her to
the risks of the lascivious non-European world. English men, by implication, would not, or
should not, endanger the sanctity of the English nation by endangering English women. Aubin
thus establishes, through a rhetoric of absence, the superiority of English moral judgment and
imperial processes.

Despite the regional oppositions that Aubin advances, she maintains the general
supremacy of Occident over Orient. By exploiting the “eighteenth-century interest in
physiognomy,” Aubin indicates the visibility of European virtues, making the face an indication
of internal moralities. Her physical descriptions of Longueville and Ardelisa create an aesthetic
of virtue that determines the inherent purity of Europeans:

This youth was Count of Longueville, then about seventeen years of age, a young
gentleman of extraordinary parts and beauty: he was tall, delicately shaped, his
eyes black and sparkling, and every feature of his face was sweet yet majestic; he
was learned beyond his years, and his soul was full of truth and ingenuity. He had
received from the best education the best principles, was brave, generous, affable, constant, and incapable of any thing that was base or mean. (116)

Aubin associates the delicacy of Longueville’s features with virtue, wisdom, and potential heroism. The connection between aesthetic appeal and nobility found in Longueville’s character creates a European male who could be nothing but virtuous. The combination of favorable qualities, indeed, makes Longueville “incapable of any thing that was base or mean.” Aubin presents Ardelisa in like manner, at once maintaining the visibility of female purity and associating Ardelisa with the assimilation of masculine heroic attributes. According to Aubin, Ardelisa was

fourteen, and the most charming maid nature ever formed; she was tall and slender, fair as Venus, her eyes blue and shining, her face oval, with features and an air so sweet and lovely that imagination can form nothing more completely handsome or engaging. Her mind well suited the fair cabinet that contained it; she was humble, generous, unaffected, yet learned, wise, modest, and prudent above her years or sex, gay in conversation, but by nature thoughtful, had all the softness of a woman with the constancy and courage of a hero: in fine, her soul was capable of everything that was noble. (116)

Aubin’s physical description places Ardelisa in the role of aesthetic object. Also the object of the readership’s aesthetic gaze, Ardelisa becomes a representative of European tenets of beauty and virtue. Aubin’s presentation of Ardelisa changes from aesthetic object to heroic subject. She notes that Ardelisa combined feminine and masculine traits as both sets of characteristics depended upon her inherent nobility. Because Ardelisa’s “soul was capable of every thing that was noble,” she was capable of exhibiting traditionally masculine heroic characteristics. Aubin,
through associating heroism with nobility, thus prepares her readers for the inevitability of transgressive female heroism, implicating her audience in Ardelisa’s heroic rendering by situating them as the subjects of aesthetic gaze and evaluation.

As soon as the family arrives at port in Constantinople, the Count de Vinevil rushes off to pay compliments to the “Bassa” and to the French consul. Meanwhile, Longueville and Ardelisa, the moral foci of this tale, discuss the perils that lie ahead. Longueville, addressing the seasick Ardelisa, offers the following evaluation of the region:

we are arrived at a strange country where we shall no more see Christian churches, where religion shows itself in splendor, and God is worshipped with harmony and neatness, but odious mosques, where the vile impostor’s name is echoed through the empty choirs and vaults, where cursed Mahometans profane the sacred piles once consecrate to our Redeemer, and adorned with the shining saints and ornaments as rich as piety itself could make them. (118)

Longueville’s description of the Orient depends upon what Abdul JanMohammed calls “‘the Manichean allegory’, in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced.” Longueville contrasts a Turkey that is dark, exotic, and odious to the light, fair, brightness of Europe. He thus establishes a counter-aesthetic that defines the Orient in terms of the absence of legitimate European aesthetic categorization. The aesthetic and counter-aesthetic categories that Longueville advances are, moreover, closely associated with the external moral and religious frameworks that Aubin has established in her work, relying on the “standard set of rhetorical strategies and cultural stereotypes that grew from centuries of religious strife and expanded with Europe’s early modern military ascendancy.” According to these cultural categorizations, religion becomes a marker of aesthetic legitimacy. Longueville further explains:
The wealth we have brought with us may, perhaps, occasion our undoing; but, more, your beauty should some lustful Turk, mighty in slaves and power, once see that lovely face, what human power could secure you from his impious arms and me from death! (118)

Longueville here moves from merchant traveler to ethnographic explorer. He determines the abhorrent outcome of their endeavors by providing a charged pseudo-sociological account of Turkish behavior. Aubin allows her traveler-ethnographer to evaluate the social variants of Turkey before he has experienced them. While bringing her narrative dangerously close to the fictions she had attempted to dissociate herself from in her Preface, Aubin uses this inversion of observational devices as a means of proving, yet again, European supremacy. Longueville’s predictions of events and evaluations of social structures come to pass, almost in exact detail. This re-establishes his status as aesthetic observer, granting him pre-observational powers of social evaluation.

Aubin also uses Longueville’s cultural prescience to demarcate the traditional feminine representations in which Ardelisa secures narratological agency. Longueville offers the following as a defense against the iniquities of the Orient:

Let me entreat you, as you prize your virtue and my life, show not yourself in public; let the house conceal you till Divine Providence delivers us from hence.

(118)

The confines of the domestic enclosure, according to Longueville, will protect the sanctity of female purity and honor. By sequestering herself in the patriarchally imposed feminine sphere, Ardelisa conceals her beauty from the gaze of the “lustful Turk.” Ardelisa, as a woman, is the object of aesthetic observation. However, it is an objectification that, as Longueville illustrates,
should not be exposed to Oriental scrutiny. Aubin, much like Montagu, exploits this aesthetic objectification in order to create an active female agency that exhibits traits of traditional male heroism. Longueville’s speech hints at this feminized heroism in that he associates Ardelisa’s actions, her preservation of the delimitations of femininity, with the preservation of his life. Through Longueville, Aubin grants the virtuous Ardelisa the heroic powers of preservation and defense. Ardelisa’s response to Longueville further advances the possibility of female heroism through a rhetoric of absence and lack:

My dear lord, I did not dare to tell my father what I thought of his design; but I like you have had a dread ever since we left our native land. I shall be wholly governed by you in all things and rather choose to confine myself from all conversation than give you the least disquiet. But, alas! should my father’s new undertakings, his tradings, occasion your absence from me, what must I do? Or who shall protect me from the infidels’ insolence? (118)

Ardelisa begins by indicating that, as a daughter, she has not dared to challenge overtly her father’s decision to journey to Turkey. Aubin thus absolves her heroine of responsibility for the misapplication of imperial travel. This observation is followed by Ardelisa’s overt submission to Longueville, placing him in the role of aesthetic and moralistic subject. However, she follows this submission with the suggestion of his heroic absence. Exhibiting the same pre-observational characteristics Longueville displayed earlier, Ardelisa puts forth a situation in which she will be left without Longueville to protect her. While this is a narratological strategy that appeals to the readers’ sympathies and nationalistic pride, the hypothetical absence of the male hero adds another dimension to the feminine sphere of delimited existence. By excluding her male
hero—or by representing him as ineffectual and weak—Aubin affords her female characters the legitimacy they require to exercise an otherwise transgressive agency.

Ardelisa’s aesthetic visibility is ultimately revealed to debauched Turkish observation. Aubin associates this exposure to the fallibility and inefficacy of masculinist practices of expansion and trade:

Ardelisa carefully avoided going abroad, whilst her father and lover visited, managed, and dispatched all the affairs with the merchants. But so many Bashaws and persons of quality came to her father’s to traffic for European goods that she could not avoid being sometimes seen. (119)

Ardelisa has preserved the female sphere of domestic identity. It is her father and lover, however, who have allowed the masculine affairs of trade to enter the domestic realm. Her exposure to the gaze of the counter-aesthetic Turk is a result of a lack of sound judgment on the part of her male caregivers. Aubin here implies that the misapplication of imperial trade is a betrayal of nation and honor—an absence of heroism that may lead to the loss of purity and virtue as they are manifest in the figure of the female.

The scene of Ardelisa’s initial attempted abduction is brutal in both its representation of the Turks and in its treatment of the primary male figures. Fearing an imminent attack, Count de Vinevil and Longueville decide first to have Longueville and Ardelisa married and second to arrange an escape plot wherein Longueville will leave as though on a trade mission and will wait not far from the Turkish coast for the Count and his daughter. Upon his departure, Longueville imparts heroic responsibility upon Ardelisa: “remember both your duty to yourself and me. Permit not a vile infidel to dishonor you, resist to death, and let me not be so completely cursed to hear you live and are debauched” (121). Once again, Aubin creates a situation in which one of
the primary male figures absents himself from heroic duty. The responsibility of upholding personal and, by extension, European, honor now falls entirely upon the female, rendering the male figure ineffectual and passive.

The Count de Vinevil receives an even worse punishment than Longueville’s exclusion from narrative agency. Shortly after Longueville’s departure, the Count sends Ardelisa to the Consul’s house, acknowledging the fact that his misjudgments have threatened the sanctity and security of his household. Alone in his house, he is confronted by Mahomet, the angry, lascivious Turk who has impertinently decided to “kill the old Lord and servants, carry off the Lady, and leave none in the house to betray him” (122). De Vinevil’s reception of Mahomet is a paltry attempt to recover abandoned honor and heroism. In response to Mahomet’s declared intent to abduct Ardelisa, the Count exclaims,

No, Villain! Ardelisa never shall be thine; not empires or the dread of any death thy cursed fury could invent should make me but in thought consent to such a deed. Life is a trifle weighed with infamy; the God I serve shall both preserve her virtue and revenge my death. My daughter is not educated so and will, I know, prefer a noble death to such dishonor. (123)

The Count’s declarations are not those of the active, resilient European hero Defoe describes in his *Complete English Tradesman*. Rather, he addresses Mahomet in the resigned tones of a defeated man. Despite his trust in his virtue and in his God, De Vinevil appears as a man who has reconciled himself to a somewhat dishonorable death rather than committing himself to a heroic defense of honor. Immediately following the Count’s statement, Mahomet retorts with perhaps the most shocking declaration in the entire work, “Slaves! go search the chambers and bring her naked from her bed that I may ravish her before the dotard’s face and then send his
Though this does not ultimately happen, as Ardelisa is secure in the Consul’s house, the Count de Vinevil’s insignificant attempt to retrieve heroic honor is cut down by the most extreme expressions of dishonor and disrepute. Mahomet—and Turkey, by extension—has rendered the Count ineffectual and worthless. Shortly after Mahomet’s outburst, De Vinevil is stabbed, not even lifting his hand in resistance. As the primary cause of the family’s current misfortune, De Vinevil receives the severest form of punishment. Aubin writes him out of the narrative, denying him not only heroic agency, but also narratological existence.

Ardelisa is now alone, with the exception of her two servants, Nannetta and Joseph. Aubin, having excluded the primary male figures from the narrative, endows Ardelisa with powers of heroic authority. The consul’s wife, an unnamed French woman, informs Ardelisa of her father’s death and of Longueville’s inability to save her, as he has been hindered by inclement weather. The two women form a gendered alliance that departs from the domestic guidelines of female behavior. They strategize, each coming up with plans for Ardelisa’s escape. The plan that they finally adopt is a combined effort; Ardelisa and Nannetta will disguise themselves as men and along with Joseph will escape to the Consul’s country house. The focus of the novel now shifts to the female characters, as they create a community of transgressive feminine agency. Even the Consul is left out of this process; Aubin informs her readers that the “Consul’s lady left the room to acquaint the Consul what they had determined to do…” (125).

Ardelisa inverts and subverts traditional gender roles by taking on a male disguise. This transgression, however, serves as the choice of self-defense over passive submission. Indeed, the inversion of gender expectations is the most efficient means of securing freedom. As Judith Butler states,
[The] association of the body with the female works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom.\(^8\)

Ardelisa adopts the male disguise as a tool for securing female freedom. The disguise itself functions on multiple levels; she does not quietly pretend to be a male traveler. Rather, her defensive self-fashioning takes on attributes of the mercantile traveler as well. She participates in limited colonial trade, prepared to bribe captains of ships, sell jewels, and negotiate travel procedures to secure her escape. The stereotypical dangers of the Orient and the failed heroism of the male characters force Ardelisa “to improvise a variety of self-reliant, aggressive, and even mercantile behaviors.”\(^9\)

Ardelisa and her entourage are captured by Osmin, another lustful Turk. Impressed by her nobility and unsure of her gender, he offers the disguised Ardelisa all the splendors of Turkish courtly life in exchange for her conversion to Islam. Osmin’s aesthetically charged descriptions of lush gardens, beautiful paintings, and downy beds are disrupted by his “rudely opening her breast” and discovering her gender (131). Upon making this discovery, Osmin determines to add Ardelisa and Nannetta to his seraglio:

At these words he left the room, and two eunuchs entered, who did lead her and the maid into the garden, and there opening the doors of a beautiful apartment conducted them in; after leaving them in a lovely room, departed, and soon returned with sherbets of delicate taste, preserved and cold meats, telling them they should refresh themselves and showing a rich bed chamber with closets full
of women’s clothes, bid them shift and dress in any of those rich Turkish habits they liked best, none should disturb them. (131-32)

The aesthetic rendering of the seraglio combines Samuel Johnson’s strategies of demystification and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s use of the invasive private gaze. Aubin’s description creates an artistic image of opulence and splendor, suggesting the beauty of the feminine interiorities of Turkish society. However, in the following sections, she also reveals the misery and boredom of its female inhabitants, suggesting a demystified Orient that is dissatisfying and mundane.

Aubin’s heroine adds, of course, her moralistic heroism in her evaluation of the seraglio. Following the description of sherbets and downy beds, Ardelisa determines to kill Osmin upon his return:

Shall this bold hand destroy the villain when he enters? Sure it can be no sin to save my virtue with his blood? Yes, I am resolved to do it, though I perish. Let his slaves revenge his death on me and torture me with all their fury can invent. Death’s but a trifle in comparison of infamy. Yes, my dear Lord commanded me to suffer death rather than yield to lustful infidels, and Christianity enjoins it.

(132)

Ardelisa here stands in contrast to her father who, when faced with “the villain,” did nothing. She plans to take it upon herself to preserve her chastity and, indeed, the supremacy of Christianity. In what Aubin describes as divine response to her nobility, Osmin is captured by the Sultan and sent to the “Seven Towers” as prisoner before he can return home. Ardelisa and Nannetta wander freely through the gardens of the seraglio, participating with Joseph in a plot to set fire to Osmin’s palace and to escape. While Ardelisa did not murder Osmin, she does exercise violent self-assertion by setting fire to the seraglio. In this instance, Ardelisa serves as a
representative of Christian justice and morality, symbolically condemning the infidels and their supposedly immoral institutions to hell by literally setting the seraglio ablaze.

Ardelisa’s trials do not end with the destruction of the seraglio. Accompanied by Nannetta, Joseph, and two other European captives she has saved over the course of her journey, she finally gains access to a ship bound for Europe. The travelers are confronted by a terrible storm that leaves them shipwrecked on a deserted island. As in Defoe’s *Crusoe*, Aubin’s characters create a functioning community within which they sustain themselves with what they can salvage from their surroundings. Several months after their arrival on the island, a Venetian ship captained by Violetta’s father—a woman whom Ardelisa had saved from the seraglio—finds them and offers to take them to Venice.

The final episodes of Aubin’s novel create a Western solidarity that promises to sustain the superiority of the Continent. The conclusion of Aubin’s tale reveals a series of familial coincidences. The captain of the Venetian ship who rescues the company is Violetta’s father; the captain of the French ship who falls in love with Violetta finds his cousin, captain of the French ship that comes to return Ardelisa to France, and learns of his newly inherited fortune; Ardelisa convinces Violetta, who has become like a sister to her, to marry the French captain and move to France where they can remain confidants and countrywomen. Relying on this narrative tradition of coincidence, Aubin implicitly indicates that the generality of Europe is a tightly knit family whose bonds are based on Christian morality and virtue. This establishes a solidly constructed Occident that can easily oppose an evil Orient.

Ardelisa’s narrative agency does not end when she returns to France. Learning of Longueville’s whereabouts, she devises an elaborate “trial of her lord’s affections” (148). Longueville has been staying in a convent since his return to France, passively awaiting
Ardelisa’s return or news of her death. The inversion of passivity and action with regard to
gender is interesting here in that even upon her heroine’s return, Aubin is careful to retain the
transgressive nature of Ardelisa’s actions. Ardelisa sends her cousin to inform Longueville that
she has died, desiring to test his love for and loyalty to her. His response is one traditionally
reserved for the passive female:

Father and friend! I thank you both and beg you’ll witness how resigned I bear the
greatest loss the e’er mortality sustained. Be witness, heaven! how dear I loved
her, and since she can be mine no more on earth, this day I’ll quit the world.
Tomorrow’s sun shall see me in the humble habit of a friar, these walks shall
bound my wishes, and I will know no pleasure but the hopes of seeing her again.
Farewell world and sensual joys, in death I place my hope. (150)

Immediately following this declaration, Longueville faints, becoming even more passive. Indeed,
he is nearly written out of the narrative except for Ardelisa’s desire to restore his honor. She has
taken on the heroic roles that he and her father had misapprehended and abused and in her
adoption of these roles, she reinstates Longueville’s function as European nobleman at the end of
the novel.

Aubin, through equating the value of her work with that of masculinist narratives of the
time and by endowing it with nationalistic and moralistic responsibilities, is able to create and
sustain female liminalities of authoritative representation. Much like Montagu, Aubin employs
masquerades and manipulations of Oriental settings that allow her characters and her readers to
transcend the delimited categories of English femininity. Her female characters assume
autonomous, improvisational, and transgressive roles that evade social and cultural
condemnation in that they serve to maintain the ideals and gendered categorizations of
eighteenth-century Europe while concretizing a vicariously accessible, aesthetically charged, and inherently inferior Orient.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1 In the early years of the eighteenth century, Aubin produced several topical political poems, including in 1708 ‘The Welcome: A Poem to his Grace the Duke of Marlborough’, celebrating the Duke’s military triumphs against the French in the War of the Spanish Succession. After these early poetic efforts, she published nothing during the next thirteen years until she turned to the travel adventure novel in 1721. See John J. Richetti’s headnote to the novel in Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology, eds. Paula R. Backsheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 113.


3 Snader, 3.


5 Grewal, 27.


7 Snader, 3.

8 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999) 16.

9 Snader, 149.
CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed.


The early English travel narrative was a narrative of authority. In it, the social and cultural assumptions of pre-imperial England found expression, exposing the cacophonous struggles for regional, international, and narrative ascendancy. The multifaceted impact of the dialogues that emerged between the authors of these narratives revealed the course of the cultural and imperial projects of early eighteenth-century England. These were active dialogues that shaped the economic and cultural perspectives that later served as both motivation and justification for one of the most successful yet deleterious modern empires. These dialogues also punctuated academic experimentations with narrative form and content, revealing the social and economic impact of eighteenth-century England on the literary forms and academic rivalries it produced.

A time of economic prosperity, the early eighteenth century bore witness to an expansion of overseas markets that would fund the imperial ventures of the nineteenth century. This prosperity produced regional and international rivalries that found expression in the works of writers such as Daniel Defoe. The fiscal responsibilities of England rested in the hands of the mercantile middle class represented by Defoe, reflecting the changing social attitudes of the English nation. Defoe’s economic works are both individually subjective, in that they are characterized by an individual desire for self-promotion and advancement, and socially
subjective, relying on the social subjectivity of a nation that seeks advancement and promotion in both trade and power.

This amalgamation of individual and social subjectivities is one of the primary characteristics of early travel literature. The authors of these narratives, male and female, coupled their individual goals and ideals with larger cultural and national assumptions, creating and maintaining authorial and narrative legitimacy. Moreover, the early travelers and travel writers expressed these subjectivities by experimenting with the application of Enlightenment thought. Aestheticism, empiricism, and neo-classicism appeared in a scholastic project that created a dialogic of pedantry, artistry, and cultural hegemony. Moore’s aestheticized account of English slave markets in Africa, Johnson’s warnings against vanity and expansion, and Montagu’s and Aubin’s creation of the authoritative female narrator incorporate the philosophical inquiries of the eighteenth century while simultaneously expressing the individual concerns of their authors.

The social, economic, and political characteristics of the early English travel narrative reveal a consolidated mixture of ethnographies, geographies, and identities that, paradoxically, created the most distinct cultural divisions in Western history. These divisions, as is evident by the recent political and economic endeavors of both East and West, have survived the demise of colonialism and overt imperialism. The persistent continuity of the dialogic of difference expresses the exilic, migratory attitudes—such as those expressed in the travel literature of early modern England—that define our modern cultural assumptions. Culture becomes a failed protective enclosure that relies on notions of “us” and “them,” revealing an inability to separate individual experience from national narration. As Edward Said states,
the trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one’s own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. Most professional humanists as a result are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other.\(^1\)

The divisibility of culture that Said describes here takes on definitive forms, I argue, in the early English travel narrative. These were some of the first texts that documented cultural difference, creating gaps in the textual representation of the newly-encountered world. These gaps allowed for the experimentation with English social and literary forms by contrasting Occident and Orient, creating the self-sustained, socially and economically motivated premises of national differentiation that continue to govern our cultural outlooks today.

The wanderings of these early travelers reveal the bases of the social and historical differentiations that determined the nature of imperial, cross-cultural interaction as well as punctuating the Western female writer’s struggle for narrative autonomy. These interactions and struggles and the various modes of aesthetic and economic description employed by their documenters, established an expansive repertoire of symbolic, imaginative imagery that came to represent the Orient and its position with respect to the Occidental gaze.
NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

REFERENCE LIST


