“Doleful Records”:
Empire and Melancholy in Romantic India

by

Tara McDonald

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Tara McDonald (2015)
“Doleful Records”: Empire and Melancholy in Romantic India

Tara McDonald
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
University of Toronto
2015

Abstract

This dissertation considers how the feelings unleashed by death – namely mourning and melancholy – were harnessed to understand, organize, and legitimate imperial power in India during the British Romantic period. The project examines the writing of women authors such as Mariana Starke, Phebe Gibbes, Elizabeth Hamilton, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Felicia Hemans, Sydney Owenson, and Emma Roberts alongside contemporary political debates to demonstrate how the affective strategies surrounding death were performing the labour of empire in the literary topography and psychogeography of the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. Faced with personal, political, and national losses on a grand scale, Britons had to reimagine grief as a force to be mobilized and deployed, rather than one acting upon them. The difficulty of dealing with death from the distance and difference of a foreign outpost, where the traditional networks of consolation could not be accessed, demanded new forms of sympathy, sociability, and a reconstitution of communal identity in response to losses that could not be confronted. While the bodies of the dead grounded the imperial project in India, the mobility of their printed afterlives reconnected them to a sympathetic national body at home. The first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates how Elizabeth Hamilton exploits melancholy as
a rhetorical strategy that provides women with access to political discourse and posits mourning as an affective branch of the imperial project. Nineteenth-century writers converged around a controversial death ritual – sati, the Hindu practice of widow-burning – to organize the policies and feelings that constituted the British “civilizing mission” in India, and the second chapter examines how the writings of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Felicia Hemans, and Sydney Owenson engage with the figure of the dying and mourning “other” woman. The third chapter investigates the vision of Anglo-Indian community drawn in Emma Roberts’s travel writing to suggest that the morbid sociability she finds in India is, in fact, an ideological projection of Anglicist colonial administration. This dissertation provides new channels of inquiry into the transperipheral dynamics of imperialism from the 1780s to the 1830s, and demonstrates how the afterlife of British Romanticism continues to haunt our understanding of political subjectivity.
Acknowledgments

Writing about grief and death can be a rather gloomy experience, but I am fortunate to have been bolstered with the undying support of family, friends, and colleagues during this undertaking.

I am thankful to Alan Bewell, whose generous supervision, collegial conversations, and enthusiastic support have influenced this project in many important ways. I also want to thank Daniel White, who introduced me to the wide world of research trips, and whose incisive comments have pushed my scholarship. My committee would not have been complete without Deidre Lynch’s exciting contributions, which always stimulated me to think in new ways about reading practices and affect. I am also grateful for Daniel O’Quinn’s engaged response to this dissertation, as well as for Karen Weisman and Lynne Magnusson’s thoughtful comments during the oral defense. My interest in melancholy was sparked by the intellectual generosity of Joel Faflak during an inspiring undergraduate seminar, and my development as a scholar is still informed by his warm spirit. Finally, I must thank the women of the English Department’s administrative staff – especially Clare Orchard, Sangeeta Panjwani, Marguerite Perry, and Tanuja Persaud – for all their help and patience over the years.

This study is indebted to the funding of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program. I have had the opportunity to share various parts of this research at conferences by the North American Society for the
Study of Romanticism and the International Conference on Romanticism, and the discussions those presentations fostered have been invaluable.

I cannot imagine what my years at the University of Toronto would have been like without the witty company of GG(O)W (Miriam Novick, Laura Claridge, Sundhya Walther, and Sarah Henderson), or without the inspiring solidarity of my fellow Feminist Killjoys. I am particularly happy to have shared my academic years with Dara Greaves and Scott Howard, both of whose brilliant scholarly insights and equally brilliant friendship have enriched my work and my life. Some friendship evolves into kinship over the years, and I am lucky to have my life coiled around the Ladysnakes (Sasha Miszczyk, Aimee Cutten, Emily Lorimer, and Xtina Bendall).

There are no words to properly express my gratitude and love for my family. Jeff McDonald, your fun-loving wanderlust has always reminded me to take a break from the books. To Suzanne and David McDonald, I owe so very much. You imparted your own love of learning to me, and have never asked me to take my nose out of my books, whether they be Nancy Drew or Norton anthologies. Without your fierce love and support, this project would never have been possible. Finally, I would like to thank my partner and best friend, Chris Fischer. Thanks to the love, laughs, and adventures we share, my melancholy can stay safely relegated to the realm of scholarship.

I would like to dedicate this work to my grandmothers, Viola McDonald and Jeannine Haslam. I strive to live by their examples of humour, independence, and love.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ vi

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... viii

Introduction Moving Objects: The Melancholy of Imperial Mobility ................................. 1
  “Melancholy Testimonies”: Cultural and Critical Contexts .............................................. 5
  Mariana Starke’s The Sword of Peace and the Imperial Will ............................................. 17
  “Death again!”: A Reconsideration of Hartly House, Calcutta ........................................ 30

Chapter 1 Imperial Feelings and “Imaginary Sorrows” in Elizabeth Hamilton’s
  Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah ................................................................. 47
  Imperial Hauntings and the Happy Ghost of Hastings ..................................................... 56
  Dido’s Tears and the Death of Tipu Sultan: Mourning for Mysore and America .......... 64
  The “Friends of Percy” and the Limits of Transnational Sympathy ............................... 76
  Excess and Instruction: Teaching Feeling Through Charlotte’s Tears ......................... 85
  Mirrored Mourning and the Pall of Genre ................................................................. 89

Chapter 2 The “Common Woe”: Sympathy, Sati, and the British Civilizing Mission in
  India ................................................................................................................................... 92
  The Case of Sati: An Administrative and Affective Debate ......................................... 99
  Felicia Hemans and the “Gift of Grief” ........................................................................ 111
  The Missionary: Sati, Subjekthood, and the Melancholy Empire ............................ 128
  “Ce triste empire de soi-même”; or the Sad Empire of the Self .................................... 144

Chapter 3 “Death and absence differ but in name”: The Melancholy Sociability of Emma
  Roberts’s Anglo-Indians ................................................................................................. 146
  Tigers, Ghosts, and Strangers: The Haunted Houses of Hindostan .............................. 152
  Necrotourism in “the grim dominion of Death”: Christian Cemeteries and the Taj Mahal .... 164
  “Pale conquerors from the west”: Roberts’s Anglo-Indian Community .................. 175
  Corpse and Corpus: Embodied Work and the Recuperation of Empire ..................... 191
Coda “I stood beside thy lowly grave”: From Romantic Elegy to Selfies at Funerals. 193

Works Consulted ............................................................................................................................................. 198
List of Figures

Introduction
Moving Objects: The Melancholy of Imperial Mobility

And parted thus they rest, who play’d
Beneath the same green tree;
Whose voices mingled as they pray’d
Around one parent knee!
– Felicia Hemans, “The Graves of a Household”

As Lieutenant-General Sir Eyre Coote boarded an armed Indiaman at Calcutta bound for Madras in 1783, he declared to a friend that he “had one foot in the grave and the other at the edge of it” (Sheppard 177). ¹ Given the large number of British men and women who were dying in the service of empire at the end of the eighteenth century, Coote’s statement is more a matter of fact than a morbid and, as fate would have it, accurate premonition. But what makes Coote’s death unique is the mobile afterlife enjoyed by his corpse. After he suffered a stroke at sea, his wife wrote that “the use of Electricity might arouse and restore him” if they could only get him to shore (Sheppard 179). These hopes were in vain, and Coote died three days later. Like Frankenstein’s creature, whom he precedes in electric myth, Coote’s was a restless body. He was temporarily interred at St. Mary’s Church in Madras, which, operating at that time as a warehouse, had to be hurriedly cleared of piles of rice so that a funeral could take place. His wife insisted that he be exhumed and returned home to England, so nine months later she accompanied his body on the seven-month-long journey to Plymouth. From the ship’s landing, Coote

¹ Coote is best known for his acrimonious relationship with Robert Clive during the Siege of Calcutta, his role in the Battle of Plassey, his decisive victory over the French at the Battle of Wandiwash, the capture of Pondicherry, his alliance with Warren Hastings, and his successes in the ongoing conflicts with Hyder Ali. See Sheppard and Wilkinson for the descriptions of Coote’s life and death that follow.
Bahadur – or Coote the Brave, as he was known by his sepoy troops – was slowly transported to the parish church of Rockbourne. Having died on 27 April 1783, Coote was finally laid to rest on 14 September 1784. If his post-mortem mobility were not memorable enough, Coote also boasts of three memorials. The most interesting one resides within the illustrious shades of Westminster Abbey, featuring “a winged Victory, an elephant, two weeping figures representing Mahratta and Hindu captives, and an inverted cornucopia the contents of which are falling into Britannia’s shield” (Wilkinson 42).² These icons are more than simple instances of “local colour,” as one biographer has it (Shephard 184). Rather, Coote’s memorial troublingly recasts its painfully oppressed colonial captives – the weeping Mahratta and Hindu figures – as fellow mourners in the Abbey shedding tears of grief for a fallen hero.³ His fitful mobility and the ill-suited community of mourners his memorial attempts to assemble thus testify to the complicated work of grief in this period, as Britons sought to understand loss on a new and radically different scale. Tears are hard to parse in the losses of empire.

Although the mobility of Coote’s corpse may be uncommon, the circulation of melancholy objects within Britain’s empire was not. When the East India Company’s troops stormed Seringapatam (present-day Srirangapatna) in 1799 to defeat Tipu Sultan and secure control of the kingdom of Mysore, they also discovered an object described by The St James Chronicle as “proof of the deep hate, and extreme loathing of Tippoo

² Of the other two memorials, one was erected in 1828 in Fordingbridge by his nephew’s widow to honour both men in death, testifying to a family’s fatal sacrifices in “extending the glory, and adding to the security of the British Empire” (Sheppard 183). Another memorial, a statue of Coote, found itself as hard to fix in place as the man himself, as it was variously housed in the Leadenhall Street and Whitehall locations of the East India Company’s India House.

³ See Watson’s chapter 1 for a discussion of literary tourists’ pilgrimages to Westminster Abbey.
Saib towards the English” (qtd. in Stronge 62). That proof was Tipu’s Tiger, an automaton made of carved and painted wood that depicted a tiger mauling an almost life-sized European soldier. Internal mechanisms made one of the victim’s hands move, mimicking his struggle against the animal. An embedded organ punctuated the fight with the man’s wails and the tiger’s roar. No longer a toy in a foreign enemy’s hand, Tipu’s Tiger was seized by the British, shipped home, and displayed first at East India House in 1808, and then at the London offices of the East India Company, before finally becoming a part of the permanent collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1880. In defeating Tipu Sultan, the self-styled “Tiger of Mysore,” and in claiming his automaton, the British gained a souvenir of their subjugation of Indian rulers. Yet Tipu’s Tiger also serves as a circulating memento mori of the Britons dying in India. In Tipu’s Tiger, then, viewers in London saw a familiar victim returned to them, endowed with another type of mobile afterlife, unlike so many others lost to the expansion of empire who would never come to rest in England. In this melancholy object was encapsulated the willful ambivalence required to subscribe to the imperial project: one sees British victory over

---

4 For more on Tipu Sultan’s role in the British imperial imagination, see the following chapter of this dissertation.

5 Another interesting mobile object appears in both White (see chapter 1) and O’Quinn who respectively discuss the travelling panoramas of the period. O’Quinn describes Robert Ker Porter’s panorama of The Storming of Seringapatam in London, in which “the troubling corpse of Tipu is not only not represented but the structure of the optical mechanism focuses viewer attention on the dead bodies of both named and unnamed soldiers” (Staging 344). O’Quinn’s description of the panorama is suggestively melancholic in its attention to dead bodies.
of the Tiger, just as one registers the tiger killing a Briton – the loss always haunting the victory.\(^6\)

What the trajectories of Sir Eyre Coote and Tipu’s Tiger together demonstrate is that the affective drives spurring imperial power in the Romantic period emanated from the grave. This dissertation argues that from the 1780s to the 1830s the feelings unleashed by death were harnessed to understand, organize, and legitimate imperial power in India. In other words, this project considers how grief and melancholy were transformed from entropic to generative forces by the labour of empire in the literary topography and psychogeography of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Faced with personal, political, and national losses on a grand scale, Britons had to reimagine grief as a force to be mobilized and deployed, rather than one acting upon them. The difficulty of dealing with death from the distance and difference of a foreign outpost, where the traditional networks of consolation could not be accessed, demanded new forms of sympathy and a reconstitution of communal identity in response to losses that could not be confronted. Although the dead women and men in the pages that follow do not experience the unusually mobile afterlife of Sir Eyre Coote, they do, however, circulate in print; while their bodies ground the imperial project in India, the mobility of their printed afterlives reconnects them to a sympathetic national body at home.\(^7\) If

---

\(^6\) Tipu Sultan would go on to haunt British theatregoers even after his death. For his legacy on the stage, see Teltscher and O’Quinn.

\(^7\) A fascinating example of the mobile print afterlife I am describing is the *Bengal Obituary; Or A Record to Perpetuate the Memory of Departed Worth: Being a Compilation of Tablets and Monumental Inscriptions from Various Parts of the Bengal and Agra Presidencies. To which is added Biographical Sketches and Memoirs of Such as have Pre-Eminently Distinguished Themselves in the History of British India, Since the Formation of the European Settlement to the Present Time* (1848). The text transcribes the
scholars continue to locate the emergence of modern subjectivity and nationalism in the reading practices of the long eighteenth century, then the ways in which the Romantics represented their dead must become a part of that narrative. Joseph Roach has suggested that “modernity itself might be understood as a new way of handling (and thinking about) the dead” (48). This dissertation investigates the modernity that emerges from the melancholy imperialism of the Romantic era.

“Melancholy Testimonies”: Cultural and Critical Contexts

British Romanticism was a bereaved culture. From its mid-eighteenth-century graveyard poetry predecessors to the sentimental tears of the age of sensibility in the late eighteenth century – from Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* to Edmund Burke’s histrionic speeches, from William Godwin’s *Essays on Sepulchres* to William Wordsworth’s *Essays Upon Epitaphs* and lugubrious Lucy poems, from Lord Byron’s exile to John Keats’s moribund verses – the Romantics were obsessed with loss. It is not coincidental that I trace this culture of loss along literary lines, since in this era of exploding print culture, reading, as Deidre Lynch has pointed out, was understood as a kind of haunting: the spirits of venerable authors resided in their books, lingering in the homes and minds of those who communed with them. This “mode of literary hermeneutics,” Lynch suggests, “combin[es] its quests for the presence of the poets with rites of mourning that cast them as, simultaneously, objects of reverence and subjects of revenance” (“Matters”

---

inscriptions on tombs, graves, and monuments from European cemeteries in or near Calcutta. For a thorough description of the *Bengal Obituary*’s form and function, see Broughton.

“Nineteenth-century writers and readers,” Samantha Matthews concurs, “had a heightened awareness of the significant relationship between the materiality of death and the materiality of books” (11). Indeed, dubbing this cultural phenomenon “necromanticism,” Paul Westover even proposes that many Romantic-era Britons “emerg[ed] into literacy by way of the graveyard” (6). Thus, in a way, the literary medium asked its readers to become spiritual mediums.

As fellow scholars of Romantic gloom have pointed out, the literary turn to the dead can be understood as a coping mechanism for the political turbulence of the era. Loss seemed to threaten Britons from all sides on both local and global scales. The secession of the American colonies, unrest in Ireland, the spectre of the Jacobite rebellion, the Napoleonic wars, the precarious solvency of the East India Company, a mad king, and the increasing urbanization and industrialization that shifted demographic forces in unsettling ways all forced British citizens to imagine new ways to weave loss into their cultural self-fashioning, or else be annihilated by it. Westover has suggested that because the French Revolution destabilized both personal and collective histories, it “intensified concurrent anxieties over the alienating forces of modernization and mass culture…feeding not only nostalgia for a lost past, but also an imperative to individualize

---

For Westover, “necromanticism” consists of “a complex of antiquarian revival, book-love, ghost-hunting, and monument-building that emerged in the age of revolution and mass print. That culture, born in the eighteenth century and triumphant in the nineteenth, created touristic and reading habits that in some cases continue up to the present” (3).
death and render it more significant” (2). Rather than disintegrating, then, this society in crisis turned mourning into a marker of national identity.10

This compensatory response to loss can be seen in the similarly extravagant mourning for two otherwise quite different figures: Horatio Nelson and Princess Charlotte.11 Nelson was killed during the Battle of Trafalgar, which decisively secured the nation’s naval supremacy. His death in 1805 provoked a painfully ambivalent reaction in the British public, torn between rejoicing over a significant military victory and mourning the loss of a national hero. This communal reaction reflects a culture’s struggle to process individual losses that stabilize political gain. Unlike Nelson, Princess Charlotte did not die in the foreign climes of empire, but at home, in childbirth, bringing a domestic calamity to the public scene in 1817. Adela Pinch’s investigation of the impact of Charlotte’s death is particularly suggestive for this project’s interest in the mobility of imperial affect. Charlotte’s death, Pinch argues, “provoked a widespread fascination with feelings’ tendency to travel,” as mourning became a way of mapping English influence abroad (179). In a study that has influenced the conceptualization of

---

10 As Tillman W. Nechtman points out, “[l]ate-eighteenth-century Britain was a political construction filled with individuals who all cherished their own specific and contingent perspectives of the new national center, and Britishness was a national identity that only precariously fused together the British Isles – the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales – under a German royal dynasty atop a multi-national, racially diverse, and geographically vast empire” (6). In The Island Race (2003), Kathleen Wilson investigates this fraught notion of British national identity in the eighteenth century. “Approaching national identity as a historical process rather than an outcome, and as an individual as well as collective mode of consciousness,” Wilson proposes, “shifts the grounds of historical interpretation, enabling us to track how contending ideas about difference and the terms of national, ethnic and imperial belonging were proliferated across varied social terrains and performed crucial ideological work in eighteenth-century notions of self, polity and collectivity” (3–4). My project adds the ideological and social terrains surrounding death to Wilson’s compelling study.

11 For more on how Princess Charlotte’s death highlights the importance of mourning to national politics, see Schor (chapter 6) and Behrendt.
this dissertation, Lynn Festa similarly considers how the feelings unleashed by sentimental writing “helped create the terms for thinking about agency and intent across the geographic expanse of the globe by giving shape and local habitation to the perpetrators, victims, and causal forces of empire” (2). The mobility of feelings – embodied in the deaths of both Charlotte and Nelson, as well as Sir Eyre Coote and Tipu’s Tiger – thus “allowed the English public to reimagine foreign relations as a conquest by tears” (Pinch 180). In this tearful conquest, Britons not only found consolation in a shared national identity based on legible feeling, but also found a new force to deploy alongside their military might.

Britons were inclined, perhaps, to sound the depths of the affective empire because they were dying at the far reaches of the globe in large numbers. The new distance between mourners and the mourned thus required new affective strategies to process such losses. Although literary culture invited necrotourists to mitigate the distance between life and death by “travel[ing] to meet the dead” (Westover 3), the imperial project did not often give up the corpses that stimulated its growth, leaving families at home without a body to mourn or remains to inter.12 Reminding us of the centrality of the corpse to social networks, Roach posits that “[i]n any funeral, the body of the deceased performs the limits of the community called into being by the need to

mark its passing” (14). Without a body to bury or a customary funeral ritual, then, metropolitan families were not only bereft of their loved ones, but also unable to demarcate and distinguish how a global British community might look, act, or feel. Indeed, bodies both living and dead were a source of anxiety on the shifting imperial scene, as Britons grew uneasy about how exposure to the peoples and climates of its colonies would affect the bodies of its subjects. Since the “British experience of India was intensely physical,” according to E. M. Collingham, “the body was central to the colonial experience…as the site where social structures are experienced, transmuted and projected back on to society” (1-2). If, as Daniel O’Quinn articulates, “the constitutional – that is, political – questions of imperial governance give way to the governance of bodily constitutions in the colonies” (Staging 265) then what happens to those bodies when they die becomes a matter of national significance. By examining the rituals and feelings that surround death, dying, and the dead in India, this dissertation does not attempt to “diagnos[e] the age” (7), as Pinch puts it. I argue, rather, that reading literary texts through the lenses of mourning and melancholy allows us to understand melancholy

---


as an individual affect, a collective mode of compensation, a rhetorical strategy, and a systemic way of regulating colonial activity.

Of course, any project premised on the dynamics of mourning and melancholy must necessarily acknowledge its debt to Sigmund Freud’s influential essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917). There, Freud posits that both mourning and melancholia are reactions to “the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (243). Although both mourning and melancholia manifest themselves similarly by painful dejection and a loss of interest in worldly activities, only melancholia displays a “disturbance of self-regard” (244). It is in this difference that Freud locates a distinction between the “normal affect” of mourning and the “pathological disposition” of melancholia (243). In mourning, the ego is capable of acknowledging the loss and withdrawing its attachments to the love-object; this process is undoubtedly painful, but the loss is overcome after a certain amount of time. In melancholia, however, the loss is withdrawn from consciousness so that the subject is unable to recognize that a loss has even occurred. Instead, Freud argues that the subject absorbs the lost love-object into his or her own psyche, causing the ego to identify with the lost object. The “self-reproaches” characteristic of the melancholic, then, are in fact reproaches against the lost object – now lodged in the ego – towards whom the subject’s feelings waver ambivalently between love and resentment. Although like mourning, melancholia can eventually pass on its own, Freud acknowledges that its fluctuating and dissembling nature make it difficult to investigate.
Freud’s formulation continues to lend itself well to literary studies – perhaps even better than to clinical practice – thanks to the claims it makes about self-expression and subjectivity. For Freud’s melancholic subject is, intriguingly, excessively talkative and self-critical, obsessed but exhausted with self-knowledge and self-representation, an overdetermined self hedging in the impending loss of self. Such a generative inward turn makes Freud’s model particularly germane to studies of Romantic selfhood, and Jennifer Radden has even claimed that “[a]longside this flowering of Romantic ideas of melancholy, with their emphasis on subjectivity, modern psychiatry was born” (33).

Indeed, Freud’s understanding of melancholia relies on a long cultural and literary tradition that links melancholy to men of genius. With his claim that melancholia leaves its subject with a “keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic” (246), Freud recuperates loss by endowing it with compensatory vision. Pointing out his reliance on the figure of Hamlet, Juliana Schiesari suggests that Freud’s melancholia participates in a cultural tradition that legitimates loss. “By privileging a nostalgic ideal that is also kept absent and deferred,” Schiesari argues, “the self not only reconverts the loss into self-display but also legitimates that display as part of a cultural myth – that of the melancholic intellectual and artist” (5-6). While Schiesari’s study is mostly focused on Italian Renaissance poetry, other literary scholars have similarly observed how Freud’s model can usefully account for Romantic conceptions of sociopolitical and cultural subjectivity. Thomas Pfau, for instance, identifies melancholy

---

15 Radden provides a useful overview of the long western tradition of melancholy. Schiesari traces a similar cultural history with a feminist consideration of how the discourse of melancholy has historically excluded women. For the iconographical tradition of melancholy, see Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl’s *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, History, and Art* (1964).
(along with paranoia and trauma) as one of the dominant “moods” of the Romantic period. Gleaning from Freud and the tradition that precedes him, Pfau reminds us that melancholy is “[b]orn of an excess of knowledge,” even going so far as to call it the “veritable apotheosis” of self-consciousness. Indeed, when he lists melancholy’s “attendant quality of exhaustion rather than possibility, of a lucid ending rather than sentient beginnings” (309-10), Pfau could also be describing the sense of exhaustion and anxiety surrounding the British empire at this time, as its increasing expansion and tenuous solvency uncomfortably conjured the ghost of the Roman empire.

With its losses of an “ideal kind,” its excess, its self-knowledge, and its negotiations of self and other, there are a number of ways in which the Freudian model of melancholy is suggestive for thinking about imperial dynamics in the Romantic period. Indeed, following the seminal work of Frantz Fanon, postcolonial scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Ian Baucom, Orlando Patterson, and Anne Anlin Cheng have each turned to the framework of melancholy to understand racial discourses. Cheng, for one, insists that grief must be read “not as merely a symptom but as an analytical paradigm responsive to the material and imaginative realities of racial dynamics” (xi). She further argues that “[t]he model of melancholia can help us comprehend grief and loss on the part of the

---

16 Because melancholy is loaded with centuries of philosophical, astrological, humoral, medical, psychological, supernatural, and emotional understandings, it should be noted that by the Romantic period, it was understood as disease, mood, and disposition. See Radden.

17 In his discussion of the uncomfortable “conviviality” of modern nations, Gilroy differentiates “[a]n older, more dignified sadness that was born in the nineteenth century” from “the guilt-ridden loathing and depression that have come to characterize Britain’s xenophobic responses to the strangers who have intruded upon it more recently” (90). See Gilroy’s Postcolonial Melancholia (2005); Baucom’s Specters of the Atlantic: Finance, Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History (2005); Patterson’s Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (1982); and Cheng’s The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief (2001).
aggrieved, not just as a symptom but also as a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination” (xi). It is precisely these transformations of the political imagination that I seek to uncover in the functions of melancholy in imperial texts of the Romantic period. First, by absorbing uneasily acknowledged losses, melancholy allows the nation to, in Cheng’s words, “grow rich in impoverishment” and understand the “history of the ego as the history of its losses” (8). Second, because of its self-reflexivity, melancholy became a productive mode for interrogating the form the British empire was beginning to take. And third, it suggests that Britons imagined themselves both as the griever seeking to reconstitute new forms of community and as melancholic objects swallowed by a foreign body. The framework of melancholy thus provides a psychological model that allows us to reimagine the colonial contact zone as the uneasily intimate arena that it was, one encroaching on the domestic, rather than a threatening space “over there.”

Despite Freud’s influence on this project, I follow Cheng, Pinch, and Esther Schor’s respective approaches to the use of psychoanalytical methods in literary studies. Like Cheng, I find psychoanalysis compelling for the “powerful vocabulary” it provides

---

18 As Kathleen Wilson has averred, “the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ have been difficult to disentangle since 1492” (A New Imperial History 15). For more on “the impact of the British Empire on the metropole” at this period (1), see At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World, edited by Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (2006). Although I agree with scholars like Hall and Rose who claim that “[e]mpire was omnipresent in the everyday lives of ‘ordinary people’ – it was there as part of the mundane” (22), others downplay the impact of imperialism on domestic British society. In Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain (2004), for example, Bernard Porter argues that “there can be no presumption that Britain – the Britain that stayed at home – was an essentially ‘imperialist’ nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of course she was, in the sense of acquiring and ruling an empire; but that empire…might not have been as burdensome as it appeared. Consequently, it did not need to have had deep roots in British society – in its culture, for example – or to have affected it greatly in turn” (24).
to address issues of grief (27-28). Following Pinch, moreover, I consider psychoanalysis as more of a “heuristic analogy” for thinking through some of the dynamics of mourning and melancholy, rather than “performing psychoanalytic readings” of the texts that follow (15). In other words, this is not a psychoanalytic project, but one that acknowledges how affective drives influence the cultural understanding of empire.

Schor’s methodology similarly insists on reading mourning “as a cultural rather than psychological phenomenon,” warning that as critics “we persist in regarding mourning through Freudian lenses, which magnify the exquisite pain of bereavement while obscuring the calm commerce of condolence.” Schor adds that “whereas a psychological account interprets mourning as a discourse between the living and the (imagined) dead, a cultural account interprets mourning as a discourse among the living” (3). Indeed, the writers and characters in the texts I examine are rarely attempting to speak to the dead, but rather, are speaking to each other about what the dead mean now.

It remains to be said, however, that my focus on the death and dying of Britons should not be read as a desire to recast them as the tragic victims of empire at the expense of their native counterparts. In his criticism of Linda Colley’s work, Paul Gilroy warns of the desire “to allocate a large measure of blame for the empire to its victims and then to seek to usurp their honoured place of suffering, winning many immediate political and psychological benefits in the process” (95). Far from revising the history of colonialism to redeem the motivations of its agents, this project examines the thanatological ethics of British imperialism to problematize Eurocentric accounts of
empire. Reading these texts through the lens of melancholy enables us, I argue, to map out a new imperial history that acknowledges the affective interpenetration of colony and metropole. Lending sustained attention to the melancholy mobility of Romantic bodies and objects thus reveals an empire premised on circulation rather than separation. Although necessarily indebted to important work in the field by scholars such as Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt, this dissertation seeks to move away from an analysis that imagines a hegemonic colonial power. Ranajit Guha has asked, “Can we afford to leave anxiety out of the story of empire?” (487), and I am indebted to the work of Guha, Sara Suleri, Homi Bhabha, and Nigel Leask for pointing out the anxiety and instability that attended the development of British colonialism. Furthermore, in its emphasis on the circulation of grief and sympathy, this dissertation garners its understanding of the complex relationship between Indians, Anglo-Indians, and Britons from the invaluable work of scholars such as Kathleen Wilson, Daniel White, Mary Ellis Gibson, Daniel

19 I take my cue here from Hall and Rose, who also acknowledge “the dangers of focusing yet again on the British, to the neglect of the lives of colonial peoples across the Empire” (5). Although they specify that “[i]t is British history which is [their] object of study,” Hall and Rose insist that “British history…has to be transnational, recognising the ways in which [their] history has been one of connections across the globe, albeit in the context of unequal relations of power” (5).

20 See, of course, Edward Said’s seminal studies Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Imperialism (1993), and Mary Louise Pratt’s Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992).

21 In his study of British Romantic writers’ relationships to the East, Leask draws on the full semantic range of the word “anxious,” denoting at once an uneasy mind about an uncertain event, a burden of distress or worry, and the desire to effect some purpose. Leask posits that “if…anxieties…sometimes block or disable the positivities of power, they are just as often productive in furthering the imperial will” (British 3). This dissertation takes its cue from Leask’s important claim in probing how mourning and melancholy – rather than simply freezing its agents in grief – give meaningful form to the British imperial project in India.
O’Quinn, Kate Teltscher, Katie Trumpener, Michael Fisher, Betty Joseph, Sudipta Sen, and Saree Makdisi, among others.22

In the sections of this introduction that follow, I provide original close readings of Mariana Starke’s play The Sword of Peace and Phebe Gibbes’s epistolary novel Hartly House, Calcutta that demonstrate how the dynamics of mourning and melancholy provide a crucial yet previously overlooked framework for understanding the affective history of the British empire in India, and the Romantic Britons who imagined and inhabited it. In my discussion of The Sword of Peace, I demonstrate how the manners of sentimental stage comedy reveal a decidedly necromantic cultural understanding of the Indian colonial space. By recognizing Starke’s morbid view of India, I provide an example of how death disrupts and restructures imperial communities. My analysis of Hartly House, Calcutta then builds on death’s important function of social regulation in the colony to elucidate how mourning rituals can be read as important markers of national identity and transnational community. Together these readings will set up the chapters that follow by first illustrating the pervasive perception of India as an inherently deadly place, and second, demonstrating how death and its attendant rituals redrew social and political positions from London to Calcutta.

Mariana Starke’s *The Sword of Peace and the Imperial Will*

I turn now to Mariana Starke’s play *The Sword of Peace; or Voyage of Love* to demonstrate how one woman writer envisioned imperial mobility and mourning in the late eighteenth century. The play was first performed in 1788 after the first session of the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings in which Edmund Burke famously lambasted the former Governor-General of Bengal. Critics have pointed out the trial’s imaginative legacy in popular culture. Siraj Ahmed notes that “the widespread public attention that surrounded the trials made Burke’s characterization [of Hastings] the single most widely disseminated representation of the imperial merchant, and in turn informed the novels about British India and the Anglo-Indian imperialist that proliferated during the early years of the Hastings impeachment” (“Theatre” 33). Likewise, David Musselwhite attests that “as the trial dragged on through seven long years to 1795, the ripples of connection and influence spread until at some point or other they touched upon practically every major figure of the period” (78). Daniel O’Quinn and Jeanne Moskal have convincingly read Starke’s play in light of Burke’s influence, focusing their respective discussions especially on the intersection of class, gender, and race in colonial space. As these critics have demonstrated, despite the play’s prologue claiming that the performance contains “not a breath of politics” to spare an audience already glutted on Hastings’s spectacular trial, Starke dramatizes the transition from Hastings’s supposedly rapacious

---

23 For discussions of Hastings’s impeachment trial, see Suleri (chapter 3), Rudd (chapter 1), and Teltscher (chapter 5).

24 See O’Quinn (chapter 6 of *Staging*) and Moskal.
rule in India to Lord Cornwallis’s paternalistic administration. Although my reading inevitably draws from this valuable critical catalogue, it examines the important functions of death and inheritance in the play to set Starke’s vision of empire apart from Burke’s. Unlike Burke, who – in his impeachment speeches and elsewhere – grounds his model of civil society on the power of succession and heredity, Starke imagines instead the ease with which filial inheritance can be disrupted by death abroad, complicating the possibility of endowing India with a stable English civil legacy. Starke’s reimagining of colonial administration relies on the perception of India as an inescapably fatal location, and relies on the forces of death and mourning to reimagine colonial and metropolitan social structures.

Whether an inheritance constitutes the transmission of property, possession, title, office, or simply a quality or characteristic, it is defined by one constant: an expressly unilateral movement of succession, from the past to the present, from the deceased to the living, or in the case of imperialism, with the civilized “improving” the uncivilized. By positing a model of inheritance – rather than of exchange – to define civil society in the

25 Starke makes it explicit in her preface that “the character of David Northcote is a real one – To Indians this is needless: the sketch, however, is not too faint, I hope, for others: it was dictated by a heart glowing with gratitude and admiration of his noble and unbounded goodness!” (viii). The “real character,” is, of course, Cornwallis, whose fictional counterpart is crucial to the play’s happy resolution.

26 Burke deploys the trope of inheritance, perhaps most famously, to explain his model of civil society in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), and he also used the language of succession as a political model in his speeches during Warren Hastings’s impeachment trial between 1788 and 1795. “The power of perpetuating our property in our families,” Burke argues, “is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice. The possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction which attends the hereditary possession…are the natural securities from this transmission” (Reflections 44). As O’Quinn points out, the passage “implies that weakness and avarice would be everywhere rampant but for the hygienic effects of heredity possession” (Staging 299). Critics such as O’Quinn and Ranajit Guha have considered how the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 attempted to displace this metropolitan fantasy of successive landed property to India.
last decades of the eighteenth century, writers sought to respond to the crisis in national identity caused by new socio-economic and colonial realities. In 1773, Horace Walpole wondered, “What is England now? A sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs—a gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation, without principles, genius, characters or allies, the overgrown shadow of what it was!” (qtd. in Moskal 103). In Walpole’s eyes, the sink of Indian wealth caused by nabobs—East India Company servants who had returned to the metropole with quickly acquired riches from suspicious private trading—threatened England’s very national identity. The figure of the nabob became popular in late-eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, satires, and plays as the embodiment of a classless upstart, disrupting civil society both in India and, more troublingly, at home in England.27 “It is a commonplace of both theatre history and British social history,” O’Quinn contends, “that Samuel Foote’s The Nabob established the figure of the exemplary nabob and thereby encapsulated the anxieties of an entire nation” (Staging 55). In Foote’s play, first performed in 1772 and published in 1778, Sir Matthew Mite (the eponymous “nabob”) schemes to bail the aristocratic Oldham family out of debt in exchange for their daughter’s hand in marriage, and a claim upon their mortgaged estate. Mite also offers to ship off the other Oldham daughters to India to procure them husbands, and to employ the sons in the Company’s service. Far from being relieved by

27 See Percival Spear’s The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth-Century India (1963) for an early study of the figure of the nabob, and Tillman W. Nechtman’s more recent Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain (2010). Nechtman studies the nabob to argue that “domestic Britons in the late eighteenth century were particularly aware of [the ways in which the British empire infused the British nation], and that, rather than taking the relationship for granted, they actively rejected the close affiliation of empire and nation precisely because the connection disturbed what they saw as the quotidian patterns of their daily, domestic, ‘British’ lives” (8).
Mite’s assistance, Lady Oldham condemns Mite for “profusely scattering the spoils of ruined provinces” and “corrupt[ing] the virtue and alienat[ing] the affection of all the old friends of the family” (1). In O’Quinn’s analysis, the play thus dramatizes the “impact of colonial economics on the social interactions of metropolitan life” (Staging 13). That this threat was supposed to be directly related to Indian wealth meant that a system of economic exchange between the two countries could not be sustained without doing serious harm to England. If an exchange meant the circulation of people, goods, and money between England and India, it also meant that corruption could travel freely through these open channels. In order to counteract the flow of insidious Indian corruption into England, writers had to imagine a new model for colonial contact, whereby a relationship could be maintained without risk of contamination to the metropole. Modeling the imperial project on inheritance could therefore neutralize certain anxieties surrounding Company activity in India. First, inheritance absorbs the fear of death abroad into the continuity of national identity. Second, exporting the concept of inherited landed property to India – for example, through the Permanent Settlement Act – could transfer socio-economic ideology to India while controlling land holdings and revenue. And third, narratives that foreground a line of inheritance also counteract the nabob’s characteristic attempt to “efface his class origins when he returns

---

28 Aside from its administrative policies, even England’s mercantile relationship with India materially changed from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century. Amal Chatterjee notes a dramatic shift in the direction and volume of trade between the two countries: “In 1813, Calcutta exported to London two million pounds sterling of cotton goods; in 1830 Calcutta imported two millions sterling of British cotton manufactures. The turnaround was even more rapid than appears from even those surprising figures...This was partially achieved by heavily taxing Indian goods entering Britain...while, on the other hand, keeping Indian import duty low” (23). Such protectionist policy materially enacts the imaginative model of inheritance: by restricting what and how many goods enter the country, England manages to paradoxically create an exploitative, unilateral system of exchange with India.
to England,” bringing attention to his problematic low-class status “outside of civil society and beyond the pale of the nation-state” (Ahmed, “Theatre” 33), and prevent his influence from circulating in the metropole.29 As her play demonstrates, however, despite promulgating an anti-Hastings agenda, Starke is not as confident as Burke in the stability of inheritance tropes in the colony.

*The Sword of Peace*’s prologue, written by George Colman, immediately invokes the anxious relationship between physical movement and social mobility that informs the discourse surrounding nabobs by setting the drama in an age of travel. “London itself seems going out of town,” announces Mr. Palmer, satirically declaring:

Abroad in search of happiness they roam,
Still dull perhaps – but duller still at home.
Shou’d health the noblest to her fountains draw,
All, sick or well, surround the genial *spa*!
Flock to the pump, and, in the highest style,
Sweeten the humors, and correct the bile!
With taste, Dame Pumpkin racks her husband’s brain,
An honest fruiterer of Botolph Lane. –
Town in the dog days! faugh! ’tis my aversion –
Let’s take a *trip*, my dear; some sweet *excursion*! (n.p.)

Colman’s opening links the physical movement of travel to middle-class social mobility, and feminizes these social aspirations by embodying them in the fruiterer’s wife.

29 For an important account of “Little Bengal,” the community of Company men returned to London after serving in India, see White.
Although the prologue prescribes a curative excursion to England’s spa towns, the play reveals that a colonial voyage is more likely to cause melancholic bile than to “correct” it. Eliza and Louisa Moreton are headed to India as a consequence of two deaths: first, “according to the strange clause in [Eliza’s] father’s will,” they must travel to India to claim their inheritance (1); and second, they are charged with collecting the sword of a young deceased officer and returning it to his relations in England.

Just as “death put a stop to the noble youth’s career,” so too does death constantly threaten the Moretons’ task. Their assignment seems simple enough – to retrieve the sword from its keeper, Clairville’s friend Dormer – but Louisa reveals a broader cultural anxiety of the Indian deathscape when she interrupts the Resident:

RESIDENT. A commission with Dormer? why he’s –

LOUISA. Not dead I hope, Sir.

RESIDENT. Dead! no, no; though he might as well be, for the good of him. (1)

The conversation up to this point has given no indication whatsoever for Louisa to assume that Dormer would be dead, so her response is telling: India is introduced as an intrinsically deadly place. Furthermore, the Resident’s response that Dormer “may as well be dead” reads as both a casual dismissal of a man he dislikes, as well as a revealing statement about the frequency of death for young Company men. David Arnold has shown how Europeans tended to view India “through the depressing prism of their own mortality,” reducing the place to a “deathscape” where “death…seemed exceptionally violent, swift, and wasteful of human life” (“Deathscapes” 340). Indeed, Louisa’s verbal interruption formally enacts the common perception of death in India as quick,
unexpected, and even poorly mannered. Anecdotes from the colony commonly explain the fast pace of death by way of a missed social engagement. For instance, on September 22, 1825, Lady West notes in her diary: “We have just heard the melancholy news of the death of a poor young man here, a Mr. Bax, so sudden that he was dead before his friends knew that he was ill. He was to have dined with us today, and the bell tolling was the only way that we heard of it” (qtd. in Wilkinson 8). The missed dinner-date without so much as a note of explanation, the interrupted conversation – death has a discourteous way of ignoring British civilities. What this exchange between Louisa and the Resident reveals is that death and India shared a metonymic relationship that threatened British identity, both in terms of national manners and bodily integrity.

The fast and frequent expiration of the British in India is also how the Resident can manipulate information in an attempt to coerce Eliza into marriage. When Dormer fails to appear at a ball with the Moreton women, Supple (the Resident’s assistant) informs them that he is absent because he is attending the deathbed of a dying friend. Supple adds that the (supposedly) dying man is named Edwards, whom Eliza recognizes as her estranged lover. The necromantic perception of India, therefore, complicates the Moretons’ goals of both reclaiming a dead man’s sword by providing the possibility that its new bearer may also be dead, and muddling their romantic prospects as their unwanted suitors manipulate the deathscape to imaginatively kill off their rivals. In the play’s final act, however, Starke enacts a comic reversal of the morbid energies haunting the play’s heroines. It takes nothing less than a servant misinforming Dormer that the women are both dead, poisoned by the jealous Mrs. Tartar, to draw out his confession of love for Louisa. This fake-out, however, is immediately replaced with an actual death, as
Northcote announces that Edwards’s father has died, and “convinc’d of his hard
treatment of a worthy son, has, by his last will, done every thing to repair his former
unkindness” (5). Starke thus attempts to neutralize the play’s anxieties about the
omnipresent threat of death by preserving its heroines, and locating its final expiration
far away from its protagonists. The hot winds of the Indian deathscape sweep over
Starke’s metropolitan audience, as Eliza and Edwards, and Louisa and Dormer secure
their unions.

It follows, then, that a play so obsessed with death is equally overrun with
inheritance plots. But in dramatizing the failure of inheritance, Starke resists the stable
continuity of a hereditary Burkean constitution. O’Quinn contends that the play is
“inflected by the same nostalgia for the natural liberty of landed property that swept
through metropolitan society at the time of the French Revolution,” but Starke’s
nostalgia turns melancholic in its scepticism. After all, the Moretons are commissioned
to retrieve the sword to redress an act of disinheritance:

  ELIZA.  [T]he generous Clairville, deserted by a father, through
  Sir Thomas Clairville’s generous assistance, sought a fortune here,
  denied him by a parent. Death put a stop to the noble youth’s career, and
  has occasioned your commission of the sword, for which I honor Sir
  Thomas with enthusiasm.

  LOUISA.  And he deserves it. – His nobly offering the legacy of
  Clairville’s gratitude has left him, to purchase the sword of the deceas’d
  youth, that he may preserve it as a trophy of honor to his memory. (1)
Both Clairville and Edwards are forced to establish themselves in India – a potential death sentence – because of paternal rejection. As O’Quinn confirms, such acts interrupt the youths’ rightful claim to landed property, and “therefore destabiliz[e] that which was commonly understood to secure the liberty of not only the landed gentry but the nation” (Staging 272-73). Such paternal failures explain, perhaps, why the death of both Eliza’s and Edwards’s fathers are curiously unmourned and rendered totally unaffecting, especially next to the saccharine remembrance of Clairville that drives the plot. In fact, the play provides clues that perhaps Eliza’s father should not be mourned in a way that affectively ties him to the network of proper British feelings, precisely because he leaves behind a suspicious nabob legacy. A “strange clause” in his will sends the Moretons to India to claim their inheritance, but how legitimate is this fortune? Eliza admits that she honours the unruly Resident as a friend of her father’s, because the Resident’s “kindness to him first help’d to raise his fortune” (4).\(^{30}\) As O’Quinn has pointed out, the “sexually suspect” Resident’s rule – standing in for Hastings’s – represents the devolution of the “British social milieu” into “a state of corrupted civility where interracial desire, class insubordination, gambling, and overt sexual commodification permeate all social relations” (Staging 271). Despite its prophylactic potential, then, proper filial inheritance

\(^{30}\) Starke seems to draw the figure of the Resident largely from Burke’s descriptions of Hastings during the impeachment trial, which in turn drew from popular imaginings of the nabob. Justifying his questionable manoeuvring with the repeated exclamation of “An’t I Resident!,” the Resident acts out the arbitrary power for which Hastings was condemned. Despite being in a position of British authority in India, the Resident enters the play “dressed in a Banyan and congee Cap” (7), in other words, dressed as a member of the Indian merchant caste. Moskal asserts that the Resident’s costume reveals “his loss of English national identity in the sink of Indian wealth and his embrace of the role of a merchant rather than that of a civil servant” (115).
cannot protect the nation when it can be subject to the whims of tyrannical fathers or insert alien fortune into proper channels.

Acknowledging the play’s “act[s] of paternal neglect,” O’Quinn reads Louisa’s retrieval of Clairville’s sword as “a shift from failed aristocratic paternalism” to “a new form of social regulation in which the sign of aristocratic exemplarity – the sword – is permeated by middle-class forms of sociability” (Staging 273). Tied to this middle-class sociability is, I would add, an important emphasis on a particularly morbid kind of sensibility. Bound up as it is in a *memento mori*, the affirmation of middle-class colonial activity relies on the affect produced by mourning. This is why Supple’s dismissal of Dormer from the ball links his lack of taste to mourning ritual:

SUPPLE. “Oh! he’s a fellow of no taste I can assure you Madam – he hardly ever appears at a ball – indeed some people doubt whether he knows how to dance; but at present he is gone to a friend of his that is dying…Yes, I saw him this morning, and in my opinion, he could not possibly survive four-and-twenty hours; but this is not a subject to entertain ladies – you must not mind it, Madam…These things happen every day with us.” (3)

Insisting that death in the settlement is a mundane occurrence that should not be “minded,” Supple implies that lingering over a dying friend is nothing but a sentimental indulgence. In his formulation, not knowing how to dance and mourning mark a parallel lack of class. Indeed, Starke deploys Supple – whose very name implies his malleability – as a satire on class confusion. Based on his “officious attentions” to them, Louisa assumes that Supple is a servant, “a kind of *maître d’hôtel*” to the Resident. To her
surprise, the Resident informs her that Supple is, in fact, a “gentleman…of a very ancient
family; and all the Supples have ever been, and still are, in all the best situations of life”
(1). Not only does Starke once again reveal the unreliability of inheritance as a guarantee
of social standing – either Supple has fallen far from his origins, or the Resident can
easily invent a false heritage – but she also links aristocratic taste for balls to a lack of
proper feeling. The play’s depiction of Supple as an unscrupulous sycophant and a dying
breed of fallen aristocrat clearly invalidates his criticism of Dormer, whom the Resident
insults as a “proud, self-sufficient puppy,” who is “as poor as the devil!” (1). Indeed,
“poor” and “self-sufficient” seem to be code for Dormer’s potential for middle-class
ascendancy.31 Other than the fact that he is “a poor Lieutenant of the Seapoys,” we are
given no information whatsoever on Dormer’s colonial activities. His respect for
Clairville’s memory and his apparent dedication to Edwards’s deathbed therefore locate
Dormer’s respectability precisely in how he mourns, rather than his status.

Starke attempts to neutralize the anxiety surrounding death in the colony by
making it a useful benchmark of sensibility, and by extension identifies those who are
qualified to replace the Resident’s debased rule with one worthy of British civility.
Posited against the play’s disruptive figures of authority, as well as its neglectful fathers,
is the character of David Northcote, playing Cornwallis to the Resident’s Hastings. Like
Dormer, his worth is premised on his sensibility. When the Resident confronts Northcote
for stealing his post, he threatens that the latter’s “benevolence and generosity” will have
a chaotic effect on the settlement:

31 For a study that similarly links forms of mourning to the consolidation of the middle-class in nineteenth-
century American sentimental literature, see Kete.
RESIDENT. Sir, you set the whole settlement in an uproar!

There’s no governing them – blacks, whites, Gentoos, and Hindoos, all alike running mad after you, and your vagaries, truly.

NORTHCOTE. Yes, Mr. Resident, I feel for human nature, of whatever colour or description; I feel for the name and character of an Englishman. I feel neither the power of gold, prejudice, nor partiality; and where the lives and properties, or even happiness, of others are concerned, I have ever regarded the impulse of *humanity*. (5)

Feeling here is not, as Pinch puts it, “lodged within the private, inner lives of individual persons” (1), but becomes instead a force that circulates between people as a useful tool of colonial regulation.32 Indeed, Northcote’s effusive speech is a prime example of Pinch’s etymological understanding of “emotional extravagance” as “that which strays beyond boundaries” (3), as his feelings are emphatically unbounded by colour or creed.

Although Pinch has shown how emotional extravagance came to be regarded with suspicion, if not derision, by the end of the eighteenth century (2), Starke’s play demonstrates that it could nevertheless be usefully exported to the colonies. When Edwards learns about Northcote’s promotion, he rejoices that it “assures our prosperity, glory and applause as a nation, is discountenancing vice, rapacity and oppression. – Now

32 Northcote’s appointment is met with resounding approval from all classes, colours, and castes, who “do nothing but call him father – they keep blessing him and his children; and King George and his children; and their great Prophet and his children” (63). Moskal notes how this passage naturalizes the submission of the colonies “in the metaphor of the patriarchal family” (118). Yet Chatterjee avers that when Cornwallis arrived in India in 1786 to “clean up corruption” from Hastings’s tenure, he replaced all Indians in high positions with English judges: “Cornwallis began the trend of ‘Anglicizing’ India in the belief that that was the only means of ensuring stability and ‘progress’…The overall effect was that Indians and Englishmen were kept apart and social contact dropped to a minimum” (25). Unlike Starke’s harmonious closing vision, then, there would be little contact between Cornwallis’s officials and Indians.
I feel proud, and glory that I’m an Englishman – and here comes Dormer, I am sure, with the same emotions” (5). Edwards’s national pride is significantly labelled as an emotion, one that can be shared, mirrored, circulated, and that, as Northcote established, will regulate colonial behaviour. However, Dormer enters the scene “in Distraction,” believing that his beloved Louisa is dead. The play’s celebratory denouement is once more interrupted by the anxiety of death, reminding the reader that emotions – such as grief – may not be the most reliable administrative tools.

*The Sword of Peace* may be a comedy, but with its central *memento mori* and its multiplying real and imagined deaths, it is deeply concerned with the melancholy of imperial mobility. Indeed, the sword’s status as a *memento mori* that stands outside the circulation of commodities reinforces the difficulty of regulating emotions such as grief, especially in colonies far separated from the familiar networks of affect that can make them socially legible. Lynn Festa reminds us that “[t]he very notion of a sentimental commodity is anomalous, representing the infusion of human particularity into the interchangeability of the commodity as an aspect of its value…Simultaneously alienable and inalienable, the sentimental object both expressed and channelled eighteenth-century anxieties about the fungibility of the commodity form and the social relations it produced” (68-69). Festa’s formulation is particularly useful when we note that the sword is interchangeably described by various characters in the play as a trophy, a legacy, a bequeathment, a memory, and a commodity; the transaction between Louisa and Dormer is at once a “romantic piece of business” (1), a sale, a purchase, a commission, a redress, and an exchange. Complicating matters further, the play’s title and preface make the sword a synecdoche for the work as a whole, as Starke is described
as “having hawked this Sword about from theatre to theatre” (vi). When the same preface registers by apophasis the threat that Starke could be “a grocer’s daughter in Thames Street, [who] has returned an unsuccessful candidate from India for gold mores, and lacks of rupees; a mere adventuress” (v), it therefore connects the sword’s circulation to a suspicious Indianized attempt at middle-class mobility. The sword’s ambiguous – but always morbid – status reveals the interpretive difficulty of establishing a coherent national identity in this transitional phase of empire, when mobility made feelings and social relations hard to pin down.

“Death again!”: A Reconsideration of *Hartly House, Calcutta*

Mariana Starke’s *The Sword of Peace* demonstrates how sentimental comedy’s take on the scandals of colonialism is inexorably, if perhaps unexpectedly, bound up in the necromantic concerns of empire. I will now offer a reading of Phebe Gibbes’s contemporaneous novel, *Hartly House, Calcutta*, which confirms the value of reconsidering these Romantic artefacts within the contexts of both colonialism and contemporary death culture. Until fairly recently, *Hartly House* had been largely ignored by critics. Published in 1789 by London’s J. Dodsley, its authorship was a mystery, and the work was often misattributed to Sophia Goldborne, who is, in fact, the novel’s fictional protagonist. Isobel Grundy has since, however, identified Phebe Gibbes as the author. Although Gibbes never went to India herself, her letters petitioning the Royal

[33] From this mislabelling, Grundy points out that the text has been variously and erroneously considered the “veiled memoirs” of a real female traveller, the work of a male writer because of its interest in politics, or a collaboration between a man and a woman. She also wryly notes that when one critic “changed his opinion from ‘hack work’ to ‘the work of a lady,’” he apparently never considered that it might be both” (85-86 n.15).
Literary Fund for financial support mention an only son who died in Calcutta. From this scrap of information, scholars have conjectured that she took inspiration from the content of his letters to depict colonial life in India during the period. Indeed, so authentic was her epistolary novel considered that extracts were plagiarized in The Aberdeen Magazine of 2 July 1789, and even in the venerable pages of The New Annual Register of 7 June 1790, as genuine accounts from an Indian correspondent.

Recent critical attention to the novel by Grundy, Betty Joseph, Michael J. Franklin, and Felicity Nussbaum similarly observes that the colonial setting of Hartly House provides a certain amount of sexual freedom for the novel’s protagonist. Unconstrained by supposedly more rigid metropolitan social structures, Sophia flirts with a Brahmin, and indulges in a scopophilic fantasy about the Nawab. “Conquest of either foreign figure,” argues Grundy, “would shatter taboos, testify to the coquette’s power, and affirm aspects of female sexuality that it was orthodox to deny or conceal” (80-81). Furthermore, these same critics tend to agree that Sophia’s sexual experimentation – or rather, her imaginative coquetry – is only temporary as she trains for proper English domesticity. In Nussbaum’s opinion, “India teaches the Englishwoman that by becoming convinced of her seductive power, she will learn to submit to domestic silencing at home” (181). Critics tend to arrive at this conclusion of normative sexuality because by

---

34 As Franklin says, “[h]ad Phebe Gibbes not applied to the Royal Literary Fund for financial support in the October of 1804, we should have known even less than the tiny amount of biographical detail we currently possess,” including her self-proclaimed pedigree as the anonymous author of at least twenty-two novels (xii).

35 See Franklin, xvii-xviii.

36 It is worth mentioning that Nussbaum crucially addresses the colonial dynamics of Sophia’s sexual rebellion, adding that she “negotiates the terms of her approaching domestic silencing to become the
the end of the novel, the Brahmin is dead and Sophia marries the English Doyly; they take his death as a foreclosure of interracial desire, a safe narrative containment and rejection of Sophia’s transgressive transcultural erotics. I would argue, however, that the way in which she mourns the Brahmin invests their relationship with meaningful affective binds that do not so tidily neutralize their desire. The importance of the Brahmin’s death is made even more apparent when we compare it to the afterlife of Sophia’s mother. Whereas she is permitted to mourn her Brahmin with culturally prescribed rituals, Sophia is repeatedly and emphatically barred from visiting her own mother’s Indian grave.37 Being attentive to the mechanics of mourning and melancholy in this text thus complicates received ideas of colonial sexuality and, more broadly, of Britain’s global communities. Grief and its attendant rituals enable a transculturation that persists not in spite of death, but because of it.

Although recent critics have curiously neglected the anxiety surrounding death in the novel, one of Gibbes’s contemporary reviewers did not overlook the novel’s attention to the deathscape. A positive review from the Analytical Review attributed to Mary Wollstonecraft praises Gibbes’s attention to mortality: “The style is easy, and the reflections pertinent: particularly those which contrast an uninterrupted round of gaudy pleasures, – pleasures which are most apt to fascinate thoughtless minds, with the swift stroke of death, that sweeps without distinction all ages to the tomb, nor warns them by invisible in England, just as she has rendered Indian women invisible in India” (181). I similarly investigate the silencing of Indian women in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

37 Gibbes is inconsistent on this plot point, though. She grants Sophia a comforting visit to her mother’s grave in Volume I, which is completely forgotten by Volume II. I will be addressing this discrepancy below.
previous decay” (qtd. in Franklin xx). What Wollstonecraft admires, then, is not simply the supposedly faithful account of colonial life, but the novel’s necromantic inclination. Indeed, like Starke, Gibbes does not waste time in establishing her Indian setting as characterized by death. The epistolary novel’s first page opens thus:

The grave of thousands! – Doubtless, my good girl, in the successive years of European visitation, the eastern world is, as you pronounce it, the grave of thousands; but is it not also a mine of exhaustless wealth! the centre of unimaginable magnificence! an ever blooming, an ever brilliant scene? And moreover, I have to inform you, that all the prejudices you have so long cherished against it must be done away; and for this plain reason, that they are totally groundless. (3)

With this pronouncement, Sophia tentatively ventures that those numerous graves are a fair price to pay for the wealth and magnificence of colonial exploitation, yet her interrogative tone invites doubt. Although Sophia attempts to dismiss Arabella’s morbid anxieties as “groundless,” her repetition of “the grave of thousands” makes her reassurances unconvincing. Far from being groundless, Arabella’s concern speaks directly to the large number of European bodies in Indian ground. Sophia’s opening letter demonstrates how death in India is both a genuine cause for concern, but also a way to legitimate colonial expansion by grounding it in place. In keeping with typical descriptions of the swift nature of death in India – recall Lady West’s diary entry – Sophia laments “that a friend is dined with one day, and the next in eternity – the feelings are interested, the sensations awful, and the mental question, for the period of interment at least, Which will be to-morrow’s victim?” (79). Demonstrating a concern with
appropriate forms of grief, Sophia disapprovingly notes that a certain “elasticity of European minds” allows her “countrymen” to retire to the tavern the day after a funeral to indulge in the very excess that precipitated their friend to the grave (80). We can perhaps take this as the same elasticity of temper that can allow a Romantic-era Briton to view Tipu’s tiger mauling a European soldier and read it as a symbol of imperial victory. Sophia’s Calcutta seems to be overrun by graves and the corpses that inhabit them, populated by unfeeling Company men, and a place where the “deep melancholy [tone]” (79) of the city’s lone church bell continually reminds its inhabitants of their fragile mortality.

Sophia’s reflections on colonial corporeality are given a personal dimension when, in her fourth letter home to Arabella, she describes an opportunity to visit the “sacred remains” of her “dear mother,” who, having caught cold on the fleet leaving England, died upon arriving in India. “All I have to say on that heart-searching subject,” writes Sophia, is that “I have beheld her hallowed tomb, and paid the best tribute in my poor power to her beloved memory! – Adieu! adieu! – I will resume my pen the first opportunity; but can no more at present” (16). At this point, Sophia’s encounter with her mother’s tomb seems like a typical example of mourning: visiting the resting place allows her to honour and remember the deceased. Although grief momentarily silences her, her “adieus” read not only as a closing of her letter, but also as a healthy relinquishing of the dead. Her closure, however, is not to last.

When in the first letter of the novel’s second volume Sophia engages in some necrotourism, her story changes. “Apropos of mortality,” she morbidly segues, “I have visited the burying grounds,” which she describes as “scenes of melancholy
entertainment” (59, emphasis mine). Her diction makes the disquisition that follows sound like a divertissements for the type of necromantic reader posited by Westover, Matthews, and Watson. Comparing Bengal’s burial grounds to those at Westminster, St. Pancras, or an old Windsor churchyard, Sophia observes that England’s dusty and disgraceful monuments fare poorly next to the expense, ornament, and care found in India. Quiting the scene “with unspeakable reluctance,” Sophia entreats Mrs. Hartly to lead her to her mother’s grave. Upon the request, Mrs. Hartly started, and accused herself of the highest indiscretion, in consenting to my viewing a spot that could suggest such an idea to my mind; and so earnestly besought me, as a proof of my affection for her, to return home, and never again attempt to investigate a circumstance, so evidently desired by my father to be kept from my knowledge, that friendship and filial reverence prevailed over every other impulse, and I suffered her to put me into my palanquin without reply. (60)

Later in the novel, Sophia is again barred from visiting the hallowed spot, when she begs “once, just once, to behold her mother’s tomb” (62). Although Gibbes has already depicted her protagonist’s graveside visit, the rest of the novel insists that Sophia has never and should never have such a morbid encounter. In Calcutta, according to Sophia, “[a]ll funeral processions are...concealed as much as possible from the sight of the ladies, that the vivacity of their tempers may not be wounded” (79). Unlike the

38 While it is tempting to read this narrative contradiction as a symptom of Sophia’s melancholy – denying her mother’s death by repressing the visit to her grave – it is more likely a simple authorial oversight on Gibbes’s part.
effaced encounter where Sophia can say her graveside goodbyes – a healthy stage of mourning – her mother’s death is now shrouded in silence and secrecy. Returning home alone in her palanquin, Sophia finds herself in a “state of miserable sequestration from all social connection” (60), her isolation mirroring the segregation of the dead. When later Sophia hears the firing of minute guns to mark the funeral of a Company officer, and asks to see the procession, her friends *again* deny her access. “[Y]et,” she writes to Arabella, “this kind of prohibition heightened the concern I took in the affair. – Death again! – It is a subject that insensibly forces itself upon my notice, and tinges my most brilliant efforts at agreeable description, with a gloom, I fear, you must find contagious” (126). The denial of death, Sophia argues, spreads a contagion of melancholy. Although the dead may be grounded in India, melancholy can be troublingly mobile, spreading from person to person, from colony to metropole, linking colonial history and military resources to funeral rites.  

Against the strangely secretive sequestration of Mrs. Goldborne’s grave, Gibbes depicts another death that moves Sophia personally, when a young Brahmin with whom she shares a flirtatious acquaintance suddenly passes. Their relationship is drawn in the sentimental terms characteristic of the late eighteenth century, and Sophia’s references to Laurence Sterne cast their flirtation in decidedly erotic – if also ironic, satiric, or

---

39 The firing of the guns startles Sophia and reminds her of “the affair of the Black Hole” (126). She is referring to an incident in 1756, when Siraj ud-Daulah allegedly held 146 British soldiers and civilians prisoner in a small dungeon, 123 of whom perished. John Zephaniah Howell, a survivor, published *A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen* (1758) describing the event, but the veracity of his claims has been questioned. For readings of Holwell’s account, see chapter 2 in Joseph and chapter 8 in Colley. Sophia thus implies a traumatic continuity between this event in colonial history and a current funeral.
humorous – terms. Christopher Nagle has reconsidered the trope of romantic sympathy by acknowledging how “Sterne’s work plays with the multifarious possibilities of a broadly eroticized, and not merely sympathetic, fellow feeling for others” (26). Sophia’s references to Sterne are not, therefore, merely showing off her literary taste, but identifying a model for her eroticized mode of transcultural sympathy. Nagle defines sensibility – a notoriously slippery concept – by its qualities of “excess,” “mixture,” and “mobility” (6), making it a remarkably useful concept for understanding how Sophia’s feelings are mobilized and circulated in this colonial space. Indeed, sentimentality is appropriate for this transcultural affiliation, because as Franklin remarks, Sophia understands Hinduism as the religion of sensibility (xxvi). For example, when the Brahmin visits Sophia after her recovery from a life-threatening illness, she notes how “– He smiled – blushed, I think” (100). The Brahmin possesses the characteristic physical signs of a man of feeling, and Gibbes surrounds these affective marks with the dashes that encode the overwrought and inexpressible emotions of the sentimental mode. Despite his potentially dangerous influence on Sophia, who declares that she is “ashamed of the manners of modern Christianity” and has “become a convert to the Gentoo faith”

---

40 Gibbes explicitly invokes her sentimental predecessor, Laurence Sterne, to develop the relationship between Sophia and the Brahmin. Exclaiming “[w]hat a sweet picture would the pen of Sterne have drawn of this young man’s person!” (111), Sophia casts the Brahmin as a character in a sentimental novel. Sterne’s presence here is more considered than as an easy token of sentimentality, however. In his *Journal to Eliza*, Laurence Sterne casts himself and his eponymous lover “under the fictitious Names of Yorick and Draper – and sometimes of the Bramin and Bramine” (107). Eliza Draper had a brief affair with Sterne, which ended when she joined her husband, an East India Company official, in Bombay. Although Eliza did, in actuality, reside in India, the “India” of Sterne’s “Bramine” is transformed into an imaginative landscape of sympathy and feeling.

41 Franklin attributes Sophia’s cultural openness to “the pluralism and enlightened tolerance of this brief Jonesian period of sympathetic and syncretic admiration for India” (xxiv).
under his instruction (111), the Brahmin is turned into a familiar object and subject of feeling in the tradition of Mackenzie or Sterne. Their flirtation, however, comes to an end when the Brahmin suddenly dies. To be sure, Gibbes’s tongue seems firmly placed in cheek when she describes Sophia’s reaction to the Brahmin’s passing. Her “concern” is punctuated with her characteristically narcissistic coquetry as she informs her correspondent that “my amiable Bramin, Arabella, died last night; and died, I am assured, blessing me” (135). Her declaration that she will “raise a pagoda to his memory in [her] heart, that shall endure till that heart beats no more” clumsily decorates her trite sentimentality with a colonial set piece (135). Critics tend to read Sophia as an object of satire, but in spite of the admitted silliness that colours this moment, the Brahmin’s death provides an important contrast to that of Sophia’s mother, a contrast that has important ramifications for how mourning establishes global communities.

Sophia explicitly brings attention to the ways in which various people mourn. Remarking that “except in the article of mourning…there is little difference between the appearance of a fine lady at Bengal, and a fine lady in London” (88-89), Sophia designates death practices as an important locus of cultural difference in a colonial space where these distinctions may be difficult to make. Not limited to the necrotourism of Anglo-Indian cemeteries, Sophia shows an interest in native death customs that was typical of contemporary travel writers. In a gruesome description of the “mangled limbs and headless trunks” feasted upon by alligators and animals of prey, Sophia considers it a

---

42 Nussbaum has suggested that “[t]o draw the analogy between English and Indian women, whose bodies visibly display the world’s wealth, disregards the unequal balance of power between the colonized and the colonizer” (177).
“nuisance, and outrage upon the feelings” that the “Gentoos” leave their dead and dying friends afloat in the Ganges. She even invokes the metropolitan miasmatic concern over dead bodies “impregnat[ing] the air” with their impurities, before moving on to a description of the practice of sati (99-100). Despite her repugnance at the sight of floating corpses, Sophia reveals a surprisingly nuanced understanding of the variety of cultures and castes within India, all of which reverence the dead differently. When the Brahmin dies, her newfound necrotouristic knowledge leads her to wonder, “How will they dispose of his worthy remains?” She initially hopes that “no funeral pile will consume his ashes,” but then corrects herself with the reassurance that cremation would secure his remains from “every possibility of insult, or danger of mingling with dust less pure than their own” (135). Enacting a type of post-mortem miscegenation, Sophia’s own assessment of the danger of “mingling” complicates how critics typically interpret this scene as a foreclosure of interracial desire.

After acknowledging the native death practices that will usher him from this world, Sophia brings her own death culture to bear on the Brahmin’s body. “[I]f that indulgence is not incompatible with the Gentoo customs,” Sophia declares, she wants to procure “a lock of his hair, for the purpose…of making it a mental talisman” (135). Like other critics, Daniel White sees “the dim flame of sexual attraction extinguished by [the Brahmin’s] death” and views Sophia’s relic as “a mental talisman of her own mind, its abundant virtues encompassing only her own copious self-regard” (188). His account

43 The fact that removing his hair would indeed be a violation of his native custom is yet another sign of Sophia’s egotistic coquetry. Daniel White points out as much, and also observes how Sophia’s hair relic “prefigure[s] in fiction” the actual shipment and selling of the late Rammohun Roy’s locks of hair in 1844 (187-88).
thus reads the hair relic as a satirical tribute to her own ego, and indeed Sophia’s narcissism is undeniably a source of amusement in the novel, a wink exchanged between the author and her knowing audience at the coquette’s expense. Nagle’s pithy formulation that sensibility’s “textual excesses tend to blur into sexual excesses” (11) can explain how her excessive feelings mark Sophia as both a product and target of sensibility and satire.

However, I want to suggest that relegating Sophia’s egotism to “a forgivable [sin] in the context of sentimental fiction” (White 188) overlooks the ways in which the ego manifests itself in another relevant literary context: the elegy. *Hartly House* may not be an elegy, strictly speaking, but the frequent necromantic musings of its protagonist are certainly elegiac in tone. Karen Weisman notes that it is notoriously difficult to provide an exhaustive generic, historical, or formal definition of elegy (1), but theorists usually converge around its narcissistic potential. Bringing Freudian theory to bear on his investigation of the English elegy, Peter M. Sacks suggests that “[o]ne of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner’s damaged narcissism” (10), adding that the “regressive narcissism” characteristic of melancholia “often includ[es] an identification between the ego and the dead” (17).

Sophia’s coquettish egotism is thus not merely a sentimental tic. Rather, the hair relic materially enacts the melancholic identification of the ego with the dead, reconciling Sophia’s narcissism to

---

44 In her introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* Karen Weisman notes foremost that “[e]legy inhabits a world of contradiction” (1). The very contradictory nature of elegy makes it an appropriate context in which to situate a protagonist who evokes both derision for her coquetry and sympathy for her grief.

45 Stuart Curran, for his part, contends that “the elegy, as meant for the living, is seldom the expression of grief *per se*” (239).
her grief. Bringing a new attention to the material culture of death thus radically revises the potency of Sophia’s thanato-erotic impulse.

Sophia’s hair relic is part of a mourning tradition that goes back to the Elizabethan period, and became increasingly popular in the Romantic and Victorian periods. In her work on secular relics, Deborah Lutz attests that “the relic, rather than being a memento mori, mark[s] the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged. To possess a piece of the beloved might provide a link to that body lost; it might comfort with its talisman-like ability to contain, and prove the existence of, an eternity” (130). Lutz further contextualizes the nineteenth-century popularity of secular relics with the Romantic concept of the “beautiful death,” which “entailed the view of death as a moment of beauty, as a transformation of the loved one into a paradise lost, to be yearned for with an erotic ache, and, in this sense, to be understood as the beginning or continuation of a narrative” (130). In the “sexualized lingering over” that Lutz describes, the hair relic materializes Sophia’s “erotic ache” and can be understood as a “continuation” of the narrative of transcultural desire, rather than its end. Relic culture, attests Lutz, speaks both to the desire to see death as impermanent while still lingering in the moment of loss, and Sophia lingers in this melancholic indeterminacy.

What is even more interesting about Sophia’s hair relic is the way in which she places it into affective circulation, not unlike Starke’s sword. This is not a private memento of secret desire, but instead a binding symbol of community. Sophia lightly proposes to share the Brahmin’s hair with Arabella in a “locket set with pearls” which

46 Recall, for instance, the “bracelet of bright hair upon the bone” from John Donne’s 1633 poem “The Relic.”
she can “wear…near [her] heart, for its virtues will be abundant” (135). Sophia knits together a global community of feeling, brought together under the aegis of a circulating death token. The relic thus becomes a type of souvenir of her Indian voyage that relies on both the rituals of mourning and travelling to endow it with talismanic powers.⁴⁷ Sophia’s mobile feelings are given a wide and all-encompassing range, as the Brahmin’s death provokes her to reflect on the transience of life, and leads her to imagine that her English suitor Doyly may “even whilst [she is] writing his name, have reach[ed] the confines of eternity, and found the ocean as merciless, as the cruel disease to which [their] favourite has fallen a victim” (135). At first glance, Sophia’s economy of grief substitutes Doyly’s imagined death for the Brahmin’s real one, confirming the Anglocentric reorienting of her desire. However, Sophia’s lamentations are ambiguous when she exclaims, “Peace, unending peace, be with his shade!” (135). Since her previous sentence refers to both Doyly and the Brahmin, the third person adjective “his” seems to deliberately blur its antecedent. Sophia repeats her desire to build a memorial pagoda – presumably to the Brahmin, who is actually dead – but this time she plans to “erect [it] in Britain,” rather than “in [her] heart” (135). Far from supplanting it, the imaginative memorial transplants her transcultural desire to the domestic space she will share with her English husband. In her final word on the subject of the pagoda to

⁴⁷ Attesting to the confluence of the secular relic with the souvenir that I point out above, Lutz describes the popularity of historical and celebrity mementoes in the Romantic period: “Byron was a collector of Waterloo memorabilia, and the bodies of the Romantic poets became part of the celebrity relic craze. Shelley’s heart and part of his jawbone were fought over and whole myths sprang up about how they were collected and where they had traveled; sections of the bedcurtains of the honeymoon night of Byron’s ill-fated marriage were saved; all became coveted emblems of the great bodies and minds that were now gone forever” (139n.13).
Arabella, Sophia curiously describes the effect of the memorial to “perpetuate to my, or, what will be exactly the same thing, your posterity, that so exemplary a character was on the list of my Bengal acquaintance” (136). Under the powerful influence of the hair relic and the pagoda, Sophia and Arabella are so tightly united that their posterity becomes “exactly the same thing,” refusing the disintegration of community in the face of death, distance, or difference. Gibbes thus envisions the empire as a space of circulation and communication, mobilizing melancholic feelings to “mingle” the spheres of colony and metropole.

* * *

As this introduction has demonstrated in its examination of the mobility of imperial objects from Sir Eyre Coote’s remains and Tipu’s Tiger to a sentimental sword and an orientalized mourning relic, the personal losses of empire could be endowed with recuperative cultural, political, and social powers. The reader might be surprised to discover that for a project about death, this dissertation deals very little with traditional mourning texts like elegies, epitaphs, tragedies, sermons, eulogies, graveyard meditations, or mourning cards. I focus instead on genres such as the epistolary novel, the sentimental novel, popular poetry, and travel guides to demonstrate how mourning and melancholy act as cultural and structural features in the literature of the period, rather than recording the countless individual instances of grief produced by British lives lost in India. Furthermore, in its focused attention on Elizabeth Hamilton, Letitia Landon, Felicia Hemans, Sydney Owenson, and Emma Roberts, this project seeks to resituate the
voices of women writers who were central to the literary landscape of the Romantic period, even if they have been displaced for the modern reader. By considering the texts of empire as part of the culture of feeling – and morbid feelings, at that – this project demands a re-evaluation of the bodies, voices, and tears around which empire was communicated and organized.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, “Imperial Feelings and ‘Imaginary Sorrows’ in Elizabeth Hamilton’s Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah,” I begin by acknowledging how many authors of the period were dealing with personal imperial losses as they also sought to envision the role of British learning, feeling, and administration in India. Elizabeth Hamilton can be counted among these voices. While mourning her brother Charles, a renowned Orientalist, Hamilton advocates for the syncretic approach to colonial administration promoted by Orientalist scholars and administrators such as Warren Hastings and Sir William Jones. Building on the work of Lynn Festa and Andrew Rudd on sentimentality and sympathy, I bring attention to melancholy’s distinct functions in colonial encounters. By considering coverage of the Mysore Wars and the death of Tipu Sultan alongside Hamilton’s novel, I demonstrate how Britons naturalized and legitimated their role in India through the affective investments surrounding death rituals. Hamilton thus deploys melancholy as a rhetorical

---

Indeed, this project also redresses the marginalization of women’s voices throughout the tradition of melancholy. As Radden observes, “[a] theme in contemporary feminist writing on melancholy and depression emphasizes the contrast between loquacious male melancholy and the mute suffering…of women. Stress on women’s loss of speech is to be found in the work of Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Luce Irigaray, as well as in Lacanian ideas. Women’s estrangement from language, in turn, is explained by an estrangement from the self, associated with the inevitably masculine ‘author’ of the ‘self-narrative’” (34-35).
strategy that allows her to access discourses typically barred from women, while also positing mourning as a subtle branch of the imperial civilizing mission.

The erotic play between mourning and miscegenation that Sophia demonstrates in *Hartly House* is again encountered in Chapter 2, “The ‘Common Woe’: Sympathy, Sati, and the British Civilizing Mission in India,” which considers how nineteenth-century writers used sati – the Hindu practice of widow-burning – as a focal point around which to organize the policies and feelings that constituted the British “civilizing mission” in India. Engaging with the postcolonial and feminist scholarship of Lata Mani and Gayatri Spivak, my argument seeks to reemphasize the importance of placing a death ritual at the center of administrative debates, and decoding the rhetorical strategies embedded in representations of mourning, dying, and dead women. In the poetry of Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Felicia Hemans, and in Sydney Owenson’s novel *The Missionary*, orientalized women are deployed to account for female historical experience and evoke sympathy in their metropolitan audiences. However, this chapter considers the problem of imagining the orientalized woman as a phantasmic likeness of the European self, an outward symbol of one’s felt grief, rather than recognizing her as an actual woman subject to oppression. Reduced to a symbol of European female experience, the “other” woman is silenced and illegible in her death and way of dying. In other words, British authors are more interested in memorializing subaltern women than rallying to “save” them. The ways in which these writers engage with the figure of the sati are thus part of a complex discourse of colonial administration that privileges the assertion of a civilizing British sympathy, rather than seeking to intervene in or even understand the subjectivity of subaltern women.
When Sophia remarks in *Hartly House* that Calcutta’s burial grounds “are well worth the visit of a stranger” (16), she anticipates the kind of necromantic tourism that informs Emma Roberts’s travel writing, which is treated in the third chapter of this dissertation. “‘Death and absence differ but in name’: The Melancholy Sociability of Emma Roberts’s Anglo-Indians” closely reads Emma Roberts’s travel writing alongside contemporary debates about cemetery reform to consider how the image of the exiled Anglo-Indian community relied on its intimate relationship with the Indian deathscape in its self-fashioning. This chapter examines Roberts’s *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* (1835) to argue that the mobility of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian exile engendered a unique form of imperial melancholy. Roberts’s travel account marries the physical landscape of death in India – climate, corpses, graves – to the inextricably social function of mourning. The forms of Anglo-Indian sociability that emerge from the grave ultimately foreclose any sympathetic commerce with Calcutta’s native community, reflecting instead the Anglicist model of colonial administration.

I conclude by bringing Romantic melancholy into conversation with today’s death culture by briefly examining the social media popularity of *Selfies at Funerals*. My analysis of melancholy’s rhetorical and political functions in the plays, poetry, novels, narratives, and debates of the Romantic period comes to bear on current representations of morbid subjectivity. This dissertation provides new channels of inquiry into the dynamics of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century imperialism, the affective strategies of Romantic-period writing, as well as the ways in which tears and ghosts continue to influence our understanding of political power and representation.
Chapter 1
Imperial Feelings and “Imaginary Sorrows” in
Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*

Are the opposite extremities of the globe our native place, because they are a part of that geographical and political denomination, our country? Does natural affection expand in circles of latitude and longitude?


Alas! the art of describing human misery, and the Virtue of feeling for it, are two very different things.

– Elizabeth Hamilton, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*

In the *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton* (1818), Elizabeth Benger attributes her subject’s authorial vocation to mourning. Elizabeth Hamilton’s brother Charles¹, an Orientalist scholar, had often encouraged his sister to “devote her talents to some literary pursuit,” but it was not until after his death in 1792 that Hamilton followed his advice.

When Hamilton finally did pursue writing, Benger notes that she was unable to force her thoughts from the only subject that appeared worthy to engage them, and was thus insensibly led to conceive the design of writing the Hindoo Rajah, in which she was not only permitted to recall the ideas she had acquired from her brother’s conversation, but to portray his character, and commemorate his talents and virtues.

When she had written a few sheets, she submitted to her chosen friend

¹ Charles Hamilton earned a cadetship with the East India Company and moved to India in 1776, where he later became one of the first members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He is best known for his 1791 translation of the *Hedaya*, the Muslim code of laws. He died of tuberculosis at Hampstead in March 1792 while preparing to take up an appointment with the grand vizier of Oudh (DNB). Gary Kelly points out that the “aim of [his] works is to justify British intervention in India and reform of colonial administration, led by the Orientalists, as an attack on court government both in the empire and at home” (129).
the plan of the work, but with a diffidence that betrays the dejection of
er her spirits. (126-27)

The source of inspiration for Hamilton’s *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*
(1796) seems confused in Benger’s account: the novel emerges when Hamilton is
“unable to force her thoughts from the only subject that appeared worthy to engage
them,” but it is unclear whether that *only* subject is “the ideas acquired from her brother’s
conversation” – that is, accounts of life in India – or if the subject is Charles himself.
This confusion of India with a mourned, representative Anglo-Indian subject serves as
the starting point of this chapter. By staging her tribute to a departed brother as an
intervention in Britain’s early imperialist project – or vice versa – Hamilton’s text
highlights the centrality of death, mourning, and melancholy to constructions of empire
in the Romantic period.

Following works such as Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721) and Oliver
Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* (1762), *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*
participates in the familiar satirical tradition of an imagined oriental traveller’s naïve-but-
incisive commentary on European culture. In her epistolary novel, Hamilton imagines a
“Hindoo Rajah,” Zāārmilla, who is inspired to travel to Britain after befriending Captain
Percy, an officer wounded during the Rohilla War in India. Like Mariana Starke,2
Hamilton posits a model of inheritance as a civilizing form of colonialism: bequeathed
Percy’s Bible, his watch, a portrait of his sister, and the manuscripts of her poetry,
Zāārmilla develops a desire to experience British society firsthand. The correspondence

2 See the introduction to this dissertation for a discussion of Starke’s play *The Sword of Peace.*
exchanged between the Rajah Zāārmilla, the Zimeendar Māāndāāra, and the Brahmin Sheerma satirizes a number of the social issues of the period, from women’s education and Godwinian philosophy to slavery and social status. As a satire, the novel depends on the “foreign” Zāārmilla’s arrival in England to engage its cultural targets, and as a travel narrative, the novel relies on a specifically melancholic form of mobility to determine its trajectory. Hamilton’s text is upheld by three deaths: metatextually by Charles Hamilton, diegetically by Captain Percy, and domestically by Prymaveda, the Rajah’s wife. The novel thus positions an impulse for global travel as always-already-after those deaths, and always as a form of mournful tribute. Similarly, the epistolary form the narrative takes is based on a relationship of mourning; between Zāārmilla and Māāndāāra, the recipient of his letters, “the vows of friendship we so solemnly exchanged over the still warm ashes of the venerable Pundit” (77). Although critics cannot come to a consensus on the genre of Hamilton’s novel, its generic qualities – travel writing, academic dissertation, epistolary fiction, sentimental scribbling, defamiliarized satire – are undeniably shaped by mourning and melancholy.

This chapter is especially interested in the models of sympathetic colonial encounter elaborated by critics such as Lynn Festa and Andrew Rudd. In her compelling study of the sentimental novel in the eighteenth century, Festa explicitly links the “turning inward of the sentimental mode” to the “turning outward of empire in order to offer a history of the eighteenth-century origins of humanitarian sensibility” (2). Crucial

---

3 Nigel Leask makes a case for the “anti-jacobin” interpretation of Letters being “retrospectively influenced by the stronger ideological colouring of Hamilton’s second novel, Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800), which satirizes the radical philosophy of Wollstonecraft and, particularly, Godwin with greater urgency” (“Elizabeth” 185).
to Festa’s formulation is the double-edged nature of sentimental writing about empire, which recognizes similitude while inscribing differences between people. “The sentimental community upholds a common identity,” Festa posits, “not by forging bonds directly between seemingly like individuals, but by creating a shared relationship to a common but excluded object about which the community has feelings” (4). Like Festa who explores “an era in which imperial reach outstripped imaginative grasp” (2), Rudd contends that the British were fundamentally incapable of meaningfully engaging with India due to its geographic remoteness and cultural otherness. He investigates the aesthetic and ethical problems caused by the failure of the sympathetic imagination, as well as the evolution of the strategies of representation through which India was brought before Britons through considerably “Westernized” literary representations.

By probing the rhetorical function of melancholy in Hamilton’s novel, I aim to show a different – though overlapping – strategy of representation than the ones explored by Festa and Rudd. Festa asserts that sympathy “veers towards a perilous absorption in another’s affect and interests that may threaten the autonomy of the self” (5). However, the drives of melancholy allow Hamilton to reimagine sympathetic “absorption” not as perilous, but as politically useful. 4 Absorbing the Orientalist other gives Hamilton access to the power and knowledge of imperial administrators, while absorbing the oriental other subsumes him in a welter of British feeling, and renders him harmlessly silent, if not invisible. Hamilton ultimately posits female melancholy as an instructive model for colonial encounters, as mourning is imagined as a subtle branch of the civilizing mission

4 For an explanation of the absorptive nature of Freudian melancholy, see my introduction.
abroad. Teasing out the melancholy notes that shade Festa’s understanding of sympathy reveals how grief structures Britain’s early imperial models of colonial contact and administration in distinct ways.

Most critics focalize their readings of *Letters* through the lenses of genre and gender, considering it as an example of the feminism of the Revolutionary decade, as an anti-jacobin novel, as an exploration of the domestic civilizing mission abroad, as a contribution to the debate on female education, or as a feminine counter to masculine orientalist constructions of India.\(^5\) This type of scholarship tends to ignore the very real presence of death that makes Hamilton’s melancholy more than a fashionable and feminized literary pose.\(^6\) Personally affected by the loss of her brother, Hamilton is not unaware of the pall that surrounds India in the British imagination. As Theon Wilkinson has pointed out, “[t]he average age of death of Europeans in India in the early colonial period...was well under 30 for men and 25 for women, but these statistics do not reflect the meagre chances of survival during the first year or two in India. In some of the more unhealthy settlements the rate of mortality during the first year approached 50 per cent” (6). Such unnerving statistics about death in India demand a reading of *Letters* that takes

---


\(^6\) For melancholy as a fashionable eighteenth-century poetic affliction, see for example Allan Ingram’s *Boswell’s Creative Gloom* (1982).
mourning and melancholy into account as material historical forces, and not merely as obscured psychological drives, or as a manifestation of self-indulgent literary characters, or as the rote ingredients of the literature of sensibility. Critics and readers alike have accepted Benger’s suggestion that Hamilton casts the novel’s ill-fated Captain Percy as Charles, and that her “individual feelings are embodied in Charlotte” (127), the novel’s lachrymose poet who mourns the loss of her noble brother. Yet such a simple biographical index makes it too easy to dismiss the text’s overwrought melancholic tone as Hamilton’s grief-stricken scribblings.

Benger’s memoir is suffused with metaphors presaging the Freudian account of melancholy.7 Noting how women often lacked the knowledge and experience to participate in “operations…of genius,” Benger describes how Hamilton managed to dissolve the barriers that blocked women from intellectual discourse. Benger deftly ascribes Hamilton’s intellectual endeavours to her sympathetic feeling for Charles, and deflects the threat of unfeminine literary practices: “From sympathy, rather than emulation, she was led to assimilate herself to him in the character of her pursuits. His conversation inspired her with a taste for oriental literature; and without affecting to become a Persian scholar, she spontaneously caught the idioms, as she insensibly became familiar with the customs and manners of the East” (109-110). In this formulation, sympathy supersedes the eighteenth-century classical model of emulation in writing. But

7 Critics have noted the pre-Freudian, proto-psychoanalytical aspect of many Romantic texts. In Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of Mystery, Joel Faflak notes that “Coleridge coined the term ‘psychoanalytical’ in a September 1805 notebook entry” (7). Further, and more to the point here, Faflak claims that “Romanticism’s concern with the trauma of self-identity is one of the ways it coheres as an historical entity, but that this historical identity is always subject to the psychoanalysis that is so much a part of its emergence, a psychoanalysis that both consolidates Romantic identity and places it under erasure” (5).
more importantly, it also conflates the language of sentiment with the drives of melancholy; sympathy here is more than just an affective affinity, but an actual assimilation. Hamilton need not “affect” the role of a scholar, for her ego has absorbed one. And just as Freudian melancholy is constituted by an unacknowledged loss, so too does Hamilton “insensibly” absorb her brother. Hamilton’s melancholy can thus be understood as a rhetorical strategy not unlike the “footnote novel,” which Gary Kelly argues enabled women to engage with issues otherwise considered beyond their purview.

8 Benger extends such proto-Freudian language to her discussion of the composition of Letters of a Hindoo Rajah, specifically. She notes that “The Hindoo Rajah bears many traces of the melancholy that pervaded the author’s mind” (127). Benger goes on to describe in sentimental terms the process of decathexis that characterizes mourning, as the libidinal investments are gradually withdrawn from the lost object. She asserts that it would have been “too painful” for Hamilton to draw an exact picture of Charles in her novel, since she was still in mourning. Arguably as a redressing of the typical imaginative compensation of the (often male) Romantic subject, Benger forwards that even imaginative coping mechanisms cannot hasten the period of grief: “There is, in deep-felt reality, a counter-power to the sorcery of the imagination; and, in our waking, as in our sleeping dreams, it is long before the beloved image of one we have lost, is permitted to mingle familiarly with the visionary forms that float upon the mind; the master-chord of feeling is no sooner touched, than an impression is produced which dissolves the momentary illusion” (128).

9 It should be noted that in Freud’s model melancholia is precipitated by a loss. While I acknowledge that Charles is still alive at this point in Hamilton’s life, his presence was spectral, at best. Hamilton’s letters often mention her deep sense of isolation when Charles is in India, and she would often go several months before receiving any new communication from her brother. Given the life expectancy of Britons in India, Hamilton having imagined his long silences as those of the grave is not improbable. Her compulsion, then, to “assimilate” him during his visit home then speaks to how even a loss that is but perceived may initiate the psychological drives of melancholia.

10 In his discussion of Hamilton’s use of genre, Gary Kelly points out her use of the footnote novel: “Hamilton both bolsters her defamiliarization and reclaims her novel from the ‘merely’ feminine by appropriating discourses conventionally gendered masculine – the Enlightened learned disciplines practised by her brother and his colleagues – in her ‘Preliminary Dissertation’, glossary, and notes. The result is an early footnote novel of the kind developed in the Revolutionary aftermath by women writers, including Hamilton herself, to practise learned discourse and engage in political issues conventionally closed to them” (132-33). Claire Grogan similarly notes that “entering the masculine sphere of writing, albeit within a novel, creates numerous problems for her. Her assumption of the mantle of masculine authority while also advocating elements of Wollstonecraft’s feminism and promoting views of racial tolerance is problematic since the crossing of gender and genre boundaries creates contradictions and tensions in her work” (34). Grogan thus proposes that “[s]ince gender precludes her joining the ranks of male Orientalists, her writing creates a new category to contain her: that of the female orientalist” (38).
The results of this assimilation produce Hamilton’s *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*. Hamilton prefaces her novel with a Preliminary Dissertation that casts her as a scholarly editor providing her readers with the background on India necessary to appreciate the Rajah’s letters. This background includes Indian religious practices and customs, but more importantly, its history of conquest at the hands of Mughal oppressors—a history of oppression significantly contrasted with the benevolent intervention of the East India Company. Despite the learned tone she adopts for this dissertation—an echo of her brother, certainly, since she everywhere cites his Orientalist work—her essay is constantly disrupted by the sentimental effusions of a mourning subject. In the voice of the editor, Hamilton refers to herself in the third person as she explains how the *Letters* emerged from conversation on “the affairs connected with the state of our dominions in India”:

> The names of the most celebrated Orientalists became familiar to her ear; a taste for the productions of their writers was acquired; and, had it not been for a fatal event, which transformed the cheerful haunt of domestic happiness into the gloomy abode of sorrow, and changed the energy of Hope into the listlessness of despondency, a competent knowledge of the language of the originals would likewise have been acquired. (73)

Describing the same type of scene Benger would later narrate, Hamilton goes on to say that time and writing have soothed her grief, but her assertion is unconvincing. Orientalism is here linked to melancholy in inexorable ways, as the terms that are meant to contrast her life before and after Charles’s death are suspiciously alike; the space in which these conversations about India occur is nominally changed from a “cheerful
haunt” to a “gloomy abode,” the dark register of both “haunt” and “gloomy” indicating that what casts a pall here is not Charles’s death, but the very subject of the conversation: “the state of our affairs in India.” What seems to contaminate these haunted spaces, then, is empire itself, the discussion of which introduces melancholy into even the most cherished domestic circle. In her discussion of grief, Judith Butler attests how “Freud reminded us that when we lose someone, we do not always know what it is in that person that has been lost” (21). What Hamilton loses in Charles, then, is her access to knowledge, to society, and to the world at large. However, melancholy can also provide a new form of sociability.\(^\text{11}\) Butler argues against the notion that grief is a private affair, and therefore depoliticized. Instead, she posits that grief “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (22). It’s not just that Hamilton works through her grief by writing – though she attempts to – or that melancholy functions as a sentimental trope that Hamilton can politicize – which she does. But what’s more, melancholy actually gives Hamilton a voice and a social role. This is why the melancholy of Elizabeth Hamilton is more than just a popular affective pose; it is at once a cause and a symptom of imperial engagement, structuring domestic relationships to redistribute knowledge and power in a global psychogeography.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{11}\) For more on the metropolitan sociability of melancholy readers, see chapter 2 of this dissertation, and for the sociability of the Anglo-Indian community in Calcutta, see chapter 3.

\(^\text{12}\) Indeed, casting Hamilton as the ever-mourning devoted sister does a disservice to the ways in which she deploys melancholy for political and authorial relevance, especially since she herself describes her successful mourning process. In a letter from 14 March, 1803, she acknowledges that with the death of
Imperial Hauntings and the Happy Ghost of Hastings

Before the reader even enters into the fiction of Zāārmilla’s letters, orientalism and imperialism are made inextricable from mourning. Hamilton deploys her melancholy to access imperial discourse and address specific socio-political targets. While painstakingly pausing to distance members of the Asiatic Society from the host of rapacious nabobs supposedly terrorizing the metropole with their upstart pretensions of class mobility, she laments in the Preliminary Dissertation that

Others of that society…are, alas, no more! The generous esteem, the cordial friendship, the warm admiration which accompanied them thro’ life, has not been extinguished in the silent grave; it lives, and will long live, in the hearts of many calling for the tear of tender recollection, and of unextinguished, though, alas! unavailing sorrow.

The reader of sensibility, will, it is hoped, pardon a digression into which the writer has been betrayed, by feelings of which they know the power and influence, and from which she hastily returns, to remark that the happiness enjoyed by the Hindoos under the mild and auspicious government of their native Princes…was at length doomed…by the resistless fury of Fanatic zeal. (67)

Charles, her “every hope of happiness expired” (185). Yet she also attests to the transformative nature of grief, which seeks objects to replace those lost: “As time advanced, new objects of interest arose; and though the memory of my dearest, my beloved brother must ever be graven on my inmost soul, neither the strength of my affection, nor the deep sense of the loss I had sustained, could prevent sorrow from being changed into tender melancholy. Even melancholy itself in time was dissipated, and the natural cheerfulness of my temper resumed its tone” (184-85). Although Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah may have been written in the throes of grief, melancholy is not a static psychological state, as Hamilton demonstrates in its circulation through her novel and letters, and it is precisely its transformative and fluid nature that makes it such a powerful rhetorical tool.
First, to reiterate, Hamilton cannot talk about England’s relationship to India – be it the scholarship of the Asiatic Society, or the commercial interests of the East India Company – without thinking about death. Mourning here is figured as a shared action, a process that the “reader of sensibility” will undoubtedly recognize, so that the universality of mourning becomes, in fact, the empire of sensibility. But second, it is important to note here that her sentimental digression unconsciously links the dispelled threat of nabobs to the ruin of happy Hindu Princes by Mughal invaders. Like much of the Preliminary Dissertation which serves as a mediation between the British readership and the empire at large, Hamilton is here trying to promote the “good” side of imperialism – a counter to the image Burke had so violently drawn during Warren Hastings’s impeachment trial. And yet melancholy everywhere allows doubt to creep back in, bringing nabobs, benevolent imperialists, and Mughal conquerors uncomfortably close in the British imagination. By celebrating the “useful knowledge” of the Asiatic Society, Hamilton can easily slip from a defense of Hastings in one paragraph, to a lamentation for the deceased Sir William Jones in the next, and round off with a criticism of Burke’s “malevolent and illiberal harangues of indiscriminating obloquy” (66). She grieves that “[l]ong and

---

13 Warren Hastings was brought up on charges of misconduct during his tenure as Governor-General of Bengal. The trial was famously long – lasting from February 1788 to April 1795 – and dramatic, the most notable speeches being delivered by Edmund Burke. Hastings was ultimately declared not guilty. Siraj Ahmed attests that “[t]he impeachment has been referred to as ‘the greatest public sensation of the seventeen-eights.’ At the very least, it brought more attention than any other single event to the complicated relationship of the British nation-state and its young empire in India and, more broadly, to the contradictory relationship of the principles of civil society and the early modern history of imperialism” (“Theatre” 30). For more on the Hastings trial see the introduction to this dissertation.

14 Balachandra Rajan has argued that although Hamilton’s Rajah arrives in England when Hastings’s impeachment trial should be in full swing, there is “[n]o trace of it to be found in the letters” (157). On the contrary, while there may not be any explicit mention of the trial, such “traces” of Hastings haunt the entire text.
deeply will [Jones’s] loss be deplored by every lover of literature, and friend to virtue” (66). The “loss” that Hamilton bemoans effectively converts the Asiatic Society’s fallen members – in death or dishonour – into heroes to be mourned rather than condemned; they are transformed into the spectral hands of British benevolence, the disinterested bestowers of inheritance, not the rapacious nabobs of Burke’s speeches.

A few paragraphs later, Hamilton casually mentions that the provinces formerly under Mughal oppression “by a train of circumstances totally foreign to our purpose to relate, have fallen under the dominion of Great Britain” (70). By refusing to discuss how Britain has gained these provinces in an otherwise detailed history of India, Hamilton tries to obscure the controversy of British territorial expansion. Using the passive voice, she lists a host of “improvements” that “have been” made in India by an invisible hand: fetters have been removed, the banditti have been subjected, Muslim bigotry has been turned into Christian indulgence, ancient laws have been restored and translated, agriculture has been encouraged, etc. Without an explicit sentimental lamentation here, melancholy becomes a rhetorical strategy in Hamilton’s project, describing imperial actions that have no acting subject, turning the British imperialist into a spectral presence that should be lauded as he is mourned, gaining his imperial legitimacy through spectralization, unlike the very physical, oppressive description of the Mughals.

In her desire to paint the scholars of the Asiatic Society as benevolent intellectuals rather than self-interested colonialists, then, Hamilton rewrites the narrative of imperial conquest as the search for knowledge: the “thirst of conquest and the desire of gain” become the means of “opening sources of knowledge and information to the learned, and the curious, and have added to the stock of the literary world, treasures, which if not so
substantial, are of a nature more permanent than those which have enriched the commercial” (55). Initially, Translation conforms to Edward Said’s model of academic orientalism.¹⁵ Yet throughout her academic preface, Hamilton’s editorial remarks point towards the instability of a cohesive, intellectual acquisition of the Orient. For example, in a footnote explaining the origin of the word “Hindoo,” Hamilton’s text enacts the impossibility of locating such information by distancing the answer from the reader in a footnote, which, in turn deflects the answer to various outside sources:

The word Hind from whence Hindoo, and Hindoostan, or country of the Hindoos, is of Persian origin, computed by Colonel Dow to have been derived from Hind, a supposed son of Ham, the son of Noah; and by other Orientalists, to owe its origin to the river Indus. For the sake of such as take pleasure in tracing etymologies, I insert a note written on the margin of the

¹⁵ In his seminal study, Orientalism (1978), Edward Said develops the theory of Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2). Locating the late-eighteenth century as its starting point, Said argues that for the British and French especially, Orientalism was a way of “dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Although the discourse of Orientalism imaginatively constructs the East as the other, the production of material reality that attends such acts cannot be ignored (for example, the ways in which the Orient is represented in literature has a correlative in historical colonial administration). Said’s theory has been crucial to the development of postcolonial studies, and still provides a useful model for examining texts that deal with the “Orient,” but it nevertheless has its shortcomings. As critics have noted, Said’s assumption of a monolithic Western subject constructing itself against the “Oriental” other is not historically accurate, especially when dealing with Britain’s early empire in the late-eighteenth century. Nigel Leask, for one, has demonstrated how Britain’s early empire was founded on anxiety, rather than any secure sense of imperial superiority (see British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire). Moreover, Saree Makdisi has argued that the Romantic period, in fact, “marks the earliest sustained (though largely doomed) attempt to articulate a form of opposition” to the forces of modernization that, in Said’s formulation, would deploy Orientalism to dominate the East (9). Following Said’s example, it should be impossible to divorce the scholarly achievements of men like Sir William Jones and the Asiatic Society from the work of colonial control they performed. Learning the languages, customs, and history of the “Orient” was the basis for a syncretic model of colonial administration – exemplified by Warren Hastings – that sought to govern India on its own terms.
copy of Gentoo Laws, now in my possession, by one whose knowledge of the Persian language has not been excelled by any. He says, ‘The word Hind is often used by the Persian Poets to signify Black, or dark-coloured, and it is probable that Hindos may mean no more than a black man, as our negro from Niger. (57)

The competing voices of authority – Hamilton, Colonel Dow, Oriental scholars, and the marginalia expert\(^\text{16}\) – in the footnote disrupt Hamilton’s attempt at scholarly mastery of the Orient. Rather than establish a linguistic origin, the footnote creates an overdetermined signifier that collapses history, religion, race, and geography into meaninglessness. The dismissive way in which the marginal voice claims the word “means no more than a black man” suggests that the question which has received such minute attention is in itself meaningless – not to mention the racial terms in which the dismissal is registered. Even Hamilton’s text, which unilaterally celebrates the efforts of the Asiatic Society, stages such moments where the academic containment or subjugation of the Orient eludes its British agents. Oriental study is thus a melancholy subject for Hamilton not only because of its association with her brother, but because of the gaps it fails to coherently fill in.

The novel’s investment in Orientalist learning means that when it stages a potential criticism of orientalism, it does so in terms which deplore a lack of knowledge, rather than condemn an institutionalized colonialism. The scene in which Sir Caprice

---

\(^\text{16}\) The source is most likely her brother, Charles Hamilton, who had translated the *Hedaya*. Her curious reluctance to name him in a footnote dealing with origins and naming, when she continually references him throughout the dissertation, may be read as a further instance of the limits of knowledge, and of the unspeaking power of melancholy.
discusses architecture with Zāārmilla makes such egregious domestic and despotic
orientalism legible by literally orientalising the domestic space.17 When Sir Caprice asks
for Zāārmilla’s advice on Chinese architecture, he must be reminded that Zāārmilla is
“from Bengal, and had never been in China in [his] life” (212). After acknowledging that
he is “a Hindoo,” Caprice asks Zāārmilla to advise him in building a “Mosque, a
Minaret” (213), once again eliding the differences between various “Oriental” groups.
The text’s satirical treatment of Caprice indicates that Hamilton is critical of his
ignorance of the Orient. Hamilton demonstrates her critique of Caprice by redacting his
voice when she inserts a footnote into this exchange: “Explanations of the terms of
Architecture, &c. though very necessary to the friends of the Rajah, it was thought,
would be rather tiresome to the English reader; they are therefore omitted by the narrator,
who has frequently been obliged to take liberties of the same nature” (213). In order to
reveal the complicity of institutional authority in Orientalist misconceptions, Hamilton
sees fit to save her reader from tedious technical talk, but she does not explicitly correct
Caprice’s aesthetic levelling of Oriental people and spaces. Moreover, this editorial
interjection forces the reader to wonder where else in the text she may have “taken
liberties” with Zāārmilla’s correspondence. Rather than providing references and
information to supplement the text, Hamilton’s footnotes often read as gaps, losses, and
miscommunications.

17 For this point I draw from Anne Mellor’s contention that “Hamilton's epistolary format produces a
multiplicity of standpoints which embraces a far more radical stance both towards British imperialist
politics and towards the roles and rights of women than…critics have suggested. In doing so, Hamilton
clearly suggests that oriental despotism begins at home, in Britain” (155-56).
Hamilton also reveals the instability of orientalism in the parts of the novel that are staged in India. Hamilton devotes the beginning of Zāārmilla’s journey to travel within India, as he comments on new and different places he has never before visited (153), a choice that particularizes and breaks up the Orientalist image of a monolithically exotic place. Eventually, Zāārmilla arrives in Calcutta. By deeming this city “the capitol of an empire” (166), he sets up a rival for London, and destabilizes the model of empire that would make the “Orient” a mere satellite of a centralized metropole. Instead, the model of empire that emerges from Hamilton’s challenge to orientalism is one that favours circulation and mobility. Zāārmilla’s description of an English camp points out how the foreign and the familiar become relative concepts:

Surrounded by the English Chiefs, whose dress, whose language, and whose manners, were all so different from what I had ever been accustomed to, I could scarcely persuade myself that I did not wander in the realms of delusion. At first, all Englishmen appeared to me to wear the same aspect, and to have the same manners. (151)

Although Hamilton intends for this Occidentalism to be comical, it nevertheless subverts the rhetorical power of such tropes; for Zāārmilla, it is the British who inhabit a “realm of delusion” in the East, and it is the British who dress, speak, and behave strangely, indistinguishable from one another. Seen through the eyes of a melancholic traveller, British identity loses its legibility.

Within the same letter in which Hamilton undermines Orientalist stereotypes, she also reworks sentimental tropes. The first place Zāārmilla visits after staying
with family is “the tomb of the renowned Afgan who was so long the terror, and the glory of Kuttaher” (147). In case the novel’s debt to the organizational powers of death was not yet clear, Hamilton draws it for her readers on Zāārmilla’s map with this first recreational stop. At the tomb, our graveyard tourist adds that he had to visit the site alone, because “[t]here are moments, when the soul, absorbed in its own reflections, feels an elevation which is incompatible with any society” (147). Hamilton provides a footnote here, itself a quotation of Charles Hamilton’s writing, to point out that “Hafiz Rhamut,” the buried Afghan leader, has been confused with the poet Hafiz, “by those who ought to have known better” (147, n.1). As Pamela Perkins and Shannon Russell have pointed out, Hamilton weaves a criticism of Burke into this passage as he is the one who should have “known better” than to confuse the two figures. Hamilton opens a standard sentimental trope – contemplation at a graveyard – to the discourse of imperial administration. Hamilton therefore conjures the spectres of Orientalists and follows the movements of necrotourism to deftly navigate the current political landscape.

---

18 Hamilton’s note explains: “Hafiz Rhamut [Hafiz Rahmat Khan], a Rohilla chief, celebrated for his warlike talents and unprincipled ambition: by that ambition, betraying the trust of his friend, and usurping the inheritance of his wards, he put himself at the head of the Rohilla government; and was killed at the battle of Cutterah, 22d of April 1774” (147 n.1). What Hamilton does not mention is that the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula had enlisted the help of Warren Hastings, then Governor General, to defeat the Rohillas. The spectre of Hastings haunts the text and tombs of Zāārmilla’s travels yet again.

19 For the popularity of graveyard tourism in this period, see Nicola J. Watson’s The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic & Victorian Britain (2006); and Paul Westover’s Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860 (2012), both discussed in the introduction to this dissertation.
Dido’s Tears and the Death of Tipu Sultan: Mourning for Mysore and America

Like her spectralized imperialists, Hamilton’s historical transposition can be read as another symptom of her text’s melancholy organization. By telescoping significant moments in Britain’s imperial history – the loss of the American colonies (1776), the Rohilla War (1773-74), and the Third Mysore War (1789-92) – Hamilton evokes the trauma of its imperial injuries. Published in 1796, Hamilton’s novel may benefit from the triumphalism that followed Cornwallis’s victory in 1792, but it also inhabits the precarious transitional period when the role of the East India Company was shifting from that of a trading company to a governing body. Scattered throughout the text, the frantic tributes to Hastings and to Orientalist scholars reveal the melancholy surrounding this moment of imperial self-definition, the lingering humiliations of Mysore and America, and the volatility of supposedly triumphant emblems.

The novel opens with Zāārmilla’s first-hand account of the Rohilla War – fought over twenty years before the publication of Letters – in which Warren Hastings and the East India Company supported Shuja-ud-Daula in his campaign against the Rohillas. Siraj Ahmed identifies the coverage of the Third Mysore War as the “primary influence on [Hamilton’s representation of colonial rule]” (“Pure Soil” 143) and he argues that Hamilton “transpos[es] the periodical press’s celebration of the Third Mysore War retrospectively to a representation of the Rohilla War, a time when the British public hardly saw the colonial government as identical with the nation, but on the contrary saw it quite literally as an autonomous and practically alien – that is to say, oriental – and degenerate force.” Ahmed proposes that this coalescing allows Hamilton to exonerate Hastings from the charges brought against him during his impeachment trial (“Pure Soil”
146-47). Indeed, P.J. Marshall attests that “[t]hroughout the period of the Third Mysore War the impeachment of Hastings was still being heard by the House of Lords” (66).\(^\text{20}\)

The representation of the Third Mysore war – which ended when Cornwallis’s forces defeated Tipu Sultan and took two of his sons hostage – in the press demonstrates a shift in the public’s attitude toward British expansion in India. Marshall remarks that for the first time in Britain’s commerce with India, this war was understood as “a national one fought for national objectives, not a local Indian one in which the arms of the state were helping the Company to further its own interests” (67). The adversaries at the heart of the Mysore conflicts were Tipu Sultan and his father Haider Ali, and they were variously depicted as respectable and able politicians, or demonized as despotic oriental tyrants. As Kate Teltscher and Linda Colley have each explored in detail, British captivity narratives “focusing on the mental and physical deprivations suffered by the captives, many of whom were forcibly converted to Islam, circumcised and drafted into slave battalions” informed the public’s image of the Mysore leaders (Teltscher 230).\(^\text{21}\) In addition to the threatening dissolution of British identity imposed on the captives, what made Tipu especially dangerous was his alliance with the French. “But Tipu, in the British

---

\(^\text{20}\) P. J. Marshall suggests that the British newspaper-reading public was “able to follow the story of the Third Mysore War in much greater detail than would have been the case for any previous war in India. The newspaper press had expanded very considerably in recent years and its coverage of world events was increasing in depth. Moreover, whereas India had previously been a peripheral theatre in earlier worldwide wars, from 1790-92 Britain was at peace. There were no other campaigns to compete for attention” (58). Ahmed adds that “[t]his coverage was unprecedented also because it led the British public to support the Indian army (which now was greatly augmented by Crown forces) as a representative of the British national interest, rather than as an instrument of the Company’s private interests, for the first time (during a war in which the East India Company engaged an Indian opponent)” (“Pure Soil” 143-44).

\(^\text{21}\) See chapter 9 of Colley’s Captives, and chapter 7 of Teltscher’s India Inscribed for their respective discussions of Mysore captivity narratives. O’Quinn also covers theatrical representations and caricatures of Tipu and the Mysore Wars at length in chapter 7 of Staging Governance.
imagination,” Colley adds, “was not just an Asian Napoleon. He was also – as his own court rituals and chosen symbolism proclaims – a tiger prince, the personification of all that seemed to the British dangerous and unpredictable about India” (297). Teltscher identifies the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799 as the definitive turning point in the East India Company’s administration of India. “The defeat of Tipu not only puts the East in its place,” Teltscher notes, “it also refashions Company rule: the new century heralds the adoption of an explicitly imperial role for Britain in India” (255). Colley concurs that Tipu’s fall in 1799 was “undiably a seismic event, a vital component of Britain’s hegemony in India” (299).

Representations of Tipu’s defeat demonstrate how Britain’s cultural narrative of empire organized itself around dead bodies – and their ghosts – across the globe. In this regard, Hamilton’s sentimental epistolary novel shares some surprisingly similar affective investments as a martial narrative by Alexander Beatson entitled *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun; Comprising a Narrative of the Operations of the Army under the Command of Lieutenant-General George Harris, and of the Siege of Seringapatam* (1800).\(^{22}\) Beatson’s account of the Fourth Mysore War (1798-99) and the death of Tipu demonstrate Colley’s assertion that eighteenth-century

---

\(^{22}\) Beatson began his career as a cadet in the East India Company in 1775 at the age of sixteen. Between 1787 and 1790 he produced a military-topographic survey of the Baramahal hills and passes, which “was praised by the court of directors and proved instrumental in the prosecution of the Third Anglo-Mysore War” (DNB). After a three-year leave in England to restore his health, Beatson returned to India as Richard Wellesley, Lord Mornington’s aide-de-camp. Beatson’s plan was instrumental to the capture of Seringapatam (Srirangapatna) and the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the experience of which he would relate in his *View*. Later in his career, Beatson served as governor of St. Helena from 1808 to 1813, introducing agricultural improvements to the East India Company’s island. After returning to England, Beatson devoted his time to more agricultural experiments, and his works on the subject have been considered a major influence in early environmentalism; Charles Darwin even carried a copy of Beatson’s *Tracts* (1816) with him on the Beagle (Grove 360).
colonial captivity narratives “began the work of transforming the warriors of the East India Company and the British state into...men of feeling” by focusing on their emotional responses to military conflict, rather than the violence of it (301). The shared narrative strategies of Hamilton and Beatson elucidate how Hamilton’s novel is not simply a generic exercise in sensibility, or an autobiographical lament. Like Hamilton, Beatson calls upon a version of British power secured as much by knowledge production and the affective politics of mourning as by military force.

Beatson’s Preface is informed by the same impetus as Hamilton’s Preliminary Dissertation, noting the dearth of available information “from the public prints of India” (viii) regarding “transactions highly honourable” – that is, the defeat of Tipu.23 Beatson’s Preface closes by affirming his impartial motives in describing “those transactions which led to the destruction of Tippoo Sultaun’s power, and to the restoration of the ancient family of Mysore” (x), a declaration that effectively positions the British as sympathetic conservators, rather than aggressive colonizers. By casting Tipu’s defeat in the affective realm of sympathy, Beatson primes his readers to pause not only over the leader’s death but over his funeral as well. Following the siege of Seringapatam, Beatson stresses that it becomes a matter of “the utmost political importance to ascertain the fate of the Sultaun” (137), and to correctly identify his body. He provides a succinct anatomical account of how Tipu died: “The Sultaun had been shot, a little above the right ear, by a musquet ball, which lodged near the mouth, in his left cheek: he had also received three wounds, apparently with the bayonet, in his right side” (137). Next he recounts a dry and detailed

23 See the third chapter of this dissertation for how Emma Roberts – writing thirty-five years later – will still be positioning her text as a corrective to the public’s supposed lack of information on Indian matters.
calculation of how many individuals fought, were wounded, and died during the battle (138). Beatson’s empirical precision acts as a necessary corrective to the discomfiting – and perhaps gothically-inflected – chaos of the scene: “General Baird,…accompanied by several officers, proceeded to the gateway, which was filled with dead bodies. The number was so great, and the place so dark, that it was impossible to distinguish one person from another” (136-37). Beatson includes another firsthand account of the discovery of Tipu’s body in an appendix. In Major Allan’s report, Tipu appears in an uncanny state of life-in-death: “Tippoo was brought from under the gateway, his eyes were open, and the body was so warm, that for a few moments Colonel Wellesley and myself were doubtful whether he was not alive: on feeling his pulse and heart, that doubt was removed” (cxxxi). Since the certainty of Tipu’s death is, after all, of “utmost political importance,” such initial ambiguity reflects the anxiety surrounding Britain’s unsure position at this point in its imperial expansion. Suspended between life and death, between respected military opponent and demonized foe, Tipu embodies what Nigel Leask identifies as Britain’s imperial anxiety: “a suspension and dislocation of cultural sovereignty” (*British 7*). It is only the physical touch of the British colonel, and the empirical confirmation, that can dispel Tipu’s post-mortem ambiguity, and eliminate the threat of native resistance to the East India Company’s expansion. The importance of looking at, identifying, and touching Tipu’s dead body is elucidated by Alan Bewell’s description of empiricist thanatology. Bewell proposes that “the nexus of all spiritual imagery is the corpse; all narratives about life after death can be reduced to and derive their formal organization from a primal confrontation, which every culture and every individual repeats, with the bodies of the dead. The history of death, then, is the history
of our organization, displacement, and metaphoric embellishments of this encounter, through language and funerary rituals” (Wordsworth 190). Indeed, for Beatson specifically, and for the British public in general, the very narrative of Britain’s colonial presence in India, like narratives about afterlife, is bound up in the fate of Tipu’s body.

While Tipu’s body serves as the organizational centre of British imperialism in Beatson’s text, it is the filial response to his death that allows the British to legitimate their presence in a foreign economy of sensibility. Beatson reports that on the morning after the siege, “Abdul Khalik, the Sultaun’s second son, and the eldest of the two hostages who were delivered to the Marquis Cornwallis in 1792, surrendered himself” (146). Beatson evokes a legacy of paternal care toward Tipu’s family, and by extension toward all natives. The View reports that upon being told his father had almost certainly been killed during the capture of Seringapatam,

Abdul Khalik betrayed not the smallest symptom of emotion: he only remarked, that the fact might be easily ascertained, and proposed sending one of his attendants for that purpose. The person who was sent, immediately returned with a report of the Sultaun’s death, which the son received with perfect indifference. The only passion excited in this young man’s breast, and which he could not restrain on this melancholy occasion, was that of curiosity. Forgetting the precepts in which he had been educated, he unguardedly expressed a desire to see the deceased Sultaun; and when the curtain, which concealed the body in the palanquin, was drawn, he viewed it without any apparent concern. (147)
Abdul Khalik’s reaction to his father’s death is already pathologized before this death has been confirmed for him, betraying no “symptom” of emotion. Despite the “utmost political importance” for the British of viewing and touching Tipu’s body, the same impulse is seen as unfeeling and unnatural in Abdul Khalik. Revealing his investment in the tropes of sensibility, Beatson inscribes Abdul Khalik only as a son and never as someone with an equal political investment in the fate of Tipu’s body. Although Beatson wants the reader to primarily think of Abdul Khalik as a son, the heir’s sympathetic allegiance has already been divided by evoking Cornwallis. Teltscher has called Cornwallis’s reception of Tipu’s sons in 1792 as “the most celebrated instance of British benevolence to emerge from the whole period of conflict” (248). Indeed, popular representations of Cornwallis’s reception of the boys depicted the episode not as a hostage-taking, but as replacing Tipu’s cruel domestic tyranny with Cornwallis’s virtuous paternal protection.24 To whom, then, could a properly feeling Abdul Khalik align himself? Even though when the younger brothers hear of their father’s death, “their sensibility displayed itself in the most unaffected marks of sorrow and concern” (147), the elder son’s faltering sympathy has already determined the British course of action. The failure of Tipu’s heir to legibly mourn his father suggests in this affective narrative a justifiable rupture in succession: by breaking the chain of affective exchange, Abdul Khalik opens a space into which the British can insert themselves into native rule.

---

24 Teltscher discusses Robert Home’s painting (1793-4) of Cornwallis receiving the hostages, and suggests that in this image paternal benevolence was meant to invert humiliating accounts of British captivity in Mysore. See India Inscribed, 248-50. For a catalogue of paintings depicting this scene, see Mildred Archer, India and British Portraiture 1770-1825, 421-4; and Denys Forrest, Tiger of Mysore: The Life and Death of Tipu Sultan, 347-50. Marshall notes that depictions of Cornwallis and the hostages were extremely popular, appearing not just in paintings but on tea trays and medallions (64).
The centrality of Tipu’s body – and the way in which that body is mourned – to the story that Britons seek to write about their role in India explains why Beatson devotes a chapter to the ruler’s funeral. Initially, Beatson acknowledges native funerary rituals by according superintendence of the event to “the principal Cauzee of Seringapatam” (148). But despite the material accoutrements of a native funeral – the state palanquin, the richly brocaded cloth (148) – the funeral is ultimately directed by Colonel Wellesley. Wellesley “inform[s] Abdul Khalik, that four flank companies of Europeans should attend, and that minute guns should be fired during the funeral; the Prince, at first, expressed some disinclination to accept the escort; but on being assured that it was meant, purely, as a mark of respect to the deceased Sultaun, he consented” (148). The encounters created by imperial expansion, then, converge upon a funerary ritual. The differences that arise from such encounters – namely between the British and the natives – is further played out during the procession. “The streets through which the procession passed,” writes Beatson, “were lined with inhabitants; many of whom prostrated themselves before the body, and expressed their grief by loud lamentations” (148). The militaristic order of the British flanks is contrasted with the prostrate and disordered inhabitants, just as the metronomic firing of the minute guns finds its corollary in the people’s lamentations; what these comparisons suggest is that British intervention is a necessary ordering of chaos.25

25 The chaotic tone is even more overwhelming in Lieutenant Richard Bayly’s diary account of the storm that threatened Tipu’s funeral: “Such a scene of desolation can hardly be imagined; Lascars struck dead, as also an officer and his wife in a marquee a few yards from mine. Bullocks, elephants, and camels broke loose, and scampering in every direction over the plain; every hospital tent blown away, leaving the wounded exposed, unsheltered to the elemental strife. In one of these alone eighteen men who had suffered amputation had all the bandages saturated, and were found dead on the spot the ensuing morning. The
In organizing the funeral, then, the British organize the country, and naturalize their role there. Beatson concludes his coverage of the funeral with a universalizing moral: “The fate of Tippoo Sultaun, affords an awful example of the instability of human power, unsupported by justice or moderation” (149). In this imperial moral, the British serve as a cosmic balancing act, a universal checking of hubris. Tipu’s demise should serve as a lesson “to the princes of India, by impressing on their minds a deeper sense of the danger of violating public engagements, and of inviting foreign invaders to assist them in schemes, for the destruction of the British power in that quarter” (149). By deeming the French as the “foreign invaders” in India, Beatson surreptitiously indicates that the British are somehow less foreign than the invaders; rhetorically, they have been naturalized.  

Ultimately, killing Tipu, organizing his funeral, and controlling the representation of these events naturalize British presence in the colony.

Beatson’s text celebrates the sympathetic containment of India through protective death rituals, but writing between the Third and Fourth Mysore Wars – that is, before Tipu’s death – Hamilton cannot rely on the same vision of imperial stability. Indeed, Marshall has suggested that although Cornwallis triumphed over Tipu in 1792, that “long and very costly war between apparently unequal forces…produced something less than total victory” since Britain would find itself in conflict with Mysore again in 1799.

funeral party escorting Tippoo's body to the mausoleum of his ancestors situated in the Lal Bagh Garden, where the remains of his warlike father, Hyder Ali, had been deposited, were overtaken at the commencement of this furious whirlwind, and the soldiers ever after were impressed with a firm persuasion that his Satanic majesty attended in person at the funeral procession” (95-96). In this passage, gothic orientalism and imperial necropolitics converge explicitly.

26 Ironically, “assisting [the princes of India] in their schemes” was a crime for which Hastings was lambasted during his impeachment trial, but here that threat is displaced unto the French.
Her historical transposition of the Third Mysore War onto the Rohilla War may therefore exonerate Hastings, as Ahmed proposed above, but it does so by conjuring a significant loss in Britain’s recent imperial history: the American colonies. After all, as Daniel O’Quinn has shown, Cornwallis “carried his experience of defeat at Yorktown and other American campaigns to India” (Entertaining 342). As such, O’Quinn maintains, “Cornwallis’s history of defeat and victory in colonial warfare makes him a volatile emblem of patriotic paternalism” (Entertaining 345). The Mysore wars thus triggered humiliating recollections of Britain’s recent losses. “In the aftermath of traumatic defeat in America,” Colley confirms, “[Mysore] also raised the spectre of a wider melt-down of British reputation – and therefore authority – in India as a whole” (275). It is unsurprising then, that Hamilton’s rehabilitation of empire seems inescapably melancholic; her celebration of Orientalist study relies on the dearly departed as much as it does on ambivalent emblems of political power.

Hamilton’s version of the Rohilla War is thus entrenched in a cultural history of imperial trauma. Amidst the “unspeakable combination of horrors” (79) he faces in the war – a rhetorical slip, since he does in fact describe the “unspeakable” pandemonium – Zāārmilla notices a young, wounded Afghan man, carrying his aged father on his back. This image of filial duty serves in Zāārmilla’s eyes as “atonement” (80) for the collective sins of the Afghans, and he offers them shelter in his fortress. This scene would evoke a number of things for a contemporary eighteenth-century reader. First, it immediately positions Zāārmilla as a familiar “man of feeling” whose sympathy overwhelms his presumed political stance and neutralizes the potential otherness of the novel’s eponymously advertised “Hindoo Rajah.” Second, the image of the young man carrying
his aged father on his back cannot but call to mind Aeneas bearing Anchises from a burning Troy. Indeed, Hamilton has already primed the reader’s mind to make such associations in her Preliminary Dissertation; she accounts for the public’s ignorance of Indian affairs by arguing that “the same objections which render the translations from the Oriental writers tiresome, and uninteresting, will operate with equal force on the most beautiful passages of Homer, or Virgil, and the names of...Anchises and Eneas, be found hard to remember, and as difficult to pronounce, as those of Krishna and Arjoun” (55-56) to those who have not had a classical education.

Praising the “Benevolent people of England!” for wanting “all [to be] partakers of the same blessings of liberty, which they themselves enjoy” (84), Zāārmilla explains Britons’ motivations for establishing colonies abroad: “It was doubtless with this glorious view, that they sent forth colonies, to enlighten and instruct, the vast regions of America. To disseminate the love of virtue and freedom, they cultivated the trans-Atlantic isles: and to rescue our nation from the hands of the oppressor, did this brave, and generous people visit the shores of Hindostan!” (84). As most readers of this scene acknowledge, Zāārmilla’s “doubtless” faith in the imperial project conjures the very doubts it dismisses. Hamilton’s belief in Britain’s imperial project here would seem to be tinged with a deep irony; staged in the mid-1770s yet written with the historical hindsight of 1796, Zāārmilla’s letter fails entirely to anticipate the American Revolution. At the heart of Britain’s imperial trauma, then, is the loss of America – a loss that bears

27 A translation of Virgil’s text reads: “‘Come then, dear father, up on my back. I shall take you on my shoulders. Your weight will be nothing to me. Whatever may come, danger or safety, it will be the same for both of us” (II.709-711).
repeating in an already confused martial narrative. By equating America with India, and by casting a native Aeneas on the scene of revolution, Hamilton forces the reader to ask whether the British should identify with the founding of Rome or the fall of Troy. Ironically, either choice augurs a doomed empire.

This confused search for a literary-historical correlative is perhaps an indication of the shifting political role of sentimental writing in the eighteenth century. Although David Quint’s important study *Epic and Empire* (1993) suggests that imperial ideology is disseminated by the epic and not the romance form, Festa has demonstrated that from the mid-eighteenth century it is sentimental literature that comes to perform the work of conquest, containing and concealing the cultural work of empire. Festa argues that “[s]entimental depictions of colonial encounters refashioned conquest into commerce and converted scenes of violence and exploitation into occasions for benevolence and pity. In the process, sentimentality, not epic, became the literary mode of empire in the eighteenth century” (2). Hamilton cannot settle on an epic model of empire precisely because she herself has supplanted the epic hero with the man of feeling. It is telling that in the opening scene of the Rohilla War, her eponymous protagonist is not the one playing the role of Aeneas, but rather, that of Dido, offering refuge to warriors. What these overlapping narratives reflect is the anxiety surrounding the British presence in India at the turn of the century; the impossibility of identifying with any one model of imperialism – or any model of sympathetic encounter – is at once a cause and a symptom of the text’s and the nation’s melancholy. O’Quinn provides the concept of “masochistic nationalism” to describe Calcutta’s celebrations of Cornwallis’s victory, which he describes as “a nationalism that coheres in the pain of its mutilated members – whose
dynamics are deeply connected to the recalibration of British subjectivity after the loss of the American colonies” (Entertaining 341). Hamilton’s project seems invested in a similarly masochistic national vision, cohering around the dead bodies of its founders and foes. The founding of Rome is, after all, inseparable from the melancholy image of a weeping Dido.  

The “Friends of Percy” and the Limits of Transnational Sympathy

Like Beatson, Hamilton’s staging of sympathy relies on a transnational dynamic – that is to say, without a British agent in the formula, sympathetic encounters fail to connect. The centrality of the British to this affective model suggests the problematic primacy of British sensibility in the affective economy of empire. But it also points to the presumption that the British character was uniquely melancholic by nature. Foucault has pointed out that depression, madness, and suicide were considered symptoms of “la maladie anglaise” par excellence, a result of specifically British social conditions (213). Hamilton’s text repeatedly reinforces Foucault’s observation. Zāārmilla reports

---

\[28\] Hamilton’s allusion to Virgil recalls another literary progenitor. In Laurence Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey (1768), Yorick casts himself as the quintessential epic hero: “I force myself, like Eneas, into evils – I see him meet the pensive shade of his forsaken Dido – and wish to recognize it – I see the injured spirit wave her head, and turn off silent from the author of her miseries and dishonours – I lose the feelings for myself in hers – and in those affections which were wont to make me mourn for her when I was at school” (73). In this evocation of Virgil’s epic, Yorick shifts the focus from Aeneas’s imperial adventures to his love affair with Dido; the epic is overridden by the romance, the conquest by the emotion. It is not heroic deeds that are celebrated in Yorick’s reimagining, but rather the proliferation of emotion: Dido’s miseries eclipse their “author,” while Yorick’s feelings dissolve at once into Dido’s and into his own past readings of her sad tale. What this mythic revision accomplishes, then, is to replace epic with sentimentality in the hierarchy of genre and to make Yorick’s individual and internal experience central to the sentimentalized quest.

\[29\] This belief possibly emerged from the popularity of George Cheyne’s bestselling 1733 text The English Malady; or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Distempers &c. As Faubert and Ingram point out, the “English malady” in question is melancholy (2.xv). Julia Kristeva similarly suggests that “melancholia is not French” because
the suicide of Doctor Sceptic’s nephew as “a privilege which is often claimed, and a practice, that is very common with the philosophers of England” (281). And perhaps because of this uniquely British sensibility, despite the enormous value placed upon the domestic circle, the same bonds do not work for the novel’s Indian characters. Zāārmilla may be the eponymous protagonist of the novel, but Hamilton stakes Percy as the catalyst and Charlotte as the hub around whom sympathies are organized, not the Hindu Rajah. Visiting Percy’s grave after hearing of his death from the Khansaman, whose “eyes were heavy with the tears of grief, and [whose] whole deportment was marked by the pressure of recent sorrow” (94), Zāārmilla gestures towards a community of consolation: “The [Company] friends of Percy united their tears with mine: they were the pure offerings of friendship flowing from hearts of sincerity” (95). This scene reads as a potential levelling of colonial forces through the powers of mourning; these sincere tears are offered by Indian and British friends together, whose sentiments create an imperial community. Yet before he dies, Percy asks that Zāārmilla inform his fellow British officers of his plight, and bring them to his bedside. “Their accounts” of his dying, suggests Percy “would soften to [his] sister the tidings of an event that will pierce her soul. She knows not the goodness of Zāārmilla; and will only imagine to herself the figure of her dying brother, expiring among strangers” (93). Why is it that the soldiers’ account of his death would be more reliable than the account of his friendship with Zāārmilla? Why can one be reported and serve as consolation, but not the other? The

caused by “the rigor of Protestantism or the matriarchal weight of Christian orthodoxy admits more readily to a complicity with the grieving person when it does not beckon him or her into delectatio morosa” (6). For a comprehensive study of the cultural understanding of the “English malady,” see Dickson and Ingram’s Depression and Melancholy, 1660-1800 (2012).
British soldiers must here witness and give account of Percy’s death, while the “balm of sympathy” offered by his Indian friends remains unimaginable to the domestic circle. As Rudd has contended, these Indians are simply too remote – both geographically and culturally – to act as arbiters of affect. What Percy’s wish highlights is that in this transitional period of empire, transnational bonds can never be made equal. Colonial power dynamics cannot be levelled, and should not appear so through affective performance, precisely because such egalitarianism is simply not possible in colonialism, as Beatson’s staging of Tipu’s funeral also demonstrates.

Esther Schor has cogently interpreted the economic metaphors that underpin eighteenth-century theories of moral sentiment surrounding mourning. She explains that Adam Smith’s theory of moral sentiments begins with an originary act of sympathy at the grave, a feeling which then regulates society’s personal and economic relations. “In sympathizing with the dead,” she posits, “we take up our place, imaginatively, in the grave. At the same time, the dead take up their places within our minds” (35). These imaginative acts of identification then become points in a network of exchange, investing mourning with value in an economy of sentiment. If mourners imaginatively take a place in the grave, or melancholically self-identify with the dead, Hamilton’s model of transnational mourning would possess the troubling potential to “veer towards a perilous absorption in another’s affect and interests that may threaten the autonomy of the self” (5), as Festa posited at the outset of this chapter. However, Hamilton provides an affective prophylactic against such dangerous forces of absorption: no British characters are asked to mourn a native person in the novel. Instead, mourning becomes a subtle way of performing the imperial civilizing mission. The native “friends” join round
Percy’s grave, imagining themselves to be part of an imperial community of sentiment, but they are never admitted into a British domesticity which here is figuratively and literally guarded by the soldiers who alone can account for Percy’s death and way of dying.

To reinforce the refusal of native sentiment and sympathy, Hamilton implies that Zāārmilla’s travels are provoked by his inability to find sympathy in the very domestic ties that elsewhere signify British civility and power. When “melancholy [takes] possession of [his] mind” (97) after the death of Percy, the Rajah of Lolldong and his brother, the “Zimeendar” come to comfort Zāārmilla. They fail to alleviate his melancholy, however, because “they were both too full of their own concerns, to take any part in the grief which filled [his] heart” (97). Those concerns are, of course, the very conflict that has taken Percy’s life. In “the late calamities of our nation, their lands had been ravaged by the troops of the Visier.” The “protecting hand of the English,” adds Zāārmilla, “had not been able to save their villages” (97). Rather than share a bond of mutual sympathy, Zāārmilla relieves the burden of comfort from his own sympathizers. However, after talking over each other, and “repeat[ing] the particulars of their grievances” a second and third time, Zāārmilla loses patience in these men who “obstinately persist in cherishing the feelings of selfish regret, for their own particular misfortune, while the miseries of thousands, who, on the same occasion, had lost their all, found no entrance into their hearts” (98). Despite Zāārmilla’s acknowledgement of a collective, national calamity (“our”), he cannot sympathize with the unsentimentalized concerns of the rajah and the zamindar. Like Beatson in his representation of the unfeeling Abdul Khalik, Hamilton seems to suggest that Indians – especially those who
act as political players – are unfit for a social model dependent on domestic civility, all while pre-empting their admittance into that very circle.30

In fact, Hamilton makes an indifference to death and suffering an essential trait of the Hindu population. In the Preliminary Dissertation, she asserts that “[t]he patience evinced by this mild and gentle race under the severest suffering, and the indifference with which they view the approach of death, which has been severally assigned to constitutional apathy, to their mode of living, and to the delicate texture of their bodies, may perhaps be equally accounted for, from their firm and stedfast belief in a future state” (62). Considering that throughout her text Hamilton makes sensibility the key to significant intervention in imperial politics, this statement cuts off every avenue of potential resistance for her imagined Hindus: their apathy is biological, environmental, and philosophical – in other words, their preclusion from sentimental politics has been anthropologically entrenched. Although she selects a Hindu Rajah as her protagonist, Hamilton’s reluctance to admit colonialized subjects into her affective model reinforces the words of a man she otherwise systematically satirizes throughout her novel. “The main drift of [colonial administrators’] policy,” declared Burke in 1784, “was to keep the natives totally out of sight. We might hear enough about what great and illustrious exploits were daily performing on that great conspicuous theatre by Britons. But…we were never to hear of any of the natives being actors” (qtd. in Colley 304). Zāārmilla thus becomes the problematically idealized model of the Indian subject: mourning a British

30 Linda Colley has pointed out the persistence of such a formula that “focus[es] attention on the emotional and moral development of Westerners caught up in extra-European conflicts” by noting the similarities between Hollywood representations of the Vietnam War and the eighteenth-century depiction of East India Company servants as men of feeling – both of which confine native people to peripheral roles (305).
soldier, recognizing British protection, and demonstrating a sympathetic impulse while determining who is in fact worthy of that affective expenditure, he is the other reimagined for domestic consumption while never fully bridging the domestic divide for a larger Indian population.

Hamilton’s complicated relationship to Burkean sentiment and staging is most explicitly acted out in one of the novel’s most satirical scenes. Entering a coffee-shop to peruse the newspaper, Zāārmilla draws the “universal attention” of his fellow patrons, and is taken up “with much formality” by a man whom the reader should readily identify as a stand-in for Burke. Recognizing Zāārmilla as “the Rajah of Almora, a native Prince of Rohilcund,” the Burkean figure apologetically and excessively rambles about the atrocities committed by the British in India. “I know, Sir, what you would say,” vehemently declares our pseudo-Burke, as he goes on to list what Zāārmilla “would tell” him if he would only let him speak (245). The irony of this speech draws a parallel with Hamilton’s act of ventriloquism: both require and enforce Zāārmilla’s silence for their own political agendas. “We have real hearts of flesh and blood” (244-45, emphasis mine), asserts the man, signalling the difference between the “real” British agents at work in the text and the rhetorical oriental bodies they deploy. And if Zāārmilla’s rhetorical construction was not already underscored enough, the man adds: “I shall make a proper representation of your case. Through me, your wrongs shall find a tongue. I will proclaim to the world, all that I have heard you utter” (245). The political and aesthetic double entendre of “representation” reinforces how the dynamics of melancholy negate Zāārmilla’s alleged subjectivity: he has, in fact, uttered nothing. Significantly, this siege of Burkean sensibility is caused by Zāārmilla’s appearance in the newspaper as an
ambassador of “the Hindoo inhabitants of Bengal” to complain to the British government about its colonial misadministration (246). If sensibility possesses the democratizing potential to level class and gender differences through shared feeling, this affective empowerment is not extended to the racial other. Rather than give voice to a disenfranchised person, the onslaught of British feeling here renders the representative of colonial oppression voiceless, inscribing native silence into the newspaper that consolidates the voice of metropolitan hegemony.31

Although the empire is embodied and made visible by Zāārmilla’s very public presence in England, his hypervisibility only points to another spectralized body in the novel’s imagining of empire. As Zāārmilla bears witness to intimate domestic scenes, the imperial connections of these people – and there are always imperial connections, even in the most remote rural setting, like a farmer who speaks Mhors – are forgotten in favour of their rooted domesticity. As Katie Trumpener has argued about Walter Scott’s fiction, “the domestic expands into the imperial; the imperial folds back into the domestic.” (188). But what is even more interesting about these scenes is that when Zāārmilla is so intimately admitted into these private moments, his retinue of numerous servants is entirely forgotten. His servants can be elided and forgotten by the narrative, even as they are the ones who sustain Zāārmilla’s travel and hence enable the travel narrative to take

31 The newspaper also acts as a site of class conflict. Zāārmilla observes the function of public obituaries for those lost in the global expanse of empire: “To the families of such as are in a situation to afford the expensive insignia of sorrow, the names of their fallen friends are announced but, to the poor, who can only afford to wear mourning in their hearts, there is no necessity of giving such a particular account of their friends; it is sufficient for them to know, that few, very few of them can ever again behold their native homes!” (209) The distinction here between the “insignia of sorrow” and the mourning heart that emphasizes the lost home restages the blurring of public and private spaces evoked elsewhere in Hamilton’s treatment of melancholic imperial spaces.
shape. Only mentioned in Letter XII when Zāārmilla sails to England, his servants “earnest[ly] entreat” him to accompany him on his journey, “all of whose services [he] find[s] very useful…in this floating castle” (184). Designating the ship a “floating castle” may raise the possibility of the global reach of Zāārmilla’s power, and yet the circumscription of his role makes such a reading unlikely. Rather, Hamilton here inscribes Zāārmilla’s sovereignty as a castle in the air, an unachievable dream. Buttressed by invisible servants in an imagined seat of power, Zāārmilla’s castle marks his impenetrable isolation, and the impenetrability of the British domesticity that pretends to admit him, while always erecting an invisible barrier of class, race, and power. Although Hamilton may depict the mourning of gallant English officers and dear old uncles, the absence of an imperial working class – both British and native – is equally constitutive of the structural melancholy of this novel and of the nation. The absence of the Indian spectator, then, points to a failure in Hamilton’s sentimental empire; without the approbatory witnessing of a racialized, working-class spectator, the enactment of sympathetic imperial encounters reads as a hollow performance. Indeed, Hamilton seems to direct this imperial show from the novel’s opening meeting between Zāārmilla and Captain Percy: “At the foot of the hill I heard a groan…and to my astonishment saw one in the dress of an English officer; he appeared to suffer the anguish of excessive pain” (80). The register of Zāārmilla’s description highlights its performative qualities: Percy is not an English officer, but merely “in the dress” of one, just as he “appears” to be in pain.

32 Into the criticism of invisible labour can – and should – also be detected the specter of slavery. Siraj Ahmed points to a criticism of metropolitan luxury in the novel, as the “fashionable taste for oriental luxuries leads to the consumption of objects produced in a distant and unseen economy whose uncivilized values inevitably sanction idolatry, despotism and slavery.” (“Pure Soil” 148)
If Zāirmilla’s encounter with Captain Percy sets into motion the kind of transcultural sympathy that will define the empire, Hamilton hints that it may be a failed performance all along.

Ultimately, Zāirmilla’s melancholy is rendered impotent. Zāirmilla laments that in concluding his travels and returning home to India, he shall be “parted [from his British friends] for ever,” resorting to the economic metaphorics of moral sentiment as he adds: “Yet shall I not purchase that felicity, without having paid the debt of anguish in many a tear; before my eyes can be solaced by beholding the companions of my youth, they must have been moistened with the sorrow of an eternal separation from every English friend” (304-05). This gesture toward an eternal parting casts Zāirmilla as a man crossing over into death, and not merely crossing the ocean – though these two movements would be conflated in a situation where his leisurely return to England would be highly unlikely. Further, the solace offered by his native companions is unconvincing, given the impossibility of finding consolation at home in the first place. Hamilton thus catches her Hindu Rajah in a perpetual loop of melancholy, shading his travels with the bleak impossibility of consolation. Identifying with the dead Percy, excluded from any consoling company, incurring debts of (usually unsolicited) feeling, Zāirmilla assimilates the silence of the grave as he does the civilizing forces of British

---

33 Seizing on Burke’s similar deployment of the insurmountable barrier of the sea, Saree Makdisi provides an astute reading of the sea metaphor that is equally salient here: “The sea is hence also an obstacle, which can be crossed in one direction, but not in the other (or, rather, by one party in both directions). It figures as a gap in status and development between India and Britain, simultaneously a material and a metaphorical barrier. Just as, according to Burke, the Indians cannot – purely on account of their own limitations – cross the material sea and travel to England, India itself cannot cross the great metaphorical divide of development to become like Britain” (102).
manners. In Hamilton’s model of empire, the native is rendered safely voiceless, to be mourned from afar, rather than claiming any place in a domestic network of sympathy.

**Excess and Instruction: Teaching Feeling Through Charlotte’s Tears**

Perhaps because of her personal experience of the grief caused by death and distance, Hamilton is critical of the unregulated circulation of feeling, and her novel stages many critiques of misplaced or artificial sensibility. The Brahmin Sheermaal vociferously denounces self-righteous British sympathy – such as the horrified reaction to sati – that can placidly ignore more local suffering.\(^{34}\) “Is it thus, by a pretended feeling for imaginary sorrows,” wonders Sheermaal, “that the Christian Shaster teaches men to exercise their benevolence? Is it in conformity to any part of its precepts, that they can so freely grieve at equivocal and distant evils, while those, which are before their eyes, excite neither compassion nor remorse?” (132). Indeed, Sheermaal’s contempt for hearts that bleed for “descriptions” of “imaginary sorrows” (132) is echoed later by the respectable Lady Grey, a repetition that gives credence to the otherwise dismissably surly Brahmin’s complaint. After a set-piece in which Hamilton tests three models of feminine behaviour, Lady Grey remarks that “[s]ensibility…is but too often another word for selfishness…[T]hat sensibility which turns with disgust from the sight of misery it has the power to relieve, is not of the right kind.” She adds that “weep[ing] at the imaginary tale of sorrow exhibited in a Novel or a Tragedy” indulges the feelings in a manner that is empty of compassion or benevolence, and which lacks any valuable action (278). Lady Grey is posited as a reliable arbiter of feeling precisely because her feminine virtue has

\(^{34}\) See the next chapter of this dissertation for my discussion of sati.
been galvanized at her husband’s deathbed. Furthermore, she is presented as an enforcer of the sympathetic network of mourning. After the suicide of Dr. Sceptic’s nephew – a victim of the “liberal opinions” of the new philosophy (284) – Lady Grey makes “the consolation of that unhappy family…the first object of her concern” (284). Whereas the capricious Lady Ardent is preoccupied with spreading news of the “melancholy event,” Lady Grey “hasten[s] to the house of affliction; there to mingle the tears of sympathy; to speak comfort to the wounded heart; and, by sharing in its sorrows, to lessen their severity” (284). Hamilton’s novel ultimately suggests that rogue feelings need to be regulated by the forces of mourning.

Although the sympathetically sedate Lady Grey seems like the best candidate for the novel’s enforcer of appropriate feeling, Charlotte Percy is cast as the novel’s affective compass, and positioned as the organizational and instructive hub of empire. After all, it is her tear-stained poetry – exported to her brother in India – that inspires Zāārmilla’s wanderlust. Despite its intimate effect on the Rajah, Charlotte’s poetry demonstrates once more the exclusionary nature of British feeling when her melancholy verses are revisited in the novel’s concluding chapters. Coming across Charlotte’s tablets while on a tour of an idyllic Scottish farm, Zāārmilla notes how “[t]he tears which had fallen on the remaining lines had rendered them totally illegible. Those which suffused the blue eyes of the gentle Emma [Denbeigh], stopt her utterance, she hastily put the tablets in her pocket – and we proceeded in silence” (301). The tablets’ illegibility and contagious silence thus provide an emblem for Hamilton’s imagined empire, one in which transnational encounters are overwhelmed and overwritten by British feeling.
Compared to Lady Grey, Charlotte does not appear to be an ideal sentimental model. Where Lady Grey’s spirit is stalwart, Charlotte’s is frail; where the former is social, the latter is isolated; where the one is controlled, the other is excessive. However, it is precisely in the exclusionary excess of her feelings that Charlotte provides a particular kind of model for imperial – and class – contact. Charlotte’s melancholy cannot but recall Hamilton’s editorial voice in the Preliminary Dissertation, one that cannot dissociate a discussion of Indian affairs from the death of a beloved brother. Although receiving a visit from her friends alleviates the “traces of melancholy” in her countenance, the “ideas associated with [Zāārmilla’s] appearance gave a perceptible emotion to [Charlotte’s] already agitated spirits. She made an effort to banish the melancholy ideas which had of late been so familiar to her mind” (301). Despite the intimate source of grief – the deaths of her brother and uncle – Charlotte’s melancholy is depicted as ridiculous in a way in which Zāārmilla’s never is. On one hand, Zāārmilla’s character experiences melancholy as part of a complex exchange in a global affective network – he is moved by the deaths of friends and family members, by the atrocities of war, or by the destitution of the poor. On the other hand, his lachrymose foil weeps at the sight of potatoes. Charlotte “is so melancholy” when walking down an erstwhile favourite path of her uncle, announces the farmer’s wife, “that I never saw the like. Soon after she came yesterday evening, she went out to the garden, and, would you believe it? The sight of the potatoes my husband planted…would you believe it? Her eyes filled with tears at the very sight of it. Now what could make any one cry at the sight of a good crop of potatoes, is more than I can imagine” (298-99). If sensibility possesses a democratizing potential, then the affective power of potatoes remains lost on this
working-class woman. And if eighteenth-century encounters of empire needed to be negotiated through new imaginative strategies, then the farmer’s wife’s incredulity reveals that certain feelings exceed imaginative containment. What these sad potatoes represent, then, is the exclusionary nature of sensibility in the imperial narrative; sentiment and labour are asked to uncomfortably occupy the same space if empire is to be expected to manage its own excess. The repetition of “would you believe it?” sorts the farmer’s wife into a separate class from the affectively and socially powerful subject.

When Hamilton concludes the novel by supposedly curing Charlotte’s melancholy, her satire is at its most subtle but also its most politically trenchant. After examining the effects of gender and feeling on interpersonal relationships throughout the novel, Hamilton finally posits sentiment as a challenge to paternalism. Mr. Denbeigh Sr. attempts to check Charlotte’s indulgent sentimentalism. After a suspiciously short period, he “has already convinced her that the indulgence of melancholy, instead of being an amiable weakness, rather deserving of admiration than censure, is, in reality, equally selfish and sinful” (302, emphasis mine). He instructs her, rather, to exert the powers of her mind for the “instruction, or innocent amusement” of others (303). Such an instantaneous checking of her grief – which just moments before was characterized as excessive and interminable – should read as laughably implausible by the end of a novel that has sustained years-long global movements and relationships through the dynamics of melancholy. Indeed, Kelly’s suggestion that Hamilton’s novel promotes a “self-reform from mourning to usefulness” (135) and Nigel Leask’s similar interpretation of Charlotte’s “conversion from self-consuming melancholy into purposeful authorship” (“Elizabeth” 188) too readily assume that Charlotte can be cheered up by well-placed
paternalism, and ignores the value of mourning in the affective economy of the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, Leask’s supposition ignores the fact that Hamilton herself has turned melancholy into “purposeful authorship.” Rather than endorse overindulgent affect, then, Hamilton’s cheeky conclusion would suggest that female melancholy can be as instructive as paternal authority, but only if it is harnessed by the regulatory forces of a sympathetic network of mourning.

Mirrored Mourning and the Pall of Genre

While this reading has foregrounded melancholy on a structural and generic level to avoid assigning too many biographical continuities between Hamilton and her characters, I do not wish to suggest that the psychological dimensions of her writing should be neglected altogether. After an Indian acquaintance of Charles visits Hamilton, she writes the following to her brother in 1780:

[Mr. A] came to see my sister and me; and you may be sure his visit was very acceptable, as he had seen you in India…[H]e thought you had but one sister, and from my resemblance to you, he said he should have known me as such any where. Indeed, many people at Belfast compliment me

35 It is equally productive to note how the desire to make something “useful” of grief is potent in today’s political landscape. In her thoughtful response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, Judith Butler posits that “we have seen, are seeing, various ways of dealing with vulnerability and grief, so that, for instance, William Safire citing Milton writes we must ‘banish melancholy,’ as if the repudiation of melancholy ever did anything other than fortify its affective structure under another name, since melancholy is already the repudiation of mourning; so that, for instance, President Bush announced on September 21 [2001] that we have finished grieving and that now it is time for resolute action to take the place of grief. When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly” (29-30). What Butler’s comment suggests, alongside Gary Kelly’s reading of the “self-reform” of grief, is that the history of melancholy as a cultural idea is inexorably imbricated in questions of political consolidation.
with the name of little Charles. I was always very well pleased to be told of this likeness...I have some hopes that while you are at Calcutta, you will have an opportunity of sending me, what I have so long wished for, your picture. You may be sure you shall have mine, when in my power to get it: but, in the mean time, you may take your looking-glass, and the face you will see there may serve to bring your Bess to your mind. (70-71)

Since this letter predates Charles’s death by twelve years, it obviously cannot figure as another instance of Hamilton’s personal grief over his loss. But it nevertheless demonstrates how Hamilton negotiates imperial encounters through a melancholic confusion of identity. To an Anglo-Indian stranger, Hamilton and her sister may as well be the same person, and are in turn merely reifications of their brother, so many “little Charleses” holding down the domestic circle while he is in India. Hamilton’s image of the mirror that reflects another’s face provides a useful emblem for imperial identity: simultaneously reflecting self and other, colony and metropole, the pathology of sentiment prevents any self-consolidation, imaging instead a self that can be exchanged for the other, like so many imperial commodities. By isolating this letter from a physical, personally affecting death, it can be seen how the dynamics of melancholy are employed through sentimentality to think through empire and imperial contact.

I conclude by mentioning a passage often quoted from Hamilton’s letter to Mrs. Gregory on the composition of Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah. When Hamilton refers to her work as her “black baby” (Benger 127), critics have usually

---

36 In turn, Benger’s memoir iterates how Hamilton’s mother described Charles as “the living image of her excellent husband” (27), in yet another instance of melancholic proliferation of the Hamilton family image.
seized upon this comment to talk about Hamilton’s novel as a product of imperial hybridization – a result of her own imaginative authorial, sexual, and racial transgression. Indeed, such a reading is impossible to ignore. But I would supplement this focus on her orientalism by reading this “black baby” as one that is coloured not only by the racial encounters of empire, but by the pall of death; a novel wearing its mourning weeds in both form and content. This book-as-black-baby is the subject of so many critical debates regarding its genre, its philosophical camp, its relationship to gender and authorship, that it, too, cannot consolidate its identity. Rather than reflecting a distinct, individualized voice, the book enacts instead the fungibility of melancholic identities in the expanding empire of the late eighteenth century.
Chapter 2
The “Common Woe”: Sympathy, Sati, and the British Civilizing Mission in India

for we will mourn with thee;
O, could our mourning ease thy misery!
– William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, II.iv

Are there no words for that common woe?
–Ask of the thousands, its depths that know!
– Felicia Hemans, “The Indian City”


Published in Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap Book for 1832 to accompany an engraving of the same title (see Figure 1), Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s “Skeleton Group in the
Rameswur, Caves of Ellora. Supposed to represent the nuptials of Siva and Parvati” presents a curiously morbid portrait of matrimony. Indeed, the subtitle’s “supposed” depiction of marriage provokes an immediate if subtle tone of skepticism. In this ostensibly ekphrastic poem, Landon portrays a celebratory scene, as nature and spirits alike prepare for the wedding of Shiva and Parvati. The sun shines, the flowers bloom, and the sea rejoices while “Suras” and “Genii” attend. However, the poem is ultimately anticlimactic – an epitaphalium manqué – ending just at the moment that “Siva comes to meet his bride” (12). Recalling Keats’s Grecian urn – perhaps the preeminent emblem of Romantic melancholy – Siva is trapped in a perpetual present tense, always on his way but never arriving at the altar. The promise, tendered by the subtitle, that the poem will represent a wedding is never fulfilled. The significance of the title, then, lies more in that vexing world of supposition, which alerts the reader to another disconnection, this time between title and subtitle: the engraving upon which the poem is based does not, in fact, depict Shiva and Parvati. Instead, the skeleton group in question is “said to represent a miser, his wife, son, and daughter, all praying in vain for food, while two thieves are carrying off his wealth” (McGann and Riess 284 n.125).

1 In “Scene in Kattiawar,” published in Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book for 1835, Landon again brings together thievery and domesticity. A note at the beginning of the poem describe the “warlike and robber race” that inhabits the northwestern portion of Guzerat, preying on travellers. “The shelter afforded by the ruined temples and tombs, occasion such resting places to be usually made in their vicinity,” Landon notes, punning on the morbid quality of such “resting places.” The first-person speaker of the poem is a robber describing his lifestyle and possessions. He resides in “a lovely mountain bower” with his companion, “a gentle Georgian flower” who was his “prize” (30-33), presumably captured during a raid. He claims that his “sweet captive loves her lot” since he can supply her with riches. Once more Landon’s portrait of colonial domesticity thwarts expectations, bringing it into uncomfortable proximity with transgression in terms of lawlessness and miscegenation.
“[i]t is not an easy thing to write illustrations to print, selected rather for their pictorial excellence than their poetic capabilities; and mere description is certainly not the most popular species of composition.” As a result, Landon has “endeavoured to give as much variety as possible, by the adoption of any legend, train of reflection, &c. which the subject could possibly suggest” (n.p.). Appealing to the demands of a periodical culture seeking exotic subject matter, Landon costumes her poem in the “suras” and “genii” of the East, and invokes the pantheon of Hindu mythology to feature an interesting image of a popular nineteenth-century tourist site.

However, the poem’s exotic content also provides Landon with the opportunity to demonstrate her own oriental learning, which she may have picked up in part while sharing lodgings with fellow writer Emma Roberts. In a footnote that is markedly longer than the poem itself, Landon plumbs the “Asiatic Researches” to inform her reader that “[t]he above lines are a paraphrase and a translation from the Siva-Pooraun” (209, emphasis mine), doubling down on our distance from the source. The footnote’s polyvocality – paraphrase, translation, citation – reinforces the disorientation invoked in the titular disjunction. Although the footnote is, in fact, about Shiva and Parvati, matching the content of the poem better than the title, it focuses on “their celebrated quarrel” rather than their nuptials (210). Following a disagreement playing dice, the lovers separate. The attempts at reunion that follow are threatened by violence and flame, as the “fires [of their devotion]…blazed so vehemently as to threaten a general conflagration,” and Camdeo is “reduced to ashes by a flash from Siva’s eye” (210). With

---

2 See the following chapter of this dissertation for Emma Roberts’s role as a prominent recorder of Anglo-Indian life.
Shiva under Camdeo’s spell, Parvati returns to him in the disguise of a mountain girl, and he takes her back. Landon describes the reunion as Parvati’s “conquest...secured,” at which point “she assumed her natural form” (210), inscribing romantic reconciliation into the register of naturalized imperial domination. Landon’s footnote lingers on the threat of fire to the relationship, perhaps, because Parvati is the reincarnation of Shiva’s first consort Dakshayani, also known as Sati, after whom the self-immolation of a Hindu widow upon the funeral pyre of her husband takes its name. The poem’s title, morbidly associating a wedding party with a skeleton group, therefore creates an effective link between death and matrimony that is borne out by the footnote’s veiled reference to sati.  

Like many of her contemporary British writers – and colonial administrators – Landon wrote on the ritual of sati. Like “Skeleton Group,” “Immolation of a Hindoo Widow” was first published for a popular audience in Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book for 1836. In the poem’s opening stanzas, the speaker directs an unnamed addressee to prepare the widow for the funeral pyre. Describing her in diminutive terms – small, soft, slight – Landon gives the impression that the widow is youthful, conforming to official discourse that consistently “‘infantilized’ the typical sati...often describ[ing] her as a tender child” (Mani 32). In her delicacy, the widow is then weighed down by the riches in which the addressee has adorned her: “Chains and bright stones are on her arms

---

3 Landon’s convergence of matrimonial and funereal ritual recalls the model Rush Rehm has termed “marriage to death,” as both ceremonies similarly constitute families and communities (4-10).

4 However, as Lata Mani also points out, “statistics on sati compiled by officials between 1815 and 1829 challenge [the conclusion that the sati was typically young]. For instance, Benoy Bhushan Roy’s analysis of the age distribution of widows who died in sati reveals that young women, between eleven and twenty, accounted for less than 5 percent of all burnings. The majority of widows who burned, 60 percent, were over forty one” (32).
and neck; / What pleasant vanities are linked with them” (13-14). The diction of captivity invoked by the “chains” and “links” mars the supposedly “happy hours which youth delights to deck / With gold and gem” (15-16), alliteration reinforcing the weighty “links.” The poem’s oppressive undercurrent is made explicit when it rushes away from the exclamation that “she is a bride!” (2) by a turn in the next line, a “yet” (21) that acknowledges her as “The bride of Death!” (24). Once marriage and death are brought together, the widow is divested of her adornments and committed to the pyre.5 The poem’s modified heroic quatrains seem to want to cast the dainty widow as a heroine, an emblem of femininity and marital devotion who at the moment of death is in “perfect unison” with her husband, “No more to part” (31-32). Yet when the final line of each Sapphic stanza shrinks from pentameter to dimeter, the heroism of her actions is likewise reduced. As her lines and life are foreshortened, Landon grants very little agency to the widow. She is continually acted upon, rather than acting. In her only action of the poem, “She gives away the garland from her hair, / She gives the gems that she will wear no more” (25-26). Her only activity is an anaphora of loss. Finally, as the “red pile blazes,” the poem seeks outside authority to sanction the final act: “let the bride ascend” (29). The return of the imperative mode from the poem’s beginning positions the reader as both sympathetic witness and authority enabling sati to occur. Either position inexorably casts the widow as a victim.

5 Matrimony and death are brought together again in “The Tombs of the Kings of Golconda,” published in Fisher Drawing Room Scrap-Book for 1838, when the speaker mistakes a lavish funeral procession for a “royal bride brought hither / With this festival array” (20).
Both Landon poems make a link – whether implicit or explicit – between marriage and death, typifying their Indian subject matter as inevitably melancholic. Landon’s perplexing ekphrasis, her expansive footnote, and her passive sati ultimately demonstrate the illegibility of oriental narrative – and indigenous women – to the metropolitan reader. “Skeleton Group” especially recalls what Nigel Leask has termed “costume poetry,” suggesting that the “absorptive strangeness of the exotic image or allusion…called for footnoting, which at once guaranteed the authenticity of the allusion, whilst at the same time reassuring the metropolitan reader that it was both culturally legible and translatable” (“Wandering” 175-76). Yet the disorientation caused by the poem’s title, subtitle, and engraving resists the “reassurance” that exotic bodies could be made legible.

By considering the relationship between melancholy and legible subjecthood, this chapter investigates the limits of transnational sympathy in the oriental works of Letitia Landon, Felicia Hemans, and Sydney Owenson. Like Anne Anlin Cheng’s work on racial melancholy, this chapter considers how “aspects of grief…speak in a different

6 It is interesting to note how the poetic link between imperialism, marriage, and death foreshadows Landon’s own fate. Following a tumultuous engagement, Landon married George Maclean, governor of an English settlement on the West African Gold Coast, in June 1838. They moved to Africa in August, and Landon was dead within two months, having swallowed an accidental overdose of prussic acid. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess report that “her shocking death set the seal on her mythic stature. Shortly after the London papers announced her death on 1 January 1839 rumours began to spread about the event…and suspicious that George Maclean or his African mistress had poisoned her led to public accusations…Others suggested that Landon had committed suicide, a possibility that took its strength from her poetry, where many of her heroines met such an end” (14-15).

7 Her choice of ekphrasis may, however, provide another unspoken link to the visual scene of skeletons and loss. James Heffernan reminds us that to recall the etymology of ekphrasis “is to see more clearly what has been noted by scholars such as Leo Spitzer and Jean Hagstrum: the genealogical link between ekphrasis and sepulchral epigrams. These inscriptions on ancient statues, tombs, and funerary columns allowed the mute still object to identify itself” (302).
language – a language that may seem inchoate because it is not fully reconcilable to the vocabulary of social formulation or ideology but that nonetheless cuts a formative pattern” (x). Although writing from distinct branches of the sentimental tradition, Landon’s commercial skepticism,8 Hemans’s domesticated nationalism, and Owenson’s cross-cultural eroticism converge around contemporary sati debates.9 The subject of sati has been thoroughly examined by scholars, and its investigation tends to reside in the discursive nexus of feminism and postcolonialism. While this chapter certainly relies on the social politics of this important scholarly groundwork, I seek to refocus attention on the significance of using a death ritual as a flashpoint for colonial debate.10 Landon, Hemans, and Owenson engage with the figure of the sati as part of a complex discourse of colonial administration that relies on the powerful conflation of the dying and mourning other woman to assert a civilizing British sympathy over the native Indian population, rather than seeking to intervene in or even understand the personhood of subaltern women. The discussion that follows highlights how each writer – from

---

8 For a compelling, though brief, close reading of Landon that elucidates the cutting irony of her gift book poetry, see the coda to Christopher Nagle’s *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* (2007).

9 In their introduction to Landon’s *Selected Writings*, McGaan and Riess also point out how two very different women writers can be brought together: “Two women – both of whom wrote for money, to support themselves and their families – preside over the poetry scene that developed with the deaths of Keats, Shelley, and Byron. One was Felicia Hemans, who would prove the most published English poet of the nineteenth century. The other was Landon. In certain respects the two writers could not be more different. Hemans’ work focuses on domestic issues and a Wordsworthian ideology of ‘the country,’ whereas Landon, distinctly an urban writer, explores the treacherous cross currents of love. Because each moves within a clearly defined female imagination of the world, however, their work independently establishes new possibilities for poetry” (20).

10 Sati even occupies a central role in Calcutta’s founding myth, since Job Charnock was reported to have “saved” a beautiful Rajput princess from a funeral pyre, and lived with her until her death. “Death was not merely a statistical challenge to the British population,” Peter Travers posits, “but a central theme in their imagination of community” (88). See Travers 88-89.
sentimental women authors to a male eyewitness – relies on the controversial pathos of the dead, dying, and mourning other to evoke sympathy in metropolitan readers. However, the orientalized woman’s strange and distant grief casts her as an ambiguous – and ultimately illegible – object of sympathy, leveraging her melancholy to elicit the privileged tears of her metropolitan witnesses.\(^\text{11}\) By transforming the sati from a sympathetic subject to an incoherent object, British writers coopt her melancholy as a symbol for British readers’ feelings, knitting together an insular European community and mining her suffering as another imperial resource.

**The Case of Sati: An Administrative and Affective Debate**

The writings of Landon, Hemans, and Owenson, amongst others, participate in the British fascination with sati that marked the transitional period from mercantile imperialism to civilizing mission following the renewal of the East India Company’s charter in 1813. The civilizing mission demanded that Britons redress the perceived moral degeneracy of eighteenth-century Indian administration – famously characterized by the governance of Warren Hastings – and sati served as the fraught locus of this redressing.\(^\text{12}\) Sati was perceived by British observers as a barbaric ritual, one that encapsulated the tyranny of Brahmin leaders and the senseless devotion of enthralled

\(^{11}\) Andrew Rudd has argued that “India in reality proved to be beyond the scope of the average metropolitan British mind although a remarkable feature of many British texts about India is their willingness to address this problem head-on and even to berate the imagination for its limitations” (19). While Landon does not explicitly address the issue, the overdetermined confusion and distance from her source material, and her expansive footnote, read as a strategy to deal with the limitations of metropolitan imagination.

\(^{12}\) For more on this transitional period, see Siraj Ahmed’s “‘An Unlimited Intercourse’: Historical Contradictions and Imperial Romance in the Early Nineteenth Century.”
Hindu subjects. Gayatri Spivak has famously contended that “[t]he abolition of this rite by the British has generally been understood as a case of ‘White men saving brown women from brown men’” (287). Uncovering the traces of subaltern women in official records, Spivak argues that “the British…construct the woman as an object of slaughter, the saving of which can mark the moment when not only a civil but a good society is born out of domestic chaos” (235). The British found themselves in an administrative bind, however, wanting to “civilize” Indians while fearing that any intervention in native religious custom would be met with resistance, and disrupt the financial stability of the East India Company’s operations. Before sati was finally banned in British territories in 1829, administrators sought to regulate the practice based on ancient – and ambiguously interpreted – precedent, determining the legality of sati by certain criteria (age, caste, physical and rational state). Most importantly, sati could only be legitimate if the widow consented to the act without coercion (drugs, physical restraint).\(^\text{13}\) Scholars such as Ania Loomba, Jenny Sharpe, and Lata Mani concur that by deferring to scriptural precedent, the British essentially generated, constructed, and authorized a version of sati so that they could in turn ban it.\(^\text{14}\)

Although the British based their defense of Hindu widows on a woman’s ability

\(^{13}\) Ania Loomba notes that between 1813-1816, when the legality of a sati was being monitored by officials, “it is estimated that only ten illegal satis were prevented out of a total of 400 that occurred in the Presidency of Bengal” (212).

\(^{14}\) Loomba cogently assesses that “the British virtually orchestrated the articulation of a textual tradition and scriptural sanction for widow immolation, made pundits the spokesmen for a vast and heterogeneous Hindu population, and thereby calcified in new and dangerous ways the existing hierarchies of Hindu society” (212), while Sharpe similarly concludes that “the British effectively sanctioned widow-sacrifice so that they might abolish it” (50).
to choose her fate, the voices of these women had no place in the controversy.\(^{15}\) In what remains perhaps the most important study on sati, Lata Mani points out ironically how “women remain a minor theme” in debates on sati, their presence merely obtaining to the contest between administrative officers and the indigenous male elite.\(^{16}\) For example, Mani notes how “Bentinck’s famous Minute on sati…makes not a single mention of the widow,” focusing “almost entirely on the safety of prohibition” (76, emphasis mine). They play a minor part in the debate because, Mani posits, “women are neither subjects nor objects but, rather, the ground of the discourse on sati” (79). The marginalization of women from the conversation on sati depends on stripping them of their subjectivity and agency, which is accomplished by an official discourse that portrays the widow as “a perennial victim” whether or not she consents to the act (31). “Paradoxically,” Loomba notes, “this process…casts the burning widow as a sign of normative femininity” (210), which Mani organizes into two poles: victim and heroine. If the widow initially resists burning, reports cast her as a victim of the males who coerce her into submission. If she voluntarily ascends the pyre, the “heroine” is rewritten as a slave to superstition, a victim of “tradition” (78). In this formulation, Mani contends, the “widow nowhere appears as a

\(^{15}\) Mani explains the symbolic role of women in national and imperial identity formation: “Debates on women, whether in the context of sati, widow remarriage, or zenanas (separate women’s quarters) were not merely about women, but were also instances in which the moral challenge of colonial rule was confronted and negotiated. In this process, women came to represent ‘tradition’ for all participants: whether viewed as the weak, deluded creatures who must be reformed through legislation and education, or the valiant keepers of tradition who must be protected from statutory interventions and be permitted only certain kinds of instruction” (79). “[I]mperialism used Woman, ‘freeing’ her to legitimize itself,” confirms Spivak (244). For more on how English women used images of other women for self-constitution, as well as her discussion of representations of sati, see Nussbaum’s *Torrid Zones* (1995).

\(^{16}\) Although this chapter takes the British reaction to sati as its object of study, Indian voices – such as those of Rammohun Roy, Radhakanta Deb, and Henry Derozio – held an important place in the prohibition debates. For more on how the male indigenous elite shaped the discussion of sati, see Lati’s consideration of the *bhadralkol* in chapter 2 of *Contentious Traditions*. 
subject-in-action, negotiating, capitulating, accommodating, resisting.” “This binary and reductive conception of the widow,” concludes Mani “forecloses the possibility of a complex female agency” (31). Similarly noting the dubious effacement of the widow’s free will, Spivak suggests that “[o]ne never encounters the testimony of the woman’s voice consciousness,” so “one cannot put together a ‘voice’” (287). The widow’s victimization is compounded by her lack of voice, since in the British discourse on sati, the widow speaks only through the official record, her voice framed, mediated, and appropriated by the officer who intercedes.

The terms of this administrative debate seeped into popular culture to shape how the public was engaging with the figure of the mourning and dying Indian woman.

---

17 Sharpe highlights the importance of Mani’s study as an intervention that redresses the widow’s effaced agency by making her the subject of feminist discourse. However, Sharpe acknowledges the “double bind” of feminist critics who take the sati as an object of study: “to address the widow as a victim is to risk representing her as an object to be saved; to introduce her agency is to open up the possibility of a voluntary suicide. This is why Mani insists that we entertain ‘the possibility of a female subjectivity that is shifting, contradictory, inconsistent.’ By this she means that we should refuse a discourse that reduces agency to the singular moment of a ‘decision’ and be attentive to the contradictions between speech and action in the widow’s active negotiations of death” (51). In her analysis of more recent occurrences of sati, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan similarly addresses the danger of feminist readings of sati that reiterate the widow’s victimhood, noting how opponents of sati “have refused to grant that wanting to die is a sufficient reason to die. However, if one subscribes to a liberal ideology of the freedom of choice one must sometimes grant sati the dubious status of existential suicide. To refuse to do so is to find oneself, as feminists have done, in another bind, that of viewing the sati as inexorably a victim and thereby emptying her subjectivity of any function or agency. The choice for the concerned feminist analyst in this predicament…is a paralyzing one” (5-6).

18 In Reading the East India Company, 1720-1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender, Betty Joseph investigates how the official records of the East India Company could determine the social fates of women, both European and indigenous. “As imperial governance came to depend on a massive archive of cultural, literary, political, economic, and historical texts,” Joseph explains, “the distance between subjects and objects of knowledge was more than a geographical issue. On the one hand, the rulers, in making the alien territory and its people into objects of knowledge, initiated a process that gradually denied the colonized any role in this knowledge production. On the other hand, governance was carried out through a practice of archiving, a systematic circulation, preservation, and recall of written texts that allowed rule by remote control from London” (5).

19 The title alone of James Peggs’s India’s Cries to British Humanity, Relative to Infanticide, British Connection with Idolatry, Ghaut Murders, Suttee, Slavery, and Colonization in India: to which are added,
Before returning to its manifestation in poetry and novels, I turn now to Richard Hartley Kennedy’s “The Suttee: The Narrative of an Eye-Witness,” which appeared in *Bentley’s Miscellany* in 1843 and exemplifies how the success of the British civilizing mission depended on the illegibility of the dying Indian woman. Although the article was published in 1843, Kennedy’s eyewitness account dates back to an incident in Baroda in 1825. Retrospectively channeling the anxiety surrounding the sati debates of the 1820s, the article begins on a note of “apprehension,” for the only thing that can rouse the otherwise “passive docility” of the Hindus is “some fancied sacrilegious violation of [Hindu] observances” (241). Writing with the benefit of hindsight from more than a decade after the prohibition, Kennedy can “happily” acknowledge that “those apprehensions” were not realized. Yet he nevertheless persists in mystifying the wrath of Hindu outrage, since “no one, who knows what Hindooism is, and can be, will doubt that a fearful risk was run, and that a less heroic and straightforward plan of procedure would have obtained the same end, with less hazard” (241). With its obscurely threatening

*Humane Hints for the Melioration of the State of Society in British India* (1830) provides a good sense of how sati was being presented melodramatically to the metropolitan British readers.

20 Indeed, Kennedy’s account conforms squarely with the type Mani describes: “they are detailed accounts, organized around four cardinal moments: that of the narrator receiving information that a burning was about to occur and hastening to the spot; the narrator’s monitoring of the widow and relatives, as well as his (or other Europeans’) attempts at dissuasion; the narrator’s observation of the practices that preceded the burning; the setting alight of the pyre and the destruction of the widow. The degree of emphasis placed on each of these moments varies, although, in general, the bulk of the narrative is given over to a scrutiny of the widow, her demeanor, and her actions. Narratives frequently include conversations between the observer and the widow. Reports of these minimal and overdetermined exchanges give us some sense of the subjectivity of the widow and the logic of her actions” (160-61).

21 Paul B. Courtright offers a detailed summary of the account, and identifies Kennedy as a “surgeon in the Bombay Medical Service and then in the Native Infantry; in 1819 he became a surgeon to the Residence at Baroda. He lived in Baroda for about a decade, until his appointment as staff surgeon at Belgaum, and later served with the army in the Afghan war of 1839-1840. He concluded his Indian career as Inspector General for Hospitals in the Bombay Presidency before retiring to London in 1843” (42-43).
Hindu villains, British heroes, and fearful risks and hazards, Kennedy rewrites a legislative debate into a romance, and casts himself as an intervening knight – placing his narrative squarely into Spivak’s aforementioned “White men saving brown women from brown men” paradigm. In this case, however, the particular hero fails in saving his damsel in order to emphasize the importance of the greater civilizing mission of British dominion in India. Kennedy’s sati report reveals a suspicion of the Brahmin men who direct the ritual and a tacit commendation of British sensibility, both of which figure as an overarching critique of improper Hindu mourning.

To relate his account of the “wretched sacrifice,” Kennedy grants himself a unique narrative perspective. Although according to Kennedy, incidents of sati happen infrequently and in areas secluded from Europeans, this particular case “was witnessed by one familiar with all the ritual of the ceremony,” a description of which “may, therefore, prove interesting” (241) – a mission statement that conjures a titillated European audience at home. His account is supplemented by detailed footnotes explaining the geography, history, and population of Baroda; particulars, family trees, and political connections of key players; definitions and translations of native terms; and even relevant aesthetic comparisons. Kennedy’s detached scholarly introduction may be accounted for by the almost twenty-year gap between the event and the publication of the article, but it sits in tension with the sentimental tone of much of the narrative. Oscillating between empirical description and sympathetic reaction, the language of

---

22 Landscape aesthetics, imperial mapping, and funereal rites jostle uncomfortably close together in his offhanded remark that “Captain Grindlay’s ‘Scenery, &c., of Western India’ contains a beautiful view of [the] bridge” where the Guicowar Adaulut’s corpse is to be cremated (242).
sensibility often disrupts the event, as Kennedy must “put [himself] in the way of having [his feelings] harrowed, as it were, from choice” in order to “prepare this history” (242). His “harrowing choice” thus acts as a bathetic mirror of the widow’s own “choice,” as if Kennedy’s options to leave or stay and watch were comparable to that of willfully burning oneself alive.23

Indeed, Kennedy depicts multiple instances of a sympathetic bond with the sati. After the British authorities try to intervene but fail to dissuade the woman from her purpose, Kennedy, because he was “personally known” to her, “[takes] one quiet opportunity, unobserved by her people, to whisper in her ear, that if she felt any misgiving, [his] presence would prevent it from being too late, even at the supposed last moment” (243). This intimate offer of salvation, too, the widow refuses, yet Kennedy maintains his special bond with the “victim.” When he is “jostled and pushed about by the mob” during the ceremony, the widow “very calmly, but quite authoritatively, [bids] the people not to incommode [him],” a special attentiveness which seems quite natural to Kennedy, for he adds that they “had now been upwards of two hours acquainted” (250). He pragmatically suggests, however, that “her consideration” results from her knowledge that Kennedy’s official position could help her soon-to-be-orphaned son. As he states

23 Both Mani and Spivak address the fraught notion of “choice” in acts of sati. Spivak argues that for “the female ‘subject,’ a sanctioned self-immolation within Hindu patriarchal discourse…brings praise for the act of choice on another register. By the inexorable ideological production of the sexed subject, such a death can be understood by the female subject as an exception signifier of her own desire, exceeding the general rule of a widow’s conduct. The self-immolation of widows was not invariable ritual prescription. If, however, the widow did decide thus to exceed the letter of ritual, to turn back was a transgression for which a particular type of penance is prescribed. When before the era of abolition, a petty British officer was obliged to be present at each widow-sacrifice to ascertain its ‘legality,’ to be dissuaded by him after a decision was, by contrast, read as a mark of real free choice, a choice of freedom. Within the two contending versions of freedom, the constitution of the female subject in life was thoroughly undermined” (235).
that her “woman’s perception” allows her to “read the heart in the countenance, and see
the deep sympathy” with which he viewed her children, Kennedy acknowledges the
politics of sensibility operating in this colonial space (250). Rather than being at odds,
the widow’s sympathy, pragmatism, and victimization are reconciled as each makes her –
or rather, her type – a worthy candidate for and justification of British civilizing.

Kennedy’s insistence that the widow “really seemed more concerned that [he]
should not be inconvenienced, than disturbed by her own frightful part in the
approaching close of the ceremonies,” reinforces the privileged position of British
sensibility in the narrative – to say nothing of the strain between an imminent agonizing
death and the underwhelming diction of minor discomfort in inconvenience. Andrew
Rudd has recently suggested that “European writers in Bengal…were engaged in nothing
less than the construction of a new notion of sensibility, one adapted for the rigours and
cultural complexities of colonial conditions” (87). Rudd may be overstating how “new”
this deployment of sensibility was; after all, Lynn Festa has astutely argued that
sensibility always functioned “as a response to colonial expansion” (3). I take his point,
however, that while in metropolitan Europe the cult of sensibility was increasingly
derided as outmoded, Britons in India sought to preserve their national identity and
subjectivity by setting their own normative sensibility against the dangers of “going
native,” replacing overwrought emotion with innate moral sense and inner fortitude. This
insular conception of national affect, Rudd contends, “increasingly shut out [Indians]
from the colonial economy of sentiment” (88). Consequently, Kennedy’s privileging of
British sensibility depends on a sentimental portrayal of victimized womanhood, and a
sustained critique of Hindu attitudes toward death.
Typical of such reports, Kennedy’s article emphasizes the admirable femininity of the sati. About thirty years old, with a “round, pleasing face,” and “jocund” and “mirthful” features, the widow possesses an “exceedingly fair” complexion and the “peculiar beauty of her caste” (243). Her pleasant appearance is yet surpassed by a “loftiness of manner…a gracefulness of speech and attitude, approaching to [his] conception of the sublime” (244). Mani has observed that “[o]ne effect of such a valorizing of the beautiful widow engaged in apparently voluntary sati was that ‘sympathy’ was reserved for such women. Their deaths are rendered empathetically” (174). Kennedy crafts a sentimental heroine in order for her downfall to resonate more profoundly, for from this sympathetic and alluring woman, the widow is transformed into a ghastly thing “defiled” and “disheveled” (243). As she sits in the low-burning pile, Kennedy hears her “deep, sepulchral, hollow” cries, “the sounds breaking forth in the most distressingly unnatural resemblance of the human” (252-53). The voice with which the widow asserts her choice to burn becomes less legible as the “sepulchral” voice of death itself. When the flames burn more intensely, Kennedy repeats his observation that “her voice again became the appalling, most unnaturally-unhuman sound” (254). The widow’s perceived lack of humanity effectively undermines the description of the ceremony as “a sort of consecration, or her own apotheosis, by which she herself became a goddess” (251). Kennedy refuses to recognize the widow’s deification; her “unhuman-ness” is not a mark of the divine, but degraded instead into that of the “wild beast” who cannot escape its cage (253). Furthermore, although ostensibly witnessing an act of consensual sati, Kennedy’s dehumanization removes the subjectivity that would enable her to make that choice. His depiction thus dismantles the legibility and the legitimacy of
a supposedly legal sati on both a religious and consensual basis, the terms under which the debate sought to interpret the act.

Kennedy attributes the dehumanization of the sublime woman to Brahmin tyranny and more generally to Hindu apathy, both common tropes in colonial representations of India. The narrative is punctuated by moments of the widow’s seemingly faltering resolve being bolstered by the Brahmins’ vociferous encouragements. Although Kennedy states the widow’s name – Amba Bhaie – at the beginning of his recitation, this is the only time her name appears. Thereafter she is persistently referred to as the “poor widow” or “poor victim,” always relegated to a position of pitiable victimhood in the hands of Brahmin men. “Her part in this, and all the other prayers, was purely pantomimic,” Kennedy avers, stripping her agency as the “Brahmin opposite and facing her read the ritual in Shunscriit, which she could not understand; and the gooroo by her side whispered her what she was to do” (249).

Although he incriminates the men who direct the rite, Kennedy’s overarching critique is for the “lack of natural sympathy” shown by the native spectators (250). As Paul B. Courtright points out, Kennedy is discomfited by the contrast between the “carnivalesque atmosphere” surrounding the ritual and the “crowd’s zombielike indifference” towards the widow’s fate (44). Unlike the “slow-paced solemnity appropriate to [European] funeral decencies,” this ceremony is perturbingly unsympathetic. Kennedy repeatedly asserts his own subject position into his commentary on the apathetic crowd. “No expressions of grief were heard, nor a tear, that I could see, was shed” (251), he declares, interposing the first-person “I” between the sign (expression, tear) and action (crying) of affect. As the woman leaves her female friends to ascend the pyre, Kennedy tersely
notices how “[t]hey stood silent, and she went unmoved.” He concludes the same paragraph a few sentences later, with the melodramatic exclamation that the woman’s preparatory ablutions are “the baptism of death!” (248). The sentimental interjection in the account of unmoved and silent spectators positions British sensibility as an appropriate mourning corrective. Indeed, Kennedy relies on the intervening powers of the I/eye in order to qualify the very nature of her death: “I think I should have heard any unrestrainable shriek of the extreme agony had it been uttered; and observed any convulsive movement, or desperate attempt to break forth, had it been made. I do not think that either took place” (255). Thinking, hearing, observing, Kennedy returns to empirical observation to shore up his sentimental reading of the event, needing to determine the exact moment of death in order to harness and distribute the appropriate energies of mourning.

Kennedy concludes his account with a description of the pagodas, temples, and tombs that are erected on the site of the funeral pile to honour the deceased. “These tombs are painfully numerous in some sites,” laments Kennedy, “and apparently of the most remote antiquity. The heart bleeds to think of the scenes of human suffering and wretchedness they commemorate, – the bloodshed and the wrongs, – all man’s violence and cruelty, and woman’s faithfulness!” (256). Despite the violent register in which Kennedy inscribes them, these monuments seem to be a more fitting symbol of mourning than the ephemeral funeral pyre, ones that can be read, interpreted, and accounted for by the feeling British observer, unlike the final prayers of the sati which Kennedy is barred from hearing because they are “too hallowed to be repeated in the hearing of unsanctified persons” (251). Memorials are a recognizable symbol of grief that can be legibly
registered by the sanctimonious – if not sanctified – British “bleeding heart.” His reflections on the “monumental stone” provoke a frantic encomium of British imperial power:

Let us hope that a new day has dawned on India, and that these wretched sacrifices may be spoken of by future generations as things that were, before British dominion enlightened India; and may the beneficent rule of the young Island Queen of the West be made memorable in her eastern dominions by those blessings of moral, and political, and physical improvement, which once established, may go on conquering and to conquer, until every dark recess of the Cavern of Error shall have been enlightened, and every stronghold of cruelty and superstition been overthrown! (256)

Kennedy’s effusive panegyric inextricably classes imperial might in the realm of necropolitics, yoking the successful abolishment of sati to British conquest in perpetuity.

Although Kennedy’s article serves as a celebration of British administrative intervention in India, the text also contains an unconscious implication of Britain’s domestic inhabitants. In his critical depiction of the Indian crowd is a reminder that there are two audiences to this spectacle: the native spectators and the British metropolitan readers. Kennedy emphasizes his incredulity at the crowd’s apparent exhilaration in anticipation of the ceremony, doubting that the “European reader could understand and believe it” (244). The intrusion of the reader serves two purposes here. First, it duplicates the immediate crowd, bringing the metropolitan audience to the scene. Second, it confirms the imaginative distance the European has from the event, rendering the
widow’s actions incomprehensible despite her sympathetic portrayal. When the ceremony is over, Kennedy remarks that the spectators “simply clapped their hands, precisely like our applause at the theatre” (255). Although throughout the narrative he seeks to create a hermetically protected British sensibility, one distinct from Indian *sang froid*, his conclusion evokes a rapprochement between spectator and reader. “[T]he entertainment was over!” he proclaims, “and those who had no part to act had no further excitement to enjoy, and betook themselves to their several homes, no doubt highly edified and gratified” (255). Like Landon’s readers, Kennedy’s can absorb this death ritual with a sense of gratification at their own expenditure of sympathy for a woman who is never fully known or knowable except as a perpetual symbol of melancholy that justifies their presence – in writing and in empire – in her life and death. Kennedy tasks himself with bringing a correct and corrective grief to these proceedings, and the effect is to rally a self-selecting community of melancholic readers behind the imperial project.

**Felicia Hemans and the “Gift of Grief”**

Felicia Hemans’s poetry is perhaps the most well-known Romantic artifact to reside at the intersection of melancholic sensibility and imperial politics. One of the most widely read poets of the nineteenth century, Hemans outwardly appears to enshrine the domestic affections that undergird the imperial civilizing mission.⁴⁴ Rather than a jingoistic

---

⁴⁴ The traces of global politics mark so much of Hemans’s writing perhaps, because her own personal life was deeply impacted by England’s global reach. Born in Liverpool to a merchant father and the daughter of an Italian diplomat, Hemans began her life in a major commercial port city. When the family’s business was disrupted by the war, Hemans’s father emigrated to Canada. No stranger to a military life’s demands on the domestic circle, Hemans had two brothers who led distinguished careers in the army, and another who became a deputy assistant commissary-general in Upper Canada. Two of her sons would also eventually emigrate to America (DNB). Hemans’s reach even extended to India. After meeting Hemans in
celebration of empire, however, her popular poetry collection *Records of Woman* (1828) explores the fatal impact of colonialism on women’s lives, accounting for women’s experiences that have been effaced from official records. While Bruce Haley is not specifically speaking to female experience when he writes that “[u]nless mourning is given form as it is in an elegy, it leaves no record for the next generation” (189), his point speaks directly to Hemans’s mission in *Records of Woman*; she records the stories of women who would otherwise be forgotten by a patriarchal history that obscures and trivializes their experiences – an effort not lost on her audience. Norma Clarke confirms that Hemans’s “popularity with women readers testifies to the centrality of ‘the cradle, the hearthstone, and the death bed’ in women’s lives, and to their desire for literary representation of those experiences” (35-36). Haley adds that the poems in *Records of Woman* “seek to remonumentalize the record” because they demonstrate how

1820, Bishop Reginald Heber – bishop of Calcutta from 1823 to 1826 – became a mentor, encouraging her to write plays (Feldman xvii). Her husband, Captain Alfred Hemans, was also a military man. The marriage failed, however; Captain Hemans left for Italy in 1818, never to return to his family. Critics have taken this biographical incident as a potential source for the absent husbands and general sense of domestic angst in Hemans’s poems.

Several critics, such as Norma Clarke, Jerome McGann, and Myra Cottingham, have noted that in order to restore women to the historical record, Hemans effectively empties her poems of men. Cottingham refines this point to add that “the reason the males are absent, dead, or dying is because of war, and that war is the reason that home, for Hemans, is necessarily made up exclusively of mothers and children” (280). However, critics have suggested that to publicly criticize the cultural forces of patriarchy would be unwise in England’s post-revolutionary climate. Susan J. Wolfson acknowledges that in “the post-Wollstonecraft, revolution-anxious 1820s, Hemans’s contemporaries did not want to hear in her repeated connections of the political to the personal, and of private life to the public world, any emerging critique of the ideology of ‘feminine virtue’ or ‘universal’ female fate” (xvii). This would be especially true for a poet whose image was precisely that of the fundamentality feminine; that Hemans depended on the popularity of her poetry to support her family meant that any criticism she offered had to be especially veiled.

In her 1840 conduct book for mothers entitled *Woman’s Mission*, Sarah Lewis emphasizes the spiritual role nineteenth-century mothers were expected to play in the lives of their families. She notes that women were the “last at the cross, and the first at the sepulchre,” and as such, women had “no less an office than that of instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world, – restorers of God’s image in the human soul” (qtd. in McKnight 4). According to Wilson’s biblical precedent, then, a woman’s maternal duties emerge from the act of mourning.
inadequately subjects and feelings are typically memorialized (184). Indeed, Hemans’s records of female experience are most often erected as grim memorials, the global dispersal of which Charlotte Sussman has aptly called “a diaspora of the dead” (502). The compulsively melancholic tone of these poems and the overwhelming presence of dead and dying bodies register the empire as a necro space that Hemans sees fit to represent through elegy. However, even in the elegiac genre, Hemans encounters another record from which women historically have been excluded. “Longstanding sexual discrimination,” argues Peter M. Sacks, “has impinged on women’s experience of mortal loss; and the difficulty in identifying with predominantly male symbols of consolation greatly complicates woman’s work of mourning” (13). Characterizing her as a “self-conscious elegist,” Michael T. Williamson suggests that Hemans “writes elegiac poems that lament the waste of women’s psychic and imaginative energy on a world tainted by male death, deplore the absence of any commemorative interest in the histories of dead women, and represent dramatically disfiguring subject positions for women mourners” (19). Her choice of an unrelentingly grieving tone, therefore, allows Hemans to reinscribe women into two histories from which they have been erased: empire and elegy. Hemans’s restorative project is necessary because, Williamson posits, “[f]emale mourning produces so few artifacts…because women are seldom permitted to represent the dead, while dead women leave so few memorial records because…they die slowly and demurely” (27). Although I question how uniformly “demurely” women die in the writings of Hemans and Owenson (to which I return below), in the act and subject of sati they certainly find a death most consistently understood as gendered, colonial, and submissive.
Although critics agree that Hemans deploys the dynamics of mourning and melancholy to represent a uniquely female experience, this restorative project is complicated by her depiction of colonial women. Anthony Harding has noted how death in Hemans’s poems “is not so much the enemy of domestic affection,” but rather “a kind of guarantee of the significance of a life, particularly of a woman's life” (138). Yet the death of “other” women in Hemans’s poem often grants significance to metropolitan women’s lives at the expense of subaltern subjectivity and purpose. Tricia Lootens considers how the gendered nature of national identity in Hemans’s poems “[e]stablish[es] feminine melancholy as something akin to a patriotic duty,” focusing on the role of patriot’s graves as a source of national poetry as well as a means to constitute identity (243). Investigating the relationship between mourning, colonialism, and national identity, Lootens considers how graves can “help dissolve national identities into mythic forms that are endlessly capable of appropriation” (248). In their “capab[ility] of appropriation,” or in Leask’s aforementioned “absorption of strangeness,” the scenes of eastern mourning depicted in these poems slip into the register of melancholy. Just as the melancholic sufferer in the Freudian model absorbs the lost love-object, so too do Hemans’s poems absorb and appropriate orientalized women to stand in for the losses of British women in the imperial deathscape. In this Hemans participates in a common trope in nineteenth-century women’s writing. Sophie Gilmartin, for example, has demonstrated how sati is figured in nineteenth-century novels and periodicals as both “a metaphor for the British widow’s mourning rituals and for the plight of the British bride in an unhappy marriage” (141). Jenny Sharpe also traces how the idealization of a Victorian woman’s absolute devotion to the family was
characterized as a “doctrine of self-immolation” that intersects with sati. Although the similarity between the two types of self-immolation may attest to the common subjugation of British and Hindu women, Sharpe points out that only the Hindu woman is represented as an object and a victim who requires saving. “An attention to this difference,” Sharpe attests, “requires finding alternative ways to read the signs of subaltern women’s agency. There is no moment when these edges of a domestic and colonial history come together into a sharply defined narrative. The stories of European and Indian women must be maintained as discontinuous” (14). In trying to bring the experiences of European and colonial women together, then, Hemans does not create a nexus of shared victimhood; using sati as a metaphor, she instead immolates the subaltern woman on the pyres of metropolitan affect.

Most critics, including Nancy Moore Goslee and Kathleen Lundeen, have worked through the colonial politics in Hemans’s poetry by focusing on her depiction of Native Americans. Goslee has argued that Hemans “universaliz[es] common affective ground,” and thereby extends sympathy toward indigenous figures “as an emotional or spiritual colonizing” (239). By mourning the individual losses that take place in the American colonies – rather than the political loss of the colonies themselves – Hemans adopts the figure of the Native American as a symbol of loss, exile, and alienation – “a complex ideological representation of melancholy.” Interpreting Hemans’s melancholy as at once “individual and expressive” as well as a “collective cultural phenomenon,”

27 Nancy Moore Goslee avers that the “supposedly Native American genre of the death song bec[ame] popular as a literary genre among white American and white British writers alike. Speaking in the voice of the dying Indian…these lyrics sum up cultural values for individual behavior at crisis-point, expressing different degrees of defiance, melancholy, and prophetic vision” (247).
Goslee cogently points out the political stakes of Hemans’s affective verse: [“H]er imaginative re-creation of colonialism occurs under the protection of a patriotic melancholy that sees her poems only as fictions of loss and thus as less threatening – even as disarming – to the actual structures of empire” (257). Similarly, Lundeen provides an analysis of Hemans’s “Indian Woman’s Death Song” to demonstrate how “ethnicity exists in the poem solely in the service of gender,” asking whether Hemans’s “empathy with the woman [is] a testament to her freedom from cultural hegemony, or [if it is] evidence of a self-serving ploy by which she can exploit another culture for her own psychological gain?” (262). The question aptly brings together the individual and imperial gains at stake in Romantic representations of subaltern subjects. Lundeen contends that “Hemans has a double attitude toward race. Simultaneously accentuating and minimizing racial difference, she conceives of the native woman in her own Western image” (267). When Lundeen points out that “Hemans’s lack of outrage” at the Indian woman’s death is “chilling” because her happiness at the woman’s fate is “an affective state that reveals empathy to be potentially as dehumanizing as hatred or indifference” (270), she joins in Lynn Festa’s skepticism towards transcultural sympathy in British literature. Festa, like Lundeen, suggests that “sympathetic identification creates difference rather than similitude” by “creating a shared relationship to a common but excluded object about which the community has feelings” (4). Positing that the literary

28 Lundeen admits that “situating ‘Indian Woman's Death-Song’ in a matrix of present-day cultural issues is anachronistic, an empathic overstepping, since Hemans never intimates a political agenda, either in the poem itself or in her preface to the poem. Nowhere does she hint that the poem is designed to give a voice to a silenced member of an underrepresented group. Her sole desire appears to be to give herself a voice, something she can do only by proxy” (269).
mode of empire in the eighteenth century is sentimentality rather than epic, Festa argues that “sentimental texts helped create the terms for thinking about agency and intent across the geographic expanse of the globe by giving shape and local habitation to the perpetrators, victims, and causal forces of empire” (2). However, Festa contends that by “designating certain kinds of figures as worthy of emotional expenditure and structuring the circulation of affect between subjects and objects of feeling, the sentimental mode allowed readers to identify with and feel for the plight of other people while upholding distinctive cultural and personal identities; it thus consolidated a sense of metropolitan community grounded in the selective recognition of the humanity of other populations” (2). In considering the intersection between sentimental writing and colonial history, Festa brings to light the “acts of affective piracy” (2-3) that typify the writing of Landon, Hemans, and Owenson. Although Haley declares that the purpose of Records of Woman “is to ask what sort of monumental form women – [Hemans] and those she writes about – can use to speak” (184), the subaltern voice is not given speech. Hemans’s melancholic subjects fail to be inscribed as coherent and legible figures.

Although “The Bride of the Greek Isle” is not technically an Indian poem, Hemans’s melancholic gaze absorbs Greece and India into the same totalizing Orient. Both the poem’s placement in the collection – second in Records of Woman after the historical “Arabella Stuart” – and its Byronic epigraph highlight the proximity between British national identity and the East in terms of female mourning. 29 In the poem,

29 Sacks notes that “elegists seem to submit, by quotation or translation, to the somehow echoing language of dead poets” (25), and while Hemans’s quotations may serve to appropriate the authoritative language of other poets, those poets are not all dead. By including epigraphs from dead poets such as Byron, Schiller,
Hemans plays out a scene of grief on the stage of an orientalized female self-sacrifice, its heroine of “dark resplendent eye” and “dark hair” (15, 206) dying in a sati-like conflagration on her wedding day. Despite the title’s emphasis on matrimony, the poem privileges maternal rather than romantic love; the “bride” is therefore evoked to heighten the role of sati in the poem, a precursor to Landon’s “bride of Death!” Hemans introduces Eudora as “the bride of the morn” (6), the aural affinity between “morn” and “mourn” subtly establishing the poem’s melancholic tone. Indeed, Hemans foreshadows Eudora’s fate even in the poem’s pastoral opening, decking her with “[j]ewels flash[ing] out from her braided hair” (7), hinting at the flames that will later consume her. Although there has been no death in the poem yet, Eudora already sings a plaintive lay, suggesting that the female experience is somehow inevitably grievous. The poem’s speaker emphasizes the inevitability of loss in woman’s life by addressing the mother: “Mother! on earth it must be so, / Thou rearest the lovely to see them go!” (86-7). Hemans evokes the link between maternal separation and death when Eudora apostrophizes her “Mother!” (68) in her farewell. She sings, “I have found that holy place of rest / Still

---

Tasso, and Madame de Staël, and living poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Baillie, not to mention herself, Hemans creates a continuity of poetic history that transcends life, death, and gender. Hemans’s epigraphs thus stage mourning as what Schor calls “a force that constitutes communities and makes it possible to conceptualize history” (4), in this case, a history that includes female experience. Westover similarly notes that “[i]n Hemans’s poetry, literary history emerges as a series of intimate interpersonal relationships, felt in the blood and along the heart, carried on in texts and in special spaces. Hemans shows us poems conversing with one another in defiance of time, but she also shows us personal, bodily encounters at the sites of memory” (75).

30 The cause and effect that Hemans portrays between “rearing” and “leaving” speaks to the specifically maternal losses of empire, a connection also explored in “The Graves of a Household” from the same collection. In the poem, a mother mourns her children who were raised together, but who are now buried across the far reaches of the globe. Observing that these dead siblings are “explicitly linked neither to imperial glory nor to one another,” Lootens observes that “[o]n the other side of Hemans’s imperial appropriation through burial stands the dissolution of domestic identity, familiar and national” (250).
changeless, – yet I go!” (70-71). The line suggests the stillness and eternity of the grave as much as it does the comfort of a maternal bosom. Hemans counters the potentially despondent inertia connoted by “still,” however, by couching it between the dynamic exclamations “I leave thee!” (68) and “yet I go!” (71). Indeed, the flux between movement and paralysis recalls Daniel Albright’s claim that “the elegy is a genre of fits and starts, of freezings and thawing; the imagination becomes fluent for a while, even prodigal, and then some stab of grief, some exhaustion, paralyzes the movement of the verse” (189). Despite the emphasis on the maternal bond, Hemans somewhat cheekily casts the home and homeland as male spheres, as Eudora prepares to take leave of her family, and “She look’d on the vine at her father’s door, / Like one that is leaving his native shore” (19-20, emphasis mine). Switching the third-person pronoun from feminine to masculine within the same couplet, Hemans hints at the tendency of national narratives to erase the presence of women from its annals to monumentalize its male heroes. Instead, the poem diminishes the presence of men by centering its actions around women who are agents and victims alike of battle. In the poem’s second section, the idyllic wedding ceremony is disrupted by an urgent cluster of heptameter lines that announces the arrival of a “pirate-horde” (131). Once the battle erupts with the pirates, Hemans does not report on the heroic feats of Ianthis, Eudora’s new husband. Instead, he is found lying “[w]ith the blood from his breast in a gushing flow, / Like a child’s large tears in its hour of woe” (143-44). Rather than a hero fallen in battle, Ianthis’s fight is not deemed worthy of poetic representation, his final moments infantile rather than courageous.31

31 Myra Cottingham notes that the sculptural quality of dead male bodies in Hemans’s poems suggests
When the speaker declares that “Now must the red blood stream for wine!” (133), the poem casts Eudora’s fate in the realm of self-sacrifice by a syncretic foreshadowing that blends the figures of Christ and the sati. Hemans closes one stanza with the mother looking toward the ship where her daughter is being held captive by pirates, wondering, “had ocean’s breast / Rock’d e’en Eudora that hour to rest?” (180-81), and links to the next stanza by anadiplosis: “To rest? – the waves tremble! – what piercing cry / Bursts from the heart of the ship on high?” (182-83). The stasis of the phrasal repetition of “to rest” is placed in tension with the calamitous dashes, sounds, and movements that follow.

In its final section, the poem thus rejects the historical narrative that casts women as bystanders or victims. Amidst the ironic diction of binding – fetters, tame, twine, coils – Hemans depicts the boundless wrath of her subject. From a passive prisoner, Eudora is not rocked into somnolence but transformed into a vengeful heroine who sets fire to the ship of her captors. The fire “twine[s] the mast like a glittering snake” (192), echoing and dynamically reversing how Eudora wound herself around her dead husband in the previous section. Hemans thus plays on the etymology of sati – referring primarily to the person committing it and secondarily to the ritual act – as Eudora becomes both fire-starter and fire itself. In an echo of the initial pirate invasion, the “flashing poniards”

---

“that they are heroic, that is, that they had been victorious in battle. Since they are dying, or actually dead, it is clear that they cannot have been as victorious as their sculptural quality might like to suggest” (283). Hemans encodes a critique of war in these bodies because masculine warfare, avers Cottingham, “disrupt[s] the home by causing grief to women as lovers, to women as mothers of daughters whose marriages are in turn disrupted by warfare, and to women as mothers of sons who go to war” (283).

32 Tracing the obscure origins of sati, Ania Loomba follows Romilla Thapar in suggesting that it “began as a ritual confined to the Kshatriya caste (composed of rulers and warriors),” thus providing a “heroic female counterpart to the warrior’s death in battle” (210). Contrasting Eudora’s heroism with Ianthis’s inutility, Hemans seems to invite a similar comparison that overrides the warrior’s absent glory.
(137) of the previous section have been transposed into “bright arrows” simultaneously changing the “darkening brows” of the male fight into the triumphant “glee” of Eudora’s protest. Engulfing the ship, the fire finally “take[s] the flag’s high place in air” (196), replacing a symbol of patriotism with the violence of melancholy destruction. Hemans adopts the heroic interpretation of the sati, proclaiming how “Proudly she stands, like an Indian bride / On the pyre with the holy dead beside” (217-18). “But,” writes Hemans, “a shriek from her mother” (219) interrupts Eudora’s triumphant moment. The poem ends not with Eudora’s heroism, but with her asking for pardon while reaching out “in vain” for her mother who must impotently witness the death. Although the act of sati allows Hemans to rewrite female death as historical and heroic, rather than erasable, the poem nevertheless ends with grief rather than triumph. Hemans not only records the individual losses of women, but also condemns the lack of space given to the energy released in grief, allowing it to manifest as both a violent immolation, and a poetic celebratory protest. When Hemans writes, “Oh! could this work be of woman wrought? / Yes! ’twas her deed! – by that haughty smile / It was hers! – She hath kindled her funeral pile!” (211-13), her words can apply not only to Eudora’s actions, but also to her own work as a poet in engineering Eudora’s death. Clarke notes that “Eudora is setting fire to a ship, but the images evoke heroic creativity, free, grand, and larger than life – especially woman’s life” (79). Hemans’s evocation of heroism, creativity, and freedom, however, erases the

33 Of course, the final sight of Eudora on the deck of a blazing ship must recall Hemans’s “Casabianca,” which opens with similar imagery: “The boy stood on the burning deck / Whence all but he had fled; / The flame that lit the battle’s wreck / Shone round him o’er the dead” (1-2). In this poem, as in Records of Woman, Hemans questions the sacrifices made in the name of patriarchal and imperial victories. Perhaps Hemans’s most well-known poem today, Paula Feldman notes that “Casabianca” “continued for decades to be a school recitation piece and thus a favourite subject for tasteless parody” (xii).
material reality, the incredible anguish, of a woman’s body burning alive.\textsuperscript{34} Transposed by Hemans, the “haughtiness” of the act reminds the reader of the uncomfortable aesthetic appropriation of subaltern women’s grief, bodies, and deaths.

Published in 1828, \textit{Records of Woman} appeared at the height of the sati debates leading to its prohibition in 1829, and its Oriental poems assume the terms of that discourse. “The Indian City” may not feature an act of sati, but it nevertheless adopts the model of the widow’s “willing” and “heroic” death to mobilize a sympathetic intervention. Like Landon, Hemans costumes her poem in the drapery of the East, setting the scene in “genii-gardens old,” amidst the “Banian,” “stems of the cocoas,” “pagodas,” “lotus-flowers” (10-15). But like the pastoral setting that begins “The Bride of the Greek Isle,” Hemans’s peaceful Indian landscape is haunted by the diction of violence and conflagration – a nearby city’s domes “Red as if fused in the burning sky,” groves “pierced” by sunlight, “blazing” spires” and “shafts of fire” (1-12). The first and last words of the opening stanza are “royal” and “[Brahmin] prayer,” containing the natural setting within the marks of social authority. This act of containment, emphasized by the poem’s controlled heroic couplets, presents the Hindu enclave as an exclusive community. The insularity of the place is broken up by the introduction in the next stanza of a “noble Moslem boy” who in Wordsworthian ecstasy enjoys the natural “scene of beauty in breathless joy” (27-28). Hemans’s tightly rhyming couplets break down, however, as the Muslim boy penetrates the Hindu “holy ground” (36): “there lay the

\textsuperscript{34} Rajeswari Sunder Rajan considers how the radical subjectivity of pain may provide an understanding of the sati that finally acknowledges her not merely as a token of colonial, feminist, or reforming ideologies (see “The Subject of Sati”).
water, as if enshrin’d / In a rocky urn from the sun and wind, / Bearing the hues of the
grove on high, / Far down thro’ its dark still purity” (37-40). The poem’s dissolution into
eye-rhymes disrupts the harmony of the Hindu holy ground, casting doubt over the
“purity” of the water that appears “as if” enshrined (emphasis mine). Despite the poem’s
romantic depiction of landscape, Hemans doubts the holiness of this Hindu place,
revealing a broader intolerance of Hindu religion. This doubt is borne out by the Muslim
boy’s fate, as he is killed by the “children of Brahma born” for profaning their holy
ground. From a delighted child he is transformed into a dying soldier, “one by a conflict
worn, / With his graceful hair all soil’d and torn / And a gloom on the lids of his
darken’d eye, / And a gash on his bosom – he came to die!” (69-72). Hemans’s poem
thus relies on the same characterization of Hindus that informed official discourse and
Kennedy’s eyewitness account of sati. First, by murdering an innocent child, Hemans’s
Hindus confirm their perceived lack of sympathetic feeling. Second, the murder
demonstrates the wrath incurred by interfering in Hindu religious customs, evincing the
anxiety surrounding British intervention in the practice of sati.

Although she does not commit sati – the boy’s mother is Muslim, not Hindu – the
way in which the central female character mourns likewise provides the grounds for a
clash of cultures in India. Similar to the sati, Maimuna is a widow, and she recalls how
her young son “had kiss’d from her cheeks the widow’s tears” (103).35 Like “The Bride

35 In both “The Bride of the Greek Isle” and “The Indian City,” Hemans features a widow, but largely
ignores the husbands in order to emphasize the relationship between mother and children. The figure of the
widow as daughter/mother may be particularly affecting for Hemans because as Paula Feldman has
claimed, “Hemans experienced her mother’s death as a kind of widowhood” (xxiii)
of the Greek Isle,” then, this poem privileges the maternal relationship over the conjugal. Hemans relies on maternal affection as a universally potent symbol. As the boy’s life slips away, the speaker muses on the forms “our love” tries to preserve as they “fade from us, while we yet hold” them “clasp’d to our bosoms” (91-94, emphasis mine). “Alas!” concludes the speaker, “and we love so well / In a world where anguish like this can dwell!” (107-08, emphasis mine). Hemans’s repeated use of first-person plural pronouns and adjectives – us, we, our – affectively accepts Maimuna into a community of grieving mothers, admitting the oriental woman into the fold of sympathetic metropolitan readers. Yet the way in which Maimuna mourns distances her from the “common woe” of all mothers (97). The speaker reports that as Maimuna

    bow’d down mutely o’er her dead –
    They that stood round her watch’d in dread;
    They watch’d – she knew not they were by –
    Her soul veil’d in its agony. (109-12)

Rather than seeking consolation in the network of people around her, Maimuna’s mute and myopic grief severs her from her immediate community who watch her with “dread” instead of empathy. Hemans once more employs eye-rhymes (by/agony), as well as multiple dashes, to reproduce the breakdown of empathy in the face of Maimuna’s powerful melancholy. Lundeen provides a theory of empathy that aptly addresses Maimuna’s social position, and accounts for the difficult ethical position the reader faces when encountering Hemans’s colonial subjects. “Like metaphor,” affirms Lundeen, “empathy claims that something is like, but is not, something else, so that even when openly expressed, it is at once a condition of sympathy and alienation. Or, to put it
another way, empathy manifests the apparent affinity one person has with another, but in so doing it magnifies the differences between them” (269). Hemans simultaneously asks the reader to identify with and be wary of Maimuna; she may grant Maimuna a supposedly universal maternal love, but her melancholic muteness and violence make her illegible.

The distancing of Maimuna from the reader and from her own network is relentless, as she is described as “the lonely one” (123), staying in “one tent from the rest apart” (155). Hemans entombs Maimuna within her own melancholy. Recalling Freud’s melancholic absorption of the lost love-object, Maimuna remains alone and “full of death” (160). She refuses to “weep,” “sink,” “sleep,” or even to bury her child’s body until the nearby Hindu city is destroyed, its “ruins…/…piled for its victim’s monument” (121-135). Maimuna thus resists the social functions of mourning and funerals to reintegrate a mourner into a sympathetic community. Her grief is sublimated instead by an extreme display of violence; to avenge her son’s death, Maimuna raises an army and unleashes a destructive “War!…Moslem war!” (146) on the Hindu city. Maimuna travels “from realm to realm” to tell her “tale,” her words acting like “a spell to unsheath the sword” (161-64). Her forces gathered, Maimuna leads the charge with “the might of a queenly foe,” her “faintest tone” interpreted by her followers as “a Sybil’s breath of prophetic thought” (171-78). From a mother suffering a common woe, to a lone and mute cipher, Maimuna is transformed into a creature of legend, a sorceress and prophetess conjuring spells and violence.

Like Eudora, Maimuna’s mourning “kindle[s] that lightning flame” of vengeance (170). But Hemans insists that “transient and faithless” revenge cannot, ultimately,
replace the work of mourning (180), and diagnoses Maimuna with a fatal “haunted fever” (184). “Sickening,” Maimuna rejects her martial “renown” and quickly “wither[s]” (185, 188). Hemans compares Maimuna’s abdication to how “a king in death might reject his crown” (186). Reverting to a masculine metaphor suggests the dearth of language or imagery available to her to talk about the intersection of female grief and power. In her weakening state, Maimuna is returned to the familiar maternal role from the poem’s beginning, murmuring “a low sweet cradle song” that sounds “[s]trange midst the din of a warrior throng” (201-02). Reclaiming her prescribed demure social role, Maimuna recalls the necessity of burying her son: “Give him proud burial at my side! / … / When the temples are fallen, make there our grave” (208-10). Her proclamation serves as a grisly reminder that while she has travelled from “realm to realm” and has had time to raise an army from “Tartar” to “Araby,” not to mention raze an entire city, her son’s corpse has been mouldering where he fell. Whereas previously Hemans used first-person plural pronouns and adjectives to forge an empathetic connection to

36 Sacks suggest that “revengers are, in a sense, elegists manqués” (65).
37 A comparison may be drawn between Hemans’s king simile and the poem “Ivan the Czar” from the same collection. In both instances, the death of a child occurs as the direct result of violent patriarchal tyranny. Unlike Maimuna, however, Ivan gives up warfare after his son’s death in battle. He, too, dies “humbly” from grief. In “The Peasant Girl on the Rhone,” Hemans provides another example of paternal mourning, but in this case, the paternal bond is no rival for its maternal equivalent, and dissipates almost as soon as the child is severed from his father. The name of the deceased son is now only heard in drunken tribute and battle song “round the hearth” (39) – the traditional space of feminine domesticity. This space reinforces the idea that women serve as “repositories of cultural value” (Wolfson xvii), and indeed, as the locus of mourning. The speaker laments the male impulse to rush the work of mourning when the father quickly seems to forget his son: “Alas! To think of this! – the heart’s void place / Filled up so soon! – so like a summer cloud, / All that we lov’d to pass and leave no trace! – / He lay forgotten in his early shroud” (47-50). Because of the insufficiency of male mourning, Hemans seems to critically suggest that the reason men need monuments like the richly sculpted DeCouci family mausoleum is precisely because their grief is inadequate. Hemans introduces a peasant girl who remonumentalizes the dead. The flowers she leaves are equated with the tomb’s sculpted garlands, thus creating a new, more affective and effective feminine memorial. In fact, through her melancholic presence, she becomes part of his crypt, and seems to die of mourning.
Maimuna, the “our” here instead links her uncomfortably to the decayed body of her son, and distances her from the reader. Maimuna ultimately dies of melancholy, the “haunted fever” that renders her grief alien rather than coherently heroic or comfortably sympathetic. Hemans’s deployment of Maimuna confirms that there are, in fact, “no words for that common woe,” because she resists identification with this mourner. The poem thus highlights how Romantic writers deploy the figure of the melancholic other in order to establish a hierarchy of affect, wherein metropolitan readers may share a “common woe” with each other by excluding the illegible subaltern woman, despite a supposedly shared maternal affection.

The poem concludes with the Indian city reduced to ruin by “flame” and “the sword of the Moslem” (17, 19), and it is in this “city of ruin” that “the boy and his mother at rest [are] laid” (222). Once the Muslim army departs, Hemans turns the city into a Romantic ruin, its formerly stately mantles, thrones, and squares now overrun with wild vines, snakes, and jungle grass – a formulaic return to vegetation typical of the traditional elegy, according to Sacks. “[T]he unique death is absorbed into a natural cycle of repeated occasions,” posits Sacks, “and the very expression of mourning is naturalized as though it too were but a seasonal event” (24). By burying Maimuna and her son in ruins, Hemans attempts to insert them into the seasonal cycles of death and rebirth that inform the elegy. More than a metonymy for Maimuna’s grief, however, the ruins of the Indian city are the scars of empire – the evidence of Mughal martial might conquering Hindu India – hearkening instead to a longstanding history of imperial death and destruction. The ruins of cultural conflict – unlike the vegetation of the elegiac tradition – cannot offer the consolation of elegy. In his analysis of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley’s
orientalism, Saree Makdisi contends that “Shelley’s vision of the East is ruthlessly violent, for he symbolically depopulates a space in order to establish the possibility (or even inevitability) of its reclamation as part of some suddenly invented ‘Western’ heritage” (142). “Emptied of their peoples,” adds Makdisi, “the living cities of the Orient are rendered as tombs of the dead, frozen museum-piece images, icons of antiquity,” which “exis[t] as signs to be read and suddenly understood” by Europeans (142). Like Shelley, Hemans appropriates the grief of the subaltern woman, and refuses her the consolation of mourning and community in order to mobilize that grief toward a hostile razing of India. The titular Indian city is violently emptied and literally rendered as Maimuna and her son’s tomb. Hemans rewrites the European domination of India by enlisting a Muslim army, and depicts the mutually assured destruction of Hindus and Muslims, clearing the colonial stage for its European actors to arrive unimpeded. In this imperial conflict, the British are left conveniently unstained by the blood of native mothers and children – a necessary corrective for the civilizing mission.38

**The Missionary: Sati, Subjecthood, and the Melancholy Empire**

Like Landon and Hemans, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) navigates the Indian colonial space using a complicated offer and retraction of transcultural sympathy. Although Owenson’s 1811 novel *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* is set in seventeenth-century Portuguese Goa and features a Portuguese protagonist, scholars have

---

38 Hemans thus reworks the late eighteenth-century narrative that characterized the East India Company’s activities as rapacious and violent. This view of colonial work is in stark contrast to Phebe Gibbes’s description in *Hartly House, Calcutta* of a British soldier who rapes a native girl and murders her father. See Joseph (chapter 2) for a discussion of the scene.
acknowledged that the novel is a “thinly disguised commentary on British colonial policy” (Neff 392). Kathryn Freeman points out, however, the difficulty of coherently locating Owenson’s own stance on imperial politics within the novel; her unusual choice as a woman writer to adopt a male point of view with her protagonist, as well as the clear influence of William Jones and the Asiatic Society’s Orientalist scholarship, suggest a tacit support of the British imperial project. However, Freeman maintains that by tracing “the emergence of Luxima’s subjectivity” throughout the narrative, Owenson takes a more “radical perspective of India than the Orientalists of the Asiatic Society” (27-28n.10). Frances Botkin, too, locates the novel’s resistance to imperial domination in its female native character, Luxima, whose “performance of sati disrupts colonial and missionary power” (36). While critics have brought careful attention to the novel’s

---

39 Siraj Ahmed also explains the significance of Owenson setting the novel in this period: “the imperial relationship was especially complicated, because while Goa was a Portuguese colonial territory, Portugal itself had recently become a province of the Spanish Empire. Hence, her choice of Goa as a setting enables Morgan to discuss two kinds of imperialism: not only that which obtains between Europe and India, but also that which occurs within Europe’s borders. The retrospective placement of the imperial relationship in seventeenth-century Goa enables Morgan, more specifically, to gesture toward the present realities not only of British imperialism in India, but also of British imperialism in Ireland and of the Napoleonic Empire on the European continent” (“Unlimited” para 20). For more important political context, see Cóilín Parsons’ analysis of Owenson’s revisions to the novel, published in 1859 as Luxima, The Prophetess: A Tale of India. Parsons suggests that the revisions are not merely a cosmetic removal of outdated sentimental prose, but that Owenson rewrites the novel as a commentary on the Mutiny of 1857-58, just as the 1811 novel provided a an implicit gloss on the Vellore mutiny of 1806-07.

40 Balachandra Rajan also testifies to Owenson’s ambiguous political stance: “Enthusiastic cooperation with a discourse humbly endorses its fictions of self-justification, but it also offers an irrefutable way of subverting those fictions, a possibility appealing in its potential for mimicry as mockery to women writers and to subject peoples. It appears, moreover, that Owenson read The Missionary, as it progressed, repeatedly after dinner to ‘distinguished guests,’ who insisted on making their own contribution. Subversive surrender may have been the only way to cope with the unwanted views of experts. Owenson’s novel can and perhaps should be read along these lines, although…she is drawn into and does not merely adopt the discourse she both affirms and interrogates” (131).

41 Although I suggest that Owenson’s critique of empire problematically reduces Luxima to an exotic object emptied of subjectivity, I take Rudd’s point that it would be “problematic in the extreme to cast individual literature authors as mere agents in the colonial state given that many…authors…sought to
colonial politics, none has accounted for the dynamics of melancholy that organize the
text, producing an illegible native subject with whom the reader cannot coherently
sympathize. Indeed, orienting our analysis with the help of necropolitics allows us, I
argue, to consider Owenson’s engagement with imperialist discourse in a way that moves
beyond a simple pro- or anti-imperialism binary.

Its opening chapter locates *The Missionary* squarely in the realm of melancholy
and its affective politics. In the very first sentence of the novel, Owenson declares that
“[i]n the beginning of the seventeenth century, Portugal, bereft of her natural sovereigns,
had become an object of contention to various powers in Europe” (71). By characterizing
Portugal as “bereft,” the novel dramatizes the relationship between mourning and
politics, attributing human affect to national conflict. Owenson further links Portugal’s
gloom to its “discordant” national identity:

The mountains; the ocean; the lake of subterraneous thunder; the ruins of
Moorish splendor; the vestiges of Roman prowess; the pile of monastic
gloom: – magnificent assemblages of great and discordant images! What
various epochs in time; what various states of human power and human
intellect, did not ye blend and harmonize, in one great picture! What a
powerful influence were not your wilderness and your solemnity, your
grandeur and your gloom, calculated to produce upon the mind of
religious enthusiasm, upon the spirit of genius and melancholy, upon a

compromise, counteract or in some way reform existing colonial practices. The sentimental premises of
sympathy moreover encouraged them to engage with colonised peoples as fellow subjects and equals,
however naïve or misguided such efforts may appear from a postcolonial perspective today” (9).
character formed of all the higher elements of human nature, upon such a mind, upon such a genius, upon such a character as thine, Hilarion! (72)

Portugal’s cacophonous collision of natural elements, its sea and air clashing in “subterranean thunder,” is thus deployed as an image of the country’s national unconscious, releasing the imperial syncretism that troubles its history.

Owenson’s palimpsestic landscape not only personifies Portugal as a pathological mourner unable to reconcile the political bodies it has absorbed, but also produces the novel’s protagonist, Hilarion, as a “spirit of genius and melancholy” (72). “Dead to all those ties, which, at once, constitute the charm and the anxiety of existence,” Hilarion’s monastic insularity transforms him into an embodiment of melancholic identification with death. Owenson emphasizes the totalizing influence – conscious and unconscious – of the landscape on his character, insisting that “all within, and all without his monastery, contributed to cherish and to perpetuate the religious melancholy and gloomy enthusiasm of his character.” Hilarion performs his religious exercises “cradled” on a cliff, “rocked” by a storm, or “buried amidst the ruins of the Moorish castle.” Internally and externally, from cradle to grave, Hilarion reads as an overdetermined emblem of melancholy, shaped and scarred by imperial history. The religious zeal that inspires veneration and qualifies him for a mission to India is linked to the “sensitive delicacy of a morbid conscience” which “plunge[s] him into habitual sadness (76). Hilarion’s character thus inextricably links melancholy and the politics of affect more generally to the imperial civilizing
Owenson initially depicts Hilarion’s civilizing mission as a secure undertaking, bolstered by historical precedent. Finally landing in India, the “soul,” “imagination,” and “memory” of the missionary are confronted with “those events in human history, which stimulate…the powers of latent genius, rouse the dormant passions into action, and excite man to sow the seeds of great and distant events, to found empires, or to destroy them” (80). Much like his native Portugal, India reveals to Hilarion its landscape marked by imperial history, and endorses the mission. As his boat travels down the Indus, everything reminds Hilarion “of the enterprise of Alexander,” especially the places “where Alexander fought, where Alexander conquered!” (85). Indeed, the Indian landscape presents to Hilarion a naturally sanctioned conquest, as he beholds the river “memorable from its connexion with the most striking events in the history of the world; whose course became a guide to the spirit of fearless enterprise, and first opened to the conqueror of Asia a glimpse of those climes which have since been so intimately connected with the interests of Europe, which have so materially contributed to the wealth and luxury of modern states” (84-85). Although this passage describes centuries of western conquest in India, it concludes that these Eastern climes have also “obviously influenced the manners and habits of western nations” (85). Even though Hilarion

---

42 It should be noted, however, that Owenson’s 1811 novel precedes parliament’s renewal of the East India Company’s charter in 1813, including the Pious Clause, which lifted the ban on British missionary activity in India. Ahmed helpfully reminds us that, “[a]lthough we tend to assume that European colonialism always fundamentally involved a civilizing mission, the East India Company’s government in India explicitly avoided such a project throughout the eighteenth century. The Company believed that any attempt to Anglicize the natives would offend their religious sensibilities, leading to unrest, political instability, and hence decreased revenue.” Ahmed adds that “the civilizing mission and the politics of empire are to an extent mutually exclusive” (“Unlimited” para 5).
benefits from a history of conquest, invoking the dominion of Adam and Alexander, his power is not without counterinfluence. Nor is he in control of his own identity. The abstraction of identity is evinced when “[d]uring the voyage” to India, Owenson stops referring to him as Hilarion entirely, addressing him instead as “the Missionary” (78). Hilarion is already a melancholic, prone to the fragmentation of identity, and his colonial travel initiates a further loss of self.

Hilarion’s unstable personhood is constituted by his national identity, triggered by his colonial voyage, and compounded by his relationship with Luxima, the beautiful Hindu priestess. After their first encounter, she “gradually became the sole and incessant subject of his thoughts; and her idea was so mingled with his religious hopes, so blended with his sacred mission, so intimately connected with all his best, his brightest views and purest feelings, that, even in prayer, she crossed his imagination” (101). The diction of syncretism that characterizes her influence – mingled, blended, connected, crossed – foreshadows the tenor of the relationship. Throughout the novel, Owenson matches the diction of syncretism with that of reciprocity. After a particularly illuminating interview with Luxima, Hilarion is convinced that “in the same light as the infidel appeared to him, in such had he appeared to her; alike beyond the pale of salvation, alike dark in error” (113-14, emphasis mine). The passage’s parallelism, racial puns (pale, dark), and diction of equality thus undermine the differences between the characters. Instead, using the same diction, redundant formulations, and alliteration, Owenson emphasizes the sympathy that exists between them: “In this sacred communion, the Christian Saint and the Heathen Priestess felt in common and together; and their eyes were only withdrawn from heaven, to become fixed on each other. The beams of both were humid, and both
secretly felt the *sympathy* by which they were *united*” (120, emphasis mine). Freeman, in her discussion of the novel’s ironic treatment of male sensibility, similarly notes how the “contrapuntal narrative perspectives of Hilarion and Luxima…decentralize Hilarion’s point of view” (22). Owenson ostensibly opposes Hilarion and Luxima as symbolic representative figures from “the most opposite regions of earth”: “she, like the East, lovely and luxuriant; he, like the West, lofty and commanding: the one, radiant in all the lustre, attractive in all the softness which distinguishes her native regions; the other, towering in all the energy, imposing in all the vigour, which marks his ruder latitudes: she, looking like a creature formed to feel and to submit; he, like a being created to resist and to command” (109). However, the persistent parallelism levels their differences, as Owenson adds that “the one [is] no less enthusiastic in her brilliant errors, than the other confident in his immutable truth” (109). The final parallelism aligns Luxima’s “brilliant errors” with Hilarion’s “immutable truth,” effectively invalidating the very nature of that truth. This ironic depiction of Hilarion’s “truth” returns them to equal footing by deflating the inherently Western power he commands in the preceding sentences.

Despite Owenson’s attempt to dismantle Hilarion’s supposedly inherent Western dominance, the sympathy established between Hilarion and Luxima cannot undo the power hierarchies of empire. “The trope of ‘human sympathy’,” avers Sharpe, “does not establish a common identity between colonizer and colonized so much as it identifies the racial superiority of the English” (52). Like Festa who maintains that sympathy produces

---

43 Freeman also notes how Hilarion’s “extreme neurosis” triggered by his desire for Luxima “would be labeled hysteria if applied to a woman. Indeed, by displacing this ‘feminine disorder’ onto the embodiment of patriarchy, Owenson underscores the latent sensibility that has been driving him all along” (25), and, I would add, that drives the politics of imperial affect.
more difference than similarity between metropolitan and colonial subjects, Rudd is skeptical of sympathy’s humanitarian potential. In his recent study on sympathy in British literature about India, Rudd explores the failure of sympathy to regulate emotional transfers between Britain and India. Relying on Scottish Enlightenment models of sympathy to frame his argument, Rudd contends that India was too remote – both geographically and culturally – to engage meaningfully the metropolitan reader’s imagination. Although sympathy and sentimentalism could not act as “effective binding agent[s] of empire” (15), Rudd maintains that “the sympathetic imagination was cast in the role of tragic hero: doomed to fail but compelled to strive for connection regardless” (17). Furthermore, the overwrought sympathy between Hilarion and Luxima is so persistently associated with death that it is far more melancholic than romantic. As their relationship becomes more intimate, Hilarion and Luxima are transformed from vibrant representatives of religious spirit to spirits trapped between life and death.

Hilarion’s frame “tremble[s] with uncontrollable emotion, and the paleness of death overspread[s] his face” as he preaches the virtue of conversion to Luxima (152). Indeed, Owenson throws her characters into such a frenzied yet impotent emotional state that death becomes the only refuge from feeling. When thrown into a particularly fraught

44 Rudd turns to the early treatises of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers such as Frances Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith to contextualize Britain’s imaginative encounter with the East: “Eighteenth-century moral philosophers remarked upon two qualities of sympathy which, if followed to their logical conclusions, placed any attempt to conceive of a remote and culturally different nation such as India in doubt. The first concerned spatial difference: the strength of an idea was held to be in proportion to its physical proximity to the self…Hume argued that the outermost boundary of imaginative sympathy was the nation state, and believed that the transfer of ideas within the polity was constitutive of national character but could travel no further. The second was the imagination’s selectiveness in gravitating towards certain objects, creating what might be termed a hierarchy of affect. The sociable transfer of ideas teaches us to sympathise with what is most recognizable to us, hence the imagination cannot easily access what is culturally unfamiliar” (2-3).
state of excitement by a potential rival for Luxima’s affection, Hilarion, in a “temporary suspension of existence,” “lay as though death had given peace to those feelings which nothing in life could at the moment soothe or assuage” (157). When he rises, he feels “agitated by that vague consciousness of misery, which disturbs, without being understood, when the mind, suddenly awakened from the transient suspension of its powers, has not yet regained its full vigour of perception, nor the memory collected and arranged the freshly traced records of some stranger woe, and when the faculty of suffering, alone remains to us in all its original force and activity” (160). For Hilarion, affection and sympathy manifest as the “acute feelings” and “exquisite sensibility” (171) of melancholy. Everything thus becomes an outward symbol for his inner affective state. Even the cross hanging from the holy thread around Luxima’s neck “awaken[s] sensations of love and melancholy” in him (184). Through Hilarion’s love for Luxima, Owenson merges sentiment and imperial conquest under the aegis of melancholy:

He who truly loves, will still seek, or find, a reference in every object, to the state and nature of his own feelings; and that the fate of a mighty empire should be connected with the secret emotions of a solitary heart, and that ‘the pomp and circumstance of war’ should associate itself with the hopes and fears, with the happiness and misery of a religious recluse living in remote wilds, devoted to the service of Heaven, and lost to all the passions of the world, was an event at once incredible – and true! (136-37)

---

45 Owenson rewrites the imperial contest over India between British and Mughal powers as a sentimental romantic rivalry when Hilarion becomes jealous of the Mughal “hero and prince” Solyman, “the gallant son of Daara, the idol of the empire” who vies for Luxima’s affection (137).
The fate of an empire and of the heart are linked by Hilarion’s mission. Like the melancholic’s impulse to absorb traits of the lost love-object, our lover seeks sympathetic identification with both the colonial landscape and its representative subject. Resistant to the affective response he has to Luxima, Hilarion desires to “conquer” those feelings “entombed” in his heart, turning the power of necromantic conquest against himself.

The novel’s morbid semantic field not only characterizes colonial sympathy as a melancholic affect, but also propels the narrative towards its climactic act of sati that haunts the entire tale. From her introduction, Luxima’s character and social position are determined by sati. After the death of her first husband, to whom she was betrothed as a child but never saw again, the “[t]ender, pious, and ambitious Luxima would have ascended the funeral pile,” but she chose instead to become a Brachmachira so as not to abandon her grandfather (97). Although Luxima is continually depicted as a unique and treasured prize, her personal history stereotypes her most feminine traits. As Sharpe has argued, the British representation of sati “locates female passivity in Hindu women” (49), and indeed Owenson’s description conforms to the type: “Pure and tender, faithful and pious, zealous alike in their fondness and faith, they immolate themselves as martyrs to both, and expire on the pile which consumes the objects of their affection, to inherit the promise which religion holds out to their hopes; for the heaven of an Indian woman is the eternal society of him whom she loved on earth” (96). Owenson entrenches these female characteristics in antiquity, affirming that “[s]uch were they, when Alexander first invaded their country – such are they now” (96). Invoking Alexander confirms the

46 It is precisely in “the silent passivity of the Hindu woman” that Sharpe locates “the grounds for the speaking subject of feminist individualism” (55).
imperial politics embedded in the representation of subaltern women, and recalls Hilarion’s own self-identification with the Western conqueror. Despite the social power her position as Brachmachira affords her, Luxima regrets having been “saved” from the funeral pile, feeling as though she was “robbed” of a “glorious death” (150).

Owenson’s ubiquitous evocation of sati in the novel does not create a cohesive critique of imperial power or of women’s subjection more generally, but instead destabilizes the legibility of colonial subjects and spaces. Merging the language of melancholy with sati, Luxima experiences a “deadly sickness of the soul” when she feels that she and Hilarion should part, insisting that they must “remember [their] respective vows, and immolate [themselves] to their performance” (179). Similarly, Hilarion characterizes his vow to give up Luxima as a “great immolation” (182). If sati guarantees the “eternal society” of its two parties, then Luxima and Hilarion’s lexical register ironically confirms their inability to separate. More than simply the equivocations of naïve lovers, however, the instability of sati’s lexical register points to the very illegibility of the subject of sati: the native woman. Luxima transforms the act of self-sacrifice from that of immolation to conversion: “that they may know the single solitary convert thy powers have made, is more than all the proselytes thy brethren e’er brought to kiss the Cross: - this I shall do less in faith than love; not for my sake, but for thine. – Yet, oh! be thou near me at the altar of sacrifice; let me cling to thee to the last” (231-32). Her unconvincing consensual conversion and devotion “to the last” recalls the fraught notion of consent that Mani and Spivak have uncovered in accounts of sati. Indeed, even the morbid language in which Hilarion characterizes the conversion undermines its success. As he approaches the “haunts of civilized society” where the
convent awaits, he “gloomily anticipate[s] the disappointment which await[s] his return to Goa,” and he considers “the youth and loveliness he was about to entomb, the feelings and affections he was about to sacrifice – the warm, the tender, the impassioned heart he could devote to a cold and gloomy association, with rigid and uncongenial spirits” (228, emphasis mine). As the novel approaches its climax, Luxima moves from being an eloquent representative of her faith to an exotic cipher. As Luxima suffers herself to wear a novice’s habit, attend Church, and perform Christian devotions, she becomes increasingly melancholic: “the secret disorder of her mind was only visible in her countenance; which wore the general expression of confirmed melancholy, the sadness of unutterable affliction” (243). Indeed, the unutterable secrecy of melancholy oppresses communication throughout the novel. A “deathlike silence” is repeatedly described as hanging around Hilarion and Luxima, shrouding their relationship – but especially Luxima’s position – in illegibility (157, 186, 187, 189). After Hilarion’s dangerous encounter with flaming bamboo, Owenson narrates that Luxima “spoke of the danger which he had recently incurred for her sake, and spoke of it with all the fervor which characterized her eloquence” (214), yet her speech is never rendered. For a character whose “fervor” and “eloquence” are made manifest throughout the novel, this sudden speech aporia is conspicuous, and marks the melancholic degeneration of Luxima’s legibility.

Perhaps because of the aborted ritual that marked Luxima’s youth, the specter of sati occupies much of the novel. In one incident, Hilarion finds himself encircled by a fire ignited from the swaying friction of bamboo stalks. In an emblematic syncretic moment, Hilarion covers himself in protective flax and plunges through the fire, using
his crosier to throw aside burning branches, and looking as he does like a Hindu “God of Fire” (212). The novel’s allusions to fiery and self-sacrificial death culminate in Hilarion’s own auto da fe; he is condemned to burn by the Inquisitors for his perceived heresy and seduction of a neophyte. At the moment in which Hilarion is being bound to the stake, Luxima’s character emerges to save her passive and unresisting companion, and in the process undergoes a complex and ambiguous transformation. On the one hand, Luxima appears at her most heroic by actively reversing the trope of the chivalric western knight saving the imperiled native woman. Described as a “form scarcely human” rushing to Hilarion’s side, Luxima’s heroism morphs her into a superhuman incarnation of the goddess. On the other hand, the echoes between this scene and Kennedy’s eyewitness account – an artifact that typifies Romantic representations of the sati – suggest a less heroic reading. Not only is Luxima’s eloquence reduced to the “unutterable,” but she is arguably demoted from person to thing. From a deeply sympathetic and feeling person equal to the loftiness of Western command, Luxima is dehumanized entirely. Kennedy and Owenson mine the same lexical field to describe their respective satis: just as Amba Bhaie was likened to a “wild beast,” “defiled,” “disheveled,” and “unnaturally-unhuman” (Kennedy 243, 253, 254), Luxima is transformed into a “disheveled” thing throwing “wild” looks, a “seeming vision,” a “spirit,” a “phantom,” an “it” (Owenson 248-49). In her “melancholy madness” (177), Luxima mistakes Hilarion’s auto da fe for her own sati and “murmur[s] the Gayattra, pronounced by the Indian women before their voluntary immolation” (249). In this climactic scene, Luxima becomes illegible:
she…now looked wildly round her, and, catching a glimpse of the Missionary’s figure, through the waving of the flames, behind which he struggled in the hands of his guards, she shrieked, and in a voice scarcely human, exclaimed, “My beloved, I come! – Brahma receive and eternally unite our spirits!” – She sprang upon the pile: the fire, which had only kindled in that point where she stood, caught the light drapery of her robe – a dreadful death assailed her – the multitude shouted in horrid frenzy – the Missionary rushed forward – no forced opposed to it, could resist the energy of madness, which nerved his powerful arm – he snatched the victim from a fate he sought not himself to avoid – he held her to his heart – the flames of her robe were extinguished in his close embrace. (249)

Luxima’s potential for assertive heroism – and by extension her subjectivity – is subverted as the agency is returned to Hilarion who rescues the “victim” from the flames. Although Còilín Parsons reads this scene as her “most assertive moment in the novel” (378), Luxima’s actions are too “wild” and manic to be convincingly understood as self-assertion. Owenson relies on the same finicky adjective – “our” – as Hemans does in “The Indian City” to confuse Luxima’s speech and complicate the novel’s sympathetic identifications. When she asks Brahma to unite “our” spirits, her prayer could be joining Luxima with Hilarion, or Luxima with Brahma, or Luxima with her first husband. On
this site of mourning, where past dead bodies are read unto present living bodies, the reader cannot parse Luxima’s melancholic position.\textsuperscript{47}

Hilarion’s intervention – snatching the “victim” from the pyre – prevents Luxima’s death by sati once again. However, Owenson seems skeptical of the benefit of European intervention in native customs. Not only does Luxima die anyway – stabbed by a Spanish dagger aiming for Hilarion – but her death inspires a native uprising. Giving vent to “feelings long suppressed” from “the sufferings, the oppression they had so long endured,” the Hindus “fell with fury on the Christians.” The instruments of the auto da fe-cum-sati are recycled into the implements of rebellion, as the natives use the “burning brands from the pile” to set a “horrid and entire conflagration.” Owenson concludes that “the conflict was long and unequal; the Hindoos were defeated; but the Christians purchased the victory of the day by losses which rendered their conquest a defeat” (250). While the rebellion is underway, Hilarion absconds with the dying Luxima, who declares that she “die[s] as Brahmin women die, a Hindu in [her] feelings and [her] faith – dying for him [she] loved, and believing as [her] fathers have believed” (257). Luxima dies in “the melancholy insanity of sorrow,” unequivocally othered in religion and affect (250). That the actual moment of her death and her funeral both occur outside the narrative

\textsuperscript{47} Parsons compares this scene in the 1811 and 1859 versions of the novel. In the 1859 version, Parsons points out that Luxima “no longer cries ‘My Beloved, I come,’ merely ‘Brahma receive and eternally unite our spirits!’ No longer is there such a yawning ambiguity, but the ambiguity that remains does not resolve itself in favor of Hilarion. In fact, the missionary is barely recognized. Luxima throws herself on the pyre, reciting the ‘Gayatra’ in memory of an already-dead husband and calling to Brahma, not to the missionary or his God. Whereas in The Missionary there was at least a possibility that her thoughts were of Hilarion, in Luxima her relapse to her previous existence is complete. This revision goes to the heart of the 1859 changes. The outbreak of rebellion that follows this incident is in 1811 potentially in sympathy with Hilarion, whose missionary calling has a very different valence in the 1811 and 1859 versions of Owenson’s novel” (378).
forecloses the possibility of including Luxima in a sympathetic network that is organized by the collective energy of mourning. In the novel’s violent ending, the Christian conversion has failed, and the European “rescue” of the sati does not, in fact, save her life, instead resulting in massive death and destruction. Immediately after Luxima’s extradiagetic funeral, Owenson reports the reversal of imperial fortunes, as Portugal resumes its independence from Spain, and Aurangzeb seizes power in India: “the mighty had fallen, and the lowly were elevated; the lash of oppression had passed alternately from the grasp of the persecutor to the hand of the persecuted; the slave had seized the scepter, and the tyrant had submitted to the chain” (259). Rewriting “conquest [as] a defeat” and evoking the vicissitudes of empire, Owenson uses the symbolic death of the subaltern woman to depict the dangers of native resistance and the transience of imperial power that threaten the civilizing mission.

The novel ends not on these scenes of colonial violence, but rather on one of quiet mourning. After Luxima’s death, Hilarion disappears, becoming a legendary recluse. Living in a cave among the hills of Srinagar, Hilarion becomes known as “a wild and melancholy man! whose religion was unknown, but who prayed at the confluence of rivers, at the rising and the setting of the sun” (260). He is eventually found dead at the foot of an altar which he had himself raised to the deity of his secret worship, and fixed in the attitude of one who died in the act of prayer.

Beside him lay a small urn, formed of the sparry congelations of the grotto – on opening it, it was only found to contain some ashes – a cross stained with blood, and the dsandum of an Indian Brahmin. On the lucid surface of the urn were carved some characters which formed the name of
“Luxima!” (261)

Hilarion’s memorial to Luxima provides another example of the failure of the civilizing mission. Not only did Hilarion fail to convert Luxima, but he also bears the marks of her influence, worshipping at an altar that consecrates the syncretism of their relationship, violently symbolized by the bloodstained cross and the dsandum. Like Luxima, he has become unintelligible in his melancholy, his identity and religion unidentifiable to those who encounter him. I have already demonstrated how Owenson denies Luxima the communal sympathy afforded by a witnessed death or funeral, and although she revisits the possibility to mourn for her, Owenson finally shuts out Luxima from any affective network. The sympathy that should be evinced by mourning instead enshrines the difference of the colonial subject. Owenson labels the funerary urn with “characters which formed the name of Luxima” (261), a curiously distancing inscription. Although Owenson’s novel is ambivalent toward the imperialist project, tacitly criticizing an interventionist civilizing mission, in this final scene of mourning, Luxima’s name is rendered as the hieroglyphics of a wild hermit, emptying her of any subjective identity or personhood, and confirming the ultimate illegibility of the dead subaltern woman.

“Ce triste empire de soi-même”; or the Sad Empire of the Self

After the death of her mother in 1827, Felicia Hemans lamented that “I never liked any thing less than ce triste empire de soi-même” (xxiii). Hemans’s personal understanding of mourning as a “sad empire of the self” provides a key to the representation of colonial subjects not only in her poetry, but in the works of other nineteenth-century writers like Letitia Landon and Sydney Owenson. For these writers, the self may be figured as an empire, but the empire also becomes a narcissistic projection of the self. Relying on the
death of the subaltern woman thus becomes a strategy to mobilize sympathy around the metropolitan feeling subject. By deploying the figure of the native woman – embodied by the sati – simultaneously as an instrument of political critique and an emblem of personal suffering, these writers empty the affective stores of their readers, leaving the other woman out, and “freez[ing] her image into a tableau vivant of death” (Sharpe 51). Abstracted and frozen in death, the other woman is represented as a fixed object of mourning. Like Landon’s Shiva and absent Parvati, and Keats’s “still unravish’d bride of quietness” (1), the native women encountered in this chapter are cast in the realm of affective tokens, barely legible as their subjective signs are worn away by circulation in the melancholy economy of empire.
Chapter 3
“Death and absence differ but in name”:
The Melancholy Sociability of Emma Roberts’s Anglo-Indians

The specters of Anglo-Indians¹ haunt the pages of Emma Roberts’s *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan With Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society* (1835) as much as they do the burial grounds of India. “[I]f the dead could feel discontented with the place of their interment, – a fact supported by ghost stories of great authority,” writes Roberts, “they would assuredly arise from the graves dug in this unhallowed spot, and flit and gibber through the streets: a most effectual plan to rid themselves of their Pagan and Moosulman neighbours” (1.185-86). Interred within the “doleful precincts” of a Patna cemetery, these restless ghosts are enlisted into the service of empire to clear India of its native inhabitants. Roberts’s necrotic imperialism is not only supported by “ghost stories” but by the ghosts of “great authority” as well. To oversee this undead take-over, Roberts conjures the body of former Governor-General Warren Hastings, whose spirit, had he “found a sepulchre in Bengal,” would still be “hovering over the land which rightfully appreciates [his] services” (2.44). Roberts’s wry deference to the literary

---

¹ Although “Anglo-Indian” is a multivalent term, I use it here in its early-nineteenth-century sense of a person of British birth who lives or has lived in India.
authority of ghost stories is an indication of her sensitivity to popular literary taste, as well as an acknowledgement of the powerful necropolitics that shaped Britain’s imperial project, and particularly its community of exiles.²

Writing from India, Roberts confronts the material realities of imperial death in a way that the other writers in the pages of this dissertation – writing from Britain – do not. In the preceding chapters, imperial death was something that happened far away, asking writers and readers to envision new mourning strategies to cope with distance and difference. Roberts is faced with a different challenge, however, where the proximity of death cannot offer traditional consolation because of its overwhelming ubiquity. In the close reading of *Scenes of Characteristics of Hindostan* that follows, I examine three different types of spaces encountered in Roberts’s writing: houses, cemeteries, and tourist attractions. Each of these spaces is turned from its traditional function – of stability, consolation, or consumption – to a haunted locus of political activity. Using her shrewd understanding of popular literary tastes for orientalism and necromanticism, Roberts first establishes India as a “deathscape” to then resurrect it as a site of community.³ The Anglo-Indian exiles in these pages are often as unsettled between life

---

² Although Roberts styles her Anglo-Indians as “exiles,” Daniel White provides an important reminder that these people “did not have exile forced upon them; they were colonialists. But they were called exiles and thought of themselves as such, so their lives, and the representations of their lives, need to be considered as part of a historical continuum” (145-46).

³ Citing the high mortality rates from cholera, malaria, and dysentery, and tracts on the “morbid geography” of India, David Arnold has used the term “deathscape” to explore how “ideas of landscape and mortality became textually entwined” for Indian travellers (“Deathscapes” 341). However, Arnold’s warning that “it might be a mistake to over-personalize…sentiments” of loss in such texts, since “[s]ome of this writing about death and cemeteries clearly reflected the conventions of the time or was done for literary effect” (Tropics 51) obscures the affective power structures demonstrated in *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*. 
and death as they are between metropole and colony, and Roberts invites them to build new networks of sociability around the dead. The “propensity to rove” that characterizes “the whole body of Anglo-Indians” (1.202) is thus countered by their own remains; what is left behind is reimagined as a token of persistence as much as it is of dissolution. However, this vision of melancholy community that structures Anglo-Indian society is steeped in a particular imperial ideology. The community conjured in these pages is more invested in importing the feeling metropolitan readers of Landon, Hemans, and Owenson to Calcutta, than in establishing a new and diverse society. The form of sociability engendered by the Anglo-Indian dynamics of mourning and melancholy is ultimately shown to be another branch of Anglicist colonial policy.

Although little attention is now accorded to Emma Roberts in our Romantic literary histories, to her contemporaries she was “well known, as a popular and agreeable writer on every subject that had employed her versatile pen” (Richardson 111). Roberts was born in London in 1791 to a father from a Welsh military family and a mother who was “a lady of some literary pretensions” (Elwood 333). After her mother’s death in 1828, Roberts joined her sister and her brother-in-law, Captain R.A. McNaghten of the 61st Bengal Infantry, on a journey to India. With them she spent the next two years travelling from Calcutta through the upper provinces of the Bengal presidency, visiting Agra, Cawnpore, and Etawah. Originally printed in *The Asiatic Journal*, the accounts of these travels were republished as the popular *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* in

---

4 Incidentally, Roberts’s biographer Anne Katherine Elwood also lived in India, and according to Indira Ghose, “stakes out a claim to fame for being the first woman traveller to take the overland route to India via Egypt and the Red Sea” (20), a trip that Roberts would later undertake as well. Ghose adds that Elwood’s claim is, however, disputed (127).
1835. Roberts published continuously throughout the 1830s. While living at Cawnpore, she released a volume of poetry, *Oriental Scenes* (appearing in Calcutta in 1830, and republished in London in 1832), claiming to be the first woman to publish out of Calcutta. After her return from the upper provinces, Roberts became the editor of the *Oriental Observer* in Calcutta. Following the death of her sister, and suffering from failing health, she returned to London in 1832 where she continued to publish frequently in literary annuals while living with fellow writer Letitia Elizabeth Landon. After Landon’s death in 1838, she contributed a memoir of her friend to the 1840 edition of *Fisher’s Drawing-Room Scrap-Book*, which was reprinted in *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.*. In 1839 she published *The East India Voyage*, a guide providing practical advice for fellow travellers. Roberts notably edited an enlarged sixty-fourth edition of Maria Eliza Rundell’s *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (1840), to which she added a purported seven hundred recipes of her own.⁵ After accepting an offer from her publishers to write a series of travel articles for the *Asiatic Journal* of 1840, she left once more for India in 1839, travelling overland through France and Egypt to publish an account of the journey. Returned to India, she continued to contribute to periodicals and edited the weekly *Bombay United Service Gazette*. Suffering from the same exhaustion and stomach complaints that had sent her home years earlier, Roberts’s health quickly

---

⁵ Mrs. C. Richardson notes that “her task was well executed, especially if we may judge by the large sum she received for the manuscript, (£300,) for although not always a true criterion of its merit, a pretty fair estimate of the success of a book may be thus obtained” (116). Roberts’s investment in her own intellectual property can be glimpsed in the initials “E.R.” that mark her additions to the cookbook, describing herself as “unwilling to lose the credit which may be due to her own labours” (xxi). Among her recipes is a section on “Oriental Cookery” (288), which naturally includes many curries.
declined, and she died at Pune in September 1840. She was buried near Maria Jane Jewsbury, leaving, according to Mary Ellis Gibson, an estate of £860 (65).

*Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* was favourably received by contemporary audiences and quickly reached a second edition, mostly due to Roberts’s caustic but sensitive attention to Anglo-Indian society. As *The Court Magazine* and *Belle Assemblée* notes, “[t]hough many books have been published on India, little is known in this country concerning Anglo-Indian Society, because no one has hitherto applied to the examination of it, powers of mind adequate to seize and depict its peculiar features” (129). *The Monthly Review* similarly draws attention to Roberts’s novel treatment of the Anglo-Indian community. The periodical remonstrates that until recently, “an unaccountable apathy and consequent ignorance prevailed in England regarding our empire in the East” (239). What Roberts offers, suggests the reviewer, is “the delineation of social and domestic matters, whether as they exist among the original inhabitants of Hindostan, or the Anglo-Indian” (240). It is information on the latter group, the reviewer adds, where “there has been the greater darkness” (240) – a loaded word choice for a group that embodied fears of creolization. Both *The Court Magazine*

---

6 In her “Memoir of Miss Emma Roberts,” Mrs. C. Richardson explores the qualities that made Emma Roberts such a popular figure, celebrating that Roberts “combined in her own person the highest and most desirable qualities of a man without losing the endearing and most valuable characteristics of a woman” (118). Such a description may recall Mary Wollstonecraft, Roberts’s predecessor in the field of melancholy women’s travel writing. William Godwin famously lauded the female sensibility in Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During A Short Resident in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) that was “calculated to make a man fall in love with its author” (249). Yet Wollstonecraft, too, balances her “endearing” qualities by describing herself as a “woman of observation” who asks “men’s questions” (68). Both Roberts and Wollstonecraft participate in a tradition of travel writing that exploits the sensibility of melancholy as an empowered mode of observation.

and Belle Assemblée and The Monthly Review locate Roberts’s prowess at the intersection of the familiar and the foreign, the home and the not-quite-home. In this “age of travellers and authors” (The Monthly Review 239), Roberts offered an original perspective on a community of exiles.

Despite such contemporary praise for Scenes, the current scope of scholarship on Roberts is limited, focusing especially on the feminine picturesque, domestic life, women’s travel, and nineteenth-century women’s conditions – topics that are conspicuously organized around her gender. This attention to gender – while certainly valuable in its own right – has led to a critical neglect of Roberts’s engagement with the dynamics of death and exile. This critical myopia is, in fact, our legacy from Roberts’s Romantic reviewers, who circumscribe Roberts’s keen gaze while praising its penetrative power. The same Monthly Review piece that singles out her unique contribution to Anglo-Indian affairs notes that although “household rather than national government and politics occupy her pen, we are persuaded the service she has conferred upon the community both at home and abroad will be on this account the more important” (240). The Morning Post similarly commends Roberts for “[e]schewing politics and political economy” (n.p.).⁸ In addition, limiting her scope to the domestic and the picturesque, The Athenaeum declares that “[o]ur authoress handles no such momentous subjects as change of empire and perplexity of monarchs; yet she meddles with matters quite as delicate and perilous. She has made it her business to lift the veil from domestic life in the East” (614-15), adding that “[i]n the splendour, as well as the domestic economy of Indian life, Miss

---

Roberts is at home” (616). What the *Atheneaum* reviewer disregards, however, is that Roberts’s writing insistently addresses the necessity of reimagining what it means to be “at home” as an exile in an Indian landscape of death of decay.

**Tigers, Ghosts, and Strangers: The Haunted Houses of Hindostan**

Reviewers and readers alike agreed that Roberts was offering a unique glimpse into British life in India. Yet those same reviews that praise the novelty of her subject are pleased that she retreads familiar “eastern topics” as well; one *Court Magazine and Belle Assemblée* reviewer singles out her treatment of the figures of the vulgar nabob and the speculating spinster, those “[t]wo old prejudices concerning India” (129).

---

9 *The Athenæum* 407 (15 Aug. 1835): 614-616. The only time Roberts’s text is mentioned in conjunction with politics outside of the domestic sphere is by mocking association. *The Satirist, and the Censor of the Time* for 20 August 1835 remarks how “Miss Emma Roberts…asserts that the native ladies [of India] excel the females of every other country in volubility of utterance, which, it must be admitted is a fearful attribute” (275). The article then suggests that the “House of Lords evidently imitated this custom, when they hired Sir Charley Wetherell and Mr. Knight to abuse the Corporation bill, and those who originated it. Supposed this to be their purpose, they succeeded to admiration. The two legal ‘old women’ proved to be perfect ‘adepts in scurrility,’ and the unfortunate bill for Municipal Reform was abused to the heart’s content of their Tory lordships” (275). In this periodical culture, Roberts’s text must either eschew politics altogether, or provide the misogynist and racist stereotype by which to degrade or consolidate men’s political power.

10 Only Anne Katherine Elwood addresses the “discomforts which await an Anglo-India[n] in Calcutta,” highlighting Roberts’s treatment of the “home sickness, which is so often felt by the poor exiles in Oriental countries, both the cause and effect of disease, accelerating their progress to an untimely grave” (336). This interpretation is not, however, part of a literary review, but instead part of a memorial published in *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England* (1843). I return to the thematic and personal eulogizing of Roberts below.

11 *The Court Magazine and Belle Assemblée* VII.III (1 Sep. 1835): 129-131. Roberts opens her second chapter, “Bengal Brides and Bridal Candidates,” with a sarcastic description of both the nabob and the marriage market: “Few opinions can be more erroneous than those which prevail in Europe upon the subject of Indian marriages. According to the popular idea, a young lady visiting the Honourable Company’s territories, is destined to be sacrificed to some old, dingy, rich, bilious nawaub, or, as he is styled on this side of the Atlantic, ‘nabob,’ a class of persons unfortunately exceedingly rare. Ancient subjects devoted to the interests of the conclave in Leadenhall-street, belonging to both services, are doubtless to be found in India, some dingy, and some bilious, but very few rich; and, generally speaking, these elderly gentlemen have either taken to themselves wives in their younger days, or have become such confirmed bachelors, that neither flashing eyes, smiling lips, lilies, roses, dimples, &c. comprehending the
keenly aware of her reader’s expectations when it came to oriental material, and her 
writing reveals a shrewd ability to cater to those tastes while undercutting them. 
She begins her introduction to Scenes with the disingenuous assertion that only recently 
is India “beginning to excite a very considerable degree of interest and attention” (n.p.) in 
British readers. Roberts is clearly aware of this untruth, later coyly wondering, “Will it 
be necessary, in these enlightened times, to describe a palanquin? It would be an affront 
to the reading public to suppose it ignorant of [its] shape and construction” (1.203). She 
paradoxically portrays India as both foreign and familiar terrain in order to differentiate 
herself and her contribution, while still marketing it alongside popular oriental poetry and 
engravings. Roberts’s description of Cawnpore could, in fact, stand in as a description of 
this writing style throughout Scenes: “The mixture of foreign and familiar objects…to a 
person newly arrived in India, is very singular. In smaller stations, it is impossible ever to 
forget that we are far from home; but here, surrounded by Europeans, and beguiled by 
the throng of English-built carriages into the idea that we are in some old accustomed 
spot, the sudden appearance of a camel or an elephant, or a fantastic group of natives, 
seems quite startling” (1.54). Indeed, when Roberts muses that “[a] youth of vivid 
imagination can scarcely be persuaded that the romantic scene before him is not a 
whole catalogue of female fascinations, can make the slightest impression upon their flinty hearts. Happy 
may the fair expectant account herself, who has the opportunity of choosing or refusing a rara avis of this 
nature, – some yellow civilian out of debt, or some battered brigadier, who saw service in the days of sacks 
and sieges, and who comes wooing in the olden style, preceded by trains of servants bearing presents of 
shawls and diamonds! Such prizes are scarce. The damsel, educated in the fallacious hope of seeing a rich 
antiquated suitor at her feet, laden with ‘barbaric pearl and gold,’ soon discovers to her horror that, if she 
should decide upon marrying at all, she will be absolutely compelled to make a love-match” (1.18-19). 

The British public had been encountering writing about India for decades before Roberts’s text in 
publications by the Asiatic Society founded in 1784, historical accounts, travel prose, poetry by Lord 
Byron, Percy Shelley, Robert Southey, Thomas Moore, and the preeminently popular fiction of Sir Walter 
Scott, to name but a few.
fanciful creation of the brain” (2.165), she almost seems to be teasing her readership to drop the oriental veil, to spot the real elephant in the herd of fictional ones.

Roberts knows that a well-placed palanquin can easily transport her reader to an already familiar imagined eastern landscape without disturbing the comfort of home. She also knows that adding a few tombs to the mix will have a similar effect on readers whose imagined Indias are as gloomy as they are enchanting. The playful self-awareness when she describes the night “as dark as a romance writer of the Radcliffe school could desire” (1.217) or when she drops a reference to the “Minerva press” (2.271, 3.11) reveals her fluency in the gothic tropes of necro-orientalism. It is in this matrix of the foreign and familiar, the exotic and the morbid, that Roberts reimagines the popular oriental trope of the tiger. While describing the scenery at Peer Pointee, Roberts pauses to recount the legends associated with neighbouring Muslim tombs. Although “various revolutions” have obscured the stories of the fallen, their “mausoleums…remain to shew the extent of their conquests” (1.288). The maintenance of these tombs has been left to “a miserable remnant of the faithful, vagrant fazeers, who profess to divide their guardianship with that of tigers, which, according to their account, every Thursday night stand sentinel over the remains of the mighty dead” (1.288). In this legend, the tiger is no longer a powerful and uncontainable threat, the sinewy symbol of a violent enemy, but a melancholy reminder of nearly forgotten conquests. The tiger’s overwhelming power has been downgraded by it having to share this guardianship with miserable vagrants. Roberts adds that at Secundermallee, “the royal animal is said to shew still greater

---

13 For the tiger’s association with Tipu Sultan, see the introduction to this dissertation.
veneration for the mouldering remains of the conquerors of the world. The natives of India rejoice in the supposition that they are possessed of the body of Alexander the Great, whose tomb on the top of a mountain is reported to be regularly swept by the tigers with their tails” (1.289). Within two paragraphs, Roberts has twice banished the tiger to the realm of the dead. But what is most striking about her second example is how the tiger shifts from a Muslim sentinel to a faithful servant of Alexander the Great, its western conqueror. No longer the embodiment of foreign violence attacking with tooth and claw, nor even the stalwart guard of Muslim legacy, the tiger has become a domesticated pet “sweeping” with its harmless tail. If the tiger shows veneration for the “conquerors of the world,” it – and the India that it metonymically represents – has implicitly become Britain’s pet.

If the wildest beasts and darkest jungles of India are nothing more than pets or decorative houseplants to her readers, the orderly comforts of the domestic space are made strange instead. Roberts thus turns the real emotional difficulties of exiled family life into the pitfalls of a gothic novel. Although in the nineteenth century the family was often imagined as a social institution that promised affective stability, it also acted as a matrix of imperial anxieties well until decolonization and beyond. In her discussion of the “baba logue, the Hindostanee designation of a tribe of children” (2.99), Roberts plays

---

14 See, for example, Elizabeth Buettner’s Empire Families, which “examines the integral role of family practices in the reproduction of imperial rule and its personnel, accounting for the substantial degree of family continuity among the middle classes engaged with the raj” (2). Saree Makdisi also shows how “the process of colonization would…be presented to the world (and to England itself) as one of gentility, domesticity, affection, and nurturance” (119). In this vision, “the British empire is…analogous to the role of the bourgeois household in preparing individual citizens for the hard realities of the public sphere” (119).
up the anxious and alienating aspects of Anglo-Indian home life, rather than presenting a supportive family structure undergirding the imperial project on the ground. These scenes of alienation are described in terms analogous to the loss of death; the psychology of grief thus turns to the psychopolitics of imperial mobility. Often, writes Roberts, a mother would accompany her children away from India to receive their education, “leaving the father thus doubly bereaved; the husband and wife are sometimes parted from each other for many years, where the latter is unwilling to relinquish the superintendence of her sons and daughters to other hands” (2.124). What marks this form of Anglo-Indian “bereavement” as unique, then, is not merely the loss, but rather the grief produced by endless mobility. Spending their time making the journey between Britain and India, these wives “seem to think nothing of making the passage half a dozen times before they settle finally in one quarter of the globe; establishments which appear to be permanent are often broken up in an instant; some panic occurs; the mother flies with her children to another land, or, should it be convenient for the father to apply for his furlough, the whole family take their departure, leaving a blank in the society to which perchance they have contributed many pleasures” (2.125).

15 Buettner confirms that “since India was not among the parts of Britain’s empire meant for permanent white settlement, those maintaining a presence there over several generations did so without formally emigrating. They became defined by long-term patterns of work and residence overseas that alternated with time spent in Britain for schooling, on periodic furloughs, and ultimately in retirement…Furthermore, although British-Indians shared some features in common with members of their class in the metropole who lacked overseas backgrounds, they were also set apart upon their return from ‘exile’ – self-imposed though it was – by distinct imperial experiences and understandings. They indeed personify the differences, yet simultaneously the inseparability and blurring of boundaries, between Britain’s domestic and imperial histories that academics now chart with increasing regularity” (Empire 2).

16 Unlike the Anglo-Indian mothers whom Roberts describes as travelling with their children, Phebe Gibbes in Hartly House, Calcutta (see my introduction) depicts a mother’s resolute firmness in leaving her child behind to pursue life abroad. Sophia’s “infant period [was] an insurmountable impediment to [her]
Jalland, family and friends were crucial to nineteenth-century mourning rituals that “structured the grieving process within a coherent framework which reduced the terrifying aspects of death” (12). Whereas female mobility creates “bereavement,” a familiar type of domestic loss that can be worked through, the absence of an entire family creates an unreadable “blank…in society,” a form of melancholy that functions by erasing the domestic structure that negotiates power and organizes affect.

Just as the people who constitute the Anglo-Indian domestic circle become unreadable symbols of loss, so is the home itself a space of the living dead. Already by the text’s first chapter, Roberts impresses upon the reader the haunting qualities of the home abroad:

One peculiarity strikes a stranger immediately as he enters a house in India inhabited by Europeans: all the sofas, chairs, tables, &c. are placed at the distance of a foot at least from the wall; a very necessary precaution in a country abounding with insects and reptiles of all kinds. Ever side of every apartment is pierced with doors, and the whole of the surrounding antichambers [sic] appear to be peopled with ghosts. Servants clad in flowing white garments glide about with noiseless feet in all directions. (1.8)

mother’s making an East India voyage” with a beloved husband, but once she has been placed with a well-principled guardian, “the firmness with which [her] mother bade [her] adieu, astonished all who knew her” (4). The mother is immediately afflicted with a consumptive disease when leaving Portsmouth, but her feminine sensibility – an extremely delicate complexion and “uncomplaining turn of temper” – mask the disease’s symptoms until it is too late to treat her. She dies upon arriving in India, where she is buried.
Roberts’s description of the home highlights a curious type of distancing. The person entering this house is labeled a “stranger,” precluding any inclusion in this domestic space. In fact, it is hardly described as a domestic space at all. This “house in India” is passively “inhabited by Europeans,” rather than belonging to them, or being their home. India was never a settler colony, but at the time that Roberts is writing, civil and military servants were living in India for longer periods than ever before. The reader gets no sense of the protracted nature of Indian residencies because domesticity and transience are put in uncomfortable proximity here. The melancholic quality of the space cannot be lost on her reader when Roberts explicitly calls the native servants “ghosts.” This early description sets the tone for Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan: the domestic space is an un-home, claustrophobic (the furniture moving in), inscribed in a violent register (the walls “pierced” with doors), crowded with creatures, ghosts, and strangers.

Although she emphasizes the domestic dynamics of imperial melancholy, Roberts’s brush with government administration ushers her readers into another haunted house. Roberts introduces Government House by echoing her earlier description of the Anglo-Indian home, relating its “effects upon a stranger.” “It is scarcely possible for a

17 Cynthia Sugars elaborates a compelling notion of “settler melancholy” in the Canadian colonial context in her reading of John Steffler’s The Afterlife of George Cartwright (1994). Engaging similar issues as this chapter, Sugars suggests that the novel “not only gestures toward a ghost that is sufficiently haunting (reflecting back a kind of historical-cultural legitimacy), but also depicts and enacts an inconclusive process of mourning, a process which should, ideally, enable a working through of some kind of reassessment of the nation’s colonial history” (693-694). Sugars cogently questions “to what degree such designations as ‘settler trauma’ or ‘settler melancholy’ constitute a case of privileged trauma or ‘privileged melancholy’ on the part of subsequent generations, whether of settler ancestry or not, who have inherited the benefits of a trauma inflicted on subordinated peoples” (696). Because Britons could not “settle” in India as part of the imperial project, Anglo-Indian melancholy cannot exactly be equated with Canadian settler trauma. However, the problem of “privileged melancholy” within a postcolonial setting is equally resonant. This chapter considers the melancholy of Anglo-Indians as a distinct affective mode without seeking to overwrite the trauma of native Indians and the lasting repercussions for inhabitants of the postcolonial space.
lively imagination,” Roberts ominously notes, “to escape the notion that, instead of being the guest of a palace, he is on the point of being conducted to some hideous dungeon as a prisoner of state.” The reader is differentiated from the Anglo-Indian by virtue of being a “stranger,” but perhaps more notably by her or his “lively imagination” – one that must suggest a lifeless counterpart. The always-already excluded stranger is then given a guided tour of yet another haunted house:

The hall which opens upon the dark cloister formed by the arch of the steps above, is large, low, and dimly lighted, completely realizing the beau ideal of the interior of the Inquisition. A good deal of rubbish of various kinds, piled confusedly and put out of the way behind rows of pillars, traversing the length of the hall, favours the supposition that it is a place of punishment; for in their shapeless obscurity, these fire-engines, or printing-presses, or whatever they may be, have very much the appearance of instruments of torture.

Upon the floor, the spectator, who has imbibed, the apprehension that he has been entrapped into some pandemonium of horror, may see the dead bodies of the victims to a tyrannical government thickly strewed around: –human forms apparently wrapped in winding-sheets, stretched out without sense of motion upon the bare pavement, add to the ghastly effect of the scene. These are the palanquin-bearers, who, wrapped up from head to foot in long coarse cloths, are enjoying the sweets of repose, little dreaming of the appalling spectacle they present to unaccustomed eyes. Many dusky figures move about with noiseless tread; and were it not
for one redeeming circumstance, the whole panorama would be calculated
to inspire horror and alarm. (3.70-72)

This is not a Government House that can reassuringly stand in as a symbol for solid
British power in India. With its arches, cloisters, Catholic valences, torture, shapeless
obscurity, and corpses, this is the house that the gothic has built. Imagining native
servants as “victims to a tyrannical government” demonstrates the instability of
necromantic metaphors in an India characterized by actual death. Roberts is, of course,
slanting the description with her typically wry tone, but vehicle and tenor collapse in this
failed metaphor: these native servants are only legible as “victims.” That she includes the
“printing press” among the imagined instruments of torture is perhaps an
acknowledgement of her own complicity in disseminating the knowledge about India that
translates as imperial power and control. Lest the reader be let off the hook, Roberts
recasts the “stranger” as a “spectator,” no longer excluded but instead a part of the
macabre performance. “In the midst of these dreary catacombs,” she proceeds, “gay
parties of visitors, ladies in ball-dresses, and gentlemen in full uniform, are passing
along, not in the least discomposed by appearances so familiar to them, even when there
is the additional agrémen of a fog, which in the cold season usually casts a mystic veil
over these subterranean apartments” (3.72). Although she introduces “gay parties” to
dispel the horror, these figures cannot rehabilitate the alarming scene; instead, their
enthusiasm is discordant, their presence even more disturbing than the gothic elements.
In the India of the necro-orientalist imagination, the spiritedness of a gay party is all too
spirit-like. When later Roberts invokes the “Old Indians [who] are fond of reverting to
[the] glorious days; when money was plenty and news scarce” (3.100), the reader cannot
help but imagine that these “Old Indians” are the ghosts haunting Government House, their spoils the “rubbish” cluttering the area, still lavishly attired in the fruits of the near-but-outdated colonial past. Corresponding to their ghostly masters, Roberts repeatedly characterizes native servants as dead, pointing out that palanquin bearers take their rest “looking like so many corpses swathed in grave-clothes” (1.87). In Government House, the same sleeping servants are “corpse-like figures” (3.72). When Roberts suggests that “[i]n India, we may almost invariably read the character of the master in the countenances and deportment of his servants” (1.91), death is mutually inscribed, corpse-like servants reflecting their moribund masters. Roberts’s vision of Government House uncomfortably rends the “mystic veil” of literary necro-orientalism, where acquisitive ghosts incorporate native inhabitants and land alike, casting imperial expansion as an inherently melancholic and deadly venture.

It is fitting that they should occupy haunted houses because Roberts transforms her Anglo-Indians into ghosts. According to Roberts, “a more unfixed, unsettled, floating community cannot be imagined” (1.202) than this society of exiles. They are marked by a profound sense of geographic, temporal, and social dislocation because “a propensity to rove seems to characterize the whole body of Anglo-Indians” (1.202). Mobility, therefore, makes the “floating bodies” of Anglo-Indians undistinguishable from the restless ghosts that “flit and gibber through the streets” (see above). Incapable of being located or imagined, an identitarian blank is substituted for a description. The exile’s longing for home is thus subsumed into the longing for self, creating a uniquely fatal form of melancholy. “That pining after home,” explains Roberts, “too often sows the
seeds of disease and death” (3.44). Describing the discovery of a corpse in a jungle outside Calcutta, Roberts writes:

> It was impossible, in the torn and mangled state of the corse, to ascertain whether he had perished by his own hand, or if the surrounding horrors of the scene, the harrowing thoughts crowding on the soul of an exile, and the fearful state of excitement, occasioned by reminiscences of home, to those who, repressing their feelings in public, give loose in solitude to the anguish of their hearts, proved too much for the outward frame, and snapped the fragile thread of life. Nothing farther could be elicited by the strictest inquiry, and the friends and relatives of the deceased were left to the most mournful conjectures. (2.48)

The act, the setting, and the idea of death are indiscriminately flattened in this post-mortem account. Roberts’s musings on the cause of death enact precisely the kind of “mournful conjectures” she assumes the family participates in, thus creating a community of mourners to forestall the despairing exile experienced by the deceased.

Such instances of mourning are reimagined as moments of self-perpetuating loss. “Illness and even death,” Roberts explains, “have been the result of attendance at the last melancholy rites performed to a brother exile committed to foreign earth” (2.51). The funeral is not figured here as a step in the mourning process, but a dangerous encounter with death. Witnessing Company recruits follow “the bodies of their comrades to the grave,” Roberts finds “proof” of the deadly effects of funerals:

> Ten or twelve dropped during the service; several of these were taken up dead, and of the number conveyed to the hospital, not more than one
recovered. The solemn office performed at funerals has often proved a death warrant to the living…The sudden nature of the dissolution, the necessary rapidity of the interment, deepen the horror of those who see their friends and acquaintances snatched from them by an invisible hand, and who are thus warned that danger is lurking abroad where they least expected to find it.

(2.51-52)

The “invisible hand” points to the deadly individual cost of empire. Roberts effectively kills off a dozen soldiers without reporting a single battle, thus putting the imperial project in peril. When the energies of grief are unleashed but uncontained by systems of consolation, Roberts depicts them as infectiously sliding across levels of society.

Reflecting on the destructive effects of cholera in Berhampore (Baharampur), Roberts notes that it makes “sad ravages amongst the King’s regiments every season: doleful records upon the tombstones chronicle its gloomy triumphs; neither sex nor age are spared, and there is no cemetery in India which contains the mortal remains of so many juvenile mothers and young brides as that at Berhampore” (1.108). Rather than establishing networks of sympathy, these examples each create chain reactions of death; a funeral for a few soldiers kills off a dozen, and what begins as a lament for a ravaged regiment is transferred to “juvenile mothers and young brides.”

Reporting the high number of deaths among very young brides, Theon Wilkinson similarly notes how “[a] number of girls appeared to die from grief at the loss of their child or husband” (108). For example, Wilkinson transcribes the epitaph of Anne Becher, who died at age eighteen “after suffering with patience a long illness occasioned by grief for the death of an only daughter.” He describes another wife who journeyed to India in
1805 to meet her husband “who had left England some years before, a few weeks after their marriage, and who had not yet seen their offspring.” She arrived in Bengal and received the news that her husband had died of fever that very day; both the wife and the child followed suit within weeks. “During her decline,” adds Wilkinson, “she used to go every day to the landing-place and weep over her child, and so the place came to be called ‘Melancholy Point’” (108). By emphasizing the death of brides and soldiers, these accounts implicitly threaten the success of empire by killing its generators and defenders. In both Roberts’s and Wilkinson’s testimonies, bodies and landscapes are equally redefined, reconstituted, and identified by Anglo-Indian melancholy, turning India into both a geographical and psychological landscape of death.

**Necrotourism in “the grim dominion of Death”: Christian Cemeteries and the Taj Mahal**

Recognizing the threat of her restless ghosts, Roberts tries to contain and reorganize these spirits by devoting an entire chapter to “Cemeteries and Funeral Obsequies.” The text formally enacts what social institutions cannot: the organization and distribution of the affective powers of mourning and melancholy. Roberts pauses to confirm for her reader that the ubiquitous references to death and graves in her text are not accidental: “The dreary character of the European burial-places in British India has already been noticed in many of the preceding pages; but the subject is of too interesting a nature to be

---

18 It is also in this chapter that Roberts includes a discussion of Calcutta’s founder, Job Charnock. She lingers on the fact that his monument has been moved from its original resting place, and that he erected a mausoleum to his native companion – a sati whom he famously “rescued” from the funeral pyre of her husband – after her death (2.55-56). We have already heard this story in the previous chapter of this dissertation, revealing ways in which Britain’s history of imperialism in India is repeatedly and consistently inscribed in the realm of necropolitics.
passed over with a few casual remarks” (2.34). To illustrate the state of burial in India, Roberts provides a disturbingly detailed description of a cemetery, which is worth quoting at length:

Strangers, visiting our Eastern territories, cannot fail to be impressed with painful feelings, as they survey the gloomy receptacles appropriated to those Christians who are destined to breathe their last in exile. The portion of ground consecrated and set apart as the final resting-place of the European residents, is seldom sufficiently extensive to give “ample room and verge enough” for those who seek repose within its gloomy precincts. All are over-crowded, and many exhibit the most frightful features of a charnel-house, dilapidated tombs, rank vegetation, and unburied bones whitening in the wind. The trees are infested with vultures and other hideous carrion-birds; huge vampire-bats nestle in the walls, which too often present apertures for the admission of wolves and jackalls crowding to their nightly resort, and tearing up the bodies interred without the expensive precaution necessary to secure them from such frightful desecration. The grave must be deep, covered, in the first place, with heavy planks, and

19 Its nature is so interesting, in fact, that Roberts give it a double treatment: once as the poem “Indian Graves” from Oriental Scenes, and again here in prose. Mary Ellis Gibson points out that “despite the poem’s title…[it] offers multiple layered landscapes: a Muslim shrine; a deserted European cemetery in India; a rural British cemetery; and the lone grave or ‘tangled solitude’ hoped for by the lost exile” (86). I would add, however, that the title foregrounds how such a palimpsestic, creolized, non-local or -localized version of the grave characterized imperial death, and could become the source of a politically charged melancholy. Gibson also discusses Roberts in terms of the picturesque, providing a nuanced interpretation of the dynamics of landscape and exile. Drawing out the interest in the picturesque in contemporary gift books and annuals, Gibson reads Roberts as an ironic Sybil contending with the contradictions and instability of the imperial scene.
afterwards with solid masonry, to preserve the mouldering inhabitant from the attacks of wild and ravenous beasts. (2.34-35)²⁰

Roberts once more conjures a “stranger” into this melancholy space – a designation that presumes a metropolitan reader, and moreover, one who is never wholly admitted into the fold. Rather than this scene shocking a reader in London, however, it may in fact provide an instance of familiarity; when it comes to burial, neither metropolitan nor colonial Britons were guaranteed the privilege of “ample room and verge enough.”²¹

Although threats to interred bodies in India might come in the form of exotic animals and exposure, anxiety surrounding the digging up of corpses was not foreign to metropolitan cemeteries, either; both in India and in Britain, the cemetery could be a site of violation rather than consolation.²² Acknowledging Roberts as a “connoisseur of graveyards,” David Arnold highlights her grisly passage above as an example of Roberts “warming to the Gothic possibilities of her subjects” (Tropics 51). According to Paul

---

²⁰ Nigel Leask pauses on this scene to note the “uncharacteristic excess of her ghoulish description” (Curiosity 224), but her morbid tone is only uncharacteristic if we understand Roberts strictly as a purveyor of a “fey romanticism” (Curiosity 225), rather than as an author deeply invested in the pervasive presence of death in India. After all, the description is neither excessive nor uncharacteristic when one considers that it appears in a chapter entitled “Cemeteries and Funeral Obsequies.” Nevertheless, Leask’s focus on her role as the “picturesque tourist” (Curiosity 220) provides a compelling reading of the “crepuscular, moonlit landscape” as a symptom of the “abject feminine aesthetic” (Curiosity 225). Furthermore, Leask astutely points out that Roberts’s graveyard evokes the “nemesis of creolization” for Britons being buried in Indian soil (Curiosity 224).

²¹ Roberts takes this quote from Thomas Gray’s “The Bard” (1757). On one hand, quoting Thomas Gray’s Bard reinforces the melancholy of the exile by distancing this burial ground from a national literary landscape. On the other hand, the Bard should also call up a poetic resistance to martial or imperial movement and a triumph in death.

²² Committing their streak of body-snatching-cum-murder in Edinburgh between 1827 and 1828, William Burke and William Hare would still be lingering in the public’s imagination. Ruth Richardson suggests that the “Burke and Hare murders are critically significant to the history of anatomy in Britain” (132). Following public outrage and revulsion from these and similar killings, the Anatomy Act was passed in 1832 – the same year that ushered in official cemetery reform.
Westover, the necromantic tendencies – from a hagiographic tradition, to the culture of posterity, to the entrenched popularity of graveyard literature – of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers suggest a culture that “emerg[ed] into literacy by way of the graveyard.” The gothic, Westover adds, “was merely one important manifestation of a broader cultural phenomenon, signaled by a huge body of writing on death, the places of the dead, and the relation of both to literary creation and long-term reception” (4-5).

Roberts thus exports the Indian graveyard home to incorporate the foreign space into a familiar cultural milieu. Roberts’s preoccupation with the mobility of bodies – on domestic and global scales – thus characterizes a modern form of unsettled and unsettling mourning; exported from the home, grief must travel alongside bodies, whether to the suburban cemetery or to the Indian deathscape.

Roberts wrote at a time when the public was negotiating a new social space for the dead. Until the nineteenth century, London’s dead were buried in the city’s churchyards, the parish receiving a fee for the interment. As the population of London grew at unprecedented rates in the first half of the nineteenth century, so did its churchyards become overcrowded with the departed. Fearing the contamination of water supplies and the potential for airborne pestilence, a debate over cemetery reform was introduced into

\[23\]

public discourse. In 1832 – the same year that Roberts returned to London from India – Parliament passed a bill authorizing the establishment of eight private, commercial cemeteries surrounding London, the most famous of which being Kensal Green Cemetery. Modeled after Paris’s Cimetière Père-Lachaise, established in 1804, these new cemeteries were suburban, expansive and leisurely green spaces, where the social significance of owning property could be replicated by owning a monument. Moving the bodies outside the city alleviated fears of miasmatic contamination while also ushering in the age of a commercialized, privatized death industry.

In the rhetoric surrounding cemetery reform can be heard echoes of imperial discourse; the preoccupation with change and progress, the location and circulation of bodies, and the recognition of affective power apply equally to metropolitan cemeteries as they do to imperial administration. Take for example Laman Blanchard, who opens his article “A Visit to the General Cemetery at Kensal Green,” published in Ainsworth’s Magazine in 1842, by waving the banner of change and progress, those hallmarks of

24 Published in 1839 by G.A. Walker, a London surgeon, Gatherings from Graveyards, Particularly Those in London studied precisely how the increasing population had dangerously surpassed the capacity of traditional burial grounds. In her study of death and burial in Victorian England, Mary Elizabeth Hotz summarizes Walker’s findings: “The population of London more than doubled in fifty years from just under 1 million in 1801 to 2,360,000 in 1851. Furthermore, the increasing physical deterioration of towns surpassed the rate of improvement, causing the death rate to rise sharply between 1831 and 1841. Because towns sustained growth in population and suffered from higher death rates, conditions in the graveyards worsened. Many of the churchyards were quite small, often with less than an acre of ground, and had been in use for centuries. In public sites, the crowded conditions persisted because owners, to turn a profit, preferred the common grave where they could bury more bodies, collect more fees, and use less space in the cemetery…In the metropolis alone, 52,000 bodies were added annually to the 203 acres available for burial. Bodies were indeed cast about the ground, bones tossed into a charnel house, and coffins chopped up for firewood – all to make room for corpses” (13-14).

25 Joseph Roach extends the connection between the suburban cemetery as a “bourgeois simulacrum of heaven” to the slave ship as “the triangular trade’s simulacrum of hell, where each of the living dead occupied no more space than a coffin, and the daily wastages disappeared over the side to a grave unmarked except by the sea” (54-55).
British imperialism: “CHANGE – so busy in this eventful century with Life – is busier yet with Death. There is no late step in the progress of opinion or the habits of society so broad as the distinction between the city Churchyard and the suburban Cemetery. Nor is it possible for change to take a healthier or wiser direction” (178). Blanchard structures his article as a stroll through Kensal Green, reflecting on the state of cemeteries and then pointing out notable tombs and epitaphs. Scaling back Roberts’s global necrotourism, Blanchard gives us the necroflâneur. Though Blanchard’s visit may be solitary, his article acts as an invitation to join him at the cemetery, textually repairing the damaged network of mourning found within the city – not unlike Roberts’s attempt to contain exiled grief in her chapter. He concludes his article with an orientalist reflection, further suggesting the affinity between cemetery reform and imperialism. Invoking Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, perhaps Roberts’s most famous predecessor in the genre of women’s oriental travel writing, Blanchard asserts that

Lady Mary Wortley Montague [sic] describes the burial-places about Constantinople as appearing more extensive than the city itself; and Mr. St. John, remarks – ‘I know of few spots on earth so productive of calm thoughts, and hushed and delightful feelings as that mysterious valley, where the dust of the Egyptian kings reposes.’ Our cemeteries, yet in their first bloom and verdure, have less of magnificence, less space, less of solitude; yet in them will these calm thoughts and elevated feelings spring up, and blossom under the eye of Heaven. (188)

26 Incidentally, Blanchard was also one of Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s biographers and editor of the Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L. (1841).
These orientalist examples create a tension in Blanchard’s text between London’s new cemeteries and their ancient oriental counterparts; he emphasizes London’s youth with words like “bloom,” “verdure,” “spring up,” and “blossom,” yet the insistent repetition of “less” points to a latent discomfort still experienced in these modern spaces of mourning.

In fact, colonial cemeteries in India had begun to adopt modern features before the continental controversies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to James Stevens Curl, the earliest modern cemeteries “were laid out by Europeans in India” (136). Established in Calcutta in 1767, the best known of these cemeteries, the Great Burial Ground at Chowringhee, later named Park Street Cemetery, was “founded for hygienic and functional reasons, and predates burial reform in Europe as a whole” (140).27 Like the modern cemeteries that would eventually emerge on the continent, “European cemeteries in India were large, set apart from churches, and laid out in a spacious fashion” (145).28 Tracing the relationship between colonial and metropolitan burial sites even further, Peter Travers points out that the architect and dramatist Sir John Vanbrugh was even influenced by British mausolea at Surat, where “the British had followed the Muslim custom of placing burial grounds on the outskirts of town,” when he “invoked this graveyard as a potential model in his 1711 plan for refurbishing London

---

27 The spatial paradigms of death were similarly modernized in New Orleans, another (French) colonial city. In the design set out by Adrien DePauger in 1721, the cimetière is placed outside the city’s fortified perimeter, rather than in a central churchyard. See Roach, 50.

28 In Phebe Gibbes’s 1789 novel Hartly House, Calcutta, the protagonist observes that “the house of prayer, at Calcutta, is not the house of sepulchre. Burying-grounds are provided some miles from the town, which I am given to understand are well worth the visit of a stranger. I will only add, that though this measure may have arisen from the fervid heat of this climate (where death is busy) which gives the idea of rapid putridity, yet surely it is disgracing the temple of the Divinity, (admitting even that in England no bad consequence results from such deposits) to make it a charnel-house” (16).
after the Great Fire of 1666” (94). Studying Calcutta, the city of palaces, as the “city of the dead” has enabled Travers to argue that “monuments to the dead became important tools for projecting British power in India” (83), since “death practices were also a significant arena for negotiating relationships with the diverse ethnic and religious populations of eastern India” (86). Travers maintains, however, that because burial practices “were always more flexible on the colonial frontier,” the establishment of Park Street Cemetery “while it was an innovation in the wider context of British burial practices, does not seem to have carried the conscious sense of cultural transformation that would mark the foundation of new cemeteries in Paris and London in the early nineteenth century” (112). Despite denying that burial innovation in Calcutta signaled a “cultural revolution,” Travers does insist that the transition from “oriental” to neoclassical style of funerary monuments in the new cemetery reflected “the further integration of Calcutta into the wide system of empire” (113).

If funerary monuments can denote Calcutta’s integration into Britain’s global empire, they must also stand in as reminders of the disintegration of that affective community in the postcolonial space. Ashish Chadha’s study of the present-day Park Street Cemetery suggests that by virtue of being a colonial cemetery that persists in a postcolonial space, it is “a monument of double death” and “a heritage of double absence” (340) – that is to say, it contains the remains of the dead while it itself decays. In this sense, “the monument mimics the disintegration of the inhabitants that it preserves” (340). According to Chadha, the cemetery occupies an ambivalent heritage that “can neither be appropriated in the nationalistic imagination nor can it be completely negated – it can at best be forgotten” (348). Yet as Elizabeth Buettner’s investigation of the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA) has shown, such forgetting is being prevented. Founded in London in 1976, BACSA’s mission of historical preservation is premised on imperialist nostalgia. “Indeed, for BACSA,” attests Buettner, “the act of writing about the Raj has been inseparable from the act of preserving its monuments” (“Cemeteries” 15). Buettner points out that Theon Wilkinson’s Two Monsoons: The Life and Death of Europeans in India (1976), a source for this dissertation, was published as part of the organization’s objectives. The book “effectively marked BACSA’s beginnings” and “highlighted what were to become the organization’s purpose and mission statement for the coming decades” (“Cemeteries” 15). By recording, preserving, and restoring European graves in India, BACSA enshrines knowledge of the colonial past. Mourning the empire’s corporeal form(s) in order to invoke its immemorial power, their motto may as well be “The empire is dead! Long live the empire!” Buettner suggests that BACSA’s interest, though dismissed as “antiquarian” or “marginal,” actually “correspond with academic trends; the ways its core outlooks clash with scholarly
So detailed and ubiquitous are Roberts’s remarks on Indian graves that one can identify a hierarchy consisting of three main categories: the magnificence of Muslim monuments, the tombs scattered among tasteful scenery, and the shameful desecration of Christian burial. If they are not revolting, Christian graves are at best clumsy, nondescript, confused, and poorly built in mean imitation of their Muslim counterparts (2.35). Throughout her account, Roberts constantly lauds “one of the most amiable traits in the Moslem character – its reverence for the dead and desire to perpetuate the memory of objects beloved in life” (2.31). This reverence “extends to persons of all countries and religions” (2.36). Whereas Britons abandon the graves of their countrymen and women to the ravages of nature, time, and scavengers, “[t]hey, who in their lifetime have acquired a reputation for the virtues most in esteem among Asiatics, will not be forgotten in the grave” (2.36) by their Muslim neighbours. Roberts’s hierarchy of graves engenders a corresponding hierarchy of sympathy, threatening British imperial power with the subversive politics of affect.

Roberts cannot, of course, engage in a discussion of Muslim monuments without visiting what remains perhaps the most famous site of necrotourism today, the Taj Mahal. 30 Roberts built her reputation as a travel writer on *Scenes and Characteristics of*...
Hindostan, and she never sounds more like a tour guide than when she writes about the “crown of palaces.” James Buzard’s work on the emergence of tourism and guidebooks in the 1820s confirms that Roberts is participating in new marketplace that capitalizes on mobility. “In this age of tourists,” Roberts remarks, “it is rather extraordinary that the travelling mania should not extend to the possessions of the British Government in India; and that so few persons are induced to visit scenes and countries in the East, embellished with the most gorgeous productions of nature and of art” (2.29). Reading William Wordsworth’s “The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem” (1800) as a template for a growing distinction between travel and tourism that portrays the former as authentic and the latter as tawdry, Buzard suggests that in the poem, tourism signifies “the beginning of modernity, characterized alternately as a time when formerly integral cultures fall within the reach of encroaching impersonal networks of influence, or as a time when one stops belonging to a culture and can only tour it” (31). Similarly, the Anglo-Indian’s unique experience of mobility becomes a testament to the alienation of travel; in Roberts’s accounts of life in India, the Anglo-Indian is un-homed from both Britain and Bengal, the imperial project blurring the line between leisure and politics.

Nevertheless, in this “age of tourists” Roberts can carve out a space of preeminence for the exile as part of a culture that is constituted by mobility. Suggesting a range of improvements – enlarged stations, new roads, bridges, and buildings – to accommodate the imagined influx of European visitors, Roberts plans out a tourist route from Calcutta to the Himalayas, eventually landing in Agra, a city which she describes as “well worthy of a pilgrimage from the uttermost parts of the globe” (2.289). The infrastructural improvements of the imperial project are here implemented under the
guise of tourist accommodation. In the symbolic economy of tourism – or anti-tourism – that Buzard outlines, “visited places were perceived as parts of a market-place of cultural goods, each location chiefly of interest for the demonstrably appropriatable tokens of authenticity it afforded” (6). In Scenes, such visited places also lend authenticity to imperial presence and mark them as acquisitions. For Roberts, Agra is the site where tourism and imperialism meet – or should meet – and it is precisely a site of mourning that encourages this intersection.31

The site’s significance to the imperial project is further strengthened when Roberts draws a connection between the Taj Mahal and British presence in India: “To Shah Jehan’s strong paternal affection we are indebted for our first settlement in Hindostan; he gave a grant of land in Bengal to an English physician travelling through Agra, as a token of his gratitude for the restoration of one of his daughters, whose malady was subdued by the stranger’s skill and attention” (2.299). This attempt to endow the British with a far-reaching history in India also reverses the trope of paternalism characteristic of British imperial administration. In a text that so consistently and emphatically draws attention to death, the connection between India’s most ornate space of mourning and a foundational imperial moment cannot be underestimated; Roberts’s Taj Mahal is not only a monument to conjugal affection, but a testament to Britain’s Indian inheritance. Its position as a contact zone between natives and Europeans further consecrates British presence: “The natives of Agra are justly proud of the Taaja [sic]

31 For criticism of graveyard tourism in England, see Sarah Matthews who testifies that Kensal Green and Highgate cemeteries were “criticized variously for being secular visitor attractions, pleasure-gardens, cities of the dead, artificial, vulgar, profiting from death, and weakening the attachment of the living to the dead” (192).
Mahal; they are pleased with the admiration manifested by strangers, and gratified by the care and attention bestowed to keep it in repair” (2.300). If the Taj Mahal is the preeminent symbol of melancholy India, and the site where imperialism is made manifest, in taking responsibility for its preservation and restoration, then, the British can assume guardianship over India itself. In this conservatory role they can even usurp their Muslim neighbours’ superior reverence for the dead.

Yet because Roberts operates within the ambivalences and ambiguities of empire, this position of British dominance is tenuous where the ethos of imperial appropriation finds its “affective limit” at the grave, as Gibson has suggested (84). “Kingdoms have passed away,” muses Roberts, “and dynasties have failed, and while nothing of the magnificence of the silent tenants of the tomb is left save the name, their graves are still honoured and respected, and flowers are strewed over them, and lamps are burned, by those who have long submitted to foreign dominion” (2.307). Immediately succeeding her discussion of the British renovations of the Taj Mahal, such remarks about the cycles of empire cast a shadow over Britain’s project in India. Kingdoms may have risen and fallen, but ghosts rely on overlapping temporalities and spaces to perform their haunting; regardless of Mughal or British ascendance, the dead retain the preeminent dominion over this political landscape.

“Pale conquerors from the west”: Roberts’s Anglo-Indian Community
It is now a commonplace in scholarship on Romantic orientalism to cite Byron’s advice to Thomas Moore to “Stick to the East” as the best “poetical policy” (3.101), but by the time Roberts was writing, the “East” was beginning to shift from not only a space of literary inspiration but to a space of literary production as well. As Daniel White has
recently argued, until the explosion of poetry printed in Calcutta’s periodical press in the late 1820s and the appearance of India’s first literary annuals in the 1830s, “Calcutta had been thought of as a capital of commerce, not of literature” (2). By tracing “the rise of an active print industry and an ever more autonomous newspaper press and reading public in Calcutta in the early nineteenth century,” White demonstrates how the English-language writing emerging from Calcutta – from Europeans, East Indians, and Indians alike – was not just an exercise in diasporic nostalgia or native mimicry, but the product of a diverse intellectual community. White is attentive, however, to the difficulty of mapping out these social dynamics as a legible Habermasian public sphere when he elucidates the “ideological fantasy that Calcutta was a Little London in Bengal” (19).32 Indeed, Roberts’s complex engagement with Anglo-Indian society reveals the “ideological fantasy” that underlies her imagined colonial community.

As a writer, newspaper editor, and associate of the Henry Derozio, Roberts operated within the “extensive intellectual, political, and educational culture” that made up Calcutta’s “Little London” (White 108).33 In the advertisement to Oriental Scenes, Dramatic Sketches and Tales, With Other Poems, her poetry collection published in 1830 in Calcutta, Roberts graciously invokes this social scene. She thanks the “upwards of three hundred” subscribers added to her patrons from the “Upper Provinces” (v). She expresses gratitude for the warm welcome her writing “has received in a land where she

---

32 See White for a fuller picture of this diverse community, especially the role played by Henry Derozio.
33 A mixed-race poet, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was described as the “Indian Keats” (Gibson 64). He created a sensation teaching at the Hindu College, where he was forced to resign for his iconoclastic rationalism and atheism. In the 1830s and 1840s, his students would unite as the Young Bengal movement, which sought to reform orthodox Hindu customs with the influence of the European Enlightenment.
expected to find strangers, but where she has met with so many persons of taste and
talent by whom the former productions of her pen were not unknown or unprized” (v-vi). And finally, she reserves her greatest thanks for Derozio, who superintended her work through the press while she was away at Agra with her sister. “[N]one save a poet could have executed [the task] so ably,” she acknowledges. In this advertisement written at Agra in 1830, Roberts assembles a community of support, friendship, taste, and talent made up of a diversity of gender, religion, and race.34

However, this glimpse into Calcutta’s creative social network disappears from the rest of Roberts’s writing. As Mary Ellis Gibson has pointed out, the revised edition of *Oriental Scenes* published in London in 1832 is “substantially different” (82). Gone are the dedication to Lady Bentinck (the Governor-General’s wife), the list of subscribers in India, and any mention of Derozio. Instead, Roberts dedicates the volume to the hugely popular poet and editor Letitia Landon, and as Gibson avers, “shap[es] her volume toward the picturesque or scenic landscape” to capitalize on the “commercial possibilities” of her Indian subject matter in the metropole (84). The changes Roberts makes between the Calcutta and London editions of *Oriental Scenes* certainly

34 She does, however, give particular importance to women within this community, proclaiming *Oriental Scenes* as “the first production of the kind, emanating from a female pen, which has issued from the Calcutta Press” (iii). In this regard, Roberts seems to privilege her position as a “female” writer rather than as an Anglo-Indian one. Indeed, dedicating the volume to Lady William Bentinck, wife of the Governor-General of Bengal, Roberts invokes a female community in the service of imperialism: “May I venture to hail its appearance under your patronage, as an auspicious omen of the advancement of literature in the East?...it will, I hope, stimulate my country women in India to cultivate those intellectual pursuits which have raised so many female writers to eminence at home: and should the perusal of ‘The Oriental Sketches’ incite more gifted pens to the illustration of the scenery of this sunny land, I shall feel highly gratified in having pointed out a mine of rich materials to their notice. I am most happy in the opportunity afforded me to offer a tribute of gratitude, however faint, to a country wherein I have found so kind a welcome.” (iv-v). The female poetic exploitation of India is called upon to mirror a typically male territorial expansion.
demonstrate her shrewd marketing sense. But these changes also reveal the nature of Calcutta’s Little London as an “ideological fantasy,” one to be shaped by both politics and aesthetics. When Roberts offers her insider knowledge on “[o]ur territories in the Eastern world” (n.p.), she launches *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* in the same register as the London edition of *Oriental Scenes*. The possessive adjective “our” aligns Roberts with those who possess these foreign territories – an us/them binary that flattens her own social position in Little London. Moreover, referring to India as “territories in the Eastern world” is a curiously distanced stance for such an active member of Calcutta’s intellectual scene.\(^{35}\)

This complex representation of British India is not an anomaly, nor is it accidental. “The various ways that Britons and Indians alike saw, failed to see, or critiqued the very idea of Little London in Bengal,” White contends, “enforced or contested the most significant aspects of imperial culture and authority. For at stake in the existence of Little London was the recognition or denial that new social formations in Calcutta constituted not an undifferentiated ‘sea of pagans’ but rather an Indian public sphere to which the East India Company and its Parliamentary Board of Control were

---

\(^{35}\) Gibson encapsulates the difficulty of resolving such identificatory tensions in her discussion of Roberts and Derozio. In Gibson’s view, “notions of diaspora or hybridity can provide only a wavering theoretical compass” for such complex figures. Rather, she proposes the usefulness of “conceptualizing their positions with reference to their multiple social locations,” which she situates in Roberts’s and Derozio’s shared literary traditions of Romanticism and orientalism (69). Máire Ni Fhlathúin also addresses this difference in cultural identification, noting how Roberts operates in different registers in her poetry and her prose, a habit that “brings out in sharp relief the contrast between the version of India offered in the different genres” (198). According to Fhlathúin, Roberts examines Anglo-Indian life with “wry clarity” in her prose, yet her poetry is “more stylized and less concrete,” more “Orientalist” in its “overwhelmingly conventional” response to Indian “otherness” (198). Like Gibson, Fhlathúin sees a version of Roberts’s landscapes where “[s]entimentalism and sarcasm do not coexist – the scene is described twice over, in separate texts – but they contribute to an overall image of India in Roberts’s work which is not susceptible to the easy reading of the picturesque” (198).
responsible” (18). I suspect that Roberts adopts this equivocal voice to both explore and obfuscate the dynamics of Little London. The Anglo-Indians imagined in the pages of *Scenes* are not those who would associate Derozio’s name with literary production, but Landon’s; this version of Anglo-Indian society is imported from Roberts’s London circles, not drawn from her local affiliations. Doubly un-homed, these Anglo-Indians find themselves in a foreign place with no recourse to the rites of society to ease the suffering of exile. Instead, Roberts calls on the melancholy forms of sociability organized around the dead to constitute her imagined community.

When Roberts alerts new arrivals to Calcutta that they can expect a “melancholy reception in a strange land” (1.11), she may also be warning them about the visions of society that are to follow in her narrative, for nowhere in Roberts’s India is conventional sociability a positive experience. Invitations to the house of a friend are rarely given, letters of introduction are coolly – if ever – received (1.10), and women are rendered listless for want of communication since “a female coterie is a thing almost unknown” (1.75-77). Cawnpore may seem more entertaining with its dinners, dances, and shows, but even there the ballroom’s “promenaders” are tellingly described as “lugubrious,” its “intimate acquaintances” acting “cold and distant” (1.78-79). The state of affairs is even worse in the remote “jungle” stations. Dinners there “are the dullest things imaginable,” and “after a few hours, wasted in vain attempts to amuse people who belong to the most difficult class in the world, a sort of universal joy takes places at the separation; the guests are glad to go, the hosts are glad to see them depart” (2.264-66). The fantasy of Little London conjured in the advertisement to the 1830 *Oriental Scenes* is nowhere to be found in this Calcutta, where “nothing is too absurd to be printed in [its] newspapers”
(3.18). As she lingers on this pervasive “tendency to divide and separate in the Anglo-Indian community” (3.93), it is no wonder that “[u]nder such circumstances, nothing could be more forlorn than the situation of a stranger” (1.10). Not even religion can bring these Europeans together, Roberts notes, as Christians “are never seen on any occasion to congregate together; there does not seem to be any one point of union, any object of general attraction, which can bring the whole into even momentary association” (1.15).

The conventional forms of sociability that metropolitan readers may expect to find imported from the homeland to Hindostan are either a nuisance to or entirely absent from this Anglo-Indian life.

It is perhaps not surprising that Roberts’s Anglo-Indians do not cohere socially because they are so insistently portrayed as spectral, barely present but chained to this foreign landscape. On one hand, Roberts’s Anglo-Indians, affected by a familiar “homesickness of the heart” (1.55), occupy the stereotypically alienated space of the exile. On the other hand, by turning the standard melancholy of the exile into a curious form of ghostliness, Roberts makes it difficult to register her Anglo-Indians in a legible historical record. Relying on overlapping temporalities, ghosts have the ability to flit through the pages of history without ever fixing in one place. Roberts can thus transform the isolation that forces “many of the most distinguished servants of the Company…to repose without any written record of their public or private merits” (2.64) into the deliberate evasion of a cheeky poltergeist. The mobility – geographic and temporal – of her melancholy exiles thus poses a challenge to an imperial administration so reliant on historiography and
fastidious record-keeping to shore up its power. Evoking the stereotypical pose of eastern indolence to declare how “[n]othing that occurs in India ever creates a sensation” (1.100), Roberts addresses how the Anglo-Indian community finds itself dislocated from history as it happens:

Intelligence from the mother-country must be of a very stirring nature to excite the sobered feelings of an Anglo-Indian: and in any revolution occurring at home, the length of time which must elapse before an account of the events which have taken place can reach India, renders it doubtful whether a counteraction has not produced some fresh change; a protracted period of uncertainty destroys interest, and confirmation or contradiction meet a cold reception: numbers are wholly indifferent to foreign events, and care nothing for the destinies of kings and ministers belonging to a distant quarter of the globe. New novels and new poems, those fertile subjects of discussion at parties in England, if spoken of at all, are mentioned coldly and carelessly; they come out to India unaccompanied

36 Betty Joseph helpfully outlines the East India Company’s investment in historical and archival record: “In 1776, the first ‘Keeper of Records’ was appointed to overlook the Indian consultations, accounts books, and other records that were kept in the ‘book office.’ In 1787, the name of this position was changed to ‘Register of Indian Records,’ and in 1793, Robert Orme was added to the payroll of the India Offices as ‘historiographer’ on a semipermanent basis. By the end of the eighteenth century, the basic record-keeping structure was in place, and it continued till the end of the Company rule in 1858. Permanent archiving of official correspondence was also made compulsory by law as the British Parliament tried to circumscribe the Company’s growing power in India in the eighteenth century” (5-6). But Joseph also reminds us that the archival impulses of the East India Company “were relatively autonomous from the more popular interest in historiography in the eighteenth century, a century often described today as ‘the historical age’” (6). Instead, she asserts that this was a period when the East India Company’s official archival record “was never deemed to be a repository for public scrutiny” and that it was not made public until after Indian independence in 1947, remaining a “secret archive sheltered from most scholars and historians” (6). “Even after the disbanding of the Company in 1858, when India came under the crown,” adds Joseph, “the records simply passed into the secret archives of the new imperial state” (6).
by the *on dits* which heighten their interest in the land of their production.

(1.101)

Not even large-scale political upheaval or literary divertissement can incite these Anglo-Indians to care, much less to locate themselves within an active, contemporary history. When these moments finally reach India, they are “unaccompanied by the *on dits,*” or not ratified by a sense of communal consolidation. The insertion of the French/foreign “*on*” instead of the first-person plural “*we*” highlights the alienation of the Anglo-Indian, cut off from the communal verbalization of British identity. Mark Salber Phillips has elaborated a Romantic vision of British history as “a book to be read” or “a scene to be revisited,” but Roberts’s Anglo-Indians do not call upon any such shared cultural scene (323). Nor can the books Roberts dismisses above be those of Westover’s necromantic culture, inhabited by the “literary ghosts” of Britain that inspire readers to “travel to meet the dead.” These Anglo-Indian books do not need to “bridge the distance between life and death” (3) because in this ghostly community, that distance is already collapsed. Continental news may be met with “cold and careless” reception, but the plosive alliteration imposes an alternative form of connection. After all, as Esther Schor suggests, mourning “constitutes communities and makes it possible to conceptualize history” (4). Barred from participating in “living” history, then, Roberts’s Anglo-Indians root their social relevance in the dead.

The only “object of general attraction, which can bring the whole [community] into even momentary association” (1.15) in Roberts’s account is, in fact, death. As my attention above to Roberts’s “haunted houses” has shown, she represents Anglo-Indians as ghostly figures precariously balanced between life and death. The funeral, a death
ritual intended to console mourners by reintegrating them into a sympathetic network, is shown instead to perpetuate more death. Roberts counters these losses that threaten imperial stability by imagining a new form of sociability that arises from death rituals abroad. Despite the “fatal consequences to the living” (2.50-51) of attending a funeral, Roberts transforms it from a failed consolatory ritual to a uniquely social event. Attendance is a social responsibility that is “rigorously exacted,” and unlike in England, women are not “exempted from this painful duty.”

A man, “on his return from the burial of the most beloved object in the world” will “count over the absentees, and descant upon their evasion of so sacred an obligation” (2.50-51). Robert Pogue Harrison elaborates the importance of ritual lament, which objectifies and externalizes loss in order to “depersonalize the condition of grief by submitting it to a set of public, traditionally transmitted codes” (57). Where the network of sympathy potentially breaks down, these women are “counted” in an incantation that counters the death toll, maintaining the dead in a necrogenic social network. “By dictating the rules for ‘how one mourns,’” adds Harrison, “ritual lament helps assure that the psychic crisis engendered by loss…will not plunge the mourner into sheer delirium or catalepsy” (57). The importance of funeral attendance is therefore not merely a matter of etiquette, but of social stability, and this is why Roberts insists that “the rules established by Anglo-Indian society are absolute, and must be complied with” (2.54). Admitted at the grave – a

37 Although women did not typically attend metropolitan funerals, they did perform significant roles in other death rites prior to the commercialized undertaking industry. Ruth Richardson notes that preparing a corpse for the grave was “traditionally done by women. It involved washing the corpse, plugging its orifices, closing the eyes and mouth, straightening the limbs, and dressing it in winding sheet or shroud.” Richardson adds that the importance of these observances “in the vast majority of death in the community cannot be overestimated” (17-18).
social site they are denied in England – these women enact the role of the ideal female mourner that would emerge in the Victorian period, but more significantly, they participate in the inscription of a unique Anglo-Indian code of mourning that constitutes a new form of society.

Instead of yielding to India’s haunted houses, Roberts reconsiders what might stand in for a living space. “The sensibilities of many persons are so much affected by the sight of the funeral processions, which almost every evening wend their way to the burial-ground of Calcutta, as to render them unwilling to live in Park Street, the avenue which leads to it” (2.53), notes Roberts. Whereas in London overpopulation drove corpses to the outskirts of town, here the prevalence of the dead demands that the living remove elsewhere. While the funeral procession in Calcutta may unnerve its residents, the presence of death in those stations too small to have cemeteries is what finally collapses the boundary between living spaces and burial sites. In these areas, “[t]ombs not unfrequently occur in the gardens and pleasure-grounds of the habitations of British residents” (2.61). From the ghostly servants who inhabit British houses, and the British dead buried in the garden, Roberts moves her countrymen prematurely into the tomb, noting that “many do not object to take up their own abode in a sepulchre.” “There is nothing extraordinary,” Roberts declares, “in the metamorphosis of a Moosulmanee tomb into the residence of an English gentleman, many choosing to appropriate the spacious apartments, so needlessly provided for the dead, to the accommodation of the living” (2.61-62, emphasis mine). For a text that is so emphatically preoccupied with mourning and restless spirits to suddenly suggest that tombs are “needless” is jarring. The casual dismissal of these tomb-homes is, in fact, Roberts’s nod toward politics: it allows her to
remain pleasantly apolitical by turning imperial acquisition into domestic economy. Neighbours of the Park Street Cemetery may shrink at reminders of their own tenuous grasp on life, but the displacement of the Muslim dead marries territorial expansion with the power of the grave.

Indeed, the fantasy of cross-cultural sociability embodied in Little London may be largely absent from Roberts’s text, but it is tacitly approached in her attention to Muslim death rituals. She everywhere pauses to notice Muslim tombs scattered across the landscape, and also provides multiple descriptions of the holiday of Muharram – particularly its ritual of symbolic mourning. As the “whole population of Patna, Moslem, Christian, and Hindoo, assemble to witness the procession,” writes Roberts, The whole square rings with shouts of “Houssein! Houssein!” accompanied by deep groans and beatings on the breast, while amid the discharge of musketry, the last sad scene is enacted by groups personating the combatants of the fatal battle in which Hossein perished. Whenever the venerated martyr is beaten to the ground, the lamentations are redoubled, many being only withheld by force from inflicting desperate wounds upon themselves. Woe to any of the followers of Omar who should dare to intrude upon the mourners; the battle is renewed in earnest. Whole companies of sepoys have been known to engage in deadly combat with each other, and numerous lives are lost in the revival of the old dispute respecting the claims of the sons of Ali. (1.179-80)

---

38 Observed during the first month of the Islamic calendar, the event honours the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the prophet Muhammad, and his followers during the Battle of Karbala.
The festival may open up a cross-cultural communal space, but by renewing the battle “in earnest,” the mourning ritual conjures the uncomfortable specter of conquest for its mixed audience. The description slips from “groups personating the combatants” to “whole companies of sepoys,” from a “procession” to a “deadly combat,” transforming the space of performed ritual mourning into an arena of colonial violence. This scene of ambiguous role-playing may be a sacred Muslim festival, but Roberts emphasizes the importance of Christian spectators and participants in the original conflict, to whom “[g]reat respect is paid, not only on account of their position in the country, but because it is believed that persons of their persuasion remonstrated against the cruel persecution of the young princes by the disciples of Omar” (179). Mourning here is figured as both a catalyst of colonial encounter and a means of enshrining British control in India, legitimating their current presence by acknowledging their long-standing and shared history.

When Roberts then incredulously comments on “the immense sums of money lavished upon the mere parade of grief” (2.185), she is also pointing out the economic stakes of this colonial encounter. What, after all, are these Christians doing in Patna if not participating in the building of empire? She goes on to describe the “hired mourners” who attend the festival alongside Christians, infecting them with their performance of grief:

After some well-wrought passage [of a Persian poem], describing the sufferings of the unhappy princes, the reader pauses, and immediately the mourners on the ground commence beating their breasts and shouting “Hossein! Houssen! [sic]” giving themselves such dreadful blows that it
seems incredible that human nature should sustain them, until at length
they sink exhausted on the ground amid the piercing cries and
lamentations of the spectators. As the narrative proceeds, the interest is
deepened: cries of wild despair are uttered on all sides, and even the
Christians who may be present cannot always escape the infection or
refrain from tears. (2.191-92)

The guests here are participating in both a reading and a play, listening to the recitation
of poetry and watching a staged reaction to it. Yet these roles are fluid, as both mourners
and spectators emit “cries of wild despair.” If, as Daniel O’Quinn argues, the
theatricalization of imperial affairs in London in the late-eighteenth century “orchestrated
national reactions to the recalibration of imperial sovereignty” (Staging 1), the same
cannot be said for this Indian scene, where meaning is constructed communally and
chaotically, rather than “orchestrated” into a coherent arrangement. Mourning here is
figured as an “infection,” a threatening, external element that can affect “even” the
Christian guests. Alan Bewell has addressed the tendency to read disease in colonial
narrative as “metaphoric projections of racial and cultural anxieties” rather than
“attending to the epidemiological context within which these representations were
formed” (Romanticism 7). After all, as Bewell acknowledges, “diseases usually did come
from somewhere,” and should not be separated from the cultural contact with which they
were “fundamentally entangled” (Romanticism 7). In a text like Roberts’s that is so
emphatically preoccupied with the physical realities of death, and one that is written
when the contamination from dead bodies was felt to be lingering in metropolitan
churchyards, the “infection” of grief must be read as at once political, social, and pestilential.  

The latent discomfort felt in these instances of cross-cultural community reveals that Roberts’s version of Anglo-Indian society is decidedly European. When she does address the complex social relationships one might expect to find in Little London, she does so in a voice that is hypothetical and grandstanding, not one of intimate connection. When she includes “country-born” ladies in her description of Calcutta’s public assemblies, she pauses to note that “until very lately, it has not been thought either advisable or agreeable to encourage a promiscuous assemblage of different classes and communities” (3.81). She reflects on this segregation:

Without wishing to impugn the motives upon which the former rulers of India have acted, it is impossible not to admit that a more liberal system is better suited to the present time. Doubtless the innovations which have taken and are still taking place, will be very unpalatable to those who remember the extraordinary dignity attached to official situations and white faces in former days; but those who entertain more enlarged views,

39 The language of infection here also recalls John Barrell’s The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism. Barrell sees in De Quincey’s writing a “particular process or scheme of displacement at work, one which suggests that a simple binary model, of self and other, might not always be adequate for thinking about the uses and dangers of the oriental to the western imagination” (8). Instead, Barell identifies a sympathetic collapse that introduces an “other” other. In Roberts’s case, she often seeks kinship between Christian and Muslim mourning practices, to the detriment of Hindu customs portrayed as unintelligible or revolting. Although Roberts acknowledges that Hindus participate in the festival of the Muharram, she quickly contrasts the “heathen revelries of the Hindoos” with the “solemn assemblies” of the Muslims: “their grief at the cruel sufferings of so many estimable members of the prophet’s family, does not assume so theatrical, or it may be added, pagan a character. Attired in the deepest mourning, they evince the most profound sorrow” (2.192). This mourning is made authentic by its exclusion. The “infection” of grief may dissolve the boundary between Christian and Muslim, but in doing so it opens up the space for “heathen” Hindu mourning to be criticized.
will rejoice that some of the barriers which have divided persons of

different persuasions and different complexions from each other, have

been broken down, and are disappearing.

While Roberts’s biography may evince the “enlarged views” that have permitted a new

kind of social mixing in Calcutta, her writing does not often engage intimately with these

“different persuasions and different complexions.” Roberts asserts that the quick rate at

which they have “quietly settl[ed]…the country under British rule” has perhaps led to

some “coldness” on their part toward the natives, not wanting to display any

inappropriate partiality. Roberts’s depiction of the Anglo-Indian community as painfully

anti-social is thus not merely her take on the stereotypical alienation of exile, but a

deeply ideological position; the fantasy of a harmonious mixed-raced community is

difficult to achieve because it emerges innocuously from a certain social awkwardness,

not from the uneven power dynamics of imperialism.

Mourning practices may establish new forms of Anglo-Indian sociability, but

they do not dismantle the barriers that continue to separate native Indians from

Europeans. When Roberts describes a cenotaph erected by natives for Augustus

Cleveland, a former judge at Bhagalpur, she seems less to invoke a shared network of

mourning than to enshrine colonial difference. This “excellent man” is rendered in the

language of paternal imperialism, his “benevolent care” “rescuing” natives from their

“degraded condition” and “endeavour[ing] to bring them within the pale of civilized

society.” Cleveland’s actions are set against a familiar Burkean backdrop of “rapine and

bloodshed” as he contends with the “fanatic disciples of Brahma.” Roberts reports that

the natives honour his life with a cenotaph, “two fakirs…employed to keep a lamp
continually burning within the building,” and an annual celebration. Yet she also records these gestures as “approaching idolatry” (2.40), that buzzword that denigrates religious difference. The exiled community may be constituted by its relationship to the dead, but the “rules established by Anglo-Indian society are absolute, and must be complied with” – and must ultimately exclude those who mourn differently (2.54).

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the version of Anglo-Indian society in *Scenes* is only superficially diverse. After all, despite the fact that she uses her first-hand knowledge of India to authorize her travel narrative, very rarely does Roberts actually relate her accounts in the grammatical first-person. Ultimately, we do not meet with the Little Londoners transforming the newspaper scene, or radicalizing the public sphere, or with any Derozians, because Roberts does not offer *that version* of Little London.

Instead of a first-hand account of society, we are given the “ideological fantasy” of Anglicist administration. Roberts muses that “[h]itherto there has been little to tempt [natives] into private society; with very few exceptions, Anglo-Indian residents have been indisposed to impart or to receive information from natives; they have taken little pains to instruct them upon the subject of modes and manners which must have struck

---

40 Roberts only writes in the first-person once, about her time at Arrah (3.105). Even the most personal-sounding anecdotes are related in an objective third-person. See, for example, her description of the “Miseries of Spinsterhood.” When she narrates that “[t]here cannot be a more wretched situation than that of a young woman who has been induced to follow the fortunes of a married sister, under the delusive expectation that she will exchange the privations attached to limited means in England for the far-famed luxuries of the East” (1.33-34), Roberts is describing her own situation. Although her descriptions of the “Miseries of Spinsterhood” seem very personal, they are not reported in the first-person.

41 This is perhaps because the intellectual climate of Bengal as recently as the 1820s threatened to replicate Britain’s loss of the American colonies. Commenting on the popularity of Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason*, Alexander Duff grumbled that “It was some wretched bookseller in the United States of America, who, – basely taking advantage of the reported infidel leanings of a new race of men in the East, and apparently regarding no God but his silver dollars, – dispatched to Calcutta a cargo of that most malignant and pestiferous of all anti-Christian publications” (qtd. in Gibson 67-68).
them as being odd and unaccountable, or to inspire them with respect by the display of superior mental powers” (3.86-87). With its emphasis on the instruction of English “modes and manners” and “superior mental powers,” as well as its desire for native informants, Roberts’s account of imperial relationships sounds decidedly like Thomas Macaulay’s famous Anglicist call to arms, the “Minute on Indian Education.” Published in 1835 – the same years as *Scenes* – Macaulay’s “Minute” advocates a similar instructional plan in India: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (313). Roberts’s “enlarged views” may accept “different complexions” into their purview, but “different persuasions” are consistently corrected by the civilizing forces of British administration. Balachandra Rajan’s postulation that Macaulay’s minute “collapses [India’s otherness] into likeness” by “Englishing India” (9) could also describe Roberts’s process of representing Anglo-Indian society. She may resuscitate a new form of sociability at the grave to combat the entropic forces of colonial death, but she does so by importing the feeling readers of Landon, Hemans, and Owenson to Calcutta, insulating this community in its own exclusionary melancholy.

**Corpse and Corpus: Embodied Work and the Recuperation of Empire**

In *Poetical Remains*, Samantha Matthews asserts that “[w]hen a writer dies, biography and work are explicitly brought together” (4). By dying in India, Emma Roberts came to embody her work within the melancholy empire. Roberts’s biographer Mrs. C. Richardson blurs this line between her corpse and literary corpus, playing up the fact that Roberts’s final travel article appeared “by a singular coincidence…in that number of the
'Asiatic Journal’ which announced her death” (113). Indeed, the intersection of death and work is one exploited by Roberts’s obituarists. “This constant occupation of the mind affected her general health,” laments Richardson, “and it is to be feared generated those symptoms which had manifested themselves occasionally during the period of closest application to her literary avocations, but which might have remained incipient for years, had not the climate and the severe mental discipline she underwent at a time when her personal strength was least capable of exertion, accelerated the complaint which terminated so fatally” (116-117). Roberts, too, saw the injurious effects of her work on her health. In a letter to a “dear friend” from Sundoolah College on 26 April, 1840, Roberts wrote: “I do not write for any newspaper at present…I have enough to do in collecting materials for my great work, and, indeed, have injured my health by employing myself too sedulously in making extracts, &c.” (qtd. in Richardson 120). Roberts’s death notice from The Gentleman’s Magazine for May 1841 inexorably links her mobility, writing, and death. Inscribing Roberts into a tradition of ill-fated female British writers (her death in “foreign climes” is compared to that of her friend L.E.L.), the obituary points out her role in promoting “our Eastern dominions,” and includes a mini-bibliography that reads like a contemporary book advertisement (544). If, as Matthews claims, “death has a recuperative effect on reputation and book sales” (5), so could Roberts’s death have had a recuperative effect on public feeling about imperial expansion and the melancholy sociability it demanded. Nothing sells books – and empire – like death.
Coda
“\textquote{I stood beside thy lowly grave}: From Romantic Elegy to Selfies at Funerals

\begin{quote}
I doubt that we have any right to pity the dead for their own sakes.
– Lord Byron, in a letter to John Murray, 1817
\end{quote}

Linda Colley begins \textit{Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850} – her study of individual narratives that make up national and imperial histories – with an evocative description of the famous 1893 Mercator map of the world:

\begin{quote}
It shows Britain and Ireland situated close to the centre of the displayed world and coloured red or pink. Around the outer circle of the map are a succession of land masses – Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the Indian subcontinent, large swathes of Africa, assorted Caribbean islands and more – all coloured an identical red or pink to Britain itself. Some late nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions of this map also include the shipping routes and telegraph lines operating between Britain and these various overseas territories, marked out in black or again in red. The visual effect is rather like spokes jutting erratically from the hub of a wheel, or a scarlet spider at the centre of a massive, global web. Britain is made to appear physically connected to the distant lands it claims as its own and that literally take colour from it. \(4\)
\end{quote}

As Colley notes, Britain is positioned at the centre of the world, its empire touching every continent save one, and its lines of trade and communication crossing every surface. Colley reimagines the visual effect of the map’s lines as the spokes of a wheel,
or a spider in its web. For the purposes of this study, however, Colley’s visual metaphors of the wheel and spider shift to the predatory mobility of feelings. Britain is refigured as the pink heart at the centre of a global body, circulating its sensibilities across the globe through a delicate network of nerves and veins. But as this dissertation has shown, the metaphorics of the feeling heart can obscure and enable the inequities – racial, social, and gendered – of an imperial culture.

This project has endeavoured to demonstrate how these networks of feeling stretching across the globe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries relied on an economy of melancholy to structure its social connections and enable the circulation of people, objects, and ideas. I hope that this project has contributed a new framework for considering the literature of imperialism, one that gives a decidedly morbid cast to the “afterlife” of Romantic texts. Indeed, it is my hope not only that such a study bring renewed attention to the neglected women writers and necromantic interests of the Romantic period, but that it can also participate in more recent death culture discourse. If people in the Romantic period were struggling to understand a new distance and difference from the dead, this estrangement has only increased today. However, recent years have seen a movement that advocates rebuilding the familiar relationship between the living and the dead.¹

In the fall of 2013, Internet commenters were filled with righteous indignation over the popular website *Selfies at Funerals*. Mining social media sites like Instagram,

¹ See, for example, The Order of the Good Death, a group of funeral industry professionals, academics, and artists whose mission is to demystify death in a death-phobic society by advocating for natural burial and home death care, among other practices.
Facebook, and Twitter, the blog’s creator, Jason Feifer, reposted the “selfies” – or self-portraits – of teens posing at funerals, along with the subject’s own glib caption. In an online article for *The Atlantic*, James Hamblin shared a few of the blog’s selections, “interspersed with more traditional efforts at celebrating life and publicly reflecting on mortality” (Hamblin). For example, a mirror-selfie of two teenaged girls – one puckering her lips, the other mimicking a crying face – with the caption “Cried off all my makeup so ew. But funeral [sad android emoticon]” is accompanied by some verses from Mary Elizabeth Frye’s “Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep.” The contrast between the selfie and the verse is, of course, intended to throw a comedic light on the supposedly superficial teenaged trend. Conveniently forgetting the Victorian tradition of post-mortem photography, most commenters criticized the subjects of the photos for their lack of respect for the dead, and decried the unprecedented narcissism of the Internet generation. In response to this collective pearl-clutching, Caitlin Doughty, a prominent voice in death culture circles, penned “A Passionate Defense of Selfies at Funerals.”

Doughty explains why the blog “is actually [a] scathing cultural commentary [on] our tragic disengagement with the reality of death,” reminding the reader how modern death practices – originating, as it were, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – have alienated these teenagers from death and the dead body. Rather than deriding them for their lack of funerary etiquette, Doughty instead proposes that we offer teens the “obligation to engage with the real processes of death, to remind them that when

---

2 Doughty is a mortician, death theorist, creator of the popular “Ask a Mortician” web series, the founder of The Order of the Good Death, and has recently published *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes & Other Lessons from the Crematory* (2014).
someone dies…there is a real corpse and real grief left behind.” By taking part in a “physical and emotional ritual,” Doughty suggests, death would no longer seem like an “abstract concept.” She concludes by declaring that “our cultural traditions have failed [these teenagers], and selfies at funerals are one of their only outlets to ritual and mourning in the age of the smartphone” (Doughty).

What this dissertation should elucidate is that these acts of self-representation stem not only from our modern death practices, but from our literary practices as well. After all, the graveyard self-portrait is not uncommon in the elegiac and necromantic canons. From Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” to Felicia Hemans’s “The Grave of a Poetess,” the space of grief has long afforded the poetic act of self-expression. I have argued in these pages that the dynamics of death, mourning, and melancholy were being recalibrated in the Romantic period in order to accommodate a community’s self-understanding in the face of global losses. Can the same not be said for teenagers seeking connection through the new global networks of social media? Are we not compelled to imagine Hartly House, Calcutta’s Sophia Goldborne in her own funeral selfie, as another teenaged girl experimenting with self-presentation in the face of annihilating death? More than just a fashionable literary commodity, melancholy operated – and still operates – as an affective economy that sought to consolidate feeling as it regulated political activity. And if it seems like a stretch to jump from the imperial politics of the British Romantic period to today’s teenagers taking duckfaced selfies, I close by pointing out that the last entry on Selfies at Funerals shows U.S. President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt taking a smiling selfie at Nelson Mandela’s memorial service on 11
December 2013. “Obama has taken a funeral selfie, so our work here is done,” announced Feifre in his final post. The work of Feifre’s blog may be done, but the work of affect continues to shape our notions of political subjectivity and psychogeography in powerful ways.
Works Consulted


Beatson, Alexander. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun; Comprising a Narrative of the Operations of the Army Under the Command of Lieutenant-General George Harris, and of the Siege of Seringapatam*. London: W. Bulmer, 1800.


*Bengal Obituary; Or A Record to Perpetuate the Memory of Departed Worth: Being a Compilation of Tablets and Monumental Inscriptions from Various Parts of the Bengal and Agra Presidencies. To which is added Biographical Sketches and Memoirs of Such as have Pre-Eminently Distinguished Themselves in the History of British India, Since the Formation of the European Settlement to the Present Time*. Calcutta: Holmes and Co., 1848.


Hall, Catherine and Sonya O. Rose, ed. *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.


Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993.


Spear, Percival. *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth-


Starke, Mariana. The Sword of Peace; or, A Voyage of Love. London: Debrett, 1789.


