Discourses of Carnival and transgression in British and Caribbean writing, 1707-1848.
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Discourses of Carnival and Transgression in British and Caribbean Writing, 1707-1848

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London
September 2001
Dissertation Summary

This thesis is an analysis of the cultural relationship between Britain and the Caribbean from the eighteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century. It is organised around the concept, considered both as an historical practice and a metaphor. Using a variety of literary sources such as diaries, historical documents, as well as poetry, drama and canonical literary texts by Lady Maria Nugent, Matthew Lewis, James Thomson, Daniel Defoe and William Beckford, the thesis develops the argument that British identity was consolidated through the rejection of an authentic metropolitan Carnival culture in favour of a constructed national profile, predicated on Protestantism and imperialism. This is contrasted with the way in which the Caribbean was framed within the parameters of Carnival and was described within a burgeoning discourse of monstrosity and fear. The thesis discusses the origins of this image of the Caribbean as a site of Carnival and moral transgression, examining how groups such as the sugar planter, pirates and slaves established the islands as corrupt, uncontrolled and antithetical to Britishness. It also highlights the centrality of the Caribbean, not only for imperial commerce, but significantly, establishes the way the Caribbean becomes a cultural repository of Carnival for Britain during the period under study. The discussion demonstrates how the Caribbean becomes a powerful symbol conflating Carnival excess and hedonism with fears regarding the fragility of Britishness as a constructed identity. It develops this by exploring the Caribbean sub-text in Romantic and Gothic fictions, investigating how the symbol evolves in the period under focus from an implicit threat in canonical texts such as Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park to a more explicit symbol of fear, as exemplified by Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte’s text Jane Eyre.
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Acknowledgements

My thanks must first go to Markman Ellis, for being such an inspiring supervisor and a source of never-failing encouragement and support. I would also like to thank Susheila Nasta and Lisa Jardine for giving me the opportunity of undertaking this study as well as Helen Thomas, Elisabeth Maslen, David Margolies and Chris Reid for all their help and advice along the way. I would also like to thank Sakichand Raghunath, Bibi, of course, and especially Bub and Chib. Finally, my extra special thanks go to my mother, Sylvia Cassidy, without whose help this study would not have been possible.
The Introduction

Wilson Harris and the Underlying Hypothesis.

The contention this dissertation addresses is a hypothesis originally voiced by Guyanese writer and theorist Wilson Harris in the essay "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" published in 1967. He proposes that Caribbean men and women are culturally 'unique' because through the course of the region's history the identity of the people has been shaped by a multiplicity of histories and cultures that transcend both time and space. Harris suggests that despite being discriminated against as a colonised people, they have the advantage of been immersed within a culture that can visualize what he terms a fulfilment of character.

The status of the West Indian-as a person in world society-is of a much more isolated and problematic character. West Indians in their national context, their nation-state, as such, are a minority in the world of the twentieth century, a very small minority at that. What in my view is remarkable about the West Indian in depth is a sense of subtle links, the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities. This is a very difficult view to hold, I grant, because it is not a view, which consolidates, which invests in any way in the consolidation of popular character. Rather it seeks to visualize a fulfilment of character. Something which is more extraordinary than one can easily imagine.¹

Through his imaginative and intuitive analysis of Caribbean culture, Harris sets up a discourse of cultural identity which resists interpretation through traditional parameters of linear history and ethnology. He identifies how Caribbean identity, can only effectively be analysed as a subject in a state of permanent change and flux, which directly challenges the stability of European cultural identity with its emphasis on fixity and homogeneous definitions of cultural identity.

The validity of Harris' claim that the Caribbean environment operates on the psyche of the native population has already been debated in several investigations of both his fictions and his theoretical work. Hena Maes-Jelinek, for example, highlights how Harris's work is rooted in images of the complex cross-cultural influences of the Caribbean, and while she resists limiting his importance as a post-colonial artist by focussing on his contributions to both postcolonial and postmodern discourses, she

acknowledges how the struggle to find a stable and representative voice in the specific environment of the Caribbean, often referred to as a "cultural void," creates the necessary conditions for Harris’s philosophical re-evaluations. Selwyn Cudjoe also investigates the relationship between the historical conditions of Caribbean culture and Harris’s argument that the population of the region has a particularly open access to a mythic archive that alters their identity. In addition, Michael Dash supports the notion that the Caribbean presents unique challenges with regard to cultural definition. In response to Harris he states, "this view of the psyche as a constantly shifting site where the known or the knowable tentatively emerges from the world of flux, of latent possibilities, points to the special manifestation of self-definition in the Caribbean imagination." Dash suggests that Harris identifies a revolutionary potential in Caribbean identity that challenges monolithic and traditional concepts of history, time and identity, which he describes as a fulfilment of character, contrasting with a more tangible, but less meaningful, traditional eurocentric character of consolidation.

This position is not without critics. Belinda Edmondson for example, identifies how discourses of the Caribbean have, over the last forty years, become articulated in the language of myth, and demonstrates the pitfalls of sentimentalising the realities of Caribbean culture. However, Harris’s position is not a nostalgic approach to cultural history, which he sees as a constantly renewable resource that is present within the environment of the Caribbean, what Stephen Slemon has called "a dialectical interchange with the past." This view is supported by the unique historical profile of the region and Harris’s willingness to re-visualise it as a site of continual cultural exchange and contestation, which he suggests is incorporated into the psyche of Caribbean men and women. Harris, like many other contemporary Caribbean writers, uses the symbol of Carnival to represent this interchange, which is both

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transitional and inclusive.\(^6\) For example in his novel, *Carnival* (1985) Harris incorporates the structure of Dante’s *Inferno*, thus setting up a self-conscious dialectic between the medieval European carnival and an exploration of contemporary Caribbean culture. For Harris, this accessible cultural archive includes not only the complex influences of Africa, Asia and Europe, but also significant pre-Columbian residues of lost cultures, which Harris suggests are integrated in the landscape of the Caribbean, and are in dialogue with the psyche of the Caribbean people.

This thesis is an exploration of the cultural dialectic that Harris sets up between Europe and the Caribbean. It will investigate the way in which the Caribbean was identified as a particular locus of cultural difference, unique in its profile of horror and instability, and examines how the Caribbean was consequently used both symbolically and metaphorically to challenge fixed notions of national identity in eighteenth and nineteenth century writing. I will focus on the way in which British culture contrasted itself with the image of the Caribbean in order to create what Harris describes as the, “novel of persuasion” in which a self-sufficient, common-sense character is presented in a realistic situation, in a society which is unquestioned and secure. Harris states this in his analysis of the nineteenth-century novel form.

The novel of persuasion rests on grounds of apparent common-sense: a certain selection is made by the writer, the selection of items, manners, uniform conversation, historical situations, etc, all lending themselves to build and present an individual span of life which yields self-conscious and fashionable moralities. The tension which emerges is the tension of individuals-great or small- on an accepted plane of society we are persuaded has an inevitable existence.\(^7\)

Harris is critical of the limited and limiting parameters of identity in the novel form. However this thesis will uncover the way in which the image of the Caribbean, contributed to the consolidation of British identity and this novel form, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. I will highlight how, having ascribed the unpredictable and irrational to the Caribbean, Britishness could consequently emerge as a simple, rational identity. Harris also suggests that nineteenth-century European novels reflected the way in which European society restricted and limited its range of experiences, to the point at which freedom became an illusion; in direct contrast to the

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\(^7\) Harris, p.32.
Caribbean culture which sought to reconcile and include multiple narrative and cultures, and thus became a culture of incorporation. It is the investigation of this polarity of cultural evolution, in terms of freedom of expression, which informs the main body of this work in hand.

This dissertation is an investigation of cultural exchange between Britain and the Caribbean from the Act of Union in 1707, and charts the progress of the relationship and its effects on both cultural sites up to the middle of the nineteenth century. This study is historicist in its perspective, and comprises a detailed study of various forms of literature, to examine the changing relationship between the Caribbean and Britain during this period. The texts examined here range from canonical British novels, drama and poetry through to parliamentary papers and other historical sources such as diaries and contemporary accounts of both the British Caribbean islands and Britain. I have chosen the Act of Union as the starting point of this study because it effectively marks the instigation of a clear British national identity in terms of history, which up until this moment had been a contentious and more fluid amalgamation of individual national identities. As Linda Colley states, "As a would-be nation rather than a name, Great Britain was invented in 1707 when the Parliament at Westminster passed the act of Union linking Scotland to England and Wales."^8

Whilst I do not suggest that the indigenous nations within the British Isles were harmoniously combined at this point, I will use this political act to mark the first phase of a self-conscious awareness of Britishness as a cultural phenomenon, with the adoption of the Union Jack, the first symbol of this new nation. As Frank Gorman highlights,

> Although British rule was steadily enforced over Scotland and Ireland, these sub-nations retained a strong sense of their own separate identities, valuing highly their own traditions, institutions and privileges. In such a composite state as Britain, sentiments of national identity were bound to be complex.\(^9\)

Nevertheless, the Act of Union does mark a definite political step in the unification of Britain.

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The dissertation is roughly divided along three complimentary routes, all of which use the metaphor of Carnival to explore both the difference and the interaction of British and Caribbean culture, and which demonstrate the importance of this cultural expression in shaping national identity in both sites of investigation. The first section is the detailed analysis of British literature after the Act of Union in 1707 in order to explore the foundation of British nationalism and culture. I demonstrate how Britishness, in accordance with the work of historians such as Linda Colley and others, is a constructed identity overlaid on existing nationalisms within the British Isles, in an attempt to create an identity founded on the principles of Protestantism and Imperialism. I examine how a mythologized past is substituted for a genuine folk cultural archive with its comic and transgressive components, and look at the effects of this suppression in terms of cultural freedoms in Britain. I highlight how the suppression of festival and Carnival was an inevitable part of a self-reflexive consolidation of cultural and national identity which was organised along the lines of the "cold rationalism" of Enlightenment ideology, described by Jurgen Habermas as the "Enlightenment project." Building on the theoretical hypothesis of Mikhail Bakhtin, I will suggest that this results in a distorted view of Carnival in British culture that views the transgressive as threatening and exterior to national identity.

The second main branch of the study establishes the existence of a significant cultural relationship between the Caribbean and Britain. I will demonstrate how all forms of transgressive folk expression and Carnival were made synonymous with the Caribbean, highlighting how the Caribbean became a repository for the exiled Carnival archive of Britishness. This was the result of several factors, all of which were connected to the way in which the Caribbean was framed in a discourse of the medieval past in which the Carnival was an intrinsic part of social life. The organisation of the Caribbean plantations with their slaves and feudal style owners were inscribed in British literature as though they existed in the Middle Ages when chattel slavery and Carnival were commonplace. I will argue that British culture

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therefore visualised the Caribbean as belonging to a different temporal as well as geographical site, and one in which the contentious issues of social transgression and contradictions could be redefined. This atavistic approach to definitions of the Caribbean, and the slave populations in particular, grew out of eighteenth century discussions about mankind and founded the widespread scientific racial theories of the nineteenth century. However, I will look at how the arguments of racial regression which were applied to the black slaves in the Caribbean, by theorists such as Henry Home, Lord Kames merged with interpretations of Caribbean culture which was consequently read as undeveloped and feudal.\textsuperscript{15} The Caribbean was also aligned with the Carnival because it had a historically enduring association with the extreme and the transgressive, through its connection with Carnival figures such as pirates and transported convicts. I examine how these associations contributed to the images of the islands as sites of debauchery and misrule, and how the black slave became the inheritor of these images of difference and contrast, against which the figure of the Enlightened Briton emerged as superior.\textsuperscript{16}

The third aspect of this dissertation will focus on the effects of this Caribbean Carnival identity on literary production in Britain, and examine how much genres such as the Gothic were informed by, and responded to, the image of the Caribbean as a site of the transgressive and horrible. As David Punter suggests, one of the main themes of the Gothic genre was the way in which social and moral boundaries were crossed or transgressed.\textsuperscript{17} I demonstrate how accounts of Caribbean life with their stories of hedonism, murder, rape and miscegenation provided a source for Gothic literature, which extends the previous reading of Gothic as a purely domestic phenomenon.\textsuperscript{18} I will identify the link between the barbarities of slavery and the plantation system with the emergence of Gothic literature, but also highlight how the power and the wealth of the Caribbean planters, the “Plantocracy” was seen in terms of a gothicised threat to Britain’s economy.

\textsuperscript{15} Henry Home, Lord Kames, \textit{Preliminary Discourses, Concerning the Origin of Men and of Languages} (London: A. Millar, 1778).
This study looks at how, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Caribbean is consolidated as a symbol within British culture through the “code” of Carnival transgression. I argue that this symbol is still current and provides transgressive images of the Caribbean in contemporary British culture and demonstrate how Caribbean society remains a site of fear and alterity. I highlight how mass emigration to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 60s was an anxiety for British culture, primarily because the established codes of Caribbean transgression were already in place within British culture. The views held by Enoch Powell, that the Afro-Caribbean was a figure of horror, that left him “filled with foreboding,” simply fed into already established images of Caribbean identity.¹⁹

It must be acknowledged that there is a British bias in terms of the selection of material for this dissertation, and the way in which the argument is organised to demonstrate the effect of the Caribbean on British culture. However this approach was determined by the intention to re-position the Caribbean in order to emphasize its influence on the development of British culture, an endeavour which is only possible by focussing on British texts. In his essay, ‘The Other Question’ Homi Bhabha states,

I do not intend to deconstruct the colonial discourse to reveal its ideological misconceptions or repressions, to exult in its self-reflexivity, or to indulge its liberatory 'excess'. In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a normalizing judgement.²⁰

Bhabha is sensitive to the eurocentric positioning of much cultural theory. However, in terms of the evolution of Caribbean identity it is necessary to unpack the British cultural inscription of the region in order to examine the misconceptions and repressions of the coloniser, and fully appreciate how important the Caribbean was in a global context.

Eric Williams, in his work *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), written over fifty years ago, investigated the effects of the triangular trade on global economics. This seminal text, demonstrated how the Caribbean sugar trade was the single most important economic site of the Old Empire.

The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution. The West Indian Islands became the hub of the British Empire, of immense importance to the grandeur and prosperity of England. It was the Negro slaves who made these sugar colonies the most precious colonies recorded in the whole annals of imperialism. 21

The economic dependence of Britain on the Caribbean islands was well documented, both during the colonial period, as well as by contemporary historians, and Williams's claims have been moderated by more recent research that calls into question his assertions about the decline of sugar production in the West Indies and the rise of humanitarianism in Britain which he sees as directly related. 22 Nevertheless, the overall significance of the Caribbean for British economic development is still regarded as a central factor. As Thomas Bender has pointed out, Williams's theory was more interpretative than factual in its handling of the economic data of the slave trade.

As all seminal works ought to do, Williams' book stimulated decades of monographic response, but as is often the case with such works, the scholarship it called into existence did not sustain its thesis. It is not at all clear that the plantation economy was in decline, nor is the crude explication of interest that Williams employed any longer compelling. Yet the legacy of the work survives. If his formulation of the argument has proven vulnerable, the larger issues of identifying the relationship between the rise of capitalism and the decline of slavery has remained stimulating. 23

Although the work of these historians is important, it serves to alert us to the relationship which existed between the Caribbean and Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This dissertation examines the cultural aspect of this relationship and how it operated and developed in tandem with the economic because there is a parallel cultural exchange between the two sites which is possibly as important as the commercial trade. Seymour Drescher suggests, "the British West Indies were generally the most important sector to Britain for the entire century between 1722 and

1822," and we shall establish how British culture became equally as dependent on a cultural image of the Caribbean as a site of colonial Otherness, both a reflection and a sign of difference, through which it consolidated its own cultural and national identity in the wake of the Act of Union.\(^\text{24}\) According to Colley, "They (the British) came to define themselves as a single people not because of any political or cultural consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the Other beyond their shores."\(^\text{25}\) I will suggest that the Caribbean provided this reflection.

Although the Caribbean was only one of many imperial sites with which Britain developed exploitative relations both economic and cultural, the Caribbean site reveals a unique influence on the evolution of Britishness, which will become clear through an investigation of a variety of mainstream literary texts such as *The Monk* (1797), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Jane Eyre* (1847). These novels, over the one hundred year period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, serve to emphasise the centrality of the Caribbean presence in British culture, and the intertextuality of cultural evolution. As Paul Gilroy notes, the cultures of the coloniser and colonised were not, "even in situations of extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from each other" and this study examines the specific influence of the Caribbean as one of those colonial sites.\(^\text{26}\)

Towards a definition of the Carnival.

As the *Oxford English Dictionary* establishes, the etymology of the word 'Carnival' is derived from the Latin of the Medieval period, "carnem levare the putting away or removal of flesh". However, and, somewhat paradoxically, Carnival has come to mean the reverse of its primary and original meaning; as it is also defined as "Any season or course of feasting, riotous revelry or indulgence."\(^\text{27}\) Its meaning therefore spans both the concept of scarcity and longing, and also of indulgence and excess. I have chosen to discuss the development of culture in Britain and the Caribbean through this metaphor for two reasons. Primarily, because it symbolises both the lack, and subsequent yearning for, the excessive and transgressive


\(^{25}\)Colley, *Britons*, p.6


characteristics absent in British identity and culture which was so heavily influenced and founded on Puritanism and the Enlightenment principles of rationalist ideology. During the medieval period, and up to the fifteenth century, folk festivals and carnival flourished in the British Isles, and were particularly strong in England. The festivals were often a conflation of old pagan celebrations, Roman traditions and later Christian festivals that ranged from the pan-European Lent carnivals and Christmas celebrations to local traditions such as the ‘bull running’ at Chester. The ethnologist Joseph Strutt comprehensively catalogued the traditional carnivals, folk celebrations and holiday customs of England. He traces the roots of many of these folk traditions such as May Day celebrations to pre-Roman England and investigates how, with the rise of Puritanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, they were discouraged and gradually lost their religious and social importance.\textsuperscript{28} Zealous ministers often focussed on the traditional folk culture as both damaging to authority and social stability. The pastor Thomas Hall for example in his pamphlet, \textit{Funebria Florae; or the Down Fall of the May Games} (1660), lists those who he felt undermined the moral health of the nation, and includes many of the conventional figures of carnival celebrations among the offenders.

Contrary to the peace of our sovereign lord, his iron and dignity, hast brought in a pack of practical fanaticks; viz. ignorants, atheists, papists, drunkards, swearers, swash-bucklers, maid-marrions, morrice-dancers, maskers, mummers, May-Pole stealers, health-drinkers, gamesters, lewd-men, light women, contemners of magistrates, affronters of ministers, rebellious to masters, disobedient to parents, mispenders of time, and abusers of the creatures, \&c.\textsuperscript{29}

The carnival festivals were either suppressed through the change in religious views such as those demonstrated by Hall which became increasingly suspicious of the overhangs of Catholicism in traditional customs, or were made obsolete by the gradual shift from an agrarian to more industrial society, and the movement of populations away from the countryside and the subsequent changes to local communities. As E.P. Thompson notes, despite the revival of many folk festivals after the Restoration in 1688, these holidays and festivals became politicised, and although carnivals and festivals were celebrated, they were now incorporated into an official calendar that upheld the Hanoverian dynasty.

\textsuperscript{28} Joseph Strutt, \textit{The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England; Including the Rural and Domestic Recreations, May Games, Mummeries, Shows Processions, Pageants and Pompous Spectacles} (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845).
The ceremonies and processions of the trades, which had once been built into the calendar of the corporate year—under the patronage of Bishop Blaize for the wool Combers, St. Clement for the blacksmiths and St. Crispin, for the shoemakers—might still be celebrated on special occasions, such as coronations and anniversaries in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{30}

Thompson also discusses how these festivals were no longer communal expressions of a whole nation, but were instead increasingly the marginalized culture of the poor and dispossessed, indicating the gulf that was opening up between the lower and middle-classes in Britain. By the end of the eighteenth century, with the new spirit of rationalism, the old folk festivals and carnivals had lost much of their remaining significance and the fear of riots and mob demonstrations from the landless masses and the poor, resulted in legislation that signalled the end of many festivals and carnivals in Britain, or had transformed them into quaint local traditions devoid of political and social threat.\textsuperscript{31}

Secondly, Carnival is the organising metaphor of my thesis because the closure and suppression of the folk festival experienced in Britain in the eighteenth century, clearly contrasts with the way in which Carnival and the creolisation of culture emerged as the central focus of Caribbean culture. Carnival operates in the Caribbean as both a cultural event, which was first chronicled in travel writings such as Lady Maria Nugent's \textit{A Journal of a Voyage to, and Residence in, the Island of Jamaica} (1839) and J.B Moreton's \textit{Manners and Customs of the West Indian Islands} (1790), as well as a contemporary cultural theory. As Paul Sharrad suggests, "In Carnival, the fixity of an all-embracing medieval world view is subverted to create a modern, ambiguous rite of passage founded on a vision of creational flux."\textsuperscript{32} Edward Brathwaite has also demonstrated how the carnivals, particularly at Christmas and Lent, were periods of brief respite from the rigours of slavery, and crucially provide evidence for the way in which Caribbean culture became a fusion of African and European traditions, and a platform for the hybridised culture of the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{33} Carnival, is therefore a useful metaphor through which to examine the intercultural relationships of Britain and the Caribbean.

\textsuperscript{29} Thomas Hall, \textit{Funebria Florae: or the Down Fall of the May-Games} (London: H. Mortlock, 1660).
For eighteenth-century Europe it is clear that Mikhail Bakhtin reads the Enlightenment as a problematic period of European cultural because it failed to understand or value the place of the Carnival and the irrational in human society. He states "the image of the contradictory, perpetually becoming and unfinished being could not be reduced to the dimensions of the Enlighteners reason." Instead, Bakhtin suggests that a reduced reading of the carnival that supported a more cerebral and 'formalized' interpretation of the literature and traditions of folk culture was adopted by the Enlighteners, who really missed the point, or subverted the themes of Carnival to support their own ideological agenda, as evidenced by the process of the renaming and reworking of traditional festivals in the early eighteenth century to celebrate new, political holidays, such as the king's birthday. This austere misreading of its sociological function however, created societies which were deficient, because they suffered from the lack of a festive life which provided, what Bakhtin called, the "universal renewal" a periodic and regular analysis of the boundaries of society, that could only be achieved through the provision of a temporary release from the strictures of official identity. This absence of the carnival negated the possibility for Britain to achieve a national identity that could exist outside an official identity founded on imperialism and Protestantism.

Nevertheless, Bakhtin's critique does not extend or negotiate cultural sites beyond the European arena, and in this thesis I will extend the parameters of the discussion to explore how this loss manifests itself in the colonial context of the Caribbean. I argue that the irrational and transgressive aspects of Carnival, ignored and relegated by the Enlightenment writers, were in fact transferred onto the Caribbean site, which was then characterised by the second dictionary meaning of the carnival: as a place of hedonism, riot and indulgence. In other words, Carnival contains within its definitions the symbolism of the adoption of a non-bodily rationalist ideology ascribed to British national identity; and also a gross physicality, similar to that identified by Bakhtin in the culture of the sixteenth century. The latter of which is both attributed to Caribbean identity and simultaneously and self reflexively, exiled from notions of Britishness.

Umberto Eco highlights another aspect of the Carnival that is essential in understanding the impact of its transgression, which is its relationship to authority.

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34 Bakhtin Rabelais, p.118.
"Carnival can exist only as an authorized transgression (which in fact represents a case of contradictio in adjecto or of a happy double binding-capable of curing instead of producing neurosis)." I will demonstrate the point, that the Caribbean is inscribed as the space of Carnival for Britain, operating at the margins of the imperial culture, both geographically as well as psychologically. It acts as a contained and authorised space in the British psyche, which provides a parody of the rules and restrictions of Britishness, and also as a site in which the repressed aspects of Britishness, such as violence and hedonism could be exercised vicariously. This ultimately served to prop-up the fantasy of British national identity. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, also note the way in which positive social definitions are made through the exclusion of the Carnival. "The Bourgeois subject continuously defined and redefined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low' - as dirty, repulsive, noisy contaminating. The low was internalised under the sign of negation and disgust." Stallybrass and White's point can be directly applied to the concept of Britishness, which could divorce itself from contradictions by associating destabilising impulses with another culture, outside its physical boundaries.

The Caribbean became a cultural symbol of Carnival transgression for British culture in order to provide a reassuring referent against which Britain's cultural progress and self-satisfied images of control could be valorised. Through following the evolution of Caribbean culture and the increasing interest in questions of black identity in discussions of race and racial theory, I will also examine how this in turn contributed to the debates in which blackness became a trope of atavism.

This dissertation also explores the cultural archaeology of writers of the modern era who have used this Carnival image of the Caribbean. Although inscribed in British culture in a negative manner, Caribbean Carnival was reworked and reclaimed by many Caribbean artists who conceptualised their Carnival identity as a positive and powerful ideology. Writers such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Earl Lovelace, Samuel Selvon and Derek Walcott as well as Wilson Harris, have used the Carnival to set up a discourse of Caribbean identity that is inclusive, evolutionary and

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incorporative. Edward Brathwaite uses the image of the Carnival to demonstrate the way in which a cultural interchange took place between the European and African communities which resulted in a whole new Creole culture, a hybrid that is unique linguistically as well as culturally. Through theoretical researches and poetry, he examines the way in which the Carnival and Creole 'nation language' became a symbol of resistance through which black slaves preserved an identity and a culture in a narrowly policed environment. Brathwaite looks specifically at how the old European customs became adapted and altered in Caribbean society.39 Earl Lovelace, uses the image of the carnival to explore the politics of Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean divisions, choosing the Carnival, the symbol of cultural fusion to debate anxieties of racial tension in his fiction. In his text The Dragon Can't Dance (1979) for example, he explores the way in which the folk culture of the yard and its expression in the Carnival celebration cannot exist as a static phenomenon, but is always under pressure to change and redefine itself, incorporating and fusing new identities and influences.40

Sam Selvon, explores the burlesque inheritance of the carnival form, often using comedy and humour to demonstrate the subversive aspects of Caribbean culture, and also images the conflation of cultures through the symbol of the calypso singer, again demonstrating how the Carnival was aligned with oral expression and resistance to authority. He writes from the perspective of the folk and uses a self-conscious version of the oral Creole as the register for his narratives, subverting and challenging the image of the Caribbean by manipulating its comic inheritance in British culture, whilst drawing on traditions such as the figure of Anancy, the trickster, from Caribbean folk traditions.41 Derek Walcott, uses Carnival thematically, but also as a structure in his poetry. However it is his view on mimicry that provides another interpretation of the Carnival. He states that "mimicry is an act of imagination...it is a design"42 Walcott in defending and celebrating his identity as a Caliban, a subverter of a received language and history, places himself as the transgressor, a Carnival reflection of an image that transforms and alters the original

into something hybrid and unique, rejecting and challenging conventional identity and ethnological classifications. The anarchic and transgressive arrangement and rhythm of Walcott’s poetry reflects another way in which the Caribbean artists incorporate the carnival into their work.

Wilson Harris has made specific use of the Carnival as an organising metaphor in his work, both theoretical and fictional, and it is perhaps the most enduring image through all his texts. For Harris, the freedom that the Carnival represents in terms of its ability to fuse identity and remain in a constant state of change is an appropriate image to reflect Caribbean identity in a perpetual state of transformation. Like other writers Harris consciously moves between Carnival as a specifically cultural event and as an ideological tool and metaphor through which to come to terms with the fragmented inheritance of the Caribbean as a post-colonial site. The way in which these artists negotiate the concept of Carnival supports Umberto Eco’s view regarding the potential effects of a permanent condition of Carnival, which inevitably alters and transforms beyond that prescriptive boundary. “In a world dominated by diabolical powers, in a world of everlasting transgression, nothing remains comic or carnivalesque, nothing can any longer become an object of parody, if not transgression itself.”

This development of the Caribbean as a site outside the parameters of British structures of society because of its permanent condition of Carnival, reinforces what Wilson Harris identifies as the unique conditions for Caribbean fulfilment. Indeed, the transgressive inscription that the British projected onto the Caribbean, is now a tool of transformation, and can even be read as providing a genuinely alternative culture, that can be strategically contrasted with the state of British culture in a crisis of postmodern breakdown, in which the homogeneous and monolithic identity, (that I have shown to be an implement of imperialist desire) struggles to redefine itself.

This thesis engages with contemporary discussions in literary theory and most obviously with those that are involved with debates about postcolonialism and postmodernism. Although it is not a specific analysis of these extensive discourses, they are implicit in discussions of the cultural exchange between the Caribbean and Britain. Renu Juneja, in Caribbean Transactions (1996), presents a comprehensive outline of how the Caribbean should not be conflated with other postcolonial sites

because of its specific history. Juneja rightly makes the point that unlike other colonies which had existing cultures that were altered or developed in reaction to the process of colonisation, The Caribbean people, (with the obvious acknowledgement to surviving indigenous peoples) were all emigrants to the islands. "No indigenous tradition exists...present day occupants of the Caribbean came there from elsewhere."45 This point is a crucial one when examining how Caribbean culture developed because all culture on the islands is necessarily manufactured, a combination of many interpretations of several original cultures.

Indeed postcolonial critics, like Helen Tiffin46 and Barbara Christian47 argue that the former colonies are in danger of being subsumed by the coloniser once again, this time in the appropriation of the discourse of the margin, and the postmodern negation of the homogeneous identity. This is exemplified by Frederic Jameson’s contentious point that in a postmodern world, identities such as race and gender become "badges of affirmation."48 However as Hena Maes-Jelinek points out, what Harris’ theory calls for is a drastic alteration in the actual parameters of discussion. Like Kamau Brathwaite, Harris rejects the terms of linear history in favour of a "prismatic approach," and his carnivalised way of interpreting culture cannot be defined within postmodern terms.49 As Jelinek says, postmodernism has failed to really revise the traditional outlook. “Certainly, the self reflexiveness of much postmodernist fiction has not necessarily entailed a drastic revision of narrative strategies and change in outlook."50 At this point, it might be worth noting that Harris’ view is only one interpretation of the specific conditions of Caribbean culture. However, even critics such as Simon Gikandi, who suggests that the Caribbean is in a state of redefining Modernity, are still challenging the static terms with which postmodernism debates identity. He argues that even this modernising process demands a "reconceptualisation of the colonial language."51

44 Umberto Eco, p.7
During the progress of this discussion several aspects of contemporary postcolonial theory will be interrogated. It is therefore essential to locate this dissertation within this theoretical context. Again Juneja has an incisive position with regard to those critics, like Spivak and Babha who can be read as being so “overly preoccupied with interrogating the colonial discourse, they give scant attention to visions of alternate realities available in West Indian literature”52

Nevertheless, for an understanding of the effects of colonisation for both sides, it is necessary to foreground the intercommunal relationships in the formation of both the British and Caribbean cultural perspectives. By examining the way in which British culture projected the repressed horror of its own potential Carnival transgression onto the Caribbean site in order to avoid recognition of the self-reflexive process of national self-engendering, arguments such as Babha’s theory of ambivalence can be re-examined. In ‘Narrating the Nation’ Bhabha clearly identifies how,

ambivalence...haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.53

Bhabha, here refers to the emergence of the nation in a postcolonial context. However his comments are also appropriate in the discussion of Britishness, which despite being an imperial power was, I shall argue, to some extent, conscious of its own ambivalent relationship with the concept of homogeneous national identity.

Throughout the dissertation I argue that British national identity was neither secure nor homogeneous at the point of colonisation, but existed as a fictional conflation of imperialism and Protestantism that was in danger of exposure, and it is this aspect of the postcolonial debate that is often overlooked, and which this thesis underlines. This point is well illustrated by Abdul Jan Mohammed in his essay The Economy of Manichaen Allegory. He says,

Moreover the colonizers invariable assumptions about his moral superiority means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society’s formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonised. By thus subverting the traditional dialectic self and Other that contemporary theory considers so

52 Juneja, p.13.
important in the formation of self and culture, the assumption of moral superiority subverts the very potential of colonialist literature. Instead of being an exploration of the racial Other, such literature merely affirms its own ethnocentric assumptions; instead of actually depicting the outer limits of "civilization," it simply codifies and preserves the structures of its own mentality. While the surface of each colonialist text purports to represent specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other, the subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures, of the collective process that has mediated that representation. Such literature is essentially specular: instead of seeing the native as a bridge toward synchretic possibility, it uses him as a mirror that reflects the colonialists' self-image.54

As JanMohammed states, the native can never be negotiated with in terms of a synchretic potential, and in fact is obliged to preserve the construction of its own mentality. However, in the light of this study, it is necessary to add that the colonists self-image, which Janmohammed assumes to be sound, is in fact problematic, because there is a disturbing self-consciousness in the literature of the colonizer, that indicates how his identity perpetually threatens to unravel at the edges, in this case exposing Britishness to be an entirely fictitious identity. Therefore it is not the superiority of European culture that these texts present in JanMohammed's essay, but the need to continually reinforce an image of superiority, which is altogether a different matter.

This assumption about the cohesive nature of British identity is one that remains unquestioned by many critics. However, as Simon Gikandi highlights the contemporary crisis of identity in postmodern Britain signals the way in which Britishness must be re-examined as an insecure phenomenon, not just in a contemporary context, but also from its moment of conception in 1707.

If the disappearance of empire has left Great Britain with nothing more than nostalgia and the signs of a post-imperial atrophy- the decaying industrial infrastructure, racism and cultural hysteria- it has also generated questions about colonialisms surreptitious function in the formation of British identity.55

The argument I present however shows how the construction of Britishness was originally flawed, and only made possible because transgressive contradictions within the ideology of British culture were re-labelled as un-British and became associated with colonial alterity. However the need and longing for this exiled festive life meant that the Caribbean was a source of fascination for British culture, and simultaneously

a site of vicarious desire and open derision. As Homi Babha has identified it is this
ambivalence, this lack of certainty and confidence which, although buried under an
ideology of national security and certainty, haunts the image of the nation.

Constructions of Britishness propose the Caribbean as a troubling site of
transgression that threatens to expose the shallow foundations of Britishness because
cultural relationships with the Caribbean are ambivalent. On one hand there is the
agenda of the demonisation of the Caribbean, where it is represented in diametrical
opposition to the values of Britishness, helping to define and support the ideology of
British national identity. While on the other, it threatens to expose, and certainly
troubles the ideology of Britishness, by not providing a simple inverted image of
British identity.

If, as I hypothesise, British identity is in constant tension with its own
inauthenticity, the carnivalised reflection of the Caribbean only emphasises the
artificiality of British identity, by reiterating its loss of the festive life as a site of
social freedom and liberation. The few remaining symbols of a residual folk culture,
for example in the celebrations at Christmas and Easter, that are still present in the
contemporary society have become parodic and meaningless, constantly evoking and
emphasising their superficiality and loss of meaning. Indeed the crisis of identity in
postmodern Britain can be viewed as a direct result of the failure to develop an
identity that exceeded the narrow parameters of Britishness and provided a space for
authentic folk expression. In contrast, the Caribbean is still circumscribed within a
discourse of authenticity, in which the spontaneous and anarchic are related to a
"primitive" construction of this culture. Therefore the carnival in Trinidad and even
Notting Hill is still viewed as transgressive and attractive, whilst also evoking
anxieties within British identity. As Kwesi Owusu in his analysis of the Notting Hill
Carnival has pointed out, although the Carnival is enormously popular and is now the
biggest street festival in Europe, the tensions and anxieties it raises evoke the
problematic relationship of British identity with folk culture.

State attempts at controlling the Notting hill Carnival and containing its social
and political impact reached a climax in 1975-7. Although this in itself is a
brief slice of history its significance is considerable because it echoes both the
cultural repression of Caribbean colonial history, and the history of the
repression of popular culture and events of mass jollification in England.\footnote{Kwesi Owusu and Jacob Ross, \textit{Behind the Masquerade} (London: Arts Media Group, 1984), p.88.}
The Caribbean exists even within contemporary society as an identity of potential transgression which continually threatens to challenge and disturb Britishness even within authorised events such as the Notting Hill Carnival which although incorporated at some level into the annual calendar of events in British culture, only serves to emphasize the gap between Britishness and expressions of folk culture.

**Reading the Caribbean in Contemporary Culture.**

Sarah Lawson Walsh and Alison Donnell, describe the literature of the Caribbean as having a "varied and mongrel nature." This terminology, with its association of the impure and illegitimate, can be read as particularly questionable, given the historical background of miscegenation and inter-racial relationships in the Caribbean and the way 'mongrel' is used as a term of abuse for those of mixed race. If they are implying that Caribbean writing is a literature whose origins are unclear, or uncharted then given the extensive range and number of intellectual studies in the field, I suggest it is only a matter of time before these origins will be apparent. However if they are referring to the way in which Caribbean culture represents a site of fusion and inclusion, then perhaps the more positive image of the Carnival adopted by for example, Lovelace, Lamming and Harris is perhaps more appropriate.

As Nana Wilson-Tagoe argues, both Caribbean artists and historians such as Edward Brathwaite, and Derek Walcott push history and culture beyond the usual linear analysis and therefore give a reflection of the Caribbean that is more accurate, as it takes into account the heterogeneous nature of Caribbean culture. She refers to Brathwaite's position as "prismatic" and investigates Wilson Harris's criticism of the inappropriate adoption of traditional historical discourse when analysing the Caribbean.

Harris has consistently called for the deconstruction of this monolithic and linear history and argued for a perspective and methodology that would reconstitute the region's history to include larger spaces and forces: other landscapes, other

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pasts and mythologies which though seeming lifeless may yet yield the essential degeneration and erosion of historical perspective, the kind of erosion necessary for the deconstruction of patterns of imperial history. 60

Therefore in this new historical revision of the past, contemporary Caribbean artists can be seen to invert the traditional negative Carnival inscriptions, thus creating a whole new cultural perspective, in which Carnival and its related sense of incorporation and conflation is used as the conceptual term for this re-visioning.

The dissertation is organised into six chapters. The first chapter offers an analysis of British identity from the Act of Union in 1707, and investigates how Britishness was a fictional ideological construct, that was laid over existing nationalisms, in order to unify the disparate and conflicting histories of its constituent nations. I examine how writers such as Alexander Pope and Daniel Defoe are implicated in the self-conscious fashioning of a new cultural identity, that is founded on the principles of Protestantism and Imperialism; and highlight how the latter effectively consolidates a British national identity, by shifting the focus away from potential domestic divisions to the colonial site, in which the fiction of British identity could stand unchallenged. In this chapter I highlight the centrality of literature, particularly the novel, in consolidating the new sense of morality and discipline that underpinned Britishness. We examine how texts such as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748-49) can be read as allegories of cultural vulnerability and indicate how symbols of the masquerade and Carnival become gradually threatening to a new cultural identity which is sensitive to tropes of disguise and refashioning.

The second chapter is an extensive investigation of the history of the Caribbean and the sugar trade. It is a focussed look at the power and influence of this region in terms of the economic structure in Britain, and how the region influenced politics in the early eighteenth century. It also introduces the theme of the Caribbean as a transgressive space in comparison with British morality, and examines the foundations of an identity of alterity in the Caribbean from contemporary factual accounts of the region. This chapter locates this historical material against a re-examination of the rise of Gothic literature, and argues that texts such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*

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60 Nana Wilson-Tagoe, p.3.
(1797), were all informed by and responded to a social anxiety about the centrality of the Caribbean in British social and economic life.

The third chapter focuses on the Caribbean and comprises a detailed analysis of how images of the Caribbean were both created and received in Britain, during the period under study. It unpacks the medieval inscription of the sugar trade and how this sets up the transfer of the British Carnival archive onto the Caribbean. This chapter also investigates the profile of the various social groups within Caribbean society, from planters and pirates through to free people of colour and slaves, and examines how they are implicated within a rhetoric of Carnival in journals and travel narratives such as those of Maria Nugent (1839) and Bryan Edwards (1793). The Carnival depiction of slaves and slavery is also debated. Images of black slaves as comic and burlesque figures in literature and particularly plays, such as Bickerstaff's *The Padlock* (1768) are examined, as is the portrayal of the slave in abolition literature; both of which are used to establish a Carnival discourse of slavery and blackness.

The fourth chapter constitutes a review of the Romantic period as a failed attempt to respond to the cultural longing for a genuine folk history and Carnival heritage. It involves an analysis of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1789), and demonstrates how the new interest in ethnology at the turn of the nineteenth century was circumscribed by the construction of British identity. The chapter also interrogates the way in which the Caribbean entered British culture as an implicit code of horror and transgression through discussions about slavery and abolition, and by examining several canonical novels by Jane Austen, such as *Mansfield Park* (1814), the chapter demonstrates how the Caribbean was established as a trope of Carnival alterity.

Chapter five is an extension and progression of the argument that highlights how the Caribbean is a coded symbol for the violation of British identity, and charts this from its implicit to explicit presence in British literature. Through texts such as *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Jane Eyre* (1847), the chapter negotiates how with the consolidation of British national identity, references to the Caribbean as the site of Carnival opposition became more openly acknowledged. The chapter also examines how the Caribbean is locked into a discourse of monstrosity, in which it became synonymous with disease, bad-blood and madness. Also, by a close examination of Sir Spenser Buckingham St. John’s text on the Voodoo practises of the Caribbean, *Hayti, Or the Black Republic*, (1884), I demonstrate how, once again, the Caribbean is
constructed in Gothic terms, and underline how this association was, by the close of the nineteenth century, both overt and explicit.
Chapter One

The Birth of Britain: A New Nation.

In the course of this chapter I will present an analysis of British identity after the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, which will argue that Britishness, far from being a tangible culture was, from its outset, a detached and rootless ideology overlaid on the existing national identities of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Through detailed examination of fictional texts such as Daniel Defoe’s *Tour Through The Whole Island of Great Britain* (1723-6), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), I will debate the hypothesis raised by many historians such as Linda Colley¹, David Speck² and Kathleen Wilson³ that Britain was a self-conscious and artificial construction. As Roy Porter states, “Great Britain was not the least important eighteenth-century invention,” and it is the invented, fictional aspect of this national identity, and the part that contemporary works of literature played in this invention, that provides the foundation of the following chapter.⁴

The argument is organised into two complementary investigations, the first of which examines how the literature of the early eighteenth century both created and sustained an image of Britishness that functioned as a consolidating trope for the divisions within the old regional nationalisms in Britain and demonstrates how the use of fiction and imaginative narrative generated this new cultural identity, which actually defined the parameters of Britishness. Secondly, the chapter analyses how this national ideology,

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although problematic within a domestic arena, was not only consolidated but also realised in a colonial context, where the contradictions and complexity of conflicting national identities within the British Isles were submerged in the ideology of imperialism and the colonial project. It will also debate the extent to which the emergence of colonial stereotypes, such as the debauched West Indian planter, influenced and effectively shaped the profile of the modern British identity.

The imperial project of colonial expansion and consolidation in regions such as the Caribbean coincided temporally with the period of great change in the organisation of the British Isles, and reveals a connection between domestic imperialism, that is the amalgamation of nation states within the British Isles, and the global exportation of “Britishness” as an ideological force. One example of this is the way in which the Highland rebels (after the defeat of Charles Stuart, in 1745) were removed or left Scotland for the Caribbean and America, indicating that the colonies were a convenient site in which to relocate, either forcibly or voluntarily, those whose views contrasted with the new British ideals. The same could be applied to the transportation of criminals to the Caribbean, which was a widespread practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The chapter will therefore focus on the way in which the colonies were a vital, but often overlooked factor in the formation of Britain, both physically by providing a space of exile for those who challenged the nascent ideology of a united kingdom, as well as psychologically by creating the reflected illusion of cultural homogeneity for Britain, that defined itself in contrast to colonial Otherness. As the historian Kathleen Wilson argues,

That the British empire permeated Georgian English culture at a number of levels, from literature and theatre to philanthropy and fashion, gardening and politics, is beyond dispute, but the specificity of the eighteenth century imperial sensibilities still needs to be recovered: the various ways in which empire was imagined, debated and discussed, and above all the contending meanings which empire held for the various groups involved in or engaged by the mesmerising spectacle of Britain’s global expansion.5

5 Wilson, p.23.
What Wilson suggests is that the empire was far more central to notions of domestic identity than is often acknowledged, and was a dominant theme with respect to not only the condition of the economy, but was one of the foundational myths of British cultural identity. This far-reaching effect of the empire is one which is clearly emphasised, particularly with regard to the way in which it permeated areas of domestic politics and culture that were not immediately involved with commerce.

The broad social basis within Britain of investment in the imperial project, from the financing of ships and investment in slave cargoes to colonial land speculation, as well as the distribution, consumption and population patterns which spread colonial and people across regions, oceans and nations, helped ensure that trade and empire were potent political issues throughout the eighteenth century, argued about and debated in a proliferation of printed materials as well as in artefacts, street theatre and demonstrations. But interest in the empire was never solely a product of material involvement. Rather it shaped the national imagination in ways that gave it particular salience within domestic politics and culture.  

Wilson recognises the interconnection between the foundations of Britain as a cultural and national ideology, and its dependence on a colonial context to give this identity meaning.

Britain and a New Geography.

At the time of the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707, it was widely recognised that the whole concept of Britishness was highly problematic and largely unwelcome by all but the prevailing political decision-makers of the day. The formation of Britain was a political necessity, but the reality of union between nations was to a large extent imaginary. Tom Nairn has referred to the creation of Britain as a "phony geography" indicating the artificial construct of this nationalism which he recognises as a "primary historic definition, alien from mere nationalism" because it is superimposed over

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6 Wilson, p.24.
an extant "multi-national reality." Therefore the illusory component of Britishness was, from the outset, a strong element in British national identity, because its fragmented reality was especially evident. According to Linda Colley, there had always been for example "a long history of mutual hatred, mistrust and armed conflict" between England and Scotland. The negotiations and the Act of Union itself were accompanied by violence and bitterness on both sides of the border, and it was only brought about by very skilful politicians who were often violently attacked by mobs vehemently opposed to union, both in England and Scotland. One Scottish negotiator complained in 1707 that, "we were threatened every day (that) we shall be murdered ...several thousands are coming to town armed who will force Parliament to give over this affair," and even in the House of Commons a leading churchman, Sir John Pakington, declared the whole treaty as an outrage, "like the marrying of a woman without her consent; an union carried on by corruption and bribery indoors, and by force and violence without."

The unified British state completed in the 1707 agreement was, however, only the latest in a historic series of highly unpopular associations within the British Isles. Despite the fact that Wales had undergone an effectual union with England in 1598, it was significant that the Welsh were still distanced economically and culturally from England, which always operated as the dominant partner in this arrangement. Roy Porter is critical of the way in which Britishness was very heavily biased in favour of England and examines how Wales, for example, remained undeveloped and virtually ignored until the nineteenth century. The same national differences existed between England and Ireland and also with other colonies like the North American territories, which were frequently regarded as part of Britain. It therefore became necessary to create cohesion between these different

8 Colley, p.117.
9 Speck, p.112, 114.
10 Porter, pp.34-38.
nations and overcome the very strong antipathy that was much in evidence despite the legislation to amalgamate them.

National allegiance remained located in the separate nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and the task facing the British people in 1707 was therefore much more complex than that of creating a nation, because nation and the idea of patriotism, and national allegiance and identity already existed. What occurred in the aftermath of the Act of Union, was the creation of what I will call here a "super-nation," a loose concept of similar religious and linguistic affiliations that bonded the different nations of Britain and provided the framework for a collective British identity. I will examine how this was perhaps the most fundamental factor that shaped Britain's relationships not only internally, but crucially transformed imperial ideology after this period.

As Ernest Gellner highlights, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness, it invents them where they do not exist." Indeed, Gellner demonstrates how the emergence of nations and nationalism is always determined by a political agenda, and in this chapter I shall argue that this is particularly clear in the case of Britain. The different nations that made up Britain were acutely aware of their differences and consequently the term 'Britain' became a complex concept. In reality the constituent nations, had their own identities which would have been difficult to supplant even in the eighteenth century. Often the result of historically enduring conflicts between these nations, the depth of their difference made the realisation of a unified Britain too problematic a concept to be easily resolved. Hugh Seton-Watson has demonstrated how national identity within the constituent nations was the result of a slow, and to large extent, spontaneous process which contrasted strongly with the new national identity of Britain, which was quickly formed by the national elite.


However the extent to which Britain and British national identity is an artifice was evident from its outset. Britain was an ideology, but crucially it was an ideology based on a projection of extra-national aspirations of greatness in the conquest of an empire, and as a plastic concept that could be moulded to fit an image of, for example, Protestant sobriety without having to negotiate existing national contradictions. Theorist Benedict Anderson suggests that a nation can be described as an imaginary community which binds its people through a sense of comradeship, sovereignty and a sense of exclusive identity through limitation in terms of numbers. Although these definitions apply to the constituent states of England, Scotland Wales and Ireland, this was clearly not the case for Britain, which was, to a large extent, a dislocated set of Protestant beliefs and symbols. Britain was imagined and projected, but it was distinct from Anderson's idea of nation because initially it most certainly lacked any sense of emotional unity in a domestic context, and "the deep horizontal comradeship" that Anderson perceives is so necessary for national unity was lacking within British identity.13

At the time of the Union, when relations between England and Scotland should have been at a peak, the traditional hatred of each other was as clear as ever. The presence and popularity of a figure like John Wilkes whose political credibility was structured around a pathological hatred of 'all things Scottish' indicated the strength of this animosity. It was obvious that the nations of Britain, despite their shared government, and religion still imagined themselves as distinct national communities with separate emotional sites, national loyalties and attachments. It is only in the imperial or colonial context that these differences became irrelevant. In the pursuit of a British imperial policy, all internal divisions became secondary and the comradeship, that Anderson argues is so crucial to notions of national identity, was created. As Patrick Brantlinger has suggested, "Imperialism functioned as an ideological safety valve, deflecting both working class.

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radicalism and middle-class reformism into noncritical paths while preserving fantasies of aristocratic authority at home and abroad.14

In the domestic setting, Britishness existed in a loose conflation of symbols, such as the Union Jack, Liberty, Freedom and Britannia, and was located in a fundamental allegiance to the King and an adherence to Protestantism.15 These general themes however provided an effective, if sketchy, framework for British identity. The strength of Britishness lay in the fact that while it did not seek to eradicate the local, it effectively ignored and marginalized the existing national allegiances, or simply incorporated them. It was described as ‘Great’ from the beginning, suggesting that Britishness was a large, inclusive phenomenon, too large to be challenged by the petty interests of the national, and crucially, too great to be confined within specific definitions.

The use of the term Great therefore not only defined the geographical dimensions of Britain, but it also suggested ambiguous interpretations of new national eminence and superiority, and Britishness became synonymous with greatness. By conflating British identity with the Protestant faith and emphasizing a moral superiority, which was tacitly interwoven in notions of Britishness, it also took on a spiritual dimension and demanded an act of faith to believe in its ideology which lacked the foundations of genuine traditions and history. As James Sambrook has identified the support of the Act of Union was seen as a moral act, and the poet James Thomson made this interconnection of British nationalism and religion emblematic in literary work. As James Sambrook states Thomson was “a child of the Union, and perhaps the first poet to write with a British as distinct from a Scottish or English outlook.”16


15 The Union Jack was adopted after the Act of Union, 1707, the figure of Britannia was first used to represent Britain in 1609, and England was represented by John Bull from 1779 onward. see: Dorothy George, Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire (London; Penguin, 1967), p.13.

Thomson's poem *Britannia* (1729) is a good example of this interleaving of religion and nationalism. The poem was written to reinforce patriotic feeling in the disputes with the Spanish over naval territories in the Caribbean, which had been a simmering contention since the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and which eventually came to a climax with the declaration of hostilities against the Spanish in the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-43). However it is clear that the poem represented more than a specific response to the inaction of the prevailing government to move against the Spanish in the 1720s, because it is an example of aggressive nationalism supported by the concept of moral superiority. The figure of Britannia, with falling tresses and torn robe not only calls for war against "insulting Spaniards" who "dare infest the trading Flood,"(1.23) she demands that Britain be restored to her natural position of global supremacy. "The World of Waters wild, made by the toil /And liberal Blood of glorious Ages, mine."(1.27) In this poem, Thomson claimed that Britain was destined by divine Providence to dominate global commerce.

This is your Glory: this your Wisdom; this
The native Power for which you were designed
By Fate, when Fate design'd the firmest State
That e'er was seated on the subject sea
A state alone, where Liberty should live. (1.184-8)\(^{17}\)

The belief in British supremacy was explicitly joined to religious faith, and therefore a defence of Britain's commercial interests was expressed as a moral obligation.

The semi-theological position that Britishness had come to represent however was more clearly demonstrated by Thomson in the ode, 'Rule Britannia' originally included in

the score of the play, *Alfred. A Masque* (1740) in which the explicit connection between Britain and God’s design is made.

When Britain first, at Heavens command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land
And guardian angels sung this strain:
‘Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves.’ (1.1-6)

The fantasy of Britain as the chosen nation receiving from God the right to dominate global trade is projected in the poem, and it reflected the contemporary confidence that Britain was not only the home of liberty and freedom, but had the responsibility of being the best country in the world. The poem continues to reason why the “bless’d”(1.7.) British should be proud. However it is significant that Thomson envisioned Britain’s greatness almost exclusively in imperial terms. He writes of subduing foreign enemies who will, “But work their woe and thy renown”(1.22), and how Britain is the “dread and envy” (1.10) of all lesser nations and repeats the theme of commercial dominance found in *Britannia*. “Thy cities shall with commerce shine...And every shore it circles thine” (1.2). However, he reveals that the notion of Britishness was located in an image of colonial identity. As Alfred states, “I see thy commerce, Britain, grasp the world: all nations serve thee: every foreign flood/ Subjected, pays its tribute to the Thames.”

While works such as Thomson’s ‘Rule Britannia’ are self-evidently and self-consciously working to establish and promote the newly formed myth of British identity, another key site for such myth-making can be found in works of contemporary fiction such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-49). As Benedict Anderson

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20 *Alfred*, Act II sc.iii, p.31.
recognised, the complex mechanism of constructing and imagining a national identity emerges simultaneously in the eighteenth century as a form of wish-fulfilment, which can only exist because of developments in written culture. Simultaneity, an ability to imagine temporal coincidence, is contained within the "Two forms of imagining which flowered first in Europe in the eighteenth century: The novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for re-presenting the kind of imagined community that is the nation." In Britain, particularly, the interest in reading was widespread and during the eighteenth century there was a huge demand for publications, newspapers, political and religious tracts, as well as novels and 'histories' that were available to greater numbers of people from all classes.

Therefore with the improvement in transport and roads to distribute material, and the increases in rates of literacy throughout the century, writers had a dominant role in shaping the new British identity. The nation could be as 'Great' as, for example the writers imagined it to be, and there was often a lack of subtlety in the advocacy of Britain. The new nation envisioned and re-wrote itself as Great, comparing itself with the heights of culture and civilisation achieved by the ancient Classical civilisations of Greece and Rome. As James Sambrook notes, Britain with her "wide mercantile empire" sought similarity with the antique time, and in fact created cultural links with Rome.

There were other reasons why Britain harkened back to Rome to support this new identity. There was a recognition of similarities in social organisation, Britain operated as a class-divided nation where an oligarchy of intellectuals and the social elite ruled over a plebeian mass. As E.P Thompson has argued, Britain in the eighteenth century was already clearly stratified between two classes and perhaps had already divided into three. "This is a world of patricians and plebs; it is no accident that the rulers turned back to ancient Rome for a model of their own sociological order." However the most striking similarity for

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21 Anderson, Imagined Communities, p.24-25

22 James Sambrook, p.72.

contemporary Britons was the way in which the new nation was the centre of a global
power around which other nations and cultures circulated. Britain was visualised as the
pivot of an empire that, begun as a unifying project in the British Isles, could look to
imperial expansion abroad for greater glory and meaning.

As early as 1713, for example, Joseph Addison’s play Cato, made the connection
between the sense and justice of Britain and the historic values of Rome. In the prologue,
written by Pope, the elevation of Britain to the historic status of Rome is emphasized.

Here tears shall flow from a more gen’rous cause,
Such tears as Patriots shed for dying laws
He bids your breasts with ancient ardour rise’
And calls forth Roman drops from British Eyes.²⁴

This project of associating Britain with great civilisations which was common among
educated writers like Pope, was an effective way of short-circuiting any examination of
what Britain really meant. By framing Britishness within traditions of classical culture,
both in literature as well as architecture, Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century,
was born into her own “Golden Age” with no cultural baggage from England, Scotland
Wales or Ireland to weigh down her illustrious progress through the world.

Perhaps the best example of this ‘valoration through association’ was to be found
in another of Pope’s literary eulogies on Britain’s greatness. The extended panegyric
entitled Windsor Forest (1713), written in a complex imitation of the pastoral style of
Classical poets such as Virgil, offers a complete reworking of British history, revealing
how Britain, since the time of ‘The Creation’ was particularly blessed.²⁵ In fact Pope
makes the claim that, “The Groves of Eden, vanish’d now so long,”(line.7) might, without

vols (London: Bell, 1914), vol.1 p.349.

²⁵ Alexander Pope,'Windsor Forest' (1713) in The Poems of Alexander Pope, (ed.), John Butt (London:
too much poetic licence, be found in Britain therefore reinforcing, like Thompson’s ‘Rule Britannia’ the religious dimension of British cultural identity. Pope acknowledges that Britain underwent difficult periods when “a beast or Subject slain, were equal crimes in a Despotick Reign” (line.57). However this is explained as the result of the un-British influence of the Norman conquest, and the terrible oppressions which the native Britons were subjected to by the French. Nevertheless, he shows that the chosen nation did not despair and, “Fair Liberty, Britannia’s Goddess, rears Her Cheerful Head, and leads the golden Years” (line.92). Within the poem, Britain is made the inheritor and improver of ancient cultures like the Greek and Roman, and is associated with the intervention of the heroes and gods of classical mythology, without any gesture toward the incongruency of mixing Christian theology with pagan mythology.

Overall the poem, described by Ian Gordon as “partly glorifying myth and partly a merging of dream and fact,” links contemporary Britain, with mythical scenes, such as that which describes Queen Anne hunting in Windsor forest as the goddess Diana.26 “Th’immortal Huntress, and her Virgin Train; Nor envy Windsor! Since thy shades have seen as bright a Goddess, and as chast a Queen;”(l.160). The poem, formally written in rhyming couplets, continues to draw comparisons from Classical literature. The Thames, the “Father of the British floods”(l.219) is transformed into the greatest river that Neptune has created, and against the unfolding of British history, Pope attempts to demonstrate how Britain not only typifies the heights of great civilisation, but even surpasses comparison with the mythic. What Pope offers in Windsor Forest is a reinscription of Britain as the epitome of human society, modelled on Roman imperial civilisation that, like Britain, looked to its empire for identity and he celebrates the imperial subtext of Britishness. Having charted the past history of Britain’s evolution from the pagan times through the reigns of the Kings such as William the Conqueror, Edward IV and Henry VIII, Pope envisions a future for Britain as a global power, that has been determined by Providence, the benevolent guidance of God. He says “the Time shall come, when free as

Seas or wind Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind, Whole Nations enter with each swelling Tyde, and seas but join the Regions they divide;"(line.398). The emphasis on conflating national identity under the overarching ideal of Britain is crucial because through this Pope clearly highlights his understanding of the way in which Britishness operates as a projection of a cultural ideal, rather than a realistic national identity.

The myth making in *Windsor Forest* was not confined to conservative, High Tory authors such as Pope, but can clearly be demonstrated as constituting a preoccupation of the middle-class writers such as Daniel Defoe. The project was even more significant for those outside the establishment because they also had the opportunity, often for the first time, of contributing to the cultural revisions that operated in the construction of Britishness. Defoe, is especially interesting because, not only did he write prolifically in the early years of the eighteenth century, he was closely involved in government intrigues and policies at the time of the Act of Union, and spent a considerable time as a government representative in Scotland, facilitating the passage of the treaty. He was therefore constructive in the creation of a politically unified Britain, and this is reflected in his work. He wrote several texts with Scotland as a theme, *Caledonia* (1706), *A History of the Union of Great Britain* (1709), *A Life of Duncan Campbell* (1719) and *The Highland Rogue* (1723). However the text, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1723-6), is of particular significance because his travel narrative, written as a factual tour guide purporting to be a work of observation, demonstrates effectively the process of both creating a sense of cohesion in the concept of Britain, while it also effects a transformation of these different countries under a cover of British glory. As Pat Rogers comments *The Tour* “embodies all Defoe’s accumulated skills as a chronicler, polemicist and creative writer. It is, in short, a deeply imaginative book.” 27 Nevertheless, Defoe’s *Tour* responds to the need to ‘take stock’ of what Britain meant for his contemporary society in the early decades of the eighteenth century and is an attempt to qualify a new geography and define

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new cultural boundaries. The *Tour* thus operates as an introductory guide to Britain that both naturalises and promotes a new hegemony. His agenda is made explicit from the very outset of the text. The Preface is replete with suggestions that the unified British Isles are not only remarkable and glorious but have, in their ability to incorporate, expand and grow, infinite potential for more “greatness.” He states, “a luxuriance of objects presents itself to our view. Where-ever we come and whichever we look we see something new, something significant, something worth the traveller’s stay or the writer’s care.”

Despite his agenda, he claims that the work is a labour of disinterested truth and assures his reader that he is a reliable and impartial narrator. He says,

> The preparations of this work have been suitable to the authors earnest concern for it’s usefulness. Seventeen very long circuits and journeys have been taken and three general tours over most of the English part of the island. In all which the author has not been wanting to treasure up just remarks upon particular places and gives but very few accounts of things, but what he has been an eye-witness to himself.  

Defoe presents his credentials to the reader in order to prove his knowledge of the land. However his theme is revealingly polemic and, like Pope, he celebrates the inherent qualities that the idea of Britain presents.

Explicitly, Defoe writes of the difficulties involved in giving a definitive account and description of Britain. His idealised account, even from its inception, is confessedly flawed because as he himself states, “no description of Britain can be what we call a finished account as no clothes can be made to fit a growing child...so no account of a kingdom thus altering daily in its countenance can be perfect.”

Defoe often substitutes his facts for fantasy and he embellishes his guide with his own opinion and politics, he connects Albion with Greatness and, most importantly, circumvents the questions of difference in British

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28 *Tour*, p.43.

29 *Tour*, p.45

30 *Tour*, p.46
identity through a reification of Britain's ability to incorporate and expand. The harvest of beautiful features in the landscape is infinite because, "The face of things so often alters and the situation of affairs in this Great British Empire give such new turns even to nature itself that there is matter new observed every day presented to the travellers eye."\textsuperscript{31}

While \textit{The Tour} offers a comprehensive guide to regions of England such as East Anglia and the Midlands, it is most interesting when Defoe writes of his experiences in crossing the borders from England to Scotland and Wales. In trying to depict Britain as a single geographical space, the text is problematic, and it at these points in the text that the task of presenting a unified account of Britain is most under stress. For example as Defoe crosses from the south west of England into Wales, he describes the extreme difficulty he experiences as a result of the natural barrier of the Brecon Mountains, which can also be read as the symbolic difficulty of the process of national integration because as Defoe points out, "we began to repent our curiosity, as not having met with anything worth the trouble, and a country looking so full of horror, that we thought to have given over the enterprise, and have left Wales out of our circuit."\textsuperscript{32} Defoe, relies on the way in which Wales supplies cattle to the London market of Smithfield in order to retrieve his argument for some kind of British unity, however the problems of this revisioning have been exposed. Likewise, his entry into Scotland describes the way in which he was faced with gales and strong winds that made further travelling almost impossible.

Mordintown lying to the west, the great road does not lie through it, but carries us to the brow of a very high hill, where we had a large view into Scotland. But we were welcomed into it with such a Scots gale of wind, that, besides the steepness of the hill, it obliged us to quit our horses, for real apprehensions of being blown off, the wind blowing full north, and the road turning toward the north, it blew directly in our faces. And I can truly say, I was never so sensible of so fierce a wind, so

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Tour}, p.44.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Tour}, p.377.
exceedingly keen and cold, for it pierced our very eyes, that we could scarcely bear to hold them open.\footnote{33 Tour, p. 563.}

Again, Defoe inadvertently demonstrates how nature seems to symbolically conspire against the unification of Britain, and his polemic agenda is perhaps reinforced through the insistence of finding connections both commercial and political that unify Scotland and England.

Through this text it is possible to chart how the transformation of the disjointed individual nations that made up the British Isles could be homogenised by locating the notion of Britishness in a projection of Greatness and vague connections with classical history, all achieved through acts of cultural definition, which in the course of the eighteenth century, became accepted as fact. Britishness as an ideology therefore did not engage with concepts of domestic alterity, and problematic national differences were submerged within a rhetoric of British greatness and were neither confronted nor explored within the cultural productions of Britain.

Robinson Crusoe: A Debate of Geographical Revision.

\textit{Robinson Crusoe} (1719) is often referred to as one of the first novels in English literature. Ian Watt, in his text \textit{The Rise of the Novel}, has argued that the realism found in texts such as \textit{Robinson Crusoe} and \textit{Pamela} formed a new literary perspective that was a particular characteristic of the novel form, and Watt suggests that \textit{Robinson Crusoe}'s interest lies in being read as the first example of natural consciousness in a narrative. He states that Defoe "merely allows his narrative order to flow spontaneously, from his own sense of what his protagonist might plausibly do next."\footnote{34 Ian Watt, \textit{The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding} (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 15.} However, I suggest that there is
another central reading of the text which not only reflects this new natural viewpoint, but is involved in portraying and naturalising the process of British national construction.

This is achieved in two ways. Firstly, the text is presented as an authentic autobiography, and through much of the early detail Defoe establishes Robinson Crusoe as a credible narrator. The character of Crusoe is both self aware and critical, particularly in his reflections about the way in which he rejects the common-sense advice of his father to not pursue his own headstrong designs of a life at sea. He regrets that “in one night’s wickedness I drowned all my repentance, all my reflections on my past conduct, and all my resolutions for my future.” He also appears exact and realistic and above all, rational. There are detailed insights into his intimate thoughts and his interests in the economic progress that he makes through the text, and the reader is made familiar with the unimpassioned rationality that effectively governs his decisions. This is typified in the act of selling his ‘friend’ Xury at the first advantageous opportunity, despite his promise to make him a great man, because it was a sensible economic choice. However, having established Robinson Crusoe as a dependable, if somewhat unemotional narrator, Defoe exploits this relationship of trust built up with the reader to promote a blunt polemical position which is rational, Protestant and proto-British.

In rejecting the traditional identity suggested by his father, the symbol of old order, Crusoe explores a new identity which he creates and invents from the interconnected themes of Protestant Providence and imperialism. He sees the fact that he was able to salvage guns and gunpowder, tools and some clothes from his own wrecked ship, as an act of Providence, and considers his fate as being determined by God in a similar way to that suggested by Thomson and Pope with regard to Britain. He is also implicated with the pursuit of colonisation, and is involved in the triangular trade between Africa, America and Britain, seeing himself through a fantasy of imperial projection in

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Brazil and “the happy view I had of being a rich and thriving man in my plantation.” Robinson Crusoe can therefore be read as the personification of the foundational characteristics of British identity, Protestantism and imperialism.

Secondly, this relationship between the text and British national identity can be extended to a reading of Crusoe’s settlement of the island as an allegory of the process of internal colonisation within Britain, and is supported by the way in which Crusoe re-visions the island, in spite of the existence of indigenous nations. Crusoe colonises the space, imposing himself on the landscape; exploring, building and domesticating his surroundings as if it were his land even when he has evidence that the island has traditionally been used by nomadic Caribbees as a sacred ground. The claim that he makes initially that the island was “all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession” confirms the colonial context within the narrative. Crusoe projects his fiction of ownership and occupancy and completely disregards the legitimacy of the indigenous culture operating in the same geographical space. In a similar way to that in which the concept of Britishness was superimposed on the old nations of Britain, so Defoe, through Crusoe, replicates this process by overlaying his own image of what the island is, despite all the contrary evidence of occupancy. In fact this is made explicit at the point where Crusoe, identifies the cannibals as ‘national’. In a revealing statement Crusoe debates the legitimacy of his own perspective in contrast to the national culture of the natives. “As to the crimes they were guilty of towards one another, I had nothing to do with them; they were national, and I ought to leave them to the justice of God who is the Governor of nations, and knows how by national punishments to make retribution for national offences.” Crusoe, who throughout the novel is sensitive to legitimacy, particularly with regard to economic or territorial rights, is here guilty of an

36 Crusoe, p.58.
37 Crusoe, p.144.
38 Crusoe, p.179.
uncharacteristic oversight in his evaluation of his position, and it is significant that this occurs in, what can be read as perhaps, the first example of a truly British consciousness at work. The text demonstrates very effectively the colonisation of the island, which is crucially achieved by not explicitly challenging any existing cultures, but by simply ignoring them as far as is possible and instead constructing a subjective version of reality which is then endowed with legitimacy.

Therefore, despite the fact that Crusoe is aware of the claims that the others have to his kingdom, he chooses to ignore it, and only acknowledges it when he is directly threatened. What Crusoe does is to legitimise his projected fantasy because he has authorised it through his own hitherto unquestionable rationality. The fact that he has no right to claim kingship of an island that is the traditional land of others, is something that he simply chooses to ignore. Crusoe's kingdom exists in the same way as Britain exists—through a fictional idea which is sustained by ignoring or glossing over any contradictions within its identity. Defoe affirms this process of substituting a constructed fiction for a complete reality. At no point does he ironise Crusoe's claim to kingship, despite all the evidence that this view is partial and lacks legitimacy. It is also perhaps of relevance for the reader that Crusoe occupies only half the island, and does not venture where he might find evidence of the natives. In the narrative, he is reluctant to do so out of motives of personal safety, however this also highlights how, in ignoring the existence of others, he can live out his fantasy of complete control, without the discomfort of any kind of contrary reminders. He kept, “Close within my own circle for almost two years after this. When I say my own circle, I mean my three plantations, my Castle, my country seat and my enclosure in the woods” and this way maintained the fiction of kingship. 39

On several occasions Crusoe makes the considered decision to adopt a policy of non-interference in his dealings with the natives, not because he cannot overpower them, but seemingly because their rights of nationality do not directly conflict with his own dominion of the island. In recent years several critics, such as Edward Said, have argued

39 *Crusoe*, p. 173.
that Robinson Crusoe is a colonial text that gives a contemporary insight into trades such as slavery and reflections on colonisation. Said argues that “Robinson Crusoe is virtually unthinkable without the colonizing mission that permits him to create a new world out of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific and Atlantic wilderness.” However the theme of colonisation has far reaching implications in uncovering the nascent British psychology that was crystallising in the British Isles as a result of the Act of Union. By sublimating the fact of national reconstruction and refiguring it onto an imaginary Caribbean island Defoe could replay those elements of construction, and resolve the anxieties of its artifice through the heroic narrator. Robinson Crusoe can therefore be re-examined as a loose allegory of the formation of Britain from its constituent nations, into a “super-nation,” bound by ideological notions of imperialism. Imperialism, in this case, becomes the raison d’être of Britain, whose central foundational principal is not one of incorporation in which constituent nations and cultures are blended together, but instead operates as a blanket identity that covers the distinct nations under the umbrella of British identity.

This hypothesis goes a great way to explain the paradox of Britain’s relationships with her colonies characterised by the superimposing of British ideology which, neither specific nor based on a real national culture, was overlaid on an existing indigenous culture which was to a large extent devalued and ignored. This same imperial process that originally linked England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, for economic and political reasons provided no real alternative national culture outside of one rooted in exploitation and domination, facts so well highlighted in the novel Robinson Crusoe. British colonial identity was limited to those structures and parameters of colonisation and was unable expand them and therefore became synonymous with the imperial project and, in contrast to its constituent national cultures (for example the Celtic culture), revealed a lack of cultural substance that would be necessary to provide a real alternative national culture for

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those who were colonised. British identity, particularly at the outset in the early eighteenth century became concentrated in its economic and imperial power and was defined by this.

Specifically, Britain existed as a colonial concept, both domestically and globally but could not claim cultural exclusivity anywhere, not even in Britain. It is clear that whatever Britain meant ideologically, it did not provide a recognisable and distinct culture, but instead, as instanced by Crusoe, generated an unspecific but fluid identity. Again Defoe seemed acutely aware of the plastic nature of British identity and this phenomenon is perhaps most explicitly highlighted toward the end of the text with the reintroduction of Europe into Crusoe’s colonial domain.

The point at which Robinson Crusoe assumes the position of the governor of the island to dupe the mutinous English sailors is loaded with subconscious reference to the symbols of imperial power, and the way in which artifice and constructions are contingent with the British imperial processes. Crusoe, through his play at being governor of the island, actually assumes this as a reality. Through this ‘magic’ of imperialism, he transforms from a shipwrecked sailor into the governor of a Caribbean island, simply through his own fantasy, and ability to project that fantasy to others. He begins by providing a disembodied voice of authority, concealing himself in order to promote the illusion of this identity as governor. “I retired in the dark from them, that they might not see what kind of governour they had, and called the captain to me.”41 Later, furnished with appropriate clothing, Crusoe appears before the sailors assuming the role of governor and is able to convince the mutinous soldiers that he is an official authority on the island. “After some time, I came thither dressed in my new habit, and now I was called govenour again.”42 Defoe, writing at the advent of Britain as a political concept, effectively demonstrated the inter-dependence of a British strategy of imperialism with a self-reflexive act of role-playing and fantasy. This idea becomes crucial in our understanding of the whole colonial episode in British history and certainly demystifies a great deal of the

41 Crusoe, p.266.

42 Crusoe, p.271.
problematic dialogues that subsequently surfaced in periods of decolonisation. The fact that Britain’s identity is inextricably linked to imperialism and the struggle to make a culture from its insubstantial symbols of empire and shallow cultural base, goes a great way to explain the contemporary cultural atrophy and desperate nostalgia for a lost empire which has yet to be acknowledged as one of the most important factors that gave Britain a meaningful existence.

However the consolidation of Britishness became a central, if not always explicit theme in many texts of the eighteenth century and in an attempt to create a recognisable domestic image of Britishness, loose concepts of Protestantism and imperialism were fleshed out in characters such as Crusoe. The body of work produced around time of the Act of Union, went some way to construct a cultural meaning for Britain. An illusionary geography was fixed in the minds of the people as a site of power and the notion of a shared Protestant belief in the face of opposition from Catholic Europe, facilitated the harmonisation of differences within the Protestant faith. As with national divisions, religious differences could be subsumed within a British identity, which could be represented by High Anglicans such as Pope, Swift and Gay, as well as by Catholics like Pope and Dissenters like Defoe, despite their open antipathy toward each other. The common thread running through much of the literature at the early part of the eighteenth century was an interest and promotion of Britishness through a celebration of the generally identifiable Protestant characteristics of individualism, self-reliance, empiricism and sobriety, which all the different sects supported. However among the most potent arguments was the foundational myth of British superiority due to her moral elevation which was predicated on their shared Protestantism and a deep suspicion of Catholicism, which not only represented an eighteenth century threat to sober Protestants, but was synonymous with ritual, display and Carnival hedonism. To be British was therefore, by definition, to be an advocate of the ‘true’ faith, and drawing on a history of religious upheaval that had dogged the British Isles, the adoption of a new cultural identity offered the opportunity of finally consolidating any religious differences within the symbol of Britannia. Despite the fact that sectarian differences within Protestantism remained one of the most volatile issues of popular politics in the early decades, with the threats and
challenges of Methodists, Quakers Dissenters and Baptists to Anglicanism, the creation of the myth of Britain helped overcome division by representing the indistinct concepts of Anti-Catholic ritual, common sense industry and sobriety, all of which these sects could subscribe to.

Not only did this help reconcile differences of faith, it also had the effect of making Britain closely interlinked with Protestantism. By making the tacit connection between Protestantism and Britishness, British identity became sanctified and the idea of criticising ironising parodying or lampooning the figure of Britannia was positively irreverent. In fact the ideology of Britain, although brittle was preserved, to a great extent, by the reluctance to scrutinise or critique what it really represented. The moral elevation designated as a natural result of being British was exemplified by Defoe’s statement in the Tour of the Whole Island of Great Britain, where he speaks of the British peoples’ innate moral superiority. “We are at least upon a level with the best of our neighbours, perhaps above them in morals, whatever we are in their pride, but let that stand as it does, time will mend.”

This cultural reification becomes very apparent when comparing the images of Britain with those of its constituent nations. This is perhaps most effectively demonstrated by the cartoons and etchings, which were so popular in the eighteenth century. Any examination of the work of Gillray or Hogarth will uncover many examples of comic and outrageous depictions of personified nations. The English were inscribed as the corpulent John Bull, Scotland as a savage wild man and France as a starving hag or blood-thirsty sansculotte. National subjects were great currency for satire and criticism, however the personification of Britain in the form of Britannia was, even in this most uncompromising of media, often treated with respect bordering on reverence. The emblem of the nation was most commonly depicted as an idealised goddess who, if any criticism should be

43 Tour, p.45.

levelled at her, was portrayed as the unwitting victim of a despicable plot by a corrupt element within society or the arch-enemy, the French. A good example of this is provided by Charles Williams's etching entitled, *A Political Fair* (1807) which depicts Britannia as a goddess as the central figure of a political rally, sharing the best and most prominent platform with her cultural associates John Bull (England) Sawney (Scotland), Wales (David, the harpist) and a fourth plaid-robed figure, Paddy Bull, who represents Ireland, all of whom are mildly caricatured and comic. The central booth, 'The Best Booth at the Fair' at which roast beef is served 'gratis' is however surrounded by a jumble of platforms on and around which are the grotesque caricatures of the other nations of Europe.(see figure 1.1)

This is a key element in any discussion of British identity because it reveals that the advent of Britishness did not mark the comfortable fusion of the home nations under the umbrella of British nationality, merging and meeting as equals. Instead it highlighted the way in which Britishness was used merely as a symbol of internal imperialism, kept distinct from domestic differences, and only useful as a response to an external threat. Simon Gikandi in his text *Maps of Englishness* investigates in detail the critical relationship between the British imperial myth and the complex dialectics that were set up in relation to the domestic, internal conflicts within the British Isles themselves, and how this in turn effected foreign relations. Through the work of Raymond Williams and Linda Colley, he identifies the domestic stage of colonialism as a precursor to the global process of imperialism, and acknowledges the mythical nature of British identity and its connections with Protestantism. However, Gikandi, like many other postcolonial theorists fails to

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46 For a discussion of the way the English myth was re-written see Chapter 4, 'Golden Ages,' Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.35-45.

A POLITICAL FAIR.
investigate how this mythology took such a strong hold on the imagination and culture of the British Isles, and its significance as an initial stage of the imperial process. 48

One of the main purposes of this particular investigation is to deconstruct this myth, and reveal how and why writers of the early eighteenth century fashioned a new domestic identity. It is insufficient to accept that British imperial identity was a fully constructed whole, and Homi Bhabha discusses the ambivalence of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, that foregrounds the insecurity of the colonisers identity in the colonial process, revealing the tensions both within the colonisers identity as well as those between the coloniser and colonised. 49 It is important therefore to probe the nature of Britishness in its initial period of formation in order to gain insight into why Britishness was a fragile domestic identity that could only be fully defined in contrast to the colonial Other; where the ‘Other’ represented those outside the coloniser’s identity. Linda Colley, has suggested “Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all else in response to conflict with the Other” and that it was the contrast with Africa and India that allowed Britishness “to emerge with far greater clarity.” 50 This raises questions about the nature of British identity in a metropolitan context, because the mythic and inauthentic aspect of Britishness remained unresolved within domestic culture.

The fact that ‘Britishness’ was an invented concept without a unique cultural history meant that it could be installed as an identity free of the contradictions and complexities that most national identities inherit. It constituted the birth of a new culture which was extremely narrow and selective in its range, and completely self-defining. It was empirical and enlightened and was inscribed by its exponents such as Alexander Pope as having the authority to colonise the world under the symbol of the Union Jack. However,


50 Colley, p.6.
It is also this rootlessness that created problems of domestic authenticity, because the image of the British as distinct from the English, Scots, Irish and Welsh was vague and undetermined. The moral fiction of Defoe and Richardson, for example, mirrored the contemporary concerns with defining a set of values and characteristics that could be identified as British. Texts such as Robinson Crusoe and Pamela engaged with the realistic depiction of essentially embryonic British characteristics embodied in the protagonists of these fictions and who can be read as marking the emergence of the new British persona on the cultural scene.

It would be misleading to limit the scope of Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Pamela (1740) to this national agenda, because both texts suggest a range of readings reflecting a diversity of themes, among the most important of which is their middle-class consciousness. However their popularity and impact on literate society in the early eighteenth century was in part due to the fact that they mirrored those aspects of Protestantism, both economic and moral, that satisfied the social criteria of a sense of national identity. It is also significant that through their didactic polemic they provided among the first examples of British consciousness that introduced recognisable British characters in the shape of Crusoe, and Pamela. As the titles of these texts suggest the focus of the narratives was centred on an individual and monitored in detail the actions and reactions of the central character. However, unlike many other contemporary texts that claimed to instruct the reader, the essence of both these narratives was to provide the prototype models of British behaviour in discreet characters thus concretising projected cultural fantasies of British national identity which were founded on two distinct foundations of Protestant ideology and imperialism.

The Protestant Legacy of Moral Identity.

One of the most significant factors in the formation of a modern British identity was its relationship with religion, specifically Protestantism. According to historians like Linda Colley, Protestantism provided not only the cohesion that unified the disparate elements in Britain after the Act of Union, but more significantly, provided a real locus of
opposition to Britain's main opponent, France, which was popularly conceived as a corrupt and decadent tyranny for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colley states that to be "Catholic and French, was to be economically inept: wasteful, indolent. Oppressive if powerful and exploited if poor."\textsuperscript{51} The argument for the importance of the Protestant faith in unifying the British Isles is well supported on considering that Catholicism would continue to be not only a psychological threat, but also a physical problem with the attempted Stuart invasions in 1715 and 1745. A very real battle for religious supremacy had been fought in Britain since the Reformation, and the destabilisation of the newly formed union within the islands was interpreted as a Catholic threat, which had very interesting repercussions in the formation of British national identity.

The effects of Protestantism on the national culture extended beyond theology and effected many other developments. For example the rise in literacy as a result of non-intercessionist religious practice has been well documented and certainly aided public access to, not only religious material, but allowed the dissemination of political literature at the same time. In accordance with Ernest Gellner's model of modern social evolution, it was the adoption of the Protestant faith and the diminution of mediation that increased the conditions for the modern society and nation. He indicates that, "Protestantism advances the social position of a vernacular, turning it into a medium of high culture, in order to advance the faith. In so doing, it helps prepare the ground for the emergence of the nation, which may or may not remain linked to that faith."\textsuperscript{52} Therefore the benefits for the population in Britain, as compared to many other European countries at the time, were widespread. The upsurge in political and social awareness was as significant as the sense of nationalism. However, despite these social benefits, Protestantism brought with it moral codes that then became incorporated into the national ideology. Protestantism marked

\textsuperscript{51} Colley, p.35

\textsuperscript{52} Gellner, p.76-79.
itself as the antithesis of luxury, ritual and all the outward display of belief that the Catholic faith was associated with.

This loss of the 'Catholic' ritual of religion was a legacy of Oliver Cromwell and The Reformation, during which the country had experienced a period of great social repression, and this had left an enduring mark, particularly on middle-class attitudes in Britain. Keith Thomas specifies the effects that the Commonwealth had on religion. "When the Civil War broke out Parliamentary troops resumed the work of iconoclasm...it exemplified a thoroughly changed attitude to the apparatus of the medieval Church and a deliberate attempt to take the magical elements out of religion." In direct contrast to Catholicism which had evolved slowly to incorporate many folk traditions and ancient ritual, the Protestant churches distrusted these important forms of social expression as reactionary and superstitious. Henceforth, these displays would be branded as the kind of popish expressions that could only be tolerated in degenerate continental countries. Carnival and charivari, and the transgressive space, which they provided, were abandoned by the Protestant faith. As Thomas explains,

Protestantism also launched a new campaign against the relics of paganism with which the early Church had done so much to compromise. Popery was portrayed as the great repository of ethnic superstitions, and most catholic rites were regarded as thinly concealed mutations of earlier pagan ceremonies. Much energy was spent in demonstrating that the holy water was the Roman aqua lustralis, that wakes were bacchanalia, Shrove Tuesday celebrations Saturnalia, and so forth. 

British identity therefore found another of its characteristics through the social abortion of ritual, and the sloughing off of the sensual in favour of the cerebral. Even with the Restoration and a revival in theatre, music and dance, regional and local culture had undergone a transformation as a result of religious repression. This factor, as well as the break up of traditional communities through industrialisation, imperial expansions and


54 Thomas, p.75.
continual threats of war, resulted in the dramatic shift away from the local and rooted folk celebrations and a loss of carnival space as a socially organised opposition to authority. This is demonstrated by the renewed interest during the eighteenth century in annual celebrations and festivity that reflected a clearly politicised agenda. Although the appropriation of the popular customs had taken place since the late sixteenth century, the number of celebrations created in the eighteenth century was significant.

A programme of cultural events was instituted which was described by Kathleen Wilson as a "well integrated part of the official structures of politics in the Hanoverian decades."

For example, a celebration of Royal Oak Day held on the 29th of May, celebrated the birthday of Charles II, and Guy Fawkes Night was commemorated, as was a celebration of George I's birthday. These events were significant because they were established and popularised with the cynical design of political statement, and lacked the transgressive potential of traditional carnivals. They went beyond the vagaries of the religious and traditional, celebrating instead political events, which were intended to unify the nation. As David Cressy has pointed out, the political aspects of festival that emerged particularly strongly after the Restoration connected the politics of Britain with Protestantism. Historic events such as the Gunpowder Plot, which fused politics and religion, were given particular emphasis.

Rather than fading with time, such "mercies" as the triumphs of Queen Elizabeth and the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot remained in view as highly charged points of reference and commentary. Any danger that they might lapse into oblivion was overcome by their continuing utility for religious polemic and political mobilisation. Instead of being drained of meaning they were reinfused with significance in the face of popish threats. The recollection of historic threats and deliverances served to warn against the ceaseless machinations of popery, and to reassure believers that God would again rescue his Protestant Englishmen from danger.

55 Wilson, p.22.

The fact that events were continually revived and featured in the eighteenth-century calendar after the Act of Union can therefore be seen as a self-conscious political decision.

Other explicitly secular festivities such as those associated with public executions were extremely popular and were not only authorised but according to Thomas Laqueur, were encouraged. "By all accounts the British state was...so hapless as to appear unconcerned with resisting the carnivalesque. Indeed it permitted and encouraged conditions under which carnival and the representation of capital punishment as carnival flourished."\textsuperscript{57} The popular festival therefore continued as a social expression in various forms but was always associated with the lower classes, with the cynical design of social control or political propaganda. As Tom Nairn has suggested, where authentic folk customs failed or were lost it was easy to substitute a manufactured version of nostalgic festival forms with a folk culture from above, which formed a pseudo-nationalism with a political agenda.

A state centred 'immemoriality' articulated around Crown and 'stately home', the Free-born Englishman and so on. The potentialities of mythic people and folk elites vanish behind these mythic Institutions-ruling customs of such weathered gravity and soul shaking import that none will dare challenge them (and certainly not with a fiddle or a bit of Morris-dancing).\textsuperscript{58}

The lower classes were often categorised by their adherence to these folk festivals whether authentic or not. Authentic traditional forms of expression, such as the Carnival now reflected the aspirations and profile of a new British middle class, and the older themes of challenging authority and bawdy sexuality were suppressed in favour of patriotic, British themes. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson have noted that during the eighteenth century there was an increasing separation between a middle, or patrician class and a


plebeian class which centred around attitudes to folklore and folk culture. A new British middle class emerged that defined itself through a sense of dislocation from plebeian folk roots, and the Puritan subtext of this national identity was therefore constructed without, for the most part, any of the residues of archaic culture, which became associated with the criminal and corrupt culture of the lower classes. E.P Thompson offers a study of the emergent middle class in Britain that demonstrates how it visualised itself as distinct from the folk and carnival and emphasises the moral tone of this identity, "the dual experience of the Reformation and the decline in Puritan presence left a remarkable disassociation between the polite and plebeian culture in post-Restoration England." In effect, British identity, certainly at the outset of the eighteenth century, was more relevant in defining a burgeoning middle class than creating alternative national identities. Therefore, Irish, Scottish, English and Welsh identity which existed at the level of folk culture, remained unchallenged by the conditions of British cultural construction, which was relevant in defining the identity of a middle class. The undercurrent of national identities was never usually brought into conflict with notions of Britishness, but existed coevally. Puritan Reformers had attempted to suppress folk culture in favour of the written word and the printed sermon and had alienated the mass of the population in Britain. However with the Restoration although there was a return to traditional folk cultures it was conducted separately from the church, functioning as a secular social form. The new British identity was to a large extent an intellectual concept, which as Anthony D. Smith has suggested, was "formed quickly, by well known leaders using the written word and modern communication." At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the notion of


Britishness was confined to the middle classes, and was only fully realised as a patriotic identity in an imperial and colonial context.  

**Britishness and Exclusion**

Kate Trumpener in her text, *Bardic Nationalism* demonstrates very effectively how at the point of amalgamation of national identities within Britain, the strong Celtic cultures in Wales, Ireland and Scotland resisted effacement and were retained within the region as a cultural archive, over which Britishness was imposed. In fact, as Trumpener suggests the urgency of preserving a distinct Celtic culture concentrated the work of what she terms the 'cultural antiquarians' who quickly responded to the threat of Britishness by strengthening the local bonds to national identity and folk traditions and custom.  

However, as I have suggested, the Celtic identities, although initially challenged by England remained within a structure of Britishness, because Britishness had no comprehensive culture with which to confront the Celtic roots in Ireland, Wales or Scotland. Therefore the seeming contradiction of being, for example, both Welsh and British, certainly in cultural terms presented little problem. It might also be suggested that the upsurge of interest in the Celtic culture in the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth century, which resulted in their appropriation by mainstream British culture, was in part a cultural longing that responded to this dearth of tradition in the culture and identity of Britain. However, at its point of formation in the early eighteenth century, British identity evolved untrammelled by such anxiety.

Writers such as Samuel Richardson capitalised on the need to provide cultural models of these traits that might be recognised as authentically British. Heroes and

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62 Fletcher and Stevenson, p.22-23.

heroines were sincere, honest, natural and independent with a strong sense of morality and an innate sense of superiority, and these characteristics formed the basis of many of the central characters in fictional literature throughout the eighteenth century. Figures such as Pamela and Captain Singleton were repositories of middle class Protestant values, and were therefore idealised British figures that could be presented as role models for the new nation. The sensible and sensitive character provided the interest in many early novels and the trials and reaffirmation of these essentially British characteristics were fundamental in the structure of much of the fiction. The critical point is that these fictional characters provided the support around which images of British identity congealed. Instead of reflecting society as it was, these reputedly realistic tales actually advanced the fantasy of what society should be.

The impact of this was profound on the contemporary society where this kind of moralising fiction provided the necessary identification and reflection of a new British identity. These novels and their protagonists such as Clarissa and Pamela were utilised not so much as novels for reading pleasure, but were set up as moral conduct guides, demonstrating and reinforcing British paragons who succeeded because of their uncompromising morality and innate superiority. There was a self-consciousness about their production, and they were often prefaced with the intention of instructing the reader. Richardson, for example, described Clarissa as, "instructive and entertaining" and the Preface of Pamela comprised a list of ten points which argued for the usefulness of the novel in providing a moral guide.

If to divert and entertain and at the same time to instruct and improve the minds of the YOUTH of both sexes: ...If to inculcate religion and morality in so easy and agreeable manner, as to render them equally delightful and profitable: 64

And so Richardson continued justifying his novel to the public, giving what he termed as practical examples that could be emulated by the new generation born into Britishness, and

who might require the assistance of a conduct guide to aid them in conceptualising what this identity meant.

There was little ambiguity in the models of virtue and sobriety that were advocated. They were unrelenting in their depiction of extreme self-control and unswerving morality. The texts, while suggesting how British subjects should behave, was equally concerned with revealing characters who should be avoided. These undesirable figures reflected real contemporary anxieties about corrupting forces within society. Through these British criticism was levelled at what were regarded as the many potential threats to middle-class values. Firstly there was the dissolute, ‘Frenchified’ elite and aristocracy who were infected by non-British styles and were therefore represented as morally dubious. As Gerald Newman points out, even before the threat of the French Revolution, British society was informed by a strong Francophobia. France and her people were equated with degeneracy and corruption and for many sections of society they became synonymous with actual religious notions of evil. France posed a constant threat not only politically but, as writers of the eighteenth century demonstrated, it represented the antithesis of British values of morality and industry. For the middle classes generally, the British aristocracy, with their dissipated lifestyles and obsession with following fashion, were regarded as having an unhealthy and unpatriotic adherence to French culture which was characterised by writers such as Richardson and Fielding in strongly critical terms. The French, and those who ‘aped’ them, appeared as figures of ridicule, but with the serious subtext that they were depraved and morally dangerous.65

A text such as *Joseph Andrews* (1742) is revealing in its description of the French man of manners in the figure of the unfortunate Beau Didapper, who having duped the foolish and corrupt aristocrat Lady Booby into believing that he is wonderful, is described by Fielding in one of the most humorous descriptions that his work provides.

The Beau was a young Gentleman of about Four feet and five inches in height. He wore his own hair, though the scarcity of it might have given him sufficient cause for a periwig, he had narrow shoulders and no calf, and his gait might more properly be called Hopping than walking. The qualifications of his mind were well adapted to his person...Such was the little person or rather thing that hopped after Lady Booby into Mr. Adams' kitchen.  

This account of the Frenchman is revealing in terms of its British cultural paranoia about the influence the French exercised on the ruling classes in Britain, and the extent to which they threatened to debase Britain.

Secondly, there were the religious extremists and Catholics who, throughout the eighteenth century, were recognised as a social threat. Groups such as the Methodists, were vilified by patriotic writers who saw in their histrionic and theatrical sermons a threat to the sobriety and moderation of Britishness. The character of Parson Adams, in Joseph Andrews, a down-to-earth and genuinely moral cleric, could be pitched against the over zealousness of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement who travelled the country conducting 'field sermons' for agricultural workers. Wesley's enthusiasm was regarded as suspicious, and his practice of whipping up his followers into ecstatic frenzy was viewed as incongruous with British identity. By the 1740s his open-air meetings were so large that they often degenerated into riots, and became associated with mob-violence much of which was directed against the Methodists themselves, and anti-Methodist literature often compared Methodist enthusiasm with Catholic spectacle. For example, George Lavington, produced a text entitled The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared (1749), which suggested in emphatic terms that true faith was more properly conducted in the sober environs of regular church services, than with the "sudden agonies, roarings and screamings" that characterised Methodist worship. William Hogarth's satirical print entitled, Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism (1762) which depicts an enthusiastic church meeting, also highlights the contemporary anxiety about the theatrical


excesses of these sects. (see figure 1.2) Lavington, was disturbed by the excesses of the sermons and commented that "Their enthusiasms are of such a loquacious Nature that it must have Vent; and their black humour be discharged-or they would burst." Indeed, Hogarth depicts this hysteria, commonly associated with Methodism, in a scene where collapsing worshippers are overcome by the ministrations of a terror-inducing preacher. The print also includes two scales, which register the level of noise, which ranges from natural tones to a "bull roar" and also a measure of the heart which resembles a fair ground test, graded from the suicidal through to raving lunacy.

Another group who were identified as a potential threat to British identity was the plebeian crowd. Again Hogarth's prints provide a good source of information with regard to the anxiety that the mob provoked in those middle class elites who were working towards a new national definition that did not include images of this lower class. The underprivileged masses with their superstitions and lack of education were often raised as a spectacle of horror, the inevitable destination for those who rejected or slipped from the path of morality and sobriety that constituted British identity. This sensitivity to the threats to nascent Britishness was also a particularly strong feature of the novel in the early eighteenth century, and indicates the extent to which British writers recognised the fragility of the new British identity. The Bildungsroman, the novel of the psychological development of a central character, was used widely possibly because authors such as Richardson and Fielding responded to the novelty of British identity. By portraying their central characters, such as Pamela Andrews and Amelia Harris, as virginal youths beset by peril and danger, the progress of a new moral identity was explored; and in the case of Richardson's novels, self-consciously policed.

It can be suggested therefore that the most important aspect of British identity that emerges in these early texts is its awareness of its own shallow foundations, because

\[61\] Lavington, p.62.

\[69\] For a study of images of the mob see: Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London; Penguin, 1967).
CREDULITY, SUPERSTITION, and FANATICISM.

A MEDLEY.

Believe not every Spirit but try the Spirits whether they are of God. Because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.

Published as the Act Directs March 15 1734.

Designed and Engraved by W. Hogarth.
implicit in the early British novels such as *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-49) *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is an extreme anxiety about its vulnerability and lack of traditional roots and history. Pamela and Robinson Crusoe for example, depict a new kind of worker, the first generation of people who left their place of origin to form a new class of mobile workers living outside their traditional communities. Henry Fielding is also particularly aware of this shift within society. Both Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews are nomadic characters who although exposed to danger because they are displaced from their original communities, face the challenge of social upheaval. This is shown in contrast with a representative of an old feudal order like Squire Weston in *Tom Jones* who is outdated and unable to cope with the changes in society and reflects an archaic world that must give way to change.

Pamela in particular demonstrates how British identity, albeit founded on the most sensible sentiments and common sense characteristics was a self-conscious selection of features, because she is an idealised model of British virtue and purity. However Richardson promotes this myth as a realisable identity and thus creates a tension between the mythic ideal of British identity and the reality of British life. This tension was exposed by Henry Fielding, who through his satiric text, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), not only ridicules Richardson's unrealistic heroine, but also unconsciously exposes the whole culture of British myth-making that many writers, including himself, were involved in. *Shamela* gave an alternative and humorous reading of Pamela's reputed virtue. Fielding highlighted the lack of credibility that was evident in Richardson's priggish and humourless character and responded to the unbelievable nature of her naiveté by suggesting that she was not quite the embodiment of Protestant sensibility that Richardson worked so hard to sustain in the narrative. The Preface to *Shamela* explodes the moral base of Richardson's text, which Fielding inscribes as an, "Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews. In which many notorious falsehoods and misrepresentations of a book called Pamela, are exposed and refuted and all the matchless
arts of that young politician are set in a true and just light." Fielding explicitly satirises Pamela's moral core in the letters that are exchanged between Parson Tickletext and Parson Oliver that introduce this revision, which suggest that the text described as "the Soul of Religion, Good breeding, Discretion, Wit, Fancy, fine thought and morality" was as sham as Pamela herself. The protagonist's true name was Shamela, the daughter of a thief and a Covent Garden orange-seller, about whose marital status the narrator was unsure.

However, Fielding's exposure of the ideological nature of the narrative confirms two points under discussion, the first is that these moral fictions were substantially polemic and didactic, providing codes of behaviour that were linked to an ideal, and therefore unrealistic, British identity and secondly that they could not withstand any criticism, which was evident in the way in which Shamela, destroyed the desired illusion of innocence in the original text. British identity, that mirage of middle class morality and self-belief, was much too ethereal to be subjected to accusation of artifice and insincerity. Indeed it is the thematic dominance of the discourse of sincerity and disguise, that indicates an underlying pre-occupation with the fragility of British identity and calls attention to the repetition of this discourse within early eighteenth-century texts.

**Disguise and Masquerade in British Culture**

British identity in the early eighteenth century can largely be viewed as a constructed culture that responded to a middle class call for a new national identity, reflecting the values of Protestantism and imperialism. However, the creation of this artificial, British myth was beset with irony from the very outset, because texts such as Richardson's Pamela, with their themes of honesty and morality were used to reflect this constructed identity. This irony was further complicated by the use of disguise and insincerity that signal the presence of the villains in these texts, and the subtext that these

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71 *Shamela*, p.6.
characters raised of the dangers of appearance as opposed to reality. In short, the fiction of British identity was promoted as authentic, and challenged by villains whose inauthenticity, was clear from their use of disguise. Through texts such as *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, there developed a narrative code which aided the readers in identifying those who were villainous because of their seductive fashionable or aristocratic appearance and their artificial manners and insincerity. Producers of British identity, like Richardson and Fielding, marked these groups as particularly threatening to their vision of British identity and, in contrast, attempted to create a British identity which self-reflexively distinguished itself by its authenticity. However, a fundamental problem arose in that British identity far from being genuine was almost exclusively constructed and was defined through the rejection of, what were viewed as, alien influences. Even pro-British narratives had difficulty producing a positive set of characteristics that were recognisably British, and this created a tension of credibility at the centre of British culture. As Peter Sahlins has suggested, national identity, like other forms of social identity is more often comprised of the negation of the alien characteristics. “National identity, like ethnic or communal identity is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or the territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other.” In this case the ‘other’ was what could easily be distinguished as un-British, and as a result of this, the subject of appearance and disguise became inscribed into British society as a cultural paranoia.

For example, the recurrence of the masked ball as a trope within eighteenth century texts can be viewed as evidence of a culture with deep anxieties about real identity. It is a standard feature of many novels, such as *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Roxana* (1724), *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-49), *Amelia* (1751), and extends to include novels right through the century influencing Gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe’s, *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Therefore, despite the attempt to project a

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fixed and stable British identity, Carnival episodes where events are confused and things are never as they seem, erupt through the texts indicating the incertitude and anxieties about British identity even as it is expounded. Codes of disguise and masquerade, and the way they could be used to transgress an ordered society were particularly important in the early eighteenth century because they revealed how, even from the outset, the inauthenticity of Britishness was problematic. This is illustrated by Hogarth's print, *Masquerade and Operas* (1724), (see Figure 1.3) which Dorothy George has described as a "blend of realism, symbolism and personalities which attacks the taste of the fashionable world, perverted by foreigners." The scene shows two playhouses, both of which were found in the Haymarket, one of which houses Heiddegger's masquerade, and the other shows the popular play 'Faustus' to which two crowds hurry. In the foreground a woman wheels a barrow full of waste paper which contains the plays of Shakespeare, Otway, Dryden and Congreve. Significantly, the crowd at Heidegger's masque are lead by the Devil and the future king George II, disguised as 'Folly' and who was said to have been addicted to masques.

British identity, fusing as it did around tight and ever tightening parameters of morality was also challenged by the continuing re-emergence of folk culture in the form of Carnival and Carnival transgression. Paradoxically Carnival, which, as Mikhail Bakhtin has identified, had previously operated in an authorised space as part of the prevailing culture, now lacked the restraints of authority as it was now exterior to British culture and therefore formed a more potentially serious threat to 'Britishness'. In the eighteenth century, Carnival, in the form of masquerade, shifted from being culturally authorised and working within the framework of a social calendar, to a culturally unauthorised space; where it was vilified as illegitimate and uncontrolled and, most importantly for this argument, un-British. Carnival was conflated to include not only folk festivals, but all manner of popular festivals, ranging from the infamous masques in London which were thinly disguised pick-up points for prostitutes and their clients, to the crowds drawn to

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73 Dorothy George, p.21.
Could, now dumb Faulus, to reform the Age,
Conjure up Shakespeare’s or Ben Johnson’s Ghost,
They’d blush for shame to see the English Stage
Debauch’d by foolries, at so great a cost.

What would their Muses say; should they behold
Monsters and Masquerades, where useful Plays
Aton’d the fruitful Theatre of old,
And visual Wells contended for the Bays.

2 Masquerades and Operas, Hogarth
fairs. This was depicted Hogarth's drawing of *Southwark Fair* (1733-4). (see figure 1.4) Sean Snesgreen indicates how, in this satirical print, Hogarth "plays with the incongruities between the high and low," by showing how the exalted forms of art are literally depicted as above the heads of the crowd, who are engrossed in gambling, drinking and low, coarse forms of entertainment such as the 'The Fall of Bajazeth,' which quite literally collapses on the crowd as the stage gives way.

Carnival signified any excess, transgression or opposition to the prevailing sensibility, which from the eighteenth century onward was no longer socially tolerable. It also, however, set up a counter culture to the narrow and stringent moral codes that were being introduced, operating in a semi-authorised space, skirting and flouting the standards of acceptability and censure. As Bakhtin demonstrates it was impossible to eradicate the human need for festivity and release. "This true festive character is indestructible. It had to be tolerated and even legalised outside the official sphere, and had to be turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace" However, this festive aspect of British culture was conducted outside of official British identity, often under the cover of a costume and mask.

British identity, unwilling and unable to negotiate directly with the realities that the Carnival and festive life reflected such as sexuality, hedonism, excess, exuberance and violence, simply negated such distasteful subjects, and relegated them to the pleasure gardens at Ranelagh and Vauxhall or the 'unspeakable' venues in Drury Lane or the Haymarket. The middle class vision of Britain refused to acknowledge them. The massive increase and attendance of public masquerades was probably related to the adoption and construction of a restrictive new British identity which disavowed these violations of Protestant morality and forced them to the periphery of decent society. The popularity and success of these masqued balls was simply a response to a natural demand for a space in

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75 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.99
which some relief might be found from the increasing constrictions of modern British identity, made especially attractive by the anonymity of the costumes.

It is therefore significant that the work of writers like Fielding and Defoe often reveals this latent theme of disguise and masquerade. *Roxana* (1724), *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), all have an underlying dialectic of appearance, and the way in which identity can be altered with costume. Roxana and Moll Flanders are in a state of continual identity flux. Defoe portrays them as chameleon-like figures who can assume character according to their situation. Everything about them is partial and disguised, even their names, which are said to be false. Their lives are carnivalesque, lived in a state of perpetual social change, danger, sexual activity and costume. They, like the Carnival impulse that they embody, exist on the edge of the respectable world, fluidly moving in and out of classes and societies, relying on the temporary appearance to merge and blend into the society or place they happen to be in.

Fielding's work, like Defoe's, was repeatedly drawn to the potential of the masquerade and Carnival. It was an effective metaphor for reflecting contemporary society through social scenes that would be easily recognised, and provided a convenient vehicle for symbolising the way British society was threatened by foreign fashions designed to undermine morality from within. Defoe was, on the whole, focussed on the potential for intrigue and mystery that the disguise provided, Fielding, by contrast, was always critical of the way in which masks were used to conceal and obscure truth. *The Masquerade* (1728), a social satire, explicitly critiques the titillation and fascination of this cultural scene. It is dedicated to Count Heiddeger, the host of the most famous masqued balls at the Haymarket in London, who was described as heinously ugly, both physically as well as morally, he is "by Satan made first minister of's masquerade" (1.144). In the dialogue between the narrator in the persona of Swift's 'Lemuel Gulliver' and a 'lady' of Drury Lane, the scene is detailed as a "a wild confusion ... A heap of incoherencies," (1.69) where the treacherous simply pray on the foolishness and curiosity of the ignorant. Gulliver,

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drawn to the ball by curiosity can see no entertainment in the ball, and suggests that perhaps Heidegger uses dark arts to attract his customers,

Madam (says I) I am inclined,
(tho' of no superstitious mind)
To think some magic art is us'd
By which are senses are abus'd:
For what here can this crowd pursue,
Where they all nothing have to do? (l.117-122)

The masquerade is described as the haunt of prostitutes, the idle and the debauched, a true affront to all things respectable and British. Terry Castle also highlights how the masque was a particular threat to British moral values because of the licence it gave to women, who were otherwise fairly restricted in society. She says,

Masks and disguises protected the reputations of middle and upper-class women, and hence...removed social restraints-including sexual ones. Contacts that were otherwise impossible, given the pervasive sexual segregation of much upper-class public and domestic life, suddenly became possible. Much of the fear the masquerade generated throughout the century is related to the belief that it encouraged female sexual freedom, and beyond that, female emancipation generally.77

These sentiments are also made explicit in the character of Wisemore in the play Love in Several Masques (1727). In this farce, notions of disguise and errors caused by the wearing of masquerade costume provide the comedy, however Fielding's censure of the masquerade and the way in which it creates confusion surfaces as Wisemore, in talking to the disguised heroine, Vermilia, takes her to be a masquerade whore,

Shall I pull off your sham face?..Go, seek your game the beaus will begin to yawn presently and sots return home from their debauches; strike there and you may make your fortune, at least get a dinner which you may want by staying here.78(Act4:2)


78 Henry Fielding, Love in Several Masques. A Comedy (Dublin: S. Powell, 1728), p.46-7
Through the character of Wisemore, Fielding raises the social spectre of female sexual licence and the threat to moral values. This is further highlighted in his anxieties about gender, and homosexuality, and the way in which Carnival potentially destabilises fixed notions of sex, and the erosion of 'proper' sexual identities. Wisemore signals the question of this challenge. "By this amphibious dress I have known a beau with everything of the woman but the sex and nothing of the man beside!" 79

Fielding’s novel Amelia (1751), is predicated on the fact that the heroine wears a mask because she has been disfigured in an accident and is the most explicit of all Fielding's writings on the subject, because Amelia becomes the object of Booth’s interest not for her beauty, but because he is so fascinated by the nature of her accident and her mask. He desperately wants her to reveal her face. He recounts, "I begged her to indulge my curiosity". 80 In Amelia, Fielding, like Defoe, highlights the sexual aspect of the masquerade and disguise, demonstrating how the concealed body or face could be exciting, arousing not only curiosity but sexual interest; while maintaining a critical stance towards those who are interested within the narrative. The fact that Amelia is still beautiful beneath the mask is however symbolic, and Booth declares that Amelia “will still be the handsomest woman in England” because she has an honest and moral character, and these qualities are undisguised even though her face is concealed: she is a true British heroine. This is emphasised within the text by the parallel description of Moll, a prostitute whose figure is carnivalesque, and whose face, disfigured as it is by venereal disease, is more like a mask, than Amelia’s disguise.

The first person who accosted him was called Blear-eyed Moll; a woman of no comely appearance. Her eye (for she had but one) whence she derived her nick-name was such, as that nick-name bespoke; besides which it had two remarkable qualities; for first, as if nature had been careful to provide for her own defect, it constantly looked towards her blind side; and secondly, the ball consisted almost

79 Love in Several , p.7.

entirely of white, or rather yellow, with a little grey spot in the corner, so small is
was scarce discernible. Nose, she had none; for Venus, envious perhaps at her
former charms, had carried off the grisly part; and some earthly damsel, perhaps
from the same envy, had levelled the bone with the rest of her face: indeed it was
far beneath the bones of her cheeks, which rose proportionally higher than usual.
About half a dozen ebony teeth fortified that large and long canal, which nature
had cut from ear to ear, at the bottom of which was a chin, preposterously short,
nature having turned up the bottom, instead of suffering it to grow to its due
length.\textsuperscript{81}

Through the horrific descriptions of the washed-up prostitute, who is symbolic of her
class, Fielding contrasts the values and morality of his heroine Amelia and, through her, a
projection of British moral identity.

Samuel Richardson, in his sequel \textit{Pamela}, Part II (1742) also uses the symbolism
of the masque to provide the action in the otherwise fairly bland second part of his tale of
morality and virtue. He was perhaps the most didactic of the novelists in this period,
evertheless even he allows himself a degree of license in his description of the
masquerade which Pamela attends, which is detailed and lurid. His original text was
extremely popular as a moral narrative and gave rise to a sequel that was centrally
foocussed on the masked ball, and the threat to Pamela's marriage to Lord B which begins
with his attraction to a mysterious woman at the ball. Pamela almost due to give birth to
her first child, attends the ball dressed like a Puritan and goes to great lengths to defend
her moral identity, she states, "I dislike it more than anything I ever saw"\textsuperscript{82}. However her
husband, the reformed Lord B, is shown to be susceptible to the immorality of the masque,
at which the effects of Pamela's radiant example become lost amid the confusion. The
back sliding of her husband and his supposed affair are therefore catalysed by the
masquerade.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Amelia}, p.21.

\textsuperscript{82} Samuel Richardson, \textit{Pamela Volume II}, 1742, (ed.), M. Kinkaid-Weekes (New York: Dutton, 1976),
p.251.
When read against the theory that the first part of *Pamela* constitutes an example of British consciousness in fiction, then the threat that the masque poses to that identity is explicit. Pamela states,

I don’t like these masquerades at all. Many ladies on these occasions, are so free, that the censorious will be apt to blame the whole sex for their conduct, and to say that their hearts are as faulty as those of the most culpable men, since they scruple not to show as much, when they think they cannot be known by their face. But it is my humble opinion, that could a standard be fixed, by which one could determine readily what is and what is not wit, decency would not be so often wounded by attempts to be witty, as it is. For here every one, who can say things that shock a modester person, not meeting with due rebuke, but perhaps with a smile, (without considering whether it be of contempt or approbation) mistakes courage for wit; and every thing sacred or civil becomes the subject of his frothy jest.83

Pamela, as a symbol of British identity is attacked by the re-emergence of the Carnival in two ways. Firstly, it quite literally dissolves the stability of her British moral influence, as demonstrated by the (temporary) loss of her husband and secondly by placing this fictional national figure in the context of illusion and disguise, the constructed nature of Pamela’s nascent British identity is foregrounded. Pamela is a fiction of Protestant moral values and placed in an environment of illusion and artifice, her prototypical British identity is rendered as artificial as any of the other mythic characters at the ball. Richardson is unconscious of the way in which her Puritan costume not only reflect Pamela’s morality as is intended, but also draws attention to the construct of Pamela’s character as bastion of British morality and identity.

These texts indicate that the travesty and transgression of the masked ball was deeply symbolic and significant for an early British identity, because it challenged and toyed with the fixity and permanence of this ideology and provided necessary relief from the cultural obsession with transparency and realism. The interrelation between the Carnival and early British novels was made evident by their repeated textual references to the masque. However their coevalness is extremely important in supporting the argument for the fictive nature of British identity which has been previously considered. Primarily it

83 *Pamela II*, p.261-262.
is crucial to note that the Carnival, with its saturnalia, cross-dressing and topsy-turvy elements not only made a dramatic reappearance on the social scene just as Britain was formed but, through the craze for masquerade, became a central part of the eighteenth-century social scene.

It was argued by the critics of the day that these Carnival masques were a foreign phenomenon brought, like some kind of continental contagion, to pollute British society. However the emergence of the masquerade points to a revival of Carnival, which drew upon old folk traditions. Despite the fact that masquerades were socially coded as either frivolous and inane; or erotic, disreputable and dangerous, they introduced a traditional link that, to some extent, rooted the newly evolving culture and super-national identity. In an ironic example of the “world turned upside down” the fantasy of Carnival provided the traditional pedigree for the newly constructed Britain, which purported to be a distillation of truth, empiricism and reality.\textsuperscript{84} The appearance of masques in the 1720s and their popularity throughout the eighteenth century can be directly linked to the formation and early years of British national identity, which evolved against this backdrop of unauthorised carnival and transgression. Apart from offering actual physical relief and liberty in a society that was extremely restrictive and claustrophobic, the Carnival presence facilitated the refinement of British identity along an axis of prudery and repression. Therefore carnival, although excluded in the most vehement terms from forming any part of this sober, controlled British identity, overshadowed the whole evolution of this cultural phenomenon, by being not only physically present in the shape of masque-saturnalia, but also by becoming negatively coded within the logic of the new national ideology as the very antithesis of British national identity.

There is considerable evidence for this interpretation of the Carnival presence in eighteenth-century society, which is to be found in the costumes that the revellers chose. It is of great significance that among the most popular disguises were those of a semi-naked nymph, a Catholic priest, a Blackamoor and a Turk. In other words the conflated horrors

\textsuperscript{84} Tom Nairn, The Break up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (London: New Left Books, 1977)
of British psyche gathered together in one nightmarish assembly. France, Catholics, female
sexuality and the colonial Other represent the major tensions of British society which were
made tangible at masqued balls, revealing in the most explicit way the undercurrent of
hysteria and insecurity which plagued British identity. Indeed it can be suggested that
British identity became increasingly xenophobic through the course of the eighteenth
century mainly because the foundations of the culture and national identity were relatively
insecure. This anxiety affected all levels of society and even George I, was accused of
disloyalty and ambiguous British allegiance because he kept two Turkish manservants.
However this reaction to foreign or alien influence was also connected to the process of
colonisation which, with Protestantism, formed the other mainstay of British identity.

The Colonies and British identity

The colonial or imperial project was crucial to the evolution of British identity and
although the fusion of modern Britain was a complex phenomenon, the foundations of
British culture were intimately and inextricably linked to the colonies in several ways.
Primarily, the need to reassess the physical limits of British identity involved a self-
conscious selection of characteristics that were acceptable to a middle class agenda. The
accounts of the communities that populated the Caribbean, for example, with their
permissive sexual practices, piracy and instability, even more than the working classes in
Britain, could be read as the very antithesis of what emergent ‘Britishness’ stood for. The
Caribbean was inscribed quite literally as a ‘hot-bed’ of vice and corruption with its
hedonistic planters, debased slave culture and immoral social licence, and represented an
incomprehensible site for British culture. Indeed, Britain appeared concrete and stable in
comparison with the Caribbean, which was projected as site of chaos and carnivalesque
confusion, and therefore the Caribbean was often conflated with the Carnival world of the
masquerade in literary production. Simon Gikandi in Maps of Englishness identifies the
role of the colonies in defining English identity and he argues that British identities are constituted in the spaces of imperial alterity. 85

Clearly the relationship between Britain and her colonies was fundamental in the debate about self-definition for the British. More than any other metropolitan site, the construction of Britain lacked specific tangible meaning, even for those within Britain itself, therefore it consolidated this identity by turning to what were viewed as 'new territories' to establish and build an identity. This could then be re-imported to Britain as a cohesive reflection of what Britishness meant. As Tom Nairn has highlighted, "Great Britain was quite unusually and structurally dependent on external relations tied up with its empire." 86

This project, to forge a recognisable nation state, occurring as it does at the time of major imperial expansions and consolidation, is therefore crucial in establishing the terms in which Britain's relationships with her colonies were initially formed. It is therefore significant that at a time when Britain was carving out an identity from a fragmented group of nations, it projected Britishness as concrete by measuring itself against its overseas colonies, which were described in terms of magic, horror and unreality. Britain at the outset of the eighteenth century may well have been a chaotic and confusing concept, but it was still presented as tangible and comprehensible in contrast to, for example, the tropical forests and Carnival society of the Caribbean. This relationship between the domestic identity and imperial project is therefore crucial, although often overlooked. Critics such as Edward Said do suggest that there is a correlation between the novel and social space and the imperial perspective that has been neglected and explicitly highlights that "out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized or rejected." 87

It might also be argued that the cultural formation of British identity was made possible through imperialism because colonial environs, such as


87 Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, p.9.
the Caribbean, came to represent a physical and psychological space which contained and symbolised the unruly or transgressive constituent of Britishness which, ejected from the domestic culture, was regurgitated in the colonial margins.

This conflation of the Caribbean and the transgressive is present in several works of the eighteenth century. It is significant that this relationship between the colonies and the carnival is established towards the end of the seventeenth century as demonstrated through Dryden’s play *Marriage a la Mode* (1673), reworked by Hogarth in 1745. In the dialogue between Palamede and Rhodophil the subject of the masque is raised, and the connection between the colonial site as a space of masquerade is established. For example, Palamede states,

> no, masquerade is vizor mask in debauch, and I like it the better for it: for with vizor masque we fool ourselves into courtship for the sake of an eye that glanced or a hand that stole itself out of a glove sometime to give us a sample of skin. But in the masquerade there is nothing to be known; she’s all terra incognita and the bold discoverer leaps ashore and takes his lot among the wild Indians and savages without the vile considerations of safety of his person or of beauty or wholesomeness in his mistress.\(^8\) (Act 4:1)

The link between the exploration of the disguise and the exploration of the unknown land is described through a metaphor of colonisation, in which it is suggested that the colony is exciting because it is potentially dangerous and unsafe. Dryden also introduces the theme of masquerade and disguise and the ethnic otherness of the Indians.

This connection between the trope of colour and cultural difference operating like a disguise which obscures and prevents understanding, is implicit in discussions of British national identity, which is represented as an open and honest in comparison with the impenetrability of the colonised. This representation also involved a psychosexual dialectic because the masked Other could be read as arousing curiosity and sexual interest. Texts such as Defoe’s *Roxana* specifically play with the idea of disguise and concealment in relation to alien culture and people, and Roxana uses her exotic costume to evoke a whole catalogue of cultural stereotypes, which were commonly associated with the mysterious

east and the sexual aspect of disguise and masquerade. There is little ambiguity about the
titillating aspect of her disguise which she uses to seduce several lovers and dazzles her
merchant husband with.

In this figure, Amy holding the train of my Robe, I came down to him: He was
surpriz'd and perfectly astonished; he knew me because there was nobody else there,
but the Quaker and Amy... Well, he was so charm'd with the dress, that he would
have me sit and dine in it; but it was so thin, and so open before, and the weather
being also sharp, that I was afraid of taking Cold; however the fire being enlarg'd
and the Doors kept shut, I sat to oblige him; 89

The excitement of the exotic dress and the invitation to reveal what lies under the disguise
with all the sexual imagery this entails was also a common feature of literature about
masques and was thematically linked to anxieties about the colonies, and the new people
who were increasingly under the authority of imperial Britain. The Carnival identity was
progressively loaded with images of the colonies, and often provided the vocabulary in
which colonial difference would be described. It is therefore significant, for example, that
William Beckford, twice Mayor of London and infamous Jamaican planter was often
referred to as a 'Carnival King,' and that Matthew Lewis' journal is at its most descriptive
when recounting Carnival scenes in Jamaica. His vivid accounts of costumes and parades
signals the association of Jamaica with the transgression and hedonism of the saturnalia,
which is used as a literary device to encode the colonial other and, by association, interlink
the pagan, uncivilised erotic and magic stereotypes with which the carnival was
associated. 90

This image of the Carnival as a symbol of colonial otherness was enduring. Elizabeth
Inchbald writing at the end of the eighteenth century, used the same stereotypes in her
fiction. For example, A Simple Story (1791) indicates the way in which costume and
masquerades are perhaps more subtly encrypted within an interpretative framework.

89 Defoe, Roxana, p292.

90 Matthew Lewis, The Journal of a West Indian Proprietor Kept During a Residence in the Island of
Within this text Miss Milner, in her erotic costume of the mythical goddess, Diana, is not only physically in danger because her nymph-like costume is too revealing, she is also in cultural danger, a fact which is reinforced within the text by Dorriforth’s refusal to let her attend the masque. The narrative recycles themes of the masquerade and its potential immorality in a more sophisticated example of how anti-Carnival, the cultural opposition to the transgressive, was used to consolidate British identity. Dorriforth, who signifies the presence of British consciousness, denies Miss Milner permission to attend the ball, and their discussion about the masque is explicit in terms of how these entertainments were perceived in correct society. Her refusal to obey him almost destroys all the security of her future, because it is her attendance at the masque, which causes Dorriforth to break off their engagement. She has risked all in order to satisfy her whims and, to add to her misery, the masque was not good. “All the pleasure it gave her was, that she was sure she should never desire to go to a masquerade again. The crowd and bustle fatigued her - the freedom offended her delicacy.”

The physical danger of the masque was a recurrent theme which resulted from the suspension of strict British morality, which then led directly to the disintegration of personal morals and the danger of assault on virtue and good sense. For example, Richardson’s decision to allow his virtuous heroine, Pamela, to attend a masquerade held at one of the pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall or Ranelagh, contained the undisguised intention to reveal the catalytic nature of the event which allowed and encouraged the very elements of loose morality and vice that British identity sought to repress. The pleasure garden was an affront, because here, for the price of a few pence, a prostitute could mingle with respectable society and even on occasion the royal family. However, the masquerades such as those staged in Soho or Covent Garden in London and which were notorious as pick-up points for prostitutes and their clients, became an acute social threat to eighteenth century British identity. Within the very structure of society they were

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microcosms of the immorality found in imperial colonies such as the West Indies, where the expectation was that morals could be relaxed, and physical pleasures and dangers were encouraged. The language used to describe them and their peripheral position within the parameters of social acceptability echoed the position of, for example, Jamaica in relation to Britain.

After all it was in colonies that even the strictest of moral characters could be besieged by the overwhelming temptation and the eroding effects of the climate and contact with the 'natives'. Colonial threats to moral fibre, of which there were many reports, were played out in the theatres of London at the Carnival masquerade of the eighteenth century. The masquerade, according to contemporary critics was the harbinger of every social and cultural evil: sexual depravity, debauchery and disease. However, it is interesting to note that the threats often mirrored those dangers that lurked for those who travelled to the West Indies. This implicit and coded threat of the Caribbean, therefore becomes more evident as the exchange between Britain and the Caribbean developed through this century.

Perhaps the most striking evidence for this is found in a text by the author Fanny Burney. *Cecilia* (1782), clearly demonstrates the association of the masque with a direct threat to the stable notion of British identity, through the stereotypical Caribbean image of a black man. Burney's text relies heavily on the symbol of the masque which, by the end of the century, has been ensconced into the culture as a place of peripheral transgression. Her use of the masque is also fairly standard, however there is one specific episode which marks the emergence of what became a common interrelation of the symbol of Black identity and the carnival. At the masque, Cecilia is significantly the only one of her company who is in common dress and in one of the few detailed descriptions of the masquerade itself, Burney suggests that despite the odd familiarity and the lack of social politeness, the masque itself, full of the usual characters of Turks and gypsies, was fairly innocuous. This however all changes with the approach of a black devil. "He was black
from head to foot ...his face was so completely covered that only his eyes were visible."\(^92\)
During the remainder of the evening Cecilia endures the assault of this "black gentleman" who does not speak. In fact, as we later discover the black devil is in fact Mr. Monkton, however during the whole scene Cecilia, the unmasked figure of a young virginal British woman, is physically repressed by a speechless black figure, brandishing his wand so that no one, "ventured to invade the territory he thought fit to appropriate for his own."\(^93\)
The conflation of the black 'Other' and the transgressive license of the masque are established in this text, mirroring the way 'blackness' was inscribed as carnivalesque within British imperial mythology.

The loose morality that was commonplace among degenerate Caribbean colonists with their gorging excesses and debauched lifestyles was also replicated by experiences in the masqued ball where immorality was thought to flourish. Critics of the masque, however, were numerous as demonstrated by the increasing numbers of literary figures such as Dorriforth and Lord Delville, who were opposed to its freedoms and potential moral problems. These characters are replicated in much of British literature and give rise to the heroes of for example Jane Austen's writing, such as Edmund Bertram and Mr. D'Arcy and highlights how the British personality came to be defined by such emblematic gestures as a refusal to be involved in the masque. The true exponents of Britishness, those who embodied the dry fiction of Britain's moral superiority and natural sensibility, rejected the dissipation of such dangerous and frivolous activities, and were therefore viewed as good examples of national sentiment. By the end of the century Britain had become largely an anti-Carnival society, and left such profane and debased practises to those who lived in the cultural wastelands of the colonies such as the Caribbean.

In contrast, the Carnival had a tendency to claim its own, this is nowhere more explicit than in the text *Cecilia*. In the figure of Mr. Harrell, one of Burney's most


\(^93\) *Cecilia*, p.124.
irredeemably dissipated characters, it is made explicit how his failure to have any self control leads to the downfall of not only him, but all the people he is connected with. He is a truly heinous character, because he is the absolute opposite of the morality and industry that Britishness projected, and despite ample opportunity to change, is unwilling to. His suicide therefore at the Carnival "watering hole", is therefore loaded with symbol. The fashionable pleasure rotunda, The Pantheon, scene of so much debauchery and idleness is a fitting place for Harrell to die, in the midst of a gaping and undignified crowd who did not assist but merely looked at the spectacle. The Carnival was always there for those who could not fully absorb this new British identity and it became an important literary device with which to test the heroic protagonist of many novels and reclaimed those whose Britishness, like that of Mr. Harrell, was both questionable and a great deal short of the mark.
Chapter Two.

The Carnival and Gothic Literature.

During the eighteenth century, a construction of nascent Britishness, consolidating the concepts of Protestant morality and imperialism, was reinforced in the emergent “realist” novels such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740). These early novels helped to provide a framework for British national identity that endeavoured to visualise itself within the parameters of a moral, middle-class system of values that, with the expansion of imperial projects, recreated itself as a global centre of moral and commercial industry. Britishness did not evolve merely in response to a domestic agenda, but was also self-consciously involved in the creation of a culture of empire, with a national identity that, from the very outset, visualized itself as an imperial power.

This chapter examines the way in which literature of the eighteenth century responded to the anxieties of Britishness as an imperial concept, particularly focussing on the relationship between Britain and the Caribbean as an example of how the colonial site not only contributed to the cohesion of Britishness, but also how in this process it became antithetically inscribed in a discourse of alterity. I highlight the way in which Britain’s increased economic dependence on the Caribbean became incorporated into cultural reflections of Britishness, which was then both defined by, and contrasted with, an image of the Caribbean as a site of disturbance and fear, which was subsequently inscribed within a vocabulary of Carnival. Following on from discussions of the construction of Britishness, I develop the arguments around the issue of the Carnival and masquerade in realist novels to demonstrate how this trope undergoes a transformation at the close of the eighteenth century, and provides a foundation for cultural inscriptions of the colonies, as well as becoming re-coded and emerging as one of the founding factors of the Gothic genre in British fiction.

In the preceding chapter I argued that it was through the tropes of the masquerade and Carnival that the ironies and contradictions of Britain’s constructed identity becomes evident, and also demonstrated how these popular entertainments became a focus and symbol of transgression and instability within British culture. The inclusion of a masquerade episode in many narratives of
the eighteenth century demonstrated how the Carnival and masquerade became a common feature of the British novel, which was used to create a challenge to the codes of British morality within the text.¹ The Carnival episodes found in texts such as Amelia (1751) and Pamela, Part 2 (1741) often demonstrated the way in which British identity, challenged by disorder and chaos, could overcome this assault by projecting images of innate moral superiority.

As Terry Castle highlights the inclusion of the Carnival within fictional narratives as a method of engaging with the real social issues of transgression and instability in British culture set up an interesting discourse around the importance of the Carnival and masquerade, both in society and in realistic narratives.

Yet given the particularly complex part the masquerade played in eighteenth-century life, the scene is never without special ambiguities. It crystallizes the conflicting imperatives at the heart of contemporary fiction. Just as the actual masquerade brought to light certain underlying and problematic impulses in eighteenth-century English society, so the fictional masquerade scene could be said to unleash those transgressive forces present just under the ordinary decorous surface of eighteenth-century narrative.²

Castle discusses how the masquerade symbol in fiction mirrored the transgression of Carnival and masquerade in social life. Through the symbol of the masquerade the gap between reality and representation was narrowed. British identity was both created and consolidated as a self-conscious construct, and degrees of slippage occurred between the image of a fictional character such as 'Pamela' or 'Amelia,' and the projected ideal of British identity. The Carnival can therefore be seen to occupy a central oppositional space to the notion of British identity both in fiction, as well as in real social circumstances. Carnival operated in contrast with Britishness both at the level of real social events as well as in fantasy and imagination throughout the eighteenth century.

¹ For examples of the presence of the carnival and masquerade see, Daniel Defoe's Roxana (1724); Henry Fielding, Amelia (1751); and Tom Jones (1749); Elizabeth Inchbald, A Simple Story (1791) and Fanny Burney, Cecilia (1782).

It is therefore curious that towards the end of the century this central symbol of expression, which was a focal point of social life in the eighteenth century as well as in the psyche of the British novel, should simply disappear. Indeed, Terry Castle having accurately predicated arguments about the dominance of the masquerade and Carnival in eighteenth-century social life, struggles to find a satisfactory explanation as to why it becomes suddenly defunct as a social institution after having dominated the British social scene. She asks,

Why the abrupt change of spirit in the 1780s and 1790s? By the last decades of the century, it seemed as though the pleasures of masking had been forgotten: the deinstitutionalization of the masquerade and the relegation of “costume parties” to the periphery of collective life were so rapid as to suggest a kind of cultural amnesia. The masquerades duplicitous fantasia were disavowed; its utopian spectacle was exorcised ... all sense of the masquerade's cultural significance was mislaid.3

Castle’s explanation makes reference to several factors. The first is that the moral reformers who had always been opposed to the Carnival throughout the eighteenth century came to dominate their debate because of the general ascendency of the bourgeois principles of industry and sobriety in Britain. The second is that the masquerades shared the fate of the European shift away from the old Carnival celebrations as a result of changing social structures and industrialisation, and a third explanation lies in the supremacy of the Enlightenment world view which was diametrically opposed to the Carnival characteristics of confusions and chaos. While all of these reasons are valid in a general discussion of the demise of Carnival, it is important not to overlook that these factors had been constant threats to Carnival throughout most of the century, and therefore they do not give a satisfactory answer as to why Carnival 'suddenly' became moribund. Indeed it is only when Britain's identity as an imperial power is included in discussions of British culture that a more satisfactory explanation presents itself. Although metropolitan Carnival and masquerade might have become obsolete for the various reasons that Castle outlines, no such eclipse is evident when considering Britain in her empire, especially in the Caribbean colonies during this period. The focus of my discussion will therefore examine how the growing presence colonial satellite

3 Castle, p.98-99.
groups such as the Caribbean planters, inherited and overtook the Carnival identity with which they become characterised, both in the Caribbean as well as in Britain.

The Planters in Britain and the Re-vision of Masquerade.

The Caribbean planters had been a part of British culture since the seventeenth century, however they had grown in strength and power in Britain. Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century there were so many absentee planters living in Britain that it caused a crisis of government in the islands where Deficiency Acts were passed in order to force absentees to return.\(^4\) In Britain the planters with their ostentatious life-styles constituted a particularly visible presence and during the second half of the eighteenth century they became problematic for both the economic and political life of Britain. They were also disturbing because they challenged received notions of Britishness. The planters were creolised, a hybrid of British and Caribbean culture, and emerged from a site which had, for many years, been inscribed within a rhetoric of transgression and corruption. It may be suggested that it was largely due to the catalytic presence of this group that a change of attitude to the Carnival in British society occurred, which provoked the alteration in British cultural attitudes to folk travesty and Carnival. The planters were representative of a real Carnival threat against which the mock-masquerades and set Carnivals of the eighteenth century lost significance. I would suggest therefore that the Carnival impulse in Britain did not disappear, as Castle suggests, but was to some extent relocated onto colonial groups such as the Caribbean sugar planters who were categorised as un-British.

This inscription of the Caribbean also occurred because Britain envisioned herself as problematically dependent on the Caribbean for colonial wealth and imperial power, and this produced an attitude to the colonists, which was based on a tense combination of jealousy and fear, which pervaded all levels of society, even to the King. The reality of this central position of the Caribbean for Britain's economics is a contentious debate. Indeed many historians have endeavoured to reveal the central place that the Caribbean and the triangular trade in sugar held in

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the government and development of all aspects of Britain. The argument that the wealth and expansion created through Caribbean colonial enterprise provided the necessary conditions for the Industrial Revolution in Britain has been vigorously debated. Eric Williams, for example, suggested that the Industrial Revolution was a natural progression of Britain's Caribbean trade, and there is a strong argument that, certainly in the early stages of industrialisation, the Caribbean was a major factor. The region provided huge capital, and its many absentee landlords were often among those who had the excess wealth to invest in risky enterprises, such as the development of the machines necessary for technical progress. They were also among the first to provide a demand for cheap mass produced goods, which could be used in trade with Africa.

Williams, in his comprehensive study of the effects of Caribbean slavery on the processes of industrialisation, cites the example of Liverpool to illustrate his suggestion that many British centres of commerce were almost entirely built around the slave trade. This city in which, according to one contemporary critic, every brick was "cemented with the blood of a slave" underwent a phenomenal development in the first half of the eighteenth century, changing from an insignificant town to one of the largest and most powerful shipping centres of the eighteenth century. Like Nantes and Bordeaux in France, Liverpool was almost solely funded by the lucrative trade in sugar, slaves and associated trades. In addition Williams charts the flow of Caribbean wealth running from the West Indies back to the "mother country" feeding a whole variety of mercantile and related streams, such as banking insurance and industry, as well as encouraging the growth of the British navy, that was developed in order to protect overseas possessions. Indeed many contemporaries noted the importance of merchant shipping for the training of seamen who were then available to fight in defence of the nation. The transatlantic ships were commonly called the "nurseries" of the British navy. In days of domestic instability, this presence of trained, experienced seamen was of vital importance to European powers like England and France, and the Caribbean supplied them. Williams also demonstrates how the sugar trade allowed the

Industrial Revolution to evolve, "fertilising the entire productive system of the country." He suggests that the investments of planters and other beneficiaries of the sugar trade possessed the capital to invest in experiments, even significantly financing James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, without which the Industrial Revolution could not have taken place.

By contrast, more recent historians have questioned the importance of this overseas trade for the developments in Britain's industries, and have done much to, for example, diminish the links between the sugar and slave trades and the mechanisation of Britain. Historians such as Francois Crouzet, have effectively demonstrated how the statistics and accounts of the colonial trade were inaccurate, and he reveals how many of the accounts of overseas trade were estimated from "official" valuations of commodities which often differed greatly from real values, therefore making the official records unreliable. Taking this into account many researchers of the Industrial Revolution have suggested that it occurred as a result of purely domestic factors, and the development of an entirely new trade in cotton, which had virtually no connection with the old colonial trades such as sugar.  

Ralph Davies argues "that overseas trade did not have an important direct role either in bringing about the Industrial Revolution or in supporting it in the first stage of its progress." He, like

6 Williams, p.105.

7 F. Crouzet, (ed.), Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution (London: Methuen, 1972), p.178. Crouzet demonstrates how for example, the inclusion of Ireland in the category of 'overseas colony' for all official customs records until it became part of the United Kingdom in 1801, resulted in the value of overseas trade being significantly larger in the eighteenth century as compared with the figures in the nineteenth century when the Irish trade was included in domestic accounts. See also Ralph Davies, The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), Ch.5; in which he highlights how cotton, a fairly negligible commodity in the transatlantic trade of the eighteenth century, was transformed through developments in mechanisation and this created not only a revolution in manufacturing in Britain but also a completely new trade which evolved separately from the traditional eighteenth century colonial sugar and slave markets; Pat Hudson, The Industrial Revolution, (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), pp.190-199.

8 Davies, pp.1-3
many other investigators, cannot find explicit connections between overseas trade and the Industrial Revolution. In fact the most important aspect that emerges from the debate over Williams’s theory is not the accuracy of his economic data, but the link he manages to establish between seemingly unrelated issues such as the projection of British national superiority and economic conditions. As William A. Green has stated,

Whenever Williams’s work has appeared irreparably discredited, some new academic physician has breathed fresh life into the old pages. How do we account for its durability?...Williams challenges our collective self-esteem. He repudiates Anglo-Saxon heroes, renders ascribed nobility ignoble, and raises doubts whether the most honoured economic achievements of the North Atlantic nations are, in reality, the reward of superior energy, organization and inventiveness.  

Green goes some way to explain the endurance of the theory forwarded by Eric Williams, but concludes that its importance lies in the way it forces British culture to re-examine its own notions of superiority.

It is also crucial to note that the contemporary economic debate in no way detracts from the fact that for the eighteenth century, the Caribbean was recognised and presented as the centre of imperial power. For the culture as a whole ‘King Sugar’ reigned and it is evident that for culture in the eighteenth century, the region was vitally important as a symbol of empire in this period. As Philip Curtin, author of Two Jamaicas 1830-1865 has noted, “for the French and British they were the most valuable of the overseas possessions and therefore their history was important as part of European history.”

I will argue, however, that it was the central place that the Caribbean occupied in the imaginative life of Britain, as a place of misrule and archaic barbarities, that was perhaps the most important and enduring influence on Britain. The Caribbean

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became the imaginative focus of colonial difference by which Britishness was measured, and the centre of imperial alterity in the eighteenth century.

The Place of the Caribbean in the Eighteenth Century

The importance of the Caribbean region as a symbolic focus of empire and imperial power for the eighteenth century is crucial in providing a background to understanding its centrality in the imaginative world of British culture. As Michael Duffy has highlighted, "The West Indies has slipped so rapidly and so completely from the focal point of Europe's overseas perspective that it is has been difficult for subsequent historians to grasp the massive importance of those islands to the maritime and commercial world of the eighteenth century." However, contemporary observers were very confident in their assertions that the Caribbean was the pivot around which colonial power evolved. For example the Abbe Raynal stated,

The trade of the whole world is connected with that of the colonies. The labours of the colonists settled in the long-scorned islands are the sole basis of the African trade, extend the fisheries and cultivation of North America, afford a good market for the manufactures of Asia, double, perhaps treble the activity of the whole Europe. They can be regarded as the principal cause of the rapid movement which agitates our globe. According to Raynal, the Caribbean was firmly placed, not only at the centre of European politics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but was also the determining factor in economic and imperial expansion. This connection between the Caribbean and European consciousness, of


its location as a space for debating and playing out the power struggles of metropolitan Europe, is highlighted by Bryan Edwards in his comment that, "Whenever the nations of Europe are engaged from whatever cause in war with each other these unhappy countries are constantly made the theatre of operations. Thither the combatants repair as to the arena, to decide their differences."13 Such references to the Caribbean and issues relating to its economic and political importance for eighteenth century recur, and although opinions are divided among contemporary historians about the genuine importance of the region for the economic development of Britain, its function as a symbol of expanding capitalism and imperialism for the eighteenth century thinkers was widespread.

For example, Edmund Burke, author of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) was deeply interested in the issues surrounding the West Indian colonies, suggesting that the region was an essential part of, not only Britain's economy, but also her sense of power.

It is the very food that has nourished every other part into its present magnitude. Our general trade has been greatly augmented, and augmented more or less in every part to which it ever extended; but with this material difference, that of the six millions which in the beginning of the century constituted the whole mass of our export commerce, the colony trade was but one twelfth part: it is now considerably more than one third of the whole. This is the relative proportion of importance of the colonies in these two periods: and all reasoning concerning our modes of treating them must have this proportion as its basis, or its reasoning is weak, rotten and sophistical.14

Burke's acknowledgement of the changing relationship between Britain and her colonies and the growing strength and importance of these dependencies, reflected popular anxieties about Britain's ability to control her imperial identity and colonial wealth. However it is the way in which the colonies were used as symbols of British identity that is significant, because Burke

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imaged the hitherto peripheral colonies of the Caribbean as the foundation of domestic power and as a consequence, a foundation of British imperial and national identity.

This symbolic use of the Caribbean was acknowledged by Adam Smith who critiqued precisely this “illusion” of imperial identity that was being constructed during this period. The closing thoughts of the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) clearly demonstrate his awareness of a self-conscious polemic agenda, in which the Caribbean was used to support a fantasy of imperial greatness.

The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in imagination only. It has hitherto been, not an empire, but the project of an empire: not a gold mine, but the project of a gold mine: a project which has no cost, which continues to cost, and which, if pursued in the same way as hitherto is likely to cost, immense expense without being likely to bring any profit; for the effects of the monopoly of the colony trade it has been shewn, are, to the great body of people, mere loss instead of profit.  

Smith was concerned by the way in which authorised fantasies of the Caribbean were being overtly used to create an image of British identity that was unreal, drawing attention to the way in which these artificial constructs of empire underpinned national identity. From an economic point of view Smith highlighted the inefficiencies of slave labour, and the major costs involved in defending the colonies and in maintaining closed trade routes. However, in identifying the profit from the Caribbean as ‘illusory’ Smith emphasised that the importance of the region was located in the symbolic projection of colonial power. Indeed what Smith recognised was the way in which eighteenth-century definitions of the Caribbean were the unreal and artificial projections of the metropolitan imagination onto this region.

His own anxieties about this are made explicit in lengthy descriptions of the history of these islands in which he suggests that from their very ‘discovery’ the West Indies were synonymous with fantasy. The true nature and identity of the region was submerged in a

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European discourse of imagination, beginning with Columbus's invented descriptions which he sent to Spain, to excuse himself for not having reached the East Indies.

Instead of the wealth, cultivation and populousness of China, he found in St Domingo...nothing but a country quite covered with wood, uncultivated and inhabited only by some tribes of naked and miserable savages. He was not willing to believe they were not the countries described by Marco Polo. In consequence of this mistake of Columbus', the name of the Indies has stuck to these unfortunate countries ever since. ...It was important to Columbus however, that these countries whatever they were should be represented to the court of Spain as of very great consequence, there was at the time nothing which could justify such a representation of them. 16

These presentations of the Caribbean as an imaginative and 'chimerical' ideal established the region as a place of fantasy for Europe from that time on. Smith is obviously troubled by the unclear, misunderstood, and inaccurate depiction of the Caribbean, which he demonstrates had overshadowed the region, ranging from the descriptions of the mythic quests for gold by the Spanish through to the fabulous descriptions of the wealth to be gained through the colonial exploitations by his own contemporary society. Through this, however, he illustrates the contemporary image of the Caribbean as a site of transgression and highlights the centrality of this characteristic through his own animated digressions, in what is essentially an economic text. Adam Smith was sensitive to the way in which the Caribbean functioned as a malleable and plastic concept to support the global image of Britishness for the British. However, the arrival of the Caribbean into the metropolis in the shape of the sugar planters caused a restructuring of the image of the Caribbean which was more concrete and, consequently, less positive.

16 Adams, p.559.
Edmund Burke described the sugar planters as "The very scum of scums and meer dreggs of corruption. The parcel of low toad-eaters." To some extent this comment encapsulated the contemporary British view of this colonial group who, having made immense wealth in the Caribbean, returned to Britain to enjoy it. The image of the Caribbean sugar planters had been formed over the course of the seventeenth century and had largely been influenced by accounts of the West Indies as a location of Carnival misrule and chaos. In 1710, for example Thomas Walduck's poem on Barbados conveyed this image.

Barbadoes Isle inhabited by slaves
And for one honest man ten thousand knaves
Religion to thee's a Romantic story
Barbarity and ill got wealth thy glory
All Sodom's sins are centred in thy heart
Death is thy look and Death in Every part
Oh, Glorious Isle in Villainy Excell
Sin to the Height. Thy Fate is Hell.  

Walduck's concerns that the Caribbean had become the locus for moral and social degeneracy among all classes of settlers, was a commonly held belief. Accounts of the physical excesses and debauchery of the sugar planters in the West Indies increased during the eighteenth century, fuelled by the stories of fabulous riches acquired by the planters who became famous for their conspicuous displays of wealth both, in the Caribbean, and at home.

17 Edmund Burke, 'The Present State of the Nation,' 1769, W. Willis, (ed.), The Works of Edmund Burke, 6 vols (London; Oxford University Press, 1906), vol.1, p.357. (The term 'toad-eaters' according to the Oxford English Dictionary is defined as a group of sycophants)

Such eating and drinking I never saw. Such loads of all sorts of high rich seasoned things and really gallons of wine and mixed liquors as they drink! I observed some of a party today eat of a late breakfast as if they had never eaten before--A dish of tea, another of coffee, a bumper of claret, another large one of hock negus; then Madeira, sangaree, hot and cold meat, stews and fries, hot and cold fish, pickled and plain peppers, ginger sweetmeats, acid fruits, sweet jellies in short it was all as astounding as it was disgusting.\textsuperscript{19}

So wrote Lady Maria Nugent, the wife of the Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica in her journal kept between 1801 and 1805. This quote effectively introduces the two themes that will be explored with regard to the Caribbean, and the domestic images of the planters. Firstly, the plantation owners synonymity with transgression and Carnival excess, and secondly their development as the antithesis of a developing British sensibility.

The first half of the eighteenth century saw the spectacular flourishing of the Caribbean plantations which, having converted to sugar as a monoculture, and having recently acquired sufficient slave labour, made immense profits for their owners. Life in the Caribbean was extreme and full of danger and an attitude of evanescence underpinned the development of the British West Indies which were viewed by most to be precarious: not only in terms of their meteorological and geographical conditions, especially after the great earthquake in Port Royal, Jamaica in 1692, but also with respect to high mortality rates due to disease, and threats of invasion and rebellion. However, with the inducement of princely wealth it promoted a way of life which developed in direct contrast to that of an increasingly sober and industrious eighteenth-century Britain. The planters came to represent a faction, both political and social, that effectively threatened Britishness. Ironically, they saw themselves as British, creating a "Little England" in the Caribbean, naming cities and towns after places in Britain and adhering to metropolitan taste and fashion however inconvenient in tropical weather. For example, it was not uncommon to see men and women in full evening dress at the hottest times of the calendar in Jamaica. Edward Long, comments on the way in which "Winter fashions of London arrive here at the setting in of the hot weather...Surely nothing can be more preposterous and absurd than for persons residing

\textsuperscript{19} Lady Maria Nugent, \textit{A Journal of a Voyage to and Residence in the Island of Jamaica from 1801 to 180, and of subsequent events in England from 1805-1811.} 2 vols (London: n.p, 1834), vol.1, p.20.
in the West Indies to adhere rigidly to all the European customs and manners which...are certainly improper, ridiculous and detrimental in a hot climate." However, the planters were alienated from the metropolitan site through the many and continual accounts of their hedonism, debauchery and miscegenation. This alterity, in the shape of 'Englishmen-gone-native' posed a threat to British identity, and was increasingly met with moral censure in Britain.

As early as 1655, the seaman Henry Whistler's journal (of Barbados) gives an account of the English settlers in Barbados that, typical in its content, did much to shape the image of the colonial community.

the genterey heare doth liue far better than ours doue in England: thay haue most of them 100 or 2 or 3 of slaues apes whou they command as they pleas: heare they may say what they haue is thayer oune: and they haue that Liberty of contienc which wee soe long haue in England foght for: But they doue abus it....This Illand is a Dunghill wharone England doth cast forth its rubidg: Rodgs and hors and such like peopel are thos which are gennerally Broght heare. A Rogde in England will hardly make a cheater heare: a Baud brought ouer puts one a demuor comportmont, a whore if handsume makes a wife for sume rich planter.21

Whistler illustrated the fact that these rogues and low characters that populated Barbadoes were actually more fortunate than decent Englishmen because they had religious freedom. In addition he outlines the paradox that although they had extensive liberties, they enslaved hundreds of Africans who were denied even the most basic freedom.

This image of the planters as diametrically opposed to the new values of Britain was successively compounded through various accounts of the lewdness of these English "wild men" who were morally corrupt. The West Indies, the scene of Adam Smith's anxieties about inaccuracy and falseness, was shown in Daniel Mackinnen's A Tour through the British West Indies in the Years 1802 and 1803 (1804) to be both corrupting and dangerous. "The climate, and perhaps their associations with the blacks, have not a little relaxed in them the strength and


integrity of the British moral character." Add to this, the tales of piracy and the stories of sexual relations between whites and the slaves, and it is clear how the planters came to occupy a place of "otherness" in the psyche of eighteenth century society long before it recognised the black populations as anything more than farm labour, devoid of human characteristics. The "other" was the planter, an unsettling precursor of Conrad's Kurtz. He was a European man reduced to a state of semi-barbarism, whilst also, enviably having great freedoms of conscience and religion, and the opportunity to gain immense wealth. The West Indies, therefore, became for the British a complex site. It was representative of her wealth and global dominion, but also of physical instability and excess, and those Britons who colonised the Caribbean were socially marked and transformed through the imperial process.

Nevertheless it was the place of the plantocracy in Britain that caused the most dramatic shift in public opinion. While they were in the West Indies the threat to British morals was negligible, but in the metropolis it was problematic. Since the mid-seventeenth century, it had been common to return to England to spend the wealth acquired in the Caribbean. Edward Littleton's pamphlet, *Groans of the Plantation* (1689), makes this clear, "By a kind of magnetic force, England draws to it all that is good in the plantations. It is the center to which all things tend. Nothing but England can we relish or fancy: our hearts are here wherever our bodies be." The need to return to Europe to consolidate wealth, by buying property and title in Britain was therefore usual, however by the mid-eighteenth century this exodus had reached a crisis point.

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both in the islands, where local government was hampered by the lack of representatives, as well as in Britain where their infiltration of national government was also seen as problematic. 

Several treatises were written in response to what seemed to be a growing threat. The Short Account of the Interests and Conduct of the Jamaican Planters (1754) defended the planters against the growing concerns about their financial power in the metropolis. Unlike their North American peers, the nouveau riche planters failed to develop Caribbean society, and preferred instead to return to Britain, both to educate their children and enjoy British culture and society. Absenteeism from their estates was common and did much to destroy West Indian social and political evolution. As F.W Pitman observes:

> For that degraded state of society in the West Indies of the eighteenth century, characterised as it was by cruelty, slave rebellions, or the constant fear of them, industrial waste, political and social corruption, and destitute of practically all the finer values of life-where shall the responsibility be placed? Must not a large share rest upon the West India aristocracy in England, which, grasping at profits did little or nothing to, ameliorate the society that created them.

The plantation owners, some of whom had never even visited their Caribbean estates, were generally disinterested with making the inhospitable and often dangerous islands their homes, and again in contrast with those in North America, turned their attention to protecting their interests from within the British government, rather than becoming independent. With this intention wealthy planters formed themselves into a political and social group in Britain known as the West India Committee. Originally, a purely social club for absent planters, the members would meet to discuss business and get the news from across the Atlantic. However, due to its immense wealth, it soon became an influential voice in British politics. Through the purchase of seats in the House of Commons and the indirect support of influential politicians like William Pitt, these planters, 

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24 Several Deficiency Acts were passed in the Caribbean to try to force the absentee representatives to return or face severe taxation between 1746-52, however these were disputed in Britain, and they were subsequently invalidated.


26 Pitman, pp.39-41.
already economically powerful, became one of the strongest factions in British politics in the second half of the eighteenth century. Thus the Caribbean extended its influence to the very heart of British society, affecting her foreign, as well as her domestic, policy.

This power is best exemplified through the instance of the settlement of the Seven Years War in 1763. Horace Walpole, author of The Castle Of Otranto (1764) sat in the House of Commons during the debate over the final settlement and in private letters acknowledged the clear influence of the planters on the outcome of the Treaty. In a letter to Seymour Conway, Walpole notes that, "we are not in a humour to give up the world ... we shall have some cannonading here if we sign the Peace. Mr Pitt from the bosom of his retreat has made Beckford (the Jamaican planter) Mayor." 27 The Seven Years War, fought by the British against her traditional enemy, France had resulted in the almost complete capitulation of the French. Among the spectacular gains of the British had been the acquisition of Goree and Senegal in Africa, which secured the slave trade for Britain, and the capture of the major sugar producing islands of the French, Martinique and Guadaloupe in the Caribbean. As J. Holland-Rose says, "the year 1759 saw the zenith of the glory of England." 28 Britain, now effectively dominated the whole of the West Indies and the sugar trade and, with demand for sugar growing both at home and abroad, Britain was set to make huge profits from this monopoly. However, at the settlement Britain not only returned Goree to the French but, to the utter disbelief of many politicians and public opinion, returned Martinique and Guadaloupe in exchange for the poorly developed, and almost worthless Canada. As Corbett highlights in his text, "the anger of the nation blazed hotter and hotter, with demonstrations outside the House of Commons during the reading." 29


As early as 1760, pamphlets appeared arguing the importance of Guadaloupe over Canada, and, for the first time, the full political strength of the plantocracy was made clear for all to see. It was, after all, the British planters who gained by returning the French islands because this meant that their monopoly of the British domestic markets were secure. Through their interference in the Treaty, they removed the threat of new sources of sugar to the blatant detriment of the ‘mother country’. Again, Holland-Rose notes that: “Beckford argued that the acquisition of the French sugar isles would injure existing British interests by reducing the price of sugar,” and although there was even opposition among some of the planters themselves, Beckford’s view prevailed. 30

The significant inroads that the plantocracy had made into British society became obvious. With planters like Beckford, Bethell, Oliver Henry Lascelles and Rose-Fuller, as members of the British parliament and the strength of the West India lobby in the City of London, they constituted a strong interest which had publicly influenced the British government.

Richard Sheridan suggests that the numbers of MPs who were either directly or indirectly connected with the Caribbean has been severely understated during the eighteenth century. He suggests that upward of seventy members had interests in the West Indies, and it was acknowledged that, “fifty or sixty West Indian members could turn the balance on which side they please.” 31 The West Indian planters had the finances to secure elections, and a well-organised lobby conducted by agents, merchants and planters who could, by approaching other members of the house, effectively generate support for various petitions and causes that were in the interest of the sugar trade. As Lily Penson states “in the House of Commons in the middle of the eighteenth century the West India group was a formidable section.”32

30 Holland-Rose, *Cambridge History*, p.507.


This lobby had manipulated legislation during the first half of the eighteenth century to ensure their monopoly of the sugar trade throughout the old British empire, but the Treaty of Paris (1763), marked the first overt and open instance of their power, working as it did for their interest only, to the disadvantage of other colonies and the domestic wealth. As Pitman has pointed out, "toward the middle of the century it was perfectly apparent that the West Indians were manipulating legislation solely for the purpose of elevating prices in England." The British public became aware that this sub-class of British society which whilst benefiting from the protection and assistance of Britain was, at the same time, making huge profits from their monopolies; and even restricting the amounts of sugar available to ensure the prices stayed high. This restraint of trade was alluded to in the early 1760s, but the intervention of Alderman Beckford, himself a friend of William Pitt's ensured a complete, if temporary, silence. Popular opinion turned against the plantocracy who seemed to be holding the country to ransom, and several pamphlets, such as A Short Account of the Interest and Conduct of the Jamaican Planters (1754) appeared clarifying that the interests of the planters did not coincide with the interests of the British public.

By the time the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763, the responsibility for the loss of the ceded French islands was placed squarely with the plantocracy who, not only preserved their monopoly, but were accused of endangering Britain. Even William Pitt acknowledged the potential folly of returning France's sugar trade to her.

France is chiefly, if not solely, to be dreaded in the light of her maritime and commercial power. And therefore, by restoring all the valuable West Indian islands... we have given her the means to recover her prodigious losses, and become once more, formidable to us at sea.

However, the planters had instigated a separation between themselves and Britain and this, added to their already dubious reputation for debauchery, hedonism and degradation, completed their

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33 Pitman, p.337.

34 William Pitt 's speech of the 9th December 1762, quoted in Frank Pitman, The Development of the British West Indies, p.351-2; Marie Peters, Pitt and Popularity; The Patriot Minister and London Opinion During the Seven Years War (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), pp.240-265.
disassociation with popular opinions. Despite their attempts to remain centrally within the respectable ranks of high society, the plantocracy was tainted in the eyes, and more significantly, in the imagination of the British public who came to despise them.

For British culture they transformed from being innocuous figures of ostentation and vulgarity, to characterising a serious and powerful threat to the nation. Even George III felt the necessity of publicly commenting on their presence. Trelawney Wentworth, reproduces a revealing account of how George III reacted to a chance meeting with a planter on a road in a fashionable seaside resort.

While visiting Weymouth George III and William Pitt encountered a wealthy Jamaican with an imposing equipage, including outriders and livery that bespoke the rank of royalty. His Majesty, much displeased is reported to have exclaimed, “sugar, sugar eh? All that sugar! How are the Duties, eh Pitt, How are the duties?”

William Cobbett, writing in the 1820s, also speaks bitingly of planters to be found at such resorts, “Cheltenham...is what they call a watering place, that is to say a place where East-Indian plunderers, West Indian floggers, English tax-gorgers, together with gluttons, drunkards and debauchees of all descriptions female as well as male resort.” These anecdotes, disclose much about the prevailing attitudes to the nouveau riche planters, who were felt to have little more to recommend them than conspicuous wealth. At a symbolic level the carnivalesque figure of the debauched and unruly planter was no longer contained, but in an authentic example of carnival inversion he had reversed the power relationship between Britain and her dependent colonies and this perhaps goes some way to explain Terry Castle’s mystery of the abrupt end of Carnival, which she suggests occurs in the 1770s onward. The end of the masquerade is a complex phenomenon, however it can be argued that the presence of the Caribbean planters and their threat to British identity does contribute to this general cultural shift. Through the figure of then planter, the trope of the masquerade had become a disturbing reality and British culture responded

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35 Trelawney Wentworth, *The West India Sketch Book* (London: Green, 1834), p. 70

by quite literally closing down the sites of this potential threat and becoming less tolerant of the anarchy and chaos which was associated with Carnival expression.

**Gothic and the End of the Masquerade.**

In arguing that the shift away from the Carnival and masquerade is related to the presence of the plantocracy in the metropolis, it can also be suggested that a parallel shift occurs in the symbolic use of tropes of masquerade and Carnival in British fictions. Novels such as *Pamela* (Part II) (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) demonstrated how the misguided domestic fashion and taste for masque and Carnival created problematic confusions and threats to British morality. However, their symbolic assaults were consistently shown to be the result of the failure of a minority of nationals to embrace orthodox Britishness. The threat was therefore almost always inscribed as a domestic challenge to the ideology of Britishness, as demonstrated through the character of Mr. Harrel in Elizabeth Inchbald's novel *A Simple Story* (1791). Through the presence of transgressive 'alien' minorities such as the planters, the symbol of masquerade represented a more sinister and serious threat to British identity, and crucially, a threat located outside the parameters of Britishness. In response British culture became increasingly repressive in an attempt to consolidate a myth of British morality, and the unruly, rebellious Carnival impulse, that had been defined by the presence of the masquerade became unacceptable both as a social and literary convention. However far from disappearing, I argue that the Carnival re-emerged in narratives of transgression and nightmare that contemporary criticism has classified as Gothic literature. The Carnival was transformed from the collective expression of the social event to the individualised experience of the anarchic feelings of terror and excitement that formed the thematic basis of this new form of narrative, in which the reader of the Gothic novel shared the feelings of fear, confusion and chaos, vicariously.

This relationship between the Carnival and images of terror was made by Terry Castle who connects how the masquerade destabilises boundaries, including those of the natural and the supernatural, through the suspension of reality and highlights the way Gothic novels replicated this process.
In the genre of the fantastic—including fantastic tales of the eighteenth century like Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and Beckford’s *Vathek*—that which precipitates movement, the necessary catalyst for narrative, is usually supernatural intervention, a mysterious or extra-logical incursion that radically disrupts the stable modes of ordinary fictional existence.37

Castle emphasises how both the supernatural and the masquerade in literature provide another layer of interest and a perspective on conventional social scenes. For the eighteenth century in which boundaries were increasingly defined, Gothic literature can be interpreted as among the only expressions of the Carnival, working against the strictures of Enlightenment rationalism. This interpretation is echoed by David Punter who goes as far as to suggest that Gothic is the evidence for the failure of rationalism in the eighteenth century to reflect the reality of British culture. He suggests that the rise of Gothic fiction was representative of “a contradiction between ‘official culture’ and actual taste.”38 William Patrick Day has also identified the way in which Gothic fiction arises from the need to reflect the unauthorised and unseen, in a diametric relationship with the realistic novel.

The realistic novel had given the new, urban middle-class readers a definition of reality, of their outer social lives, and their public fables of identity. The gothic fantasy provided this same group with internal definitions of the reality they felt and experienced, definitions that might not fit with the public fables.39

Indeed, as Day suggests, Gothic literature provided the alternative space that the Carnival traditionally occupied, in which to gain relief from the stricture of authority which was ubiquitous, even having pervaded works of the imagination.

The relocation of a positive Anti-Enlightenment agenda onto a medieval period was also highly significant, because the Gothic was visualised in a period when the carnival prevailed as

37 Terry Castle, p.121.


social expression. David Punter has examined the way in which the term Gothic was re-vised during the eighteenth century, moving away from its original reference to a Germanic tribe which reputedly defeated the Roman Empire, to representing a generic term for the medieval, pagan and 'an opposition to the Classical.' Markman Ellis also draws attention to the fictional aspect of this revision, noting how in Gothic literature, the medieval is idealised, "The emergence of gothic fiction represents one of the defining moments when an older chivalric past was idealised at the expense of a classical present." However the positive image that Punter and Ellis ascribe to the emergence of Gothic literature is complex, because, like Carnival, which Gothic literature parallels, it emerges as a genre in contention with authority, in this case the authority of official British identity. This is demonstrated by the way in which Gothic was circumscribed within British taste and morality, just as old folk customs and the medieval Carnival which it evoked, were circumscribed by feudal controls of government and church. Like Carnival, Gothic literature straddled the boundary of authority and transgression, but unlike Carnival, the transgressions of Gothic literature were experienced individually, without the sense of power of the collective experience, which as Castle suggests ended with the death of the masquerade.

**Gothic literature: Domestic and Imperial**

Gothic fiction can therefore be viewed as a cultural reaction to a range of events in the mid-eighteenth century, but which are primarily located in relation to Britain's new identity of self-restraint. As Kenneth Graham has suggested,

> It is historically obvious that Gothic coincides with a specific stage of reorganisation of English society and economy. The years between 1760 and 1820 saw an enormous set of changes - at the level of course, of the social body, but also in terms of the individual experience and in particular in terms of how the individual might experience expectancy and change.

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40 David Punter, p.6.


Graham is correct in his belief that the rise of Gothic is an important event because it marks a move toward a sublimation of meaning in literature which had not occurred in texts previous to this genre. Gothic therefore represents a significant departure from the realist novels of Smollet and Richardson, and highlights itself as an authorised space within which to fantasise, imagine and indulge in flights of fancy which, as Walpole astutely recognised, was incompatible with the direction in which society seemed to be evolving. In reference to the Castle of Otranto (1764) he stated, “I have not written the book for the present age, which will endure nothing but cold common sense. I have composed it in defiance of such rules, critics and of philosophers; and it seems to me just so much the better for that reason.”

In literary terms Gothic constituted an aesthetic of excess and transgression, which evolved in eighteenth century British literature as a reaction to the growth and institutionalisation of morality, rationality and order. Gothic paralleled Carnival, in that it represented the legitimised space in which the cultural disturbers of British society such as female sexuality, social disorder and economic upheavals, as well as the social taboos such as incest, violence and the supernatural could be exercised. Gothic literature became a space, albeit fictional, in which the very real fears of a rapidly changing society could be examined, often in sublimated and disguised forms. Critics have interpreted the Gothic genre as a submerged proto-feminism, and also used it to debate the effects of the French revolution and political agitation of the late eighteenth century on British society. However an additional interpretation arises by examining the way in which the colonial presence of the Caribbean planters constituted a real horror for eighteenth-century British


identity. Gothic fiction can be read as a response to the discourse of empire and specifically anxieties about the Caribbean.

In effect what I suggest is that early gothic novels can be tentatively divided into two categories, the Gothic novel of resolution, and the novel of transgression, a division determined by a relationship to British ideology. The first involves a discourse of British national identity, which frames the parameters of not only the production of Gothic texts but also informs the content of the transgression and nightmare. These ‘domestic’ Gothic novels negotiated the horror of moral, social and sexual transgressions but, crucially, resolved them. Sir Walter Scott, in 1825, recognised the division of the Gothic into texts which were explained and those that were truly transgressive and suggested that the distinction was made according to the gender of the author. However, I suggest that the Gothic fictions of the eighteenth century can be viewed within the parameters of British national identity and divided into those that ultimately work within the confines of Britishness, such as Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) and those that transgress those boundaries, and reflect an imperial challenge to the codes of British national identity, such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1796) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1797).

Authors such as Clara Reeve, and Ann Radcliffe, despite priding themselves on their respectable and proper manner, often operated on the margins of acceptability in British culture. They examined ‘unspeakable’ acts of violence, transgression and irrational terrors which they raised with all their evocative excitement and emotion, only to rationally explain them. *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794), perhaps Radcliffe’s most successful text, is replete with supernatural events and threats which are overcome, such as the appearance of the bloody cadaver of Emily’s aunt. This is graphically described with all its lurid gore as a “corpse stretched on a low kind of table crimsoned with blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death were ghastly and horrible and more than one livid wound appeared in the face.”

However this grisly

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scene is described only to be shown shortly after to be the exhausted form of her living aunt, who had been bloodied from the wound of one of the servants who had recently been in a fight! Radcliffe clumsily explains away Emily’s fears of murder by informing the reader that, “The track of blood Emily had seen upon the stairs had flowed from the unbound wound of one of the men employed to carry Madame Montoni and which he had received in the late affray.”

Ann Radcliffe was extremely careful to work within the strictures of eighteenth-century sensibilities, and always resolved her mysteries with rational, if not always credible explanations.

However it can be suggested that, like Carnival, Gothic fiction gave vent to the unvoiced fears of society, and despite the fact that the heroines remained virginal and good triumphed over evil, their popularity could not be explained by their moral conclusions. The appeal of themes such as lust, sexuality, corruption, chaos, disorder and immorality and the enormous popularity of these Gothic texts was an indication of the growing contradictions between the construction of British society as sober, moral and beyond any interest in the irrational, and the fascination with those elements of chaos and uncontrolled emotion that were being consciously eradicated from a new image of British national identity. Gothic literature was consistently relegated to popular culture, and as a literary form it was less than respectable. Despite their commercial success authors like Clara Reeve and Charles Maturin occupied a contentious place in the literary world, and even Ann Radcliffe, the much lauded ‘Queen of the modest Gothic romance,’ just managed to keep within the limits of social acceptability through a conscious manipulation of these boundaries of “good taste.”

The Gothic genre implicitly challenged order and reason even if, as in the case of Radcliffe, these challenges were foregrounded in order to be resolved or neutralised. Ann Radcliffe and Charles Maturin, for example, recognised the need for imaginative expression, and Gothic came to embody a literary palliative to the strictures of British culture, bent on ridding itself of Carnival, excess and transgression. These Carnival urges were transposed onto unfamiliar locations, usually on the

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47 Udolpho, p.365.

margins of Europe and were conveniently distanced by their time frames, and thereby posed no threat to emergent sensibility. Through the Gothic texts, readers could experience the pleasure of subversion in their imaginations, and have the thrill of sublime terror; albeit vicariously, and could interact with the very elements of superstition, folklore and pagan belief that had been ousted by eighteenth century enlightenment. These pleasures were also perhaps heightened by Gothic's associations with immorality and distaste, which made reading them almost an act of subversion. According to Victor Sage, by the late 1790's when “The Cult of Gothic was at its height, the potential dangers for women of excessive reading was on a par with gin and laudanum.”

Therefore it is possible to discern how Gothic fiction was a cultural site of great complexity, dealing as it undoubtedly did with the unconscious reworking of a repressive and repressed British Society. This point is highlighted when considering the Gothic texts written by William Beckford and Matthew Lewis. These writers were the inheritors of, not only vast Caribbean wealth and estates, but also a perspective and familiarity with excess and transgression which was associated with the West Indies, and which was anathema to the new sense of British national identity. Emma McEvoy has noted how, for example, Matthew Lewis flouts the conventions of the Gothic that had been established by other Gothic writers, particularly Radcliffe, and “throws a disturbing, retrospective light on the excitement of earlier Gothic novels, and reveals their prurience. ‘This is the way it was all tending’, Lewis seems to say, ‘only you didn’t dare say it’.” However, I suggest that this explicitness is characteristic of those writers of Gothic fiction who are not writing from the confines of a solely British perspective, and the openness that McEvoy recognises in The Monk (1796) is also found in Vathek (1786), which is written by another member of the plantocracy, William Beckford.

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It has been demonstrated above how the plantocracy occupied an almost demonised space in English society. Throughout the eighteenth century, they represented the worst excesses of wealth and decadence, and became symbols of Britain's carnival transgression. They enjoyed a larger than life reputation for hedonism, and a parallel can be drawn between this reputation and aspects of carnival misrule and transgression. William Beckford, the father of Vathek's author, was a caricature figure of misrule and excess, and there are many accounts of his "larger than life" personality. Matthew Lewis, like William Beckford (the younger) was the inheritor of vast fortunes from the Jamaican sugar trade, and his connections with slave ownership and plantation life become apparent in his later Journals, in which he gives accounts of Jamaican life on his own estates.

Horace Walpole however, is a less obvious name to add to that of Beckford and Lewis, as his family had no direct connections with the West Indies. However, he had close relationships with the plantocracy in Britain and, sharing a social position with many of these nouveau riche planters, Walpole became one of the most vocal critics of this class of wealthy upstarts who constituted a threat to his own established aristocratic elite. Through his writings and particularly through his novel The Castle of Otranto (1796) there is an acknowledgement of, and reaction to, social excess which was synonymous with the plantocracy in Britain.

Walpole was also a critic of slavery, a fact established by his biographer Dorothy Stuart, which she supports with evidence from letters in which he denounces the slave trade. Stuart notes that Walpole’s satire, An Account of Giants Lately Discovered (1766) attacks the slave trade, as one of the great problems of his age. 51 Walpole was a complex figure, but his private views on those who made profits from slavery were clear. In a letter to his friend Horace Mann, Walpole wrote,

We the British senate, that temple of liberty have, this fortnight been considering methods to make more effective that horrid traffic of selling negroes. It has appeared to us that six and forty of these wretches are sold to our plantations alone! It chills one's blood - I would not have to say that I voted for it for the Continent of America. The destruction of the miserable inhabitants by the Spaniards was but a momentary misfortune that followed from the discovery of the New World, compared with the lasting havoc which is brought upon Africa. We reproach Spain that do not even pretend the nonsense of butchering these poor creatures for the good of their souls. 52

He also condemned, outright, the contemporary fashions for indulgence and dissipation, and although he was himself very fashion-conscious, this comment on the excesses of society found in Dorothy Marshall's text on the social history of the period, was typical of his censure.

Silly dissipation rather increases and without object. The present folly is late hours. Everybody tries to be particular by being too late; and, as everybody tries it, no-one is so. It is now the fashion to be at Ranelagh two hours after it is over. You may not believe it but it is literal. 53

However, Walpole was also concerned with the loss of imagination and freedom. He often expressed his frustration at the vogue for Enlightened thinking that made all things explicable, and was nostalgic for a time that naively believed in the supernatural, hence his inclination for the romantic setting of his novel. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Walpole did not see a contradiction in the freedom of imagination with his British identity, although for the most part his values were in keeping with those of his contemporary society. He opposed Parliamentary reforms and Catholic Emancipation and condemned the revolution in France. However his condemnation of extravagance and excess which he described as un-English is unambiguous, and is clearly present in his writing. What is often referred to as the first Gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto, can be linked to a literary manifestation of anxieties regarding unchecked power and excess.

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The Castle of Otranto as a Response to the Plantocracy

A close reading of *The Castle of Otranto* (1746) reveals Walpole’s criticisms of “usurped power” and, in fact, the text can be read as an allegory of the challenge that the new wealth, chiefly from the overseas colonies, made to the landed aristocracy and its sense of English tradition. Walpole, himself, made no secret of his dislike of the way in which the nouveau riche undermined what he considered to be the authentic aristocratic elite, and he bemoaned the effect they had on society.

What is England now? A sink of Indian wealth, filled with Nabobs and emptied by Macaronies. A senate sold and despised.... A gaming robbing, wrangling ruling nation without principles, character or allies; the overgrown shadow of what it was.54

This overgrown shadow, it might be said, needed the remedy of an overgrown hero, hence the magnified figure of Alfonso The Great, who, appearing piece by piece in *The Castle of Otranto*, returns to replace the false Prince Manfred with the genuine inheritors of the kingdom. The novel reveals an agenda which coincides with much of the aristocratic opinion in the mid-to-late eighteenth century concerning new colonial wealth. Manfred, who it transpires is only the progeny of Ricardo, a treacherous manservant, is the embodiment of planter characteristics. Despite his pretensions to princely identity, Walpole highlights how his innate nature, the result of low breeding, cannot be resisted. He is uncontrolled, with violent emotions which are unchecked by any kind of self-control, and he falls into terrible rages when faced with any kind of opposition. From the very outset of the novel, he is established as an unfeeling monster; cruel and insulting to his virtuous and devoted wife Hippolita, tyrannical in his relations with his people and so devoid of any paternal feeling that he almost steps on the mangled body of his own son in his haste to examine the giant helmet that has so ominously descended on the castle. Walpole ensures that, despite his occasional guilty reflections on his actions, Manfred is shown to be a thorough villain, who cannot be redeemed. The savage Manfred who has acquired the trappings of nobility is demonised in the same way that planters were in Walpole’s contemporary society, and the sentiments of Friar Jerome, himself really the noble Count Falconara, expressed an opinion

regarding Manfred which finds echoes among the sentiments of Walpole and his peers. "They start up, said the Friar who are suddenly beheld in the seat of lawful princes, but they whither away like the grass and their place knows them no more." It is of significance that Manfred can find no words to respond to this criticism of the Friar. He is uncharacteristically silenced and leaves, seemingly unable to respond except with a "look of scorn".

There is also other evidence linking Manfred's caricature with those of the eighteenth-century Caribbean planters. Firstly, there is the evidence of his flagrant carnality and appetites. He pursues Isabella throughout the text, oblivious to the almost incestuous nature of this desire. He calls her "daughter" on several occasions and straddles the role of guardian and sexual aggressor; setting up a tension within the text around issues of incest and bigamy. When he asks her to become his wife, despite being already married to Hippolita and the fact that Isabella was betrothed to his son the horror of this transgression is highlighted by Isabella's response. "You, My lord, You! My father in law! The father of Conrad! The husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!" One of the criticisms levelled at the planters was their lasciviousness and sexual baseness and there were frequent accounts of their "perverted acts" of miscegenation, which gave them the reputation for sexual transgression and amorality. Manfred is also bereft of any elevated or moral considerations. He cannot be reasoned or appealed to, and his selfish, mercenary agenda is paramount in his considerations. He will hold Otranto whatever the cost to those around him. This self-centred interest might, without difficulty, find a parallel with the action of the planters at the close of the Seven Years War in 1763, the year preceding the publication of the text.

As has been previously discussed, the public outcry at the self-interested pressure put on parliament to return Martinique and Guadaloupe, to the detriment of British interest was, an act of great significance and major social and economic anxiety, and the Castle of Otranto can be read as an unconscious critique of the circumstances around the formation of the Treaty of Paris.


56 Castle of Otranto, p.23.
in 1763. Walpole’s dream, the inspiration for the text, might therefore be seen to reveal much about the misgivings of a society, which seemed to be threatened from within. This idea of internal menace is given further support when one considers the events which take place within the text after Frederick, the rightful heir to Otranto, returns from the Crusades. Manfred sets about corrupting the Prince by tempting him with his daughter Matilda. In a highly symbolic representation, the legitimate inheritor of the title is almost lured into degeneracy by Manfred, Walpole feared the corruption of the country by monied upstarts and here in his novel there is an allegorical treatment of this same apprehension. Frederick is almost seduced by the thought of Matilda, and were it not for the timely intervention of a ‘cowled skeleton’, he would have acquiesced to Manfred’s wishes, in order to satisfy his “increase of passion.”

It is worth emphasising that the central tension of the text is played out between the usurpers and the legitimate antagonists for the estate, and there is an insistence that the dispute is limited to those of a similar social peer group, and is not extended to the lower classes. This is made explicit by the, often superfluous, accounts of lower class stupidity. Although Manfred is the descendant of a servant, it is suggested that he has to some extent evolved. The Castle of Otranto is very specific with regard to the social groups it represents, and clearly the garrulous Bianca, and the gullible peasants, who are easily influenced, vacillating in their opinion about Theodore, are never part of the threat to Otranto; or symbolically therefore, to the ruling classes. Walpole’s own comment on his use of, what he refers to as, the “domestics” as foils for the Princes and heroes, highlights his own restrictive attitudes to those of a lower social order, which pose no challenge to authority. In his ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ (1765) Walpole comments,

> However grave, important or even melancholy, the sensations of Princes and heroes may be, they do not stamp the same affections on domestics...In my humble opinion, the contrast between the sublime of the one (princes) and the naïveté of the other (domestics), sets the pathetic of the former in a stronger light.

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57 Castle of Otranto, p.102.

This is further affirmation that Walpole’s text is class explicit and that the tension of his text is not located in the sublimated fear of the lower class masses, but involved the upper classes exclusively.

Walpole’s choice of a Gothic style also suggests his underlying critical project. In a letter to Elie De Beaumont he states, “I perceive you have no idea what Gothic is, you have lived too long amidst true taste to understand venerable barbarism,” it might be suggested that for Walpole, the Gothic style, with its characteristic extremes of villainy and virtue, provided him with a simple vehicle for depicting the extremity within his own society.59 His intention to, “blend together two kinds of Romance, the Ancient and the Modern” as he claimed in his ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ becomes an attack by the nouveau riche on aristocratic taste, in his contemporary world, and a carnivalesque inversion of the proper order. Walpole’s dream-text, the inspiration for the novel can thus be read as his own unconscious associations between ancient barbarism and the new threat caused by Caribbean excess.

*Vathek* (1786): The First Caribbean Gothic Text

The use of the Gothic, as a vehicle for the representation of the planter society, visible in Walpole’s text, becomes consolidated in the work of the son of the most famous Caribbean planter of his day, William Beckford. The Beckford’s, despite their enormous wealth and involvement at the very summit of British politics, were regarded first and foremost as Jamaican planters, and they were always associated with those characteristics of “otherness” that Walpole was so sensitive to.

In terms of writing, Walpole was one of the first to recognise the underlying link between *The Castle of Otranto* and William Beckford’s most renowned Gothic text, *Vathek* (1786). In his only comment on Beckford’s work he noted their shared characteristic excess and waywardness. Referring to a collection of poetry, *The Arno Miscellany* (1784), reputed (but now known not to have been) written by Beckford, Walpole states, “it is not unfair to draw an obvious comparison

between Vathek and the Castle of Otranto.\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Castle of Otranto} can be read as an allegory of aristocratic struggle, in which the "horror" takes the shape of the nouveau riche plantocratic usurpers to aristocratic power. Likewise, in \textit{Vathek}, the evidence of the Caribbean as the motivation for the terrifying aspects of the text is substantial, and more explicit. Firstly, there is the biographical evidence of Beckford's association with the planters. Briefly, he was the son of the most powerful planter and slave owner in the Caribbean, and belonged to one of the strongest families in Jamaica. As Boyd Alexander has highlighted,

The Beckfords are one of those interesting families who rise suddenly from nothing, rapidly attain power and wealth and produce successive generations of men of great ability, culminating in an eccentric near-genius. Then with equal suddenness they are extinguished like a meteor in outer darkness.\textsuperscript{61}

The Beckfords typified, almost to the point of caricature, the image of the Caribbean planter and might even have been the source for some of them. They were connected with vice, violence, enormous wealth and even murder. By the time William, author of \textit{Vathek} was born in 1760, his father had been Lord Mayor of London twice, and was established as the leader of the West India interest in the City of London, having held the position since 1754. The 'Alderman', as he was called, was a larger than life character, famous for his ostentation and outspokenness and, significantly, critical of the aristocracy in Britain. The younger William idolised him, and as Boyd Alexander notes "he was unquestioningly the most important influence in the life of his son, who drew a portrait of him in his \textit{Episodes of Vathek}.\textsuperscript{62} Therefore \textit{Vathek}'s author was, from birth, immured in the West Indies and apart from being what Byron called "England's wealthiest son" was also famous for being the off-spring of the 'Carnival King,' Mayor Beckford. There is evidence that the characters in \textit{Vathek} are loosely based on Beckford's close family and friends,


\textsuperscript{61} Alexander, p. 29

\textsuperscript{62} Alexander, p.35
and Guy Chapman suggests that “The source of Vathek is Beckford himself.” However the similarity between the Caliph, and his father is more striking. This point is emphasised by the author himself who, in his description of the Gordon Riots said, “If my father had been Lord Mayor...he would have stopped the riot in a moment, Aye, almost with one of his own ferocious glances under which the King himself has learned to tremble.” This mirrors closely the description of the Caliph whose “terrible” eye is to be feared. However, within the text more interesting dialogues, such as the one with the Caribbean, can be found because, through Vathek it can be suggested that Beckford debates his own unconscious anxieties about being a plantation owner, and the immoral origins of his own great wealth.

These sublimated anxieties, like those in The Castle of Otranto, are for Beckford, only manageable when wrapped in a Gothic shroud, but the theme of violence and excess indicates his own difficulties with his Caribbean identity. The text is replete with scenes that depict the destruction of the living and the desecration of the dead, and while Vathek is full of sensual images, there is a textual emphasis on consumption, cannibalism and the degustation of human flesh, both before and after death. The theme of cannibalism echoes early accounts of the Caribbean and the literary associations between native Indians and their cannibalistic tendencies formed one of the foundational myths of western views of the Caribbean. Christopher Columbus, for example, in 1492, reported the Arawak description of the inhabitants of the West Indies as “people who had one eye in the forehead and others whom were cannibals.” Therefore, the fact that Vathek draws so heavily on these themes to establish the horror within the text is an indirect reference to its Caribbean agenda. This anxiety is made central, however, through Vathek’s Negresses, whose presence within the text make Beckford’s Caribbean theme clear. The image of

64 Alexander, p.35
66 Christopher Columbus, cited in Peter Hulme ‘Columbus and the Cannibals,’ Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797 (London: Methuen, 1986), p.13-43
the black women (as they are referred to in the text) consuming people therefore can be seen to symbolise the planter fears of being overwhelmed, “consumed” by those who they keep in silent subjugation. These Negresses with their unruly sexuality and ghoulish appetites, span the space between reality and nightmare.

the negresses, full of joy at the behest of their mistress; and promising themselves much pleasure from the society of the ghouls, went with an air of conquest and began their knocking at the tombs. As their strokes were repeated a hollow noise was heard in the earth; the surface hove up into heaps and the ghouls on all sides, protruded their noses to inhale the effluvia, which the carcases of the woodman began to emit.67

They physically serve the living but can exist in the world of the dead and through their depiction Beckford caricatures a plantocratic fear of blackness and reversal of colonial power. “they beheld not the agreeable smile with which the muted and negresses adjusted the cord to their necks: these amiable personages rejoiced, however, no less at the scene.”68

One of Beckford’s overwhelming problems arose with the battle for the inheritance of his Jamaican sugar estates. Although he never visited them, he was interested in all the debates about slavery and plantations. Boyd Alexander suggests that Beckford was politically interested in the state of his plantations, “Beckford did not ignore the debates on slavery and was conscious of the threat to the sugar trade.”69 Beckford was very aware that it was his estates that provided the only means to support his luxurious lifestyle. Unfortunately, from the time of his father’s death, Beckford was forced to fight continual and often very public battles with his father’s illegitimate children for his inheritance. His depiction of the ghastly and disturbing Negresses can be read as a manifestation of his Jamaican problems. The one-eyed cannibal Negresses, therefore represent original stereotypical images of Caribbean “demons” conflated with the eighteenth-century horror of black slaves.

67 Vathek, p.92.

68 Vathek, p.34.

69 Alexander, p.218.
The inclusion of the Negresses in an Oriental tale is also striking. Although they are not misplaced within the parameters of an Eastern context, their transgressive qualities disturb its homogeneity. It is this disparity which reinforces their significance in the text. The Orient is used as a site of sublimation, in a similar way to Walpole’s transposition of his own contemporary fears to a historic, medieval location. The dream script of Vathek, like The Castle of Otranto displaces Beckford’s very real problems onto another context. The Negresses, silent and half blind black monsters conjured up by Beckford’s imagination are capable of committing the most horrible excesses of violence and horror, which can be related to Beckford’s own apprehensions about the voiceless slaves and their threat of rebellion. Slave uprisings were a constant threat to the planter systems, and it is significant that in Jamaica, where slaves often outnumbered whites by more than ten to one, rebellion was endemic on this particular island. The presence of Maroon settlements, which waged guerrilla-war against the plantations, periodically threatened the viability of the colony, and the memory of Tacky’s Rebellion in 1760, referred to in Gad Heuman’s text The Killing Time as “the most serious rebellion of the eighteenth century” was still, for Beckford and his fellow planters, a fairly recent event. 70

The text is also linked to the characteristics of the planters and eighteenth century Caribbean through its preoccupation with themes of excess and hyperbolic descriptions of images and characters. Among the best examples are the descriptions of the Caliph’s own prodigious appetites for food, sex and luxury: “his indulgencies (are) unrestrained.” 71 In what can be read as a parodic representation of the nouveau riche planters in English society, Vathek imposes himself through display and pageantry. We are told that, “He could not forbear pausing at intervals to admire the superb appearance which everywhere courted his view...The Majesty of so magnificent a spectacle.” 72 Revealingly, however, Vathek is tightly constrained within the sensual world, and


71 Vathek, p.1.

72 Vathek, p.43.
despite his limitless luxury, he is unable to transcend his own definitive materialism and is therefore frustrated.

he was almost ready to adore himself; til lifting his eyes upward, he saw the stars above him as they appeared when he stood on the surface of the earth. He consoled himself however for this intruding and unwelcome perception of his littleness, with the thought of being great in the eyes of others; and flattered himself that the light of his mind would extend beyond the reach of his sight, and extort from the stars the decrees of his destiny.\textsuperscript{73}

It is possible that Beckford, through Vathek, revealed the dilemma facing many of the excessively rich planters who, although able to buy seats in parliament, and move in the circles of the elite, were still rebuffed by the aristocracy which presented itself as unattainably elevated. This point is emphasised by the symbolism of Vathek’s tower building, because Beckford’s own father, despite reaching great heights in British society, was still obliged to remain on the periphery of the great aristocratic circles of that society. Nonetheless, Beckford’s predilection for extravagance demonstrates that the Gothic, when combined with a thematic Caribbean agenda, was able to imbue this literary form with new layers of significance. The Gothic became representative of unlimited transgression, and shared this characteristic with profiles of Caribbean planters.

\textit{The Monk (1796): A Tale of Caribbean Destruction.}

In 1796, Matthew Gregory Lewis succeeded to William Beckford’s seat as M.P. for Hindon in Wiltshire. This was coincidentally the same year that the sensational Gothic novel \textit{The Monk} was published, and through this text Lewis also succeeded Beckford as the most infamous planter novelist to outrage the British public with his tales of excessive horror. Like Beckford, Lewis was identified as the son of a nouveau riche sugar trader. Through his wealth, he was able to develop a critical attitude to the dominant sensibilities of eighteenth century society and felt free to indulge his imagination unfettered by social mores. As the Gothic literary critic Donald Spector has commented, “It was a bolder aesthetic and moral and religious challenge to orthodoxy than

\textsuperscript{73} Vathek, p.4.
anything that had previously appeared in the genre."\textsuperscript{74} Victor Sage echoes this point in his text the
\textit{Gothic Novel}, in which he identifies the subversive characteristics of the work of Walpole, Beckford and Lewis. According to Sage they were "all Whig members of parliament ..and may be said to form a tradition of Whig dilettantism which one might broadly speak of as a form of cultural dissent."\textsuperscript{75} However this dissent, in the case of Lewis and Beckford was arguably formed by their peripheral positions to mainstream British society due to their Caribbean connections. Lewis’s peripheral position is highlighted by R. Platzner by comparing him with Ann Radcliffe, whose text, \textit{The Mystery of Udolpho} (1794) was said to have been the inspiration for \textit{The Monk}.

Lewis’ marginally pornographic romance is but an actualisation of the incipient or imagined horrors of an Emily or Adeline. To put it another way the paranoid apprehensions of the Radcliffean heroine become the real crimes of Ambrosio.\textsuperscript{76}

Here, Platzner identifies in \textit{The Monk}, the hypocrisy of the eighteenth-century British society that would allude to sex and debauchery, but condemned Beckford and Lewis who merely made those fears explicit.

The links between \textit{The Monk} and its communication with the Caribbean, like those in Vathek, are expressed through a pre-occupation with images of excess, which evoke and reflect commonplace concepts of the plantocracy in England. When approaching the text with a Caribbean agenda, \textit{The Monk} reveals an underlying and specific discourse of colonialism. It is of significance, from the outset of the text, it is established that the hero Lorenzo is a plantation owner in Hispaniola (later known as Haiti) a title which gives him, not only wealth, but social position in Madrid.\textsuperscript{77} Indeed the text has several Caribbean sub-themes that only become clear


\textsuperscript{75} Victor Sage, \textit{The Gothick Novel}, p.14

\textsuperscript{76} R. Platzner, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Rejoinder," \textit{PMLA} 86 (March 1971), pp.266-274.

with a background knowledge of the Caribbean, which Lewis undoubtedly possessed. For example there is the specificity of Ambrosio's monastic order. He is a Capuchin, and this seemingly inconsequential detail only becomes meaningful with the knowledge that it was the Franciscan order of Capuchins who, with the early Spanish adventurers, were among the first to encounter and colonise the Caribbean. A Franciscan Friar, John Perez, accompanied Columbus on his first voyage to the Caribbean. As J. Moorman in his History of the Franciscan Order has noted,

the meeting of Perez and Columbus marked a turning point in the history of discovery, for the friar immediately became interested in the plans which his visitor, Columbus, proposed and was able to put him in touch with those who could help him most. From that time onward Columbus did not look back.\textsuperscript{78}

The Capuchin history in the West Indies is extensive, and they often operated as the colonising force especially after the arrival of the hugely successful colonist Friar Francis Bobadilla in 1499. By 1503, for example, they were established enough to ask the Pope to set up a Bishopric of the New World. The Capuchin influence in the Caribbean remained a potent force in the early period of colonisation, and they occupied many of the West Indian islands, ready to "assist" throughout the region for the next two centuries. For example, Carl Brindenbaugh has documented their presence in the Caribbean, and sites an example of their presence on St. Christopher. He says "by 1643 the Catholic Irish who had become more numerous in the Leeward Islands dispatched a petition to the Jesuits in France asking for spiritual guidance...It was the Capuchins who sent the first priest."\textsuperscript{79}

In the light of this, Lewis's choice of the Capuchin order for Ambrosio takes on new meaning because Ambrosio is "discovered" by the Capuchins. In one of the most revealing extracts of the novel we are told that the,


late superior of the Capuchins found him while yet an Infant at the Abbey-door. All attempts to discover who had left him there were in vain, and the Child himself could give no account of his parents. ...He is a present to them (the Capuchins) from the Virgin."80

Ambrosio, therefore, within the parameters of a Caribbean sub-text, is transformed into a symbol of the Caribbean which is then claimed and colonised by Europe. He, like the Caribbean, has been re-modelled from a state of naiveté through the intervention of religion/western authority. However, he is a parody of western belief, kept in a state of artificial ignorance through physical isolation. This review of Ambrosio, as a symbol of the Caribbean is also confirmed by his description as, dark and mysterious. He is exoticised through Don Christoval's description of him as unknown, and by implication, unknowable, and this theme can be extended throughout the whole text. In the same way as European's described the virgin territories of the New World as untainted, so Ambrosio is seen to be free from corruption. However his fall from a state of perfection, through contact with the outside world, mirrors the pollution of the Caribbean, and the establishment of, what was to become, one of the most heinous and depraved societies.

By the time The Monk was published the awareness of abuses and exploitations involved in the slavery system had grown to become a political, as well as a social issue. Matthew Lewis was later to visit his own plantations with a view to ameliorating the conditions on his own properties, and it is possible to suggest that through The Monk, Lewis illustrates a sensitivity to the corruption of the Caribbean by Europe. Matilda, like the early explorers, "invades" Ambrosio's territory, in disguise, and destroys the state of innocence which prevails, despite her claims that, what I feel for you is love, not licentiousness; I sigh to be the possessor of your heart, not lust for the enjoyment of your person. Deign to listen to my vindication: A few moments will convince you that this holy retreat is not polluted by my presence, and that you may grant me your compassion without trespassing against your vows.81

Matilda represents the insuperable force of sexuality, which is symbolically linked to the text as an urge to conquer and colonise. The sight of Matilda's naked breast and the emotions of sexual

80 The Monk, p.17.
81 The Monk, p.59.
desire the evoke in Ambrosio are depicted as so completely overmastering that, in the same way that the Caribbean is conquered, so Ambrosio is colonised by Europe. Despite his physical and mental resistance Matilda, the source of adult knowledge which has been denied to him, is irresistible. In a thinly disguised re-working of Adam's fall from grace, by the temptation of Eve, Lewis extends this theme of lost purity. In this respect, Ambrosio’s body therefore becomes a metaphor for the virgin territories of the ‘New World’. Significantly, however, Lewis while indulging in his detailed accounts of Ambrosio’s descent into debauchery always remains sympathetic towards him. He shows his internal conflicts, and regrets his destruction. Again this echoes Lewis’ later accounts of the effects of slavery in Jamaica in which he laments the abuses he finds on the island caused by the outrages of plantation systems and slavery. Europe becomes for the Caribbean what Ambrosio accuses Matilda of being, “the source of danger, of suffering and despair...”. Despite her charms, Ambrosio makes one last effort to evade his damnation and pleads with Matilda to leave the Convent, which she agrees to do.

However, the Caribbean sub-plot returns in the shape of a venomous snake the ‘centipedoro’. In the text the centipedoro is described as “a Native of Cuba, and to have been brought into Spain from that Island in the Vessel of Columbus.”82 The snake bites Ambrosio at the moment when Matilda swears to leave the monastery and forces Matilda to renege on her promise, thus sealing Ambrosio’s fate. It is interesting that Lewis specifies that it is a Caribbean snake that attacks Ambrosio, who is already depicted as a flawed guardian of Caribbean purity. The text previously demonstrated that he has been tempted by Matilda’s image, lusting over the portrait of the Madonna which Matilda had commissioned. He stated,

Were I permitted to twine round my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom! Gracious God, should I then resist the temptation? Should I not barter away for a single embrace the reward of my sufferings for thirty years?83

82 *The Monk*, p.72; According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the ‘centipede’ or ‘centiped’ was originally thought to be extremely poisonous and in the 18th century was also thought by some travel writers to have originated in Jamaica.

83 *The Monk*, p.41.
Therefore the snake symbolically bites the facilitator of its destruction. The Caribbean is undefended, it is a lost and vulnerable space, and is therefore inevitably conquered by Europe and the subsequent defilement and deterioration of Ambrosio therefore comes to replicate the corruption of the Caribbean, which goes far beyond European limits of transgression.

This reading of The Monk also enlarges on the way in which the Caribbean threatens British cultural sensibilities. By allowing Ambrosio to murder Elvira, his mother, and rape his own sister, Antonia; the effects of Ambrosio/Caribbean corruption are depicted as a catalyst for destruction of metropolitan virtue, a point echoed by Coleridge in his accusation that Lewis is guilty of "blending with irreverent negligence, all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition." Ambrosio, committing his incestuous rape in the subterranean passages of the monastery, undermines the social structure and value systems of Madrid to such an extent that it causes open insurrection. The Caribbean body comes back to haunt European society as a distortion of its own excesses in the region. It not only threatens, but also destroys the most refined aspects of that society as embodied by the virtuous Elvira and chaste Antonia. Lewis perhaps suggests that the excesses of the plantocracy might have a destabilising effect on society as a whole. After all, it is the estate owner Lorenzo who, in an ironic reflection on the destruction of the convent by the inflamed mob is "shocked at having been the cause, however innocent, of this frightful disturbance!" 

The Caribbean Gothic in Context

Donald Spector in The English Gothic, suggests that "Pronounced resemblances exist between the work of Walpole, Beckford and Lewis." He has identified connections of homosexuality, architectural curiosity and eccentricity as cementing a relationship between these three Gothic writers. However Spector, like most critics of Gothic fiction, fails to challenge the


85 The Monk, p.358.

86 Donald Spector, The English Gothic, p.171
entrenched conception of Gothic as purely domestic in its agenda. On considering that its literary ascendency, and the height of its popularity (1760-1820), coincided with some of the most spectacular colonial events of modern history, this eurocentric reading of the Gothic genre perhaps needs reviewing. The fact that Beckford and Lewis belonged to a leisured class and could indulge in writing Gothic novels was a direct result of their Caribbean wealth. It is also of great importance that unlike Ann Radcliffe, wealthy authors such as Walpole, Beckford and Lewis were not restrained by contemporary economic forces to produce “marketable” work. They were able to indulge their imaginations regardless of whether the work would be accessible and popular with the reading public. After all, “England’s wealthiest son” was hardly likely to starve because Vathek was commercially unsuccessful (which was the case). Instead these writers sought popularity and fame as authors of ‘shocking’ texts, and I suggest that their familiarity with the Caribbean provided an obvious source of horror and transgression, which they used to produce their notorious Gothic texts.

Robert Miles, in his critical text *Gothic Writing*, identifies the complexity of the Gothic as a genre because it attempts to articulate the history of the self. He explains that an understanding of the theoretical agendas of Gothic are crucial in order to appreciate how Gothic texts succeed in representing the imbalance of the social self. However, even this reading of Gothic assumes, despite its claim to historicize the genre, a hermetically exclusive domestic agenda. The reading of Gothic as an anxiety of colonisation and the planter presence in the metropolitan therefore must be added to what Miles calls, “the multiplicity of dialectics shaping the Gothic.”87 After all colonisation, and colonial expansions can surely be suggested as one of the most important catalysts for the birth of nostalgia and the negotiation of the social self. As Miles himself states, nostalgia is, “a recognition of difference, married to an insistence on sameness. In the eighteenth century arguably for the first time nostalgia comes into being as a cultural fact.”88 This motivating force for the birth of the Gothic is therefore intimately connected to the anxiety of


colonial expansion and more specifically with the effects this process had on those who became "transformed" through the process. In the eighteenth century it is the challenge of the Creole, European in appearance but Caribbean in outlook, that threatens an emergent British identity. It is this challenge that Walpole recognises in *The Castle of Otranto*, and which is perhaps developed in more explicit ways by Beckford and Lewis, through their own familiarity with plantocratic excess and otherness.

For the eighteenth century, the Caribbean became a repository of the savage, debauched elements that British society attempted to disassociate itself from, by displacing them onto the 'New World'. The planters, particularly those who returned to Britain bore the marks of transformation for British society. Even those pamphlets written in support of the Caribbean planter as British were unable to ignore stereotypical images of excess and difference. In, for example, the article, *Reasons Offer'd why a Duty should not be laid on Sugars* (1695), it states that "The Planters are Englishmen, and our own people....They consume 10 times more of our own produce and manufacture than we do in England and pay 3 times the price for it." They were European, but through their contact with indigenous peoples and slaves, were tainted. The planters and even their British born progeny remained disreputable through association with the West Indies, and despite reaching great heights in society and government were never fully incorporated into the ruling aristocracy during this period. Beckford and Lewis merely reflected these images and themes of dissipation and lack of restraint that became encoded in a style of Gothic excess.

There is a thematic link in the texts, *The Castle of Otranto*, *Vathek* and *The Monk*, which hinges on their underlying Caribbean agendas, and all three texts identify the threat that the Carnival transgression of the planters posed to British sensibility. This is further supported by the critical, reception of the works. In the case of Beckford and Lewis, both authors were accused of moral corruption, in which their personal characters were called into question. In the *Critical Review*, S.T. Coleridge, remarks with outrage about *The Monk*’s author that,

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89 Anon, *Reasons Offer'd Why a Duty should not be Laid on Sugars*, (London, 1695)
The sufferings which he describes are so frightful and intolerable, that we break with the abruptness from the delusion, and indignantly suspect the man of a species of brutality, who could find a pleasure in wantonly imagining them; and such are the abominations which he pourtrays with no hurrying pencil, are such as the observations of character by no means demanded, such as no observation of character can justify, because no good man would willingly suffer them to pass, however transiently, through his own mind.90

Likewise, when it was discovered that the text Vathek was not a genuine Oriental tale, but the work of the planter's son, William Beckford came in for very personal criticism. "it is a mad book, by a mad author."91 It is perhaps significant that as plantation owners in an age of growing concerns about the ethical viability of slavery, that their critics implied not only criticism of the texts, but raised questions over the soundness of their personal principles and their fitness to serve as members of parliament. Public opinion was consolidating against the planters, as a group within British society. Alderman Beckford had already identified this growing criticism and responded by producing his book celebrating the sugar plantation and demonstrating how much better off the slaves were than the typical English worker, and there were several pamphlets written by planters in desperate attempts to gain sympathy with the British public. For example, A Proposal Offered for Sugar Planters Redress, (1783) which feebly challenges their reputation

As to the unfair insinuation of those who have falsely advanced that if the sugar planters would retrench in their luxury and Extravagance, they might afford to sell their sugar at 10s per Hundred as formerly, I should think some of those frugal industrious gentlemen should try to amend their fortunes in Barbadoes, a healthy country as they may get 15 or 18 for what they alllege may be afforded at 10, and thereby save great estates for their posterity, while their neighbours, the Breed of Barbadians are squandering away their yearly Produce in Coaches and Six, embroider'd Petticoats, numerous attendants and twelve Dishes at a Meal.92


91 Hester Thrale-Piozzi, quoted in Roger Lonsdale, 'Introduction,' Vathek, p.xxi.

92 Anon, A Proposal Offered for the Sugar Planters Redress and for Reviving the British Sugar Commerce (London: J.Wilford, 1783), p.15
However, despite such protest, the growing moral voice supported by, among others, the King, effectively closed down that sub-group of Gothicists who revelled in depiction of real horror and excess, what the Marquis De Sade called their “appeal to Hell.”

The Gothic genre, so well adapted for the literary exercise of hedonism and impropriety pushed to imaginative extremes, became contained by those “tame” Gothic writers who enveloped the genre with their morally acceptable tales of explained supernatural phenomenon and virtuous heroines who remain chaste, and whose sensibility overcomes the threat of the morally corrupt. These Gothic authors, for example Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve, not only domesticated the genre by promoting a new image of sensible and moral heroes and heroines, they also, through their moral censorship, transformed it into a useful ideological tool. It is of great importance that Ann Radcliffe, the author who according to Walter Scott could make, “a most decided claim to take her place among the favoured few, who have been distinguished as the founders of a class or school,” was prompted, “several years after resigning her pen” to re-write Lewis’ text *The Monk.* As Emma McEvoy astutely notes “Radcliffe read *The Monk, and was so horrified that in 1797, she produced* *The Italian,* which in many respects is a reworking of material from *The Monk,* as well as a review of her own works in the light of Lewis’ novel.” This powerful reaction to the darker Gothic novels, which merely make explicit what the more domestic novel imply, was more than a prudish over-reaction. What occurred through Ann Radcliffe’s re-visioning of *The Monk* was the effacement of the threat posed by groups such as the plantocracy. Radcliffe overlaid *The Monk* in an act of cultural erasure, which mirrored British society’s moral rejection of this wealthy and vulgar minority. The eighteenth century saw the rise of a modern English national identity which, as perfectly demonstrated by Radcliffe, removes any alien elements that might disrupt the construct of this controlled and sober identity. Radcliffe’s re-writing of *The

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Monk, therefore constitutes one of the first examples of cultural hegemony, that created a sense of cohesive national identity for the British, whilst denigrating and disparaging the act of "colonial creation."

Through such highly symbolic acts, the fiction of British moral superiority thus became a cultural reality. It set the precedent for relations between its position as coloniser and the colonised, in which British cultural supremacy was unquestioned. The colonies would henceforth be defined by their "otherness" which would be reinforced by the cultural superiority of sensible and ethical Britain. The Caribbean, demonised by the planters would consequently never lose its associations with moral degeneracy and likewise remained fixed in its position of alterity, a cultural location which was originally consolidated by the Gothic texts of Walpole, Beckford and Lewis.
Chapter Three

The Medieval Caribbean and the Relocation of Carnival

One of the major problems that arose from British ‘self-invention’ was how to negotiate the Carnival folk heritage of the British Isles which, with its superstitions and irrational customs, was to a large extent the antithesis of new British identity. Poets such as Pope and Thomson had eulogised Britain’s rise from an ancient and glorious past that was kept obscure in order to support the cultural fantasy of British greatness and gloss over the barbarisms of periods such as the Middle Ages. Britishness evolved in the eighteenth century as an image of imperial glory and morality in contrast to the Caribbean which, through the use of metaphors of Carnival and transgression, became increasingly circumscribed within a discourse of archaism. The Caribbean was defined as an atavistic region with a medieval identity that became a cultural reference point against which the positive projection of Britain’s cultural evolution could be measured.

In the first part of this chapter I will therefore examine how contemporary travellers to the Caribbean, such as J.B. Moreton, Lady Maria Nugent and Matthew Lewis both engendered and supported the image of the Caribbean as a site of cultural anteriority, and how they negotiated the Caribbean through a vocabulary of medieval discourse complete with feudal lords and Carnivals. I will suggest that, supported by Enlightenment notions of the linear progress of humanity, the experience of the Caribbean for these travellers, was negotiated through a temporal as well as a geographic displacement. The second part of the chapter examines the way in which the Caribbean provided a set of stereotype characters, such as the pirate and the black clown, that drew on carnival conventions of exaggeration for their success, and which were often used to critique and analyse British society through humour and burlesque.

Part One. The Notion of Social Evolution.

One of the most significant social factors that resulted from the adoption of a British ideology after the Act of Union in 1707 was the conviction that to be British was
synonymous with liberty, and it was a commonly held belief that British identity naturally
gave a person the status of a citizen, a free-born Briton. The working classes in particular
were transformed from the peasant serfs of the seventeenth century, who were described
by the Duke of Albemarle as, “the poorer and meaner people who have no interest in the
commonwealth but the use of breath,”¹ to an increasingly politicised and cohesive group
whose identity in many ways hinged on notions of commonwealth and empire. As Linda
Colley suggests,

Before 1700, the mass of men and women had generally been expected to be
orderly, obedient and above all, passive in the face of those set in authority over
them. Active citizenship was the prerogative of the propertied and of the
male....impressive numbers of Britons did make the step from passive awareness of
nation to an energetic participation on its behalf. But they did so in the main not just
because patriotism was recommended from above, but because they expected to
profit from it in some way. Men and women became British patriots in order to
advertise their prominence in the community, or out of ambition for state or imperial
employment, or because they believed that a wider British empire would benefit
them commercially, or out of fear that a French victory would damage their security
or livelihood, or from a desire to escape the humdrum or because they felt their
religious identity was at stake, or-in some cases-because being an active patriot
seemed an important step towards winning admission to full citizenship, a means of
coming closer to the vote and a say in the running of the state.²

However, this enormous progress, this “scaling-up”, of the working class Briton that
Colley highlights is complex because, as this chapter suggests, this advancement was
predicated on Britain's imperial identity in which the lowest classes were now superior, by
token of their nationality, to the many thousands who lived in British imperial territories.
The lowest class of society was no longer represented by the dispossessed classes of
Britain who might now gain their identity through the fact that they were members ‘of the
chosen people.’ In fact the revisioning of the British as the biblical Israelites was a
powerful image that was well established before William Blake recorded the concept in

¹ Quoted in Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (London: Yale University Press, 1992),
p.370.

² Linda Colley, p.371.
poems such as *Jerusalem* (1820). There was a general confidence that, irrespective of
their actual circumstances, cultural identification with Britishness signalled social evolution
from the barbaric feudalisms that were occurring in areas such as the Caribbean.

This sentiment was expressed in James Thomson's patriotic ode 'Rule Britannia,'
which contains the famous lines "Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves. Britons never
shall be slaves." 3 It might be suggested that Britishness could be defined in this line from
Thomson's anthem, because it is this statement that encapsulates the Enlightenment
philosophy that man was in a linear progress from slavery both physical and mental to
understanding and liberation. What Thompson highlighted was the belief that Britishness
was synonymous with social progress in which old images of domestic slavery were no
longer relevant. This polemic argument gained much currency during the eighteenth
century, in part due to the actual improvement in conditions and political awareness of the
lower classes, but more fundamentally, by the philosophical discussions about the different
groups of man, and their different stages of social and physical evolution.

The work of Enlightenment theorists all over Europe debated questions of racial
theory, many of whom, such as David Hume, assumed an innate superiority for the white
European which he felt was impossible for other races to achieve, and supported the view
that there was an insurmountable hierarchy between the ethnic groups. In a footnote to his
essay 'Of National Characters' (1748) he suggested that, "There never was a civilized
nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any other individual eminent either in
action or speculation." 4 However even those theorists such a James Beattie, who refuted
the claims of natural superiority, still supported the concept that there was a linear
progression for the human species in which the European was unquestionably the most
evolved. In response to Hume, Beattie suggests,


4 David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 4 vols, 4th ed. (London: A. Millar, 1753), I,
p.231n.
The inhabitants of Great Britain and France were as savage 2,000 years ago as those in Africa and America are to this day. To civilize a nation is a work which requires a long time to accomplish. And one may as well say of an infant, that he can never become a man, as a nation now barbarous, that it can never be civilized...The Africans and Americans are known to have many ingenious manufactures and arts among them, which even Europeans would find it no easy matter to imitate. Scientists they have none because they have no letters, but in oratory some of them, particularly the Indians of the Five Nations, are said to be greatly our superiors. 5

Indeed despite Beattie’s acknowledgement of the existence of great civilisations outside of Europe, such as the Aztecs of Peru he, like other Enlightenment philosophers, held firmly to the belief that linear progression towards Enlightenment rationalism was the natural order of universal progress.

In the context of those contemporary debates it seemed reasonable to assert that Britons would never be slaves again because they had progressed beyond that “primitive” stage, in a natural evolution. They had been replaced in the chain by truly primitive peoples who, being further down the developmental system, either through innate inferiority or lack of civilization, entered the British culture as representatives of a medieval “Dark-Age” of ignorance, barbarity and bestiality. In fact, the British, as a nation, could devolve any connections with its own pre-Enlightened history by continually citing their development and difference from the Caribbean plantation systems, which represented an ancient almost quaint society, far removed from their own image of themselves. As J.B. Moreton reminds his readers, “For Britons once bore the name of savages and enslaved and sold each other; and as it please God, out of his goodness to enlighten them, they should have compassion for their black creatures.” 6 However, as indicated by Moreton, by the middle of the eighteenth century the feudal past had entered British culture as something which was conveniently relegated to some vague and distant


6 J.B. Moreton, West Indian Customs and Manners (London: n.p, 1793), p.139.
time far beyond recall, another age shrouded and indistinct, through which the notion of British domestic slavery were practically effaced. Nevertheless and perhaps ironically British culture circumscribed its own contemporary commerce in slaves within a medieval discourse, complete with feudal lords, estates and rural slaves. The Caribbean therefore came to represent not only a location for Britain's contemporary identity of evolved civilisation through her contrast with the barbarities of the unevolved African slaves, but also an archive for her own suppressed Carnival heritage which was displaced both geographically and temporally from the rigid parameters of British identity.

Medieval Readings of the Caribbean Plantation Systems.

In the eighteenth century, the Caribbean was frequently read as a regressive zone, untouched by modernity and progress: in a primitive state of development that could be equated with the feudal Dark-Ages of Britain's medieval past. The plantation system, and the society it fostered, also suggested links to feudalism, particularly in the early period of colonisation. For example, it is interesting to note, that as late as 1553, less than seventy years before the settlement of Barbados, a Statute Against Vagabonds was passed in England, that dealt not only with the domestic use of branding irons and iron collars, but debated the use of domestic slaves. There were many similarities between the plantation in the Caribbean and the medieval serf system in Europe, and aspects of both were contemporaneous in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both systems were based on un-mechanised slave labour, in which the slave was bound for all aspects of life to an estate.

In his text, Medieval Slavery and Liberation, Pierre Dockes makes the relationship clear. "During the Middle Ages the slaves were generally classed with the livestock," and he goes on to demonstrate that the feudal organisation of Europe differed negligibly from that of the eighteenth and nineteenth century plantations in America and the Caribbean. He

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suggests that before the gradual evolution of the feudal system in Europe, which took place in the later Middle Age, and which enabled the progress to serfdom and hence to wage labour, the parallels between the situation of the European and African slave were numerous. Both were decreed to be the absolute property of a master, they were denied individual rights and were domiciled collectively and were given a commercial value. Caribbean society worked along the same lines as the despotic medieval form of social organisation. The state was comprised of a government and judiciary who were the slave owning lords, and there were no external forces limiting their actions. The state therefore emerges as the faceless will of the collective interests of the landowners. The parallels between slave-owning plantation colonies and feudalism were striking especially in terms of the slaves’ lack of recourse to an impartial authority and basic legal protection.

It should be noted that in this situation the right to execute, (or Mutilate) the slave is taken from the masters only to be given in turn to their state, that is themselves in a socialised form, to the masters collectively...That the state rather than the Masters individually now exercises the power to inflict death is a change of some moment, however. Collectively, the interests of the masters are not the same as their individual interests. The state, in other words has a certain autonomy. It may happen, for example, that an individual master will be reluctant to put a criminal slave to death for fear of suffering a considerable financial loss. Crime by slaves must be put down ruthlessly, however, for it is always damaging to the interests of the masters as a group, to the slave system, and hence to the state. In the Antilles in the eighteenth century, for example, masters were reluctant to put fugitive slaves to death when they were captured. The state however, did the job and compensated the master for his loss.  

However this stage that Dockes refers to as the organisation of the feudal overlords into something resembling an organised state, occurs not long before serfdom became the predominant form of labour in Europe, and roughly coincided with the beginning of plantation economy in the Caribbean. Therefore it is unsurprising that the colonists would structure their government along traditional lines which were recognisably medieval. As G.W Bridges points out,

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8 Dockes, p.27.
the early settlers in the West Indies might be expected to carry with them, as they did, those ancient prejudices in favour of the villeinage system, which coincided with their ideas of an active government, and the necessary restraint of wild Africans... The Negro slave-code which until lately governed the labouring classes of Jamaica, was originally copied from that of Barbadoes; and the legislation of that colony resorted, for a precedent, to the ancient villeinage laws, then scarcely extinct on British ground. They copied thence the principles which ruled, and the severity which characterised the feudal system under the Saxon government.  

Bridges suggested that the feudal systems were a stage of social evolution which the ‘New World’, would have to endure in order to progress, and that by changing the name of ‘slavery’ to ‘serfdom’ the plantation system might be more favourably recognised as a necessary experience for the Caribbean. “Abolish that odious name, and the serfs of Jamaica will be found to be as free as those of Britain at the time that Europe was moulded into the feudal system, when servile labour and blind obedience were imposed upon a people far more civilised than these.”

Nevertheless, the important point is that the agrarian slave system remained static in the Caribbean, unlike in Europe. The conditions that caused the development from slavery in Europe to one of wage labour did not apply to the Caribbean, where the supply of labour from Africa was plentiful and the cultural progress and effects of the renaissance in philosophy and reforms in religion were non-existent. This crudely commercial society remained locked in a medieval time zone, both in terms of culture and society. It is therefore unsurprising that the Barbadian Joshua Steele in the 1780s would find useful ideas in feudal documents to improve his Caribbean estates, which he acknowledged were organised in a similar way to those in Britain “five or six hundred years ago” and were in


10 Bridges, p.513.  

need of reform. Steele describes a debate regarding the adoption of a medieval villeinage system as a way of moving the Caribbean slave society forward. He suggests,

To make this colony such a civilized country, it is only necessary to exert the authority of the charters...and under such humane laws, as we should then enjoy, our slaves, or servants, our servi or douloi would then be as happy as our slaves were three or four hundred years ago in England. ¹²

Nevertheless, the Caribbean was recognised as an archive, a synonym for the Dark Age corruption that the newly formed British culture had severed itself from.

Such a construction of the Caribbean as a place of feudalism resonates with the convention within the gothic discourse associating transgression with a medieval context. In Sophia Lee’s novel, The Recess (1785), which I will examine later in the chapter, the themes of European medieval transgressions are conflated with contemporary images of the Caribbean slave systems. However other Gothic texts such as Matthew Lewis' The Monk (1796) and William Beckford's Vathek (1786) also used the contemporary debates about the medieval nature of Caribbean slavery to inform their novels of excess.

The medieval construction of the Caribbean was also supported by contemporary images of Africa as a site of barbarism, which through the slave trade effected the Caribbean. Indeed, reliable information concerning Africa was rare and sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts such as The Description of Africa, by Leo Africanus translated into English in 1660, and Hakluyt's Principle Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, published in 1599, were still used as sources up until the nineteenth century explorations of Africa provided a more comprehensive picture of the continent. Indeed as late as 1846, the editor of the history of Leo Africanus stated that, “up until a recent date, nine-tenths of the names of those parts of Africa traversed by him were placed there on his authority alone: for he was not only the great, but the sole authority in these

¹²Joshua Steele, p.18.
regions." One of the features of these accounts and subsequent travel narratives was that Africa was a primitive space where nature and the natural were in the precedent, and where the Africans were represented as barbarians and savages and, at best, lived in a state of feudal, agrarian social organisation. According to the Scottish philosopher John Millar, humanity had evolved through four stages of social development: hunter-gatherers, to the village unit with domesticated animals and thence to a feudal community with a local chief and finally to a sophisticated modern society and culture capable of commerce. Africa, like the Caribbean which it supplied with labour, was clearly seen as occupying the stage behind Britain in terms of development. Walter Rodney in *How Europe Undeveloped Africa*, has demonstrated in great detail how, at the point of contact between Africa and Europe, "European society was leaving feudalism and was moving towards capitalism; African society was moving into a phase comparable to feudalism." As Philip Curtin has also noted, most African society was comparable in almost every respect in the early Middle Ages with Europe, however it did not develop in the same way as Europe which made great progress in specific areas of technology and therefore had advantages over Africa in terms of critical areas such as navigation. Curtin demonstrates how the primitive image of Africa informed every discussion of African culture, and created an imbalanced picture of the culture which had serious consequences in terms of later scientific racisms of the nineteenth century.

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Increasingly through the eighteenth century with the rise in contemporary interests in issues of humanity and debates concerning the morality of slavery, Africans became the subject of increasingly polarised identification. On one hand they were described as child-like and innocent, conforming to a European myth of a prelapsarian, pastoral idyll, and depicted as simple peasants connected to the land with no aspirations but to continue in their simple and unprogressive state of nature. On the other hand, the Africans were imaged in a state of barbarism, as cannibal butchers amongst whom debauchery and barbarity were endemic, which fed into another European stereotype of Carnival transgression. However it is significant that both images could be read as conforming to medieval stereotypes, and Africa was pigeonholed, without much exploration, into a primitive agrarian stereotype, an image that was exacerbated in the Caribbean where, despite advancements in technology and mechanisation in Britain, the sugar plantations remained almost totally un-mechanised due to the lack of investments of the planters. Lowell Ragatz notes, “At home, scientific agriculture was gradually making headway during the latter part of the eighteenth century, yet this advance went all but unnoticed by the West Indians.”

This image is effectively reflected in Aphra Behn’s text Oroonoko (1688) which corroborates this representation of African society in the Caribbean. Oroonoko’s Africa is comparable to a common inscription of a feudal society. The African kingdom depicted in the novel is ruled by an omnipotent king, whose subjects are servile vassals who do his bidding. In her description of the old king in Coramantien, Behn states, “This gave the old king some affliction, but he salved this with this, that the obedience the people pay their king was not at all inferior to what they paid their gods....’Tis death to disobey; besides, held a most impious disobedience.” Oroonoko himself is a product of this feudalism.

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Behn describes his innate nobility, which distinguishes him from the African peasants who, even within the plantation, create a quasi-feudal state around Oronooko and, despite being a slave himself, he is still served by these minions. "They all waited on him, some playing, others dancing before him all the time, according to the Manners of their several Nations; and with unwearied Industry, endeavouring to please and delight him."\(^{19}\)

This image of Africa is also present in Olaudah Equiano’s text, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1788), written one hundred years after *Oroonoko*. According to Equiano in his descriptions of his own society, “Our tillage is exercised in a large plain or common, some hours walk from our dwellings, and all the neighbours resort thither in a body. They use no beasts of husbandry; and their only instruments are hoes, axes, shovels, and beaks, or pointed iron to dig with.”\(^{20}\) Equiano’s accounts of his life in Africa, although designed to give a favourable account of his society, serves to locate Africa, for a British reader, within the discourse of a feudal, and retrograde era. For example, his descriptions of the gullibility of the people with regard to superstition and witchcraft locates them within a medieval period of ignorance and credulity. He recollects how a poisoned corpse possessed its bearers to drop the body outside the house of the murderer on the way to being buried.

As soon as the bearers had raised it on their shoulders, they seemed seized with some sudden impulse, and ran to and fro unable to stop themselves. At last, having passed through a number of thorns and prickly bushes unhurt, the corpse fell from them so close to a house, and defaced it in the fall; the owner being taken up, he immediately confessed the poisoning.\(^{21}\)

Significantly Equiano himself is somewhat ambiguous in his condemnation of such supernatural phenomenon, leaving it to the reader to form their own opinion of such

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\(^{19}\) *Oroonoko*, p.110.


\(^{21}\) *Equiano*, p.12
accounts. He also confirms the reading of the Caribbean as a stagnant non-progressive society by demonstrating how the superstitious customs of Africa were practised among the slaves, where knowledge of magic and poison was still widespread. He gives a parallel story of another poisoned corpse accusing its murderer from beyond the grave, however this time the bearers were sceptical English sailors who were in turn possessed and ran about with the coffin until it fell at the hut of the murderer.²² Equiano, like Behn presented images of Africa and the Caribbean that traced the origins of Caribbean medieval society to Africa, however in the accounts of eighteenth-century British travel writers such as Lady Maria Nugent and Matthew Lewis, the medieval image of Caribbean life was made increasingly explicit.

The Medieval Caribbean in Lady Nugent's Journal

The construction of West Indian life as a continuation of the medieval is clear from the cultural archive provided by literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and a particularly good source of information was provided by the accounts of the British travellers who visited and lived in the Caribbean. It is through these texts that the inscription of the Caribbean, as a site of medieval backwardness was most apparent. For the eighteenth-century traveller, to encounter the Caribbean world was to be faced with a temporal disruption. It was not merely the dislocation of physical distance but crucially, represented a return to a feudal agrarian past with slaves, unreformed religion and moral abuses as well as the actual bodily threat of peasant revolts and untamed nature.

The writing of Lady Maria Nugent is of particular interest for several reasons, but primarily because her position as wife to the British governor to the colony gave her a unique insight into the British view of Jamaica, and Jamaican society. Lady Nugent's journal of her residence in Jamaica from 1801-1805 comprised, for the most part, an account of the official and social duties of the governors household in Jamaica at the turn of the nineteenth century, which, in the course of her five years residency enabled her to

visit the whole island and meet not only all the major plantation owners and local magnates, but also gave her access to a comprehensive view of the Caribbean slave system. Few accounts of the Caribbean could compare with her first hand experiences of Jamaican life, which were crucially viewed from a 'British' perspective. Despite the fact that Nugent was American by birth, her agenda was clearly one of a British gentlewoman; firmly Protestant and very strongly British in ideology. As Linda Colley has identified there was a growing sense, particularly at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the landed establishment were foremost in promoting British identity, "top Britons not only buttressed and consolidated their own social and political primacy, they also helped influence what Britishness was all about." Lady Maria Nugent was clearly of this upper class elite and was very conscious of her identity as a British gentlewoman. Her husband General George Nugent, was closely related to some of the most powerful and politically influential figures of the period such as William Pitt and William Wyndham, Lord Grenville, and therefore Lady Maria's journals provide us with representative views of an aristocratic class that directly shaped and promoted the ideology and polemic of Britishness.

Nugent's journal is also unique because she was a peripheral observer of events. Being the wife of the Governor, her account was the view of a disinterested party, to the extent that she had no political power or responsibility, and therefore hers was a much more open, and honest account of plantation society than would be generally found in texts such as those of planters Edward Long or Bryan Edwards which, despite being more informative also labour under the weight of their political agendas, and promote positive images of the planters. It is only therefore through accounts such as Lady Maria’s journal, that the commonplace view of the Caribbean can be ascertained. Her diary reveals its own agenda of hearsay, speculation and accepted generalisations and reflects the view of the Caribbean as a place of medieval archaism. Although Lady Maria’s journal is a factual depiction of her years as the Governor’s wife, her whole account is underpinned by the

23 Colley, p.193.
sense of unreality, fear and temporal disruption she associates with Jamaica. She is entering a site of carnival and feudal masquerade, which contrasts strongly with her own notions of propriety and acceptability.

In the journal this psychological fracture begins as early as the voyage from England during which time Nugent anticipates having to negotiate a Caribbean environment that is very different from British society. As the Nugents’ pass the Tropic of Capricorn, the fleet celebrate with a masquerade in which sailors, “dressed as Neptune and Amphitrite” come aboard, and this signals her entry into the carnival culture of the Caribbean. Curiously this process is mirrored on her return to England where on reaching the English Channel, she is suddenly conscious that her clothes and those of her children are inappropriate and costume-like. Having lived in a Carnival society for four years, Nugent quickly reappraises her appearance and finds it comical and slightly ridiculous.

Before I describe our landing I must mention our appearance... The children we put a second frock on so as to supply the place of warm clothing; but their ankles, arms and necks were covered with beads; and for myself, in my hurry and anxiety to get ashore, I forgot the dress prepared for me, and put on a full Lieutenant-Generals Uniform, that I had used as my dress of ceremony on the voyage. It was a scarlet habit, with embroidered fronts, and two gold epaulettes on the shoulders. In short we made a most extraordinary appearance altogether.  

The entire journal of Nugent’s life in the Caribbean is neatly framed by these two episodes of masquerade which signal her entry to and her re-emergence from the feudal and Carnival world in the Caribbean. Although at no time is there a suggestion that Nugent misinterprets or overreacts to coincidences or events, it is clear that much of what


she experiences during her stay in Jamaica is made acceptable by associating it with a past age. Her sojourn is like a time travel, in which she goes back to an ante-British era, symbolised by the sailors’ masque. What Nugent appears to undergo in her physical journey is a psychological adaptation in order to prepare for Caribbean society. Her ability to cope with the presence of black slaves and debauched planters is only made possible by equating these things with a former Dark-Age, and one in which she, to a large extent, is obliged to suspend her moral British ideology.

Nugent arrives in Jamaica to be greeted by Lord Balcarres, the incumbent Governor, who seems, like the masquerade on board, to suggest her entry into a Carnival world-turned-upside-down. Lord Balcarres’s official residency is filthy, as he is himself. She says

I wish Lord B. would wash his hands, and use a nail brush, for the black edges of his nails really makes me sick. He has, besides, an extraordinary propensity to dip his fingers into every dish. Yesterday, he absolutely helped himself to some fricassee with his dirty finger and thumb.

Nugent depicts him as repulsive figure who is not only of doubtful personal hygiene, but really seems to be a ridiculous figure followed around as he is, by his “extraordinary pet...a little black pig that goes grunting about to everyone for a tit-bit.” Lord Balcarres was also known to be a single man who had a reputation for womanising and having sexual relations with black women. Indeed the ‘carnival-king’ image of her husband’s

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26 This use of the figures of fantasy to describe this shift in perspective on crossing the Tropic of Cancer is also used in J.B. Moreton’s text, Manners and Customs of Jamaica, in which he states, “On passing the Tropic of Cancer, you will be boarded by Mr and Mrs. Cancer in a formal manner (a venerable pair older than Methusaleh) who constantly attend the latitude of 22° 30’, ready to shave all passengers who have never passed that way before;” p.15.

27 Nugent, vol.1, p.25.

predecessor is outrageous in the view of Nugent's British morality. She complains she was,

left alone part of the morning, with Major Gould who entertained me with an account of Lord B's domestic conduct, and his menage here altogether. Never was there a more profligate and disgusting scene, and I really think he must have been more than half mad. 29

Balcarres has been living like a debauched planter, and Nugent reveals a very British disgust at his lack of self-control.

Nugent's emphasis on the excessive consumption of food and drink in Creole society is also another indication of the way in which she reads the society as a Carnival environment. In fact, for Nugent the planters seemed to be in a perpetual state of saturnalia that was deeply offensive to her concepts of Protestantism, restraint and sobriety. The Jamaican habit of loading the table was evidence of their lack of civilised restraint. This contrasts strongly with the opinions of the Jamaican planter Bryan Edwards who reads this excess as a sign of their innate generosity. 30 However, for Nugent, such propensity for consumption was clearly un-British or rather hearkened back to an antiquated time where such feasting was acceptable.

I don't wonder now at the fever the people here suffer from- such eating and drinking I never saw! Such loads of all sorts of high, rich and seasoned things, and really gallons of wine and mixed liquors as they drink! I observed some of the party, today, eat of a late breakfast as if they had never eaten before- a dish of tea, another of coffee, a bumper of claret, another large one of hock-negus; then Madeira, sangaree, hot and cold meat, stews and fries, hot and cold fish pickled and plain, peppers, ginger sweetmeats, acid fruits, sweet jellies- in short, it was all as astonishing as it was disgusting. 31

29 Nugent, vol. 1, p. 87.


Her whole account is littered with depictions of excessive feasting, “a profuse and overloaded table, and a shoulder of wild boar stewed, with forced meat, etc, as an ornament to the table. Sick as it all made me...” Nugent’s seemingly endless cycle of breakfasts and dinners, are described as unrelentingly oppressive.

Our dinner, at 6, was really so profuse that it is worth describing. the first course was entirely of fish, excepting the jerked hog, in the centre, which is the way of dressing it by the Maroons. There was also a black crab pepper-pot, for which I asked for the receipt...The second course was of turtle, mutton, beef, turkey, goose, ducks, chickens, capons, ham, tongue, crab patties-etc,etc.-The third course was composed of sweets and fruits of all kinds.- I was really sicker than usual, at seeing such a profusion of eatables.”

However the link between the excessive feasting and the commonplace imagery of feudal banqueting tables was clear in Nugent’s work. What she suggests is that the Creole was living in the Dark-Ages, in a culture that was ante-British, ante-modern and ante-Enlightenment. For Mikhail Bakhtin, Voltaire’s ‘enlightened’ reading of Rabelais precisely reflects this wholesale disgust and rejection of the medieval pleasure of wallowing and luxuriating in excess and superfluity. He suggests that the thinkers of the eighteenth century were unwilling to embrace bodily pleasure, and that with the progress of modern rationalism, the Carnival and the transgressive were rejected.

The Enlighteners had a lack of historical sense, an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanistic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalization and typification on one hand and to documentation on the other hand. They were quite incapable of understanding and appreciating Rabelais; to them he was a typical representative of “the wild and barbaric sixteenth century.” This point of view was clearly expressed by Voltaire. 34

32 Nugent, vol.1, p.156.


What is significant is that Nugent reads the Creole society in the same terms of a barbaric society that often moves her to physical nausea. In her criticism of Creole culture Nugent demonstrates those elements of Caribbean society that reflect Rabelasian immoderation. The similarity is striking. Her nationalist British cultural agenda serves to dissociate her from the Creole culture, which is described as decayed and scandalous, and most importantly discordant with modern thinking and therefore retarded.

Nugent’s commentary, like that of Voltaire with regard to Rabelais, is characteristic of modern enlightened attitudes. According to Bakhtin “In the sixteenth century everybody laughed at Rabelais novel, but nobody despised it. Now, in the eighteenth century, the gay, century-old laughter becomes something despicable.”

However, her reading of the Creole world as disgusting, firmly associates the Caribbean planter culture with those very elements of festive folk culture which were eradicated from notions of modern British identity.

The problematics, raised in Nugent’s rejection of the Creole excesses of consumption were also extended to a criticism of sexual depravity which she observes in Jamaica.

white men of all descriptions, married or single, live in a state of licentiousness with their female slaves; and until a great reformation takes place on their part, neither religion, decency nor morality, can be established among the Negroes.....Their example must be the worst possible to these poor creatures.”

The moral laxity of white Creole society, and the complexity of an inter-racial society was a great source of anxiety for Lady Maria. As governor’s wife she was expected to entertain, “the black, brown and yellow ladies of the house,” in her dressing room as was

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35 Bakhtin, p.117.

36 Nugent, vol.1, p.87.
customary. Nugent suggests is a moral compromise and semi-acknowledgement of the mistresses and the offspring of the Creoles. Their lack of self-control is chiefly blamed on the climate, and Nugent feeds into this common belief that the hot weather loosened morals.

It is extraordinary to witness the immediate effect that the climate and habit of living in this country have upon the minds and manners of the Europeans, particularly of the lower orders. In the upper ranks they become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything except eating and drinking and indulging themselves, and are almost entirely under the dominion of their mulatto favourites.

Nugent's sentiments are echoed by Moreton, Long and Edwards. Indeed Moreton explicitly blames the climate for quite literally melting the morals of the British, "how imperceptibly, like wax softened by heat, they melt into their (the Creoles) manners and customs." However she is also sensitive to the carnivalesque challenge that miscegenation raises, and there is even an element of ironic reversal in her depiction of an attractive black woman who she refers to as a "black sultana" who is pregnant for the fourth time to an ugly Scottish overseer. She describes him as "about fifty, clumsy, ill-made and dirty. He had a "dingy, sallow-brown complexion, and only two yellow discoloured tusks by way of teeth." Nugent also blames sexual laxity on a general lack of Protestant religious education, and she laments the lack of religion which is a strong part of her own national identity. "It is indeed melancholy to see the general disregard of both religion and morality, throughout the island." Nugent is outraged at the lack of respect

39 Moreton, p.78.
41 Nugent, vol.1, p.234.
the church is given and describes how the planters, when in church, talk continuously and only attend infrequently, and as a matter of display. This is in total contrast with her own very British confidence in the principles of the Protestant faith. The Creoles were heathenish, irreligious and indifferent to the British fusion of national and religious identity. Again this underlines the primitive nature of Caribbean society for Lady Maria Nugent and the Caribbean constituted a site of chaos, a pre-reformed medieval turmoil, in which the order of British sobriety was disrupted and flouted.

**Nugent and the Slaves.**

In Nugent’s diary, it is the presence of the slaves that generate the most powerful indication of her temporal disruption during the period of her residency, because it is the description of the slaves that give the strongest indication that she can only negotiate Caribbean society within a historical framework.

In returning home from our drive this morning, we met a gang of Eboe negroes, just landed, and marching up the country. - I ordered the postillions to stop, that I might examine their countenances as they passed, and see if they looked unhappy; but they appeared perfectly the reverse. I bowed, kissed my hand, and laughed; they did the same. The women, in particular, seemed pleased, and all admired the carriage, etc. One man attempted to show more pleasure than the rest, by opening his mouth as wide as possible to laugh, which was rather a horrible grin. He showed such truly cannibal teeth, all filed as they have them, that I could not help shuddering. 42

It is in her infrequent descriptions of the African slave trade that Nugent’s journal is at its most revealing, responding and reflecting the whole range of commonplace stereotypes and myths about Africans. Although genuinely concerned about the issue of slavery and, having from very early on determined to convert her own black servants, Nugent seems remarkably comfortable with the concept of human bondage that surrounds her. Despite her own familiarity with the Emancipation movement, and the work of William Wilberforce, the reality of slavery and its prominent place in Jamaican society is seemingly of no great concern to her. Indeed the spectral apparition of two slaves who appeal to the

Governor to be released having been in chains for more than a year, and who appear unannounced among her description of the strawberries and flowers, suggests that either Nugent is completely oblivious to her surroundings, which is unlikely considering her otherwise keen observations, or else she has psychologically distanced herself from the whole social structure of Caribbean society by relegating scenes of slavery to a manifestation of a bygone era.\(^{43}\) She seems to accept that her British sensibilities are out of place in Jamaica, or more accurately 'out of time' with the Caribbean culture. This position is however ambiguous and creates a tension in the text because on one hand she is concerned by the abuses that occur on Lord Balcarres’s estate, but she is also resigned to the understanding that Negro slavery is a natural part of the archaism of West Indian life and which is no part of her world.

Nugent provides clear evidence of her reluctance to view the slaves distinct from a picturesque background, preferring to describe them as part of the scenery. Her arrival in the Caribbean demonstrates this depiction of the slaves within a romantic tableau, “We were immediately surrounded by boats, with naked men and women covered with beads, and bringing us all sorts of tropical fruits.-The pretty Bridgetown. The hills behind it, the palms of all sorts—in short, the whole—was most picturesque, and altogether enchanting.”\(^{44}\) The slaves merely add a touch of colour to the descriptions of Jamaican nature.

The road, this day, was beautiful, but tremendous. Steep rocky roads, rivers to ford, high rocky hills to pass over, thick woods for the carriage to be dragged through, aloes and a variety of beautiful plants and shrubs in full bloom, and innumerable parties of negroes, laughing, dancing, and singing, and dressing their food along the roadside.\(^{45}\)

\(^{43}\) Nugent, Vol.1, p.176.

\(^{44}\) Nugent, Vol.1, p.18.

It is therefore interesting that the only occasion where she gives any detailed description of them is through the cultural filter of Carnival. During these public festivities Nugent's descriptions become animated and interesting; and it suggests that through Carnival she discovers a comfortable vocabulary with which to describe the slaves. Instead of her cursory descriptive asides, she details the celebrations.

Christmas Day! All night heard the music of the tom-toms, etc. Rise early, and the whole town and house bore the appearance of a masquerade. After church, amuse myself very much with the strange procession and figures called Johnny Canoes. All dance, leap and play a thousand antics. Then there are groups of dancing men and women. They had a sort of leader or superior at their head, who sang a sort of recitative, and seemed to regulate all their proceedings; the rest joining at intervals in the air and chorus. The instrument to accompany the song was a rude sort of drum, made of bark leaves, on this they beat time with two sticks, while singers do the same with their feet. Then there was a party of actors- Then a little child was introduced, supposed to be a king, who stabbed all the rest. They told me that some of the children who appeared were to represent Tippoo Saib’s children and the man was Henry the 4th of France. What a melange!- All were dressed very finely, and many of the blacks had really gold and silver fringe on their robes. 46

Therefore we can see how the prism of Carnival allowed Nugent to find a vocabulary with which to describe the African slaves.

This was the case for other writers coming from Britain and struggling to find a language with which to access the slave community. Matthew Lewis, for example, also focuses on the carnival, which he recognises as the point of convergence between himself and the slaves. It is meaningful that Lewis, like Nugent, was comfortable in his description of the Jamaican carnival, because in the carnival he thought he recognised aspects of antiquated British customs and therefore could make sense of the otherwise unique creolised celebrations of the black slaves with their curious instruments, such as nose flutes, and wild erotic dances.

In a similar way J.B Moreton compared the Caribbean carnival to the metropolitan masquerade, however making the point that,

"Such scenes, I'm sure, in curious masquerade,

By British Lords and nymphs were ne'er displayed."^47

However Lewis was explicit, for example, equating the Creole figure of John Connu, an adaptation of a masked African folk character, with the British traditional character of the Merry Andrew. He says,

John-Canoe is a Merry-Andrew, dressed in a striped doublet, and bearing upon his head a kind of pasteboard house-boat, filled with puppets, representing, some sailors, others soldiers, others again slaves at work on a plantation, &c. ^48

According to Frederick Cassidy, the John Connu figure was exclusively African in origin. ^49 Indeed Lewis struggles to describe the figures of the headdress or the possible significance of it, and his insistence that the figure is the same as one found in old English folk customs, suggests that he is stubbornly overlaying his own cultural interpretation of what he saw in the Carnival. What is significant is how Lewis, like Nugent, brought his own cultural agenda of the displaced medieval culture to the Caribbean and to a large extent ignored the way in which the Caribbean carnival differed very significantly from the traditional folk cultures in Britain. As Edward Brathwaite has noted despite the adoption of European forms in the carnival, the content of the carnival was markedly different.

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^47 Moreton, p.158.


^49 Frederick Cassidy, *Jamaica Talk* (London Macmillan, 1961), pp. 256-262. Here Cassidy investigates the origins of John Connu, in which he suggests that "the most likely source is the Ewe language in which the dzono means a magician or sorcerer and kunu means something terrible or deadly, a cause of death." p.259.
It was the Negro fiddler who usually led the costumed bands; and it was the music of 'negro drums, the sound of the pipe and the tabor, negroe flutes a, gombas and jawbones', that moved them along. There were also large areas of public entertainment that remained intransigently African or Afro-creole.¹⁰

There is an argument that perhaps travellers such as Nugent and Lewis could only negotiate the horrors of the plantation system by relocating the whole of Caribbean society within a medieval discourse and that the Carnivals with their superficial similarity to British folk culture was a comforting, if not entirely accurate confirmation of this. Again Matthew Lewis describes the way in which the Carnival depicts a traditional rivalry between the English (the red band) and the Scots (the blue band), and reads no irony into the fact that the figure of Britannia, the symbol of freedom at home, is played by a slave girl who has been forced to wear the costume. He instead is carried along by what he recognises as a familiar patriotic parade.

First marched Britannia; then came a band of music; then the flag; then the Blue King and Queen. The Queen splendidly dressed in blue and silver ...His majesty wore a full British Admiral’s uniform with a white satin sash, and a huge cocked hat with a gilt paper crown upon the top of it.⁵¹

Lewis is ‘charmed’ by the sight of “so many people who appeared to be unaffectedly happy” however it might be suggested that his interpretation of the Creole Carnival was far from impartial.⁵²

Both Lewis and Nugent develop the connection between the traditional carnival forms of medieval Europe, and that of the African slaves, and it is here they reveal their own cultural agendas by over-reading the European nature of the Carnival and avoiding any real acknowledgement of the strong African folk traditions which were present in

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⁵¹ Lewis, p.55.

⁵² Lewis, p.56.
this first example of truly creolised culture. Both reporters are attracted to the creolised carnival, because it seems to provide a confirmation of their expectations of the medieval nature of Caribbean life. This interpretation of the Carnival through the European perspective is made even more explicit in J.B. Moreton's *West Indian Customs and Manners* (1793). Moreton unpacks the fundamental point about the displacement of European folk culture onto the Caribbean through his comparison of the Creole Carnival festivities with the folk culture of the Irish peasants. He says of the slaves,

Their funerals and weddings are celebrated in this manner. Indeed I think I never saw anything that so resembled the amusements, particularly the passions held on Sunday by the vulgar peasantry on the mountains in Ireland; where to the music of a rotten bagpipe or crazy fiddle they dance to tire each other down, where they court, laugh and sing at once; and cry and pipe and play at once and where they gormandize and guttle fight and quarrel at once!" 53

Moreton, through his unguarded prejudices reveals the cultural parallels between European folk culture that has become disreputable and the Caribbean Creole culture. He attempts to relegate this folk culture to Ireland, however the evocation of old British national folk cultures underlies his correlation between the vulgar medieval customs of the Irish peasants and his interpretation of Caribbean Creole Carnivals. Therefore from the accounts of writers such as Lady Maria Nugent and Matthew Lewis, it is possible to discover how the Caribbean became consolidated by the nineteenth century as a site of medieval and Carnival transgression. In a social and cultural replication of the effects of the Gothic genre in literature, the Caribbean became a coded cultural symbol of disorder, chaos, fear and transgression for Britain.

**Sophia Lee and the Carnival of Transformation.**

Sophia Lee’s gothic novel, *The Recess or a Tale of Other Times* (1783) is significant because it fuses together both aspects of Caribbean inscription that evoke the medieval period of British history. The text is set in the reign of Elizabeth I, an era in

53 Moreton, p.155.
which the feudal structures of society were still in place. The heroine of the Gothic tale is Matilda, the secret daughter of Elizabeth’s rival, Mary, who with her sister, had been raised in the grounds of a monastery in which a concealed recess constituted their refuge, hence the title. Matilda has married the Earl of Leicester, the Queen’s favourite and fears the retribution of Elizabeth, and the couple escape to France. Unfortunately, Leicester dies and Matilda is forced to flee her refuge in Europe, taking with her newborn baby as well as the corpse of her husband. In her efforts to avoid discovery the unfortunate Matilda escapes to Jamaica in the care of a trusted planter, Mr. Mortimer, who as soon as she is on board ship, transforms from a saviour into a vile seducer. As the ship gets closer to Jamaica, Mortimer reveals his true nature, which is described as transgressing the boundaries of decency and morality. He has “a passion, he no longer concealed and led him to be forever in my presence; neither the unburied dead, nor the sad circumstances in which I was widowed any longer operated on his imagination.”54 She is trapped, and on arrival in Jamaica becomes aware that in this medieval world of the Caribbean plantation, she has no recourse to a higher authority for any hope of deliverance.

The interlude in Jamaica is brief in the text, but supports the reading of the Caribbean as a place of medieval transgression. Mortimer represents the tyrannical feudal lord who knows no authority other than his own passion. Mortimer is set on forcing her into a marriage, days after she has given birth to her dead husband’s child. He is despotic, and on reaching Jamaica arranges the wedding. There seems to be no hope for Matilda, and the priest is about to complete the ceremony, at which point the slaves on Mortimer’s estate revolt, and bursting into the room, butcher Mortimer before her very eyes.

What is interesting in Lee’s portrayal of Jamaica is that although her text is reputedly set in the sixteenth century, it is only in Jamaica that the feudal archaism of her text becomes convincing, with its slave peasants and lords of the estate. All the residents in her Jamaican scenes belong to a feudal world; and it is as if Matilda, on reaching

Jamaica, is transported to a place that is recognisably historic. The planters are described as having no law, but their own power which they use despotically and the slaves are the mass of peasant labour pushed beyond their endurance. They are, "uninformed desperate wretches, not the happy beings that injurious tyranny first found them. Inflicted cruelties have hardened their hearts and the sight of untasted luxuries, corrupted them." However, the slaves are also a murderous rabble of unpredictable actions, they are ferocious and bloody and are described as though they were wild beasts, who have been brutalised into savagery. The transgressive violence of medieval feudalism is therefore created within the Jamaican context.

This depiction of the Caribbean as medieval is extended through the figure of the Governor's black mistress, Anana. Matilda, having been imprisoned by the Governor of Jamaica, languishes in jail for seven years with her daughter Mary, during which time she is visited by a wealthy black woman who is attracted by the infant. Anana takes pity on the child and often takes her out of the prison to play with her, giving her gifts of food and toys and generally making the prisoners lives more tolerable. There is one particular incident however that reinforces the Carnival theme of the text. Anana has been playing with Mary and as she returns, Matilda is struck by her transformed appearance. As Matilda states,

Imagine a girl between 3 and 4 years old, slight and graceful, fair and blooming whose amber locks the hand of nature had turned into a thousand spiral rings... her little arms and ankles encircled with fanciful bracelets of different coloured beads, while her hand bore a gilt basket filled with fruits of the country. She seemed to be of another world, descending to bless this- while in the arms of her sable conductor, she appeared to me like new born light reposing on a bosom of chaos.

In this key passage, Lee unconsciously introduces an extended metaphor in which Anana symbolises the feudal Caribbean which supports and sustains Mary who represents British

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56 Lee, vol.2, p.120.
cultural identity. This parallel is made even clearer when Lee describes Mary as “new born light.” She is a metaphor for a new British identity which can only exist because it is brought by a sable conductor, who represents the chaos of the medieval. The Caribbean enabled the restructuring of a new British identity because it absorbs the chaotic and primitive, that were no longer accepted as part of the British identity. This metaphor is continued later in the text when Anana, dying of smallpox, asks to see Mary. Despite the hazards of the disease, Matilda is swayed into allowing Mary to attend the sick bed, primarily because she knows that Anana wishes to give Mary a parting gift, which she thinks may well relieve them from their destitution. Matilda says, “She intreated me in the most moving and broken accents, once more to let her hear the little angel she could no longer see; to suffer her to give into the dear child’s hand the casket she was so soon going to bequeath her.” In fact, Anana gives Mary diamonds, and as a consequence of her gift, they are wealthy enough to secure their liberation from Jamaica and to set themselves up in England. They also and, ironically, purchase slaves to attend them, and the symbol of the dying Negro woman, pressing her wealth into the hands of Mary, the representative of British identity who uses that wealth to purchase other Negroes, is therefore emphasised.

Lee demonstrates a consciousness of how the Caribbean became a convenient cultural site to which Britain could shift the baggage of her own feudal past, dismissing it to the oblivion of the primitive tropics and only to re-emerge with a new imperial British identity through a crude act of cultural reconstruction and fantasy. Octave Mannoni in his text *Prospero and Caliban*, suggested that Europeans “project upon the colonial peoples the obscurities of their own unconscious-obscurities they would rather not penetrate.”

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However through this projection of the Caribbean, Britain attempted to slough off the uncomfortable carnal and unruly aspect of her old cultures.

This disavowal of an integral part of Britain’s folk culture, was present in the many British representations of the black subjects, but was translated into a libidinous fascination and fetisization of blackness. Even as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century the symbolic associations of blackness with wildness, the natural, and sexual freedom was a symptom of the strictures of self-imposed Protestant, British cultural suppression. Moreton expressed this in his first hand account of life in Jamaica,

In Europe, Great Britain and Ireland I should say, it would render a gentleman of fortune odious in the community to take half a dozen ladies of easy virtue into keeping at once; in those countries frigid lovers trifle away half their time in stiff formalities and religious ceremonies whilst children of the sun, fostered and invigorated beneath his caelestial rays, eternal votaries to the revels of Bacchus and Venus, luxuriously and voluptuously spend their few days and nights in dissipations.\(^59\)

What is of great interest for this discussion is therefore the way in which both British and the Creole cultures both developed around the issue of Carnival and folk tradition, in polarised directions. Whereas in Britain every effort was made to repress and abandon the folk impulse in culture, in the Caribbean, the opposite was true.

As Edward Brathwaite has suggested, the African traditions became crucial to the survival of the enslaved population, and through creolisation and adaptation, the folk culture became an image of survival (much as it had been for the Bards of Ancient Wales).\(^60\) However, the critical point is that not only did Creole culture struggle to preserve its African legacy, it also ironically provided an image of an ante-British, medieval folk culture. The Caribbean became a reference point in British culture for the

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59 Moreton, p.78.

Carnival, and this archive would be drawn on repeatedly to examine the hidden side of the British psyche; those carnal impulses that it was impossible for the British to display. *Jane Eyre* (1847) for example, shows how wild or passionate urges loaded with implied sexuality are conveniently located in the character of the Creole, Bertha Mason. Bronte, can therefore introduce the theme of sex and violence but can distance these from her heroine, through the use of the ‘code of the Caribbean’. Similarly, Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* (1818) can be read as the piecing together of the Caribbean profile from the disparate remnants of dead British cultural material. Frankenstein creates a monster, a larger than life repository of uncontrolled and menacing passions that haunts him, and symbolises the wild, Carnival force that British culture had suppressed.

**Part II. The Caribbean Characters**

One of the main consequences of the medievalising of the Caribbean was the fact that groups associated with the region were inscribed within British culture as carnival figures. The preceding chapter examined the way in which the absentee Caribbean planters were framed within a Carnival discourse in the metropolitan context because of their reputation as a wealthy and debauched satellite group, who threatened the stability of British identity. However, there are several other groups associated with the Caribbean, who were also given Carnivalised identities. In this chapter I am going to focus on five such figures: (i) the planter, (ii) Creole women, (iii) Pirates, (iv) black clowns and (v) the punished slave. These figures became part of the commonplace portrayals of the Caribbean, particularly in literature and on stage in the eighteenth century. They were often based on real (historical) identities which developed independently in literature and were usually exaggerated, either to shock or to add a comic dimension, forming a code or a set of conventions. I will argue that, to a large extent, characters such as Mungo, the black servant, were substituted for traditional Carnival characters such as The Fool who could critique the strictures of British society because they were portrayed as both alien and antiquated, and therefore outside the boundaries of contemporary Britishness, which was no longer challenged by domestic forces of Carnival transgression. I will also examine briefly the way in which the traditional Carnival theme of the body is a central feature of
Caribbean representation in accounts of the islands, and particularly with regard to Abolitionist literature at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. I will suggest that slave narratives paralleled the conventional Carnival focus on the corporeal and therefore allowed mainstream British culture to satisfy a longing for a Carnival experience, again through the filter of the Caribbean.

(i) The Planter

One of the most popular Caribbean characters was that of the planter, who having newly arrived in England creates comic mayhem through his lack of social restraint. I have examined the way in which British culture reacted against the threat of the planters in Britain, however they were also the subject of satire and comedy, particularly on stage. Richard Cumberland's comedy, *The West Indian* first performed in 1771, demonstrates an understanding of the tightening of social morality and the severity which mirrored the consolidation of British culture. Indeed, his 'Prologue' is explicit in its agenda of criticising the loss of carnival humour, and the ability to laugh at oneself that he observed, and opposed, in his contemporary society and which he feels has been lost to a bygone age.

Rouse, Britons, rouse, for honour of your isle,  
Your old good humour; and be seen to smile.  
You say we do not write like our fathers-true,  
Not were our fathers half so strict as you.  

Cumberland's play therefore, represents a serious observation on the loss of comedy and humour, and he significantly chooses to remedy this through the actions of his hero, Belcourt, a West Indian planter, newly arrived from the Caribbean.

Belcourt represents a natural spirit in contrast to the hypocritical and embittered morality of British society. The archetype of British identity is Mrs. Rushport, who is seen

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as vain and pompous and who would, "As soon put her foot in a pest house as a play house," such are her propensities for humour. Mrs. Rushport is contrasted strongly with Belcourt who is quick tempered, profligate and generous to the point of stupidity. He confesses that his, "curs'd tropical constitution," is the cause of these failings in his character and continues, "Would to Heaven I had been dropped upon the snows of Lapland, and never felt the blessed influence of the sun, so I had never burned with these inflammatory passions!" However despite his lack of manners, he is refreshing, cutting through the formality of prim society with his over-familiar style and natural exuberance.

Belcourt is a Carnival character, placed in British society, which Cumberland implies is in great want of that element of raw sensuality that is now so despised. This is emphasised through Louisa Dudley, Belcourt’s romantic object, who, as the play progresses becomes attracted to Belcourt’s honest sexual approach. In a monologue, Louisa Dudley is portrayed debating his frank attitude. Her British moral code conflicts with her natural feelings, and this theme underpins the whole comedy. Cumberland exposes the artifice of manners and suggests that beneath them human nature with its lusts for sex and wealth is absolutely unchanged.

Think of him no more! Well, I will obey; but if a wandering uninvited thought should creep by chance into my bosom, must I not give the harmless wretch shelter?...My wishes then, my guiltless ones, I mean, are free: how fast they spring within me with this sentence! Down, down ye busy creatures! Whither would you carry me...Belcourt pursues, insults me; yet, such is the fatality of my condition, that what should rouse resentment, only calls up love.

The West Indian, Belcourt, is given a positive image, as opposed to the scheming and heartless puritanical Mrs. Rushport, daughter of Sir Oliver Roundhead, who attempts to cheat her nephew out of his inheritance and is as miserable as she is miserly. Belcourt, the

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62 Cumberland, Act 1, sc. VI, p.13.
63 Cumberland, Act 4, sc.10, p.65.
64 Cumberland, Act 4. sc.2, p.54.
child of a secret passion and the ‘hot tropical sun’ allowed Cumberland to condemn British hypocrisies even if he is a, “Bold, impetuous man.” There is also a strong thematic link between Britishness and a loss of spontaneity. A relationship between two lovers Charles Dudley and Charlotte Rushport, that looks doomed because of the social mores of British society, is given a new perspective from Belcourt, who suggests that they should elope. Belcourt cuts through the barriers, he transgresses the order of Britishness, and offers to unite the lovers, “never wait till you’re of age; life is too short, pleasure too fugitive; the soul grows narrower every hour; I’ll equip you for your escape; I’ll convey you to the man of your heart, and away with you then to the first hospitable parson that will take you in.”

The West Indian, a character not dissimilar to Fielding’s Tom Jones, highlights the error of suppressing one’s feelings in favour of manners and appearance and a constructed façade of delicacy

It is important to recognise that Cumberland’s Caribbean hero was popular as a comic figure in its positive portrayal of the planter in comparison with the British, who are represented as repressed and formal. The dislike of alien groups such as the West Indian planters and Indian Nabobs, became progressively more pronounced during the course of the eighteenth century and corresponded to the tightening morality and narrowing definition of Britishness. As British identity rejected more and more of its folk culture, carnival and bawdy comedy, the planter became correspondingly more repugnant, and the gap between the Briton and the West Indian became wider. Nevertheless, Cumberland recognised that the stereotype of Caribbean planter was a powerful symbol in the emergent British culture because it represented the benchmark by which British culture could measure its civilisation and self-control; and this hypothesis is supported by examining the representation of the planter in British literature, which became increasingly demonic and problematic.

65 Cumberland, Act.3, sc.12, p.48.
The West Indians that crop up in for example, Smollet’s text, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), written the same year as Cumberland’s play, gives a very different portrait of the planters, and more closely reflects the typical eighteenth century picture of the planters as dissolute and objectionable. Matt Bramble encounters a group of them predictably at the fashionable resort of Bath. Bath, according to Bramble is,

contrived without judgement, executed without solidity, and stuck together with so little regard to plan and propriety, that the different lines of the new rows and buildings interfere with and intersect one another in every different angle of conjunction...as if some Gothic devil had stuffed them altogether in a bag, and left them to stand higgledy-piggledy, just as chance directed. What sort of a monster Bath will become in a few years, with all these growing excrescences, may easily be conceived. 66

It is unsurprising then to find it peopled by, “Every upstart of fortune...planters, negro drivers and hucksters from our American plantations, enriched they know not how; ...men of low birth and no breeding have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence, unknown to former ages and no wonder that their brains are intoxicated with pride, vanity and presumption...and all of them hurry to Bath.” 67

Smollett is uncompromising in his portrait of the planters, and within his description of Bath, there is a carnival agenda. The resort is depicted as a place of profligacy and chaos, the natural residency of the vile planter. In a Rabelaisian description, Bath is transformed into an excessive Carnival space.

The number of people, and the number of houses continue to increase; and this will ever be the case, till the streams that swell this irresistible torrent of folly and extravagance shall either be exhausted, or turned into other channels, by incidents and events which I do not pretend to foresee. 68

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67 *Humphry Clinker*, p.36.

Bath is a manifestation of the old folk Carnival, but dangerously it is no longer contained, and according to Smollett this hedonism now infects everyday life with its, “monstrous jumble of heterogeneous principles,” it is therefore symbolic that the Grand Ball at Bath should be opened by a mulatto heiress. In Smollet’s Carnival world, in Bath, it is a Caribbean woman, the product of miscegenation who presides over this transgressive scene.69

(ii) The Creole Woman.

The image of the Creole woman was, like that of the planter, a caricature of conventional features that could be drawn upon to create a Carnival figure. Indeed, it might be suggested that the Creole woman was closely connected to the old traditional figure of the waspish and manly wife that figured in many Carnival processions of the Middle-Ages. She was almost always depicted as monstrous in her excesses and Isaac Bickerstaff’s play entitled Love in the City (1767), extends the commonly held perception of this characteristic through his experiments with femininity and barbarism. He creates a young, pretty and beguiling Creole character who, whilst looking like a typically beautiful young lady, has a propensity for demonic cruelty with regard to her slaves. Priscilla, is impervious to the suffering she inflicts. She openly states that she sees nothing wrong with having her slave “horse-whipped till there is not one bit of flesh left on your bones.” Priscilla defends her position by saying, “she is but a Neger. If she was at home at our plantation, she would find the difference; we make no account of them there at all: if I had a fancy for one of their skins I should not think much of taking it.”70 Therefore the symbol of naïve feminine virtue, so important in eighteenth-century literature of sensibility, is effectively presented as being deformed by her Creole

69 Humphry Clinker, p.55.

70 Isaac Bickerstaff., Love in the City. A Comic Opera, As it is performed in the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. (Dublin: W. Smith, 1767), p.10
heritage. The young Creole woman is a whip-wielding tyrant, dramatically juxtaposed with her feminine British counterparts.

J.B. Moreton confirms this image of the Creole woman as a duplicitious fiend, suggesting that women of the Caribbean are never what they seem to be.

Young ladies who have been confined to the narrow limits of Jamaica from their infancy are soft, innocent, ambitious, flirting play-things; and in more particular manner, those who are retired in the country; when they dress they decorate themselves elegantly; abroad they appear as neat as if they came out of band boxes, lovely and engaging:- at home diametrically the reverse. If you surprise them, as I have often done, you will be convinced of this assertion, that Ovid, with all his metamorphoses, could not match such transformations. In stead of well shaped, mild angelic-looking creatures you beheld abroad, you will find, perhaps, a clumsy greasy tom-boy, or a paper-faced skeleton, romping or stretching and lolling from sofa to sofa in a dirty confused hall or piazza, with a parcel of black wenches, learning or singing obscene or filthy songs, and dancing to the tunes.71

Moreton’s account highlights what he feels to be the, often disguised, carnivalesque nature of the Creole women who live a double-life. In public appearing as demure and delicate stereotypes of femininity whilst in reality they are drunken, lascivious fiends.

This de-feminising of the Creole woman strongly echoed the Carnival precedent of cross-dressing, where the outward appearance of a woman belied the man beneath. Sarah Scott’s novel Sir George Ellison (1766) is a good example of this questioning of the gender roles, because in this novel Sir George and his wife exchange gender positions. He is sentimental, emotional and is often moved to tears, whereas she is hard, cruel and seems to lack any real tenderness. Mrs. Ellison, a Creole plantation owner of considerable wealth is described as agreeable and, “although the bloom of youth was past, she was still handsome;”72 However, as Scott is at great pains to emphasise, Mrs. Ellison was not only hard-hearted with regard to the sufferings of her slaves, but is also


scheming and manipulative. Mr. Ellison’s marriage is a disappointment to him, and like many sentimental heroines he finds himself not in a partnership of mutual sensitivities and respect, but caught in a relationship that resembles a commercial arrangement, in which his wife feels herself to be the usurped manager. Before marrying Ellison, she had run her own estates and managed her own finances and resents his interference in her property, and in the text is consciously more masculine than her husband. As Scott remarks on their family, “in theirs woman was certainly not the weaker vessel, since she was above those soft and timorous whims which so much affected him.”73 This carnivalesque reversal of the sexes is made clear when Sir George attempts to repeal the punishment of slaves on their estate, he says,

Had you dear been present when they threw themselves at my feet, embraced my knees and lifting their streaming eyes to heaven, prayed with inexpressible fervency to their supposed gods to shower down their choicest blessings on me, you would have wept with me.74

This feminine outburst of emotion however is contrasted with the response of his very dry-eyed wife, who simply concludes that the slaves were just relieved at having escaped a deserved punishment that her “weak and simple” husband could not tolerate.

Sir George is increasingly horrified by his wife’s unfeminine and unfeeling responses, but concludes that she cannot know any better having been born in the barbarous Caribbean. He states that, “Education has perverted her understanding, or in some degree suppressed the best sensations of the heart.”75 As a Creole woman her environment is shown to have destroyed her gentleness and compassion. She is not only de-feminised, she is carnivalised into the figure of an unnatural woman who disrupts the natural order of gender and society.

73 Ellison, p.25

74 Ellison, pp.21-22.

75 Ellison, p.56.
The image of the Caribbean as a medieval construct was further supported by the enduring association of the region with the presence of pirates and buccaneers who, during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, became integrated into the commonly received picture of the Caribbean. Lady Maria Nugent’s journal reveals that they were still a major factor in the region at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “The trade of the island has been for a long time injured and several merchants almost ruined by the constant depredations of small privateers and feluccas, which infest this coast.”

Privateers and pirates had since the reign of Elizabeth I, played a hugely significant role in the politics of the Caribbean, and the legendary exploits of their lives on the island of Tortuga were well publicised. The pirates, periodically with and without the consent of European powers, monopolised the sea and were a constant presence in the trade with the colonies. In addition to their political role, they also formed an “alternative” society, with its own social orders that went beyond the traditional authority of seamen. In fact as Marcus Rediker in his text Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea has made clear, the sailors who became pirates were not a dissolute rabble as was commonly thought, but formed a highly disciplined and organised group who had rebelled against the harsh conditions and arbitrary authority of the British navy, in order to create more egalitarian conditions. According to Rediker, “pirates, self righteously perceived their situation and the excesses of these powerful figures through a collectivist ethos that had been forged in the struggle for survival. The self righteousnes of pirates was strongly linked to a world-

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traditional, mythical, or utopian. He compares the action of piracy to the endemic peasant protest against oppression and poverty in the Middle-Ages which attempted to create a new social order.

It is clear, however, that whatever their real agenda, the pirates under their carnival flag, the Jolly Roger or the “banner of King Death” constituted a direct disavowal of constructed British identity which added to the carnivalesque profile of the Caribbean. According to eighteenth century accounts such as Defoe’s, *History of the Pyrates* (1724) they existed on the periphery of civilisation, had their own pirate code and effectively lived like carnival-kings, indulging in excessive feasting and drinking, were immoral and immoderate and according to accounts of their activities, revelled in the transgression of even the most basic rules of European civilisation. The pirate was a symbolic threat because of his open rejection of religion and Protestant morality, which was such a major constituent in British identity. Cotton Mather, a Protestant minister who specialised at preaching on the occasion of pirate executions was himself in no doubt. He said that the pirate,

mocked at fear, and like a horse rushing in to Battle, he rushes upon the Grossest Abominations. Riot, Revels, Debauches grow familiar with him. Horrid Oaths and the Language of Fiends, proclaime his Tongue set on fire in Hell. Bawdy and Filthy songs, enough to infect the very air they are uttered in are the finest music of his vocal chords ...He forsakes, he abhors the Churches of God.

Mather’s view was an extreme position, however pirates were generally assumed to be diametrically opposed to British principles of industry and morality. Daniel Defoe’s *History of the Pyrates*, offers a detailed record of not only many individual pirates, but

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78 Rediker, p.255.

crucially gives a general background of their collective inscription on the everyday imaginations of the Europeans. For example the accounts of Captain Avery, had made a deep impression on the metropolitan centres of Europe where he was described as "one who had raised himself to the dignity of a king, and was likely to be the founder of a new Monarchy.... A play was writ upon him called the Successful Pyrate, and these Accounts obtained such belief, that several schemes were offered to the Council for fitting out a Squadron to take him." 80

The pirate was from the outset a Carnival figure, a larger than life folk character who, like 'the highwayman' or 'aristocratic thief' became a figure of legend and fantasy. He had a kingdom that was mysteriously located in the Caribbean islands, and unlike the romantic robbers in Britain, lived in open defiance of the law in a carnivalesque topsy-turvy kingdom, complete with a pirate code of honour and pirate laws. Defoe was sensitive to the interest in the salacious detail of their lives, and his text contains many reputedly accurate accounts of their depravity that in some respects provided a vicarious outlet for the imagination of a British society, which although increasingly morally restrained at home, could indulge their own fantasy of rape, gluttony and bloodlust through the colourful tales of the pirates in their Caribbean context. The descriptions of Captain Teach, alias Blackbeard, reflected this interest. In Defoe's account we are told that,

Before he sailed upon his Adventures, he married a young creature of about sixteen Years of age, the Governor performed the ceremony. As is the Custom to marry hereby a priest so it is thereby a Magistrate; and this, I have been informed made Teach's fourteenth wife, whereof about a dozen might be still living. His behaviour was extraordinary, for while his sloop lay in Okorecock Inlet, and he ashore at plantation, where his wife lived, with whom after he had lain all night, it was his

custom to invite five or six of his brutal Companions to come ashore, and he would force her to prostitute herself to them all, one after another, before his Face.  

The descriptions are virtually pornographic, and the Caribbean was labelled as the place in which these acts not only took place, but also where they were indulged, unchecked by any authority, not even that of the governor. The pirates’ notoriety only added to the image of the islands as the hot-bed of danger and lasciviousness. Defoe passed his accounts off as true narrative, however they were embellished by fantasy and imaginative detail, which as is demonstrated in the above extract, revealed much about the assumed readers expectations. The representations of the pirates was set up to morally instruct readers, however there was also a strong element of humour in many of these tales which were so extreme that they reflected a degree of Carnival slippage between serious polemic and comedy. This is illustrated by an episode in the pamphlet about Blackbeard. Defoe states,

Our Heroe, Captain Teach, assumed the Cognomen of Black-beard, from that large Quantity of Hair, which, like a frightful meteor, covered his whole face, and frightened America more than any comet that had appeared there for a long time! This beard which was black, he suffered to grow of an extravagant length; as to breadth, it came up to his eyes; he was accustomed to twist it with ribbons, in small Tails after the fashion of our Ramilies Wiggs, and turn them about his ears. In time of Action he wore a sling over his Shoulder, with three brace of pistol, hanging in holsters like Bandaliars, and stuck lighted matches under his Hat, which appearing on each Side of his Face, his eyes naturally looking fierce and wild made him altogether such a Figure, that Imagination cannot form an Idea of a Fury, from Hell, to look more frightful.  

This comic appeal of the pirate was a large part of their image because they were so extreme in their barbarousness that they became caricatures of transgression.

The Jamaican town of Port Royal was also a place of transgressive Carnival myth described as the point where the two worlds of pirates and settler communities coincided.

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81 Pyrates, p.84  
82 Pyrates, p.107
However, the settlers are described as being just as bad as the pirates, and were in little
danger of being corrupted by them. According to Moreton they were, “convict gaol birds
or riotous persons, roten before they are sent forth, and at best idel and fit only for the
mines,” and their contact with pirates only reinforced this general opinion of the creoles.
In fact they were implicated in indulging the pirates’ whims, and were quickly absorbed
into the Carnival-world of the buccaneer. As Moreton suggests, Port Royal was an
infamous site of pirate contagion that would infect anyone who was unfortunate enough to
enter one of the, “incredible number of grog shops occupied by people of the vilest
character, rogues and whores, who like syrens attract poor thoughtless sailors in those
dens of infamy.” However, it was not only the low and poor who were involved with
pirates. According to Defoe these rogues proved to be the ultimate authority in the
American colonies, and all sections of society, from the Governor down were implicated
in their world of misrule. According to Defoe, Blackbeard,

> often diverted himself by going ashore among the planters, where he Revell’d Night
and Day: By these he was well received, but whether out of Love or Fear I can not
say; Sometimes he treated them courteously enough and made them presents of
Rum and Sugar, in Recompense of what he took from them; but as for the Liberties
he and his companions took with the Wives and Daughters of the planters, I cannot
say whether he paid them Ad Valorem, or no.

Therefore, it becomes easy to trace the characteristics of the pirates that, having become
legendary in terms of depravity, created an image that bled into the portrayal of the
Caribbean Creole. The Creole, already linked to the feudal world was also loaded with the
carnivalesque barbarity of the pirate overlords.

These accounts were hugely successful in British society. Defoe’s History
capitalised on the market for the stories of pirate exploits. Pamphlets on the lives of pirates
were popular and enhanced a developing myth. Stories of their miscegenation and

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83 Moreton, p.36

84 Pyrates, p.127.
luxurious lifestyles both preceded and echoed those of the planters who, in many ways, became the natural inheritors of this image. The pivotal point for this discussion is that whether pirate or planter, the representation and appeal was one of Carnival subversion, anti-heroism and folk humour, that were all peripheral to the new British identity, and which had been effectively exiled across the Atlantic.

(iv) The Black Clown

The depiction of the black servant as the comic Clown in the theatre is interesting because it draws on the dramatic conventions that allow the clown to be comic and at the same time to be potentially subversive. The presence of the black clown character in plays by Bickerstaff and Reynolds might therefore be read as a response to the growing tension that the call for abolition was creating in the Caribbean. His role as fool, therefore, reflected his real potential to destroy the plantation society, which was often represented as a Carnival kingdom. As Bakhtin has demonstrated, the character of the fool or clown inherited from antiquity, would be used to undercut and parody all forms of official authority. The fool, operating from the space of folk comedy and its association with the negation and mockery of power, had the ability to level social hierarchy to the most base level.

A second and less positive image of the fool, however, also fitted the profile of the Caribbean slave in common place prejudices. The black subject had been long described as dull and lacking European intellect, therefore his place as the ‘village-idiot’ character of carnival was also in keeping with established ideas about blackness, and echoed some philosophical thinkers of the day. Montesquieu, for example, was uncompromising in *Espirit de Lois* (1748). "The Negroes prefer a glass necklace to that gold which polite
nations so highly value: can there be a greater proof in their wanting common sense?"  

The black slave was also the figure of comedy, because of the allusions to his sexuality. According to Philip Curtin, the fantasy of excessive sexual appetites associated with blackness had already become commonplace by the eighteenth century. Therefore the black slave was already loaded with Carnival imagery which connected him with the figure of the clown, and Bickerstaff and Reynolds merely drew on cultural conventions to create the characters of Mungo and Sambo.

Perhaps the most successful black clown was the character of Mungo, who appears first in Isaac Bickerstaff's play, The Padlock (1768). He is the servant to the dissolute and miserly Don Diego, who tries to prevent the lovers, Leander and Leonora, from marrying. It is fairly conventional comedy, however the introduction of Mungo, created a Carnival comic aspect which contributed greatly to the success of the play. Mungo, with his complaints, witty comments and peripheral perspective, added a subversive dimension to the play.

Mungo. Go get you down, you damn hamper, you carry me now. Curse me old Massa, sending me here and dere for one something to make me tire like mule-Curse him imperiance-and damn him insurance.

Diego. How now?

Mungo. Ah, Massa Bless your Heart!.

His Creole accent is also interesting because it is among the first representations of an 'authentic' Creole voice, although Bickerstaff parodies the accent for comic effect. During

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87 Isaac Bickerstaff., *The Padlock. A Comic Opera. As it is Performed by his Majesty's Servants at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane* (Cork: n.p, 1770), Act I. sc.VI, p.10.
the course of the play Mungo is a central source of the humour, often adding wit and sarcasm to the utterances of the leading characters.

Leander. By your lips of heavenly blue;  
by your lips of Ambrosial dew;  
your cheeks, where rose and lily blend;  
Your voice the music of the spheres.

Mungo. Lord O'Mercy how he swears  
He makes my hairs  
All stand an ends! 88

The character of Mungo was in fact so successful that he quite literally emerged from the play. Bickerstaff was approached to write a sequel text in which Mungo was the central protagonist. In 1781, therefore The Padlock Open'd, or Mungo's Medley appeared, which was a compilation of miscellaneous pieces in prose and verse which were advertised as Mungo's own choices. The text is interesting because it comprises comments and satires on a variety of contemporary subjects which Mungo narrates. For example, in 'Essay V' Mungo gives his opinion about women. "They are like an enclos'd piece of common, which by industry and care becomes a different thing." 89 This alludes to the recently passed Enclosure Acts, which saw the loss of great areas of public lands into private hands. His satire on dogs mirrors Swift's Tale of a Tub (1704) and the card entitled, On Dogs, with a Proposal For a Tax on Them, suggests that dogs should be taxed as a good way of raising revenues for the public good and to curb the disturbing trend of "dog worship". He says, "Dogs are suffer'd to make a noise and commit such indecencies as they would first get a good knock o'the skull for them...At this rate we shall have the old Egyptian idolatory

88 The Padlock, Act.1, sc.10, p.16.

revived in our churches.\textsuperscript{90} Despite losing his Creole voice in this text the play indicated the potential that the black comic figure had. The audience was invited to play along with the belief in Mungo’s credibility as a reasonable, witty and rational man, and although it was presented as a comedy, and Mungo was played by a white actor in make-up, there was progress in the fact that Mungo was presented as a realistic character giving his “own” critical views on a whole range of subjects that effected British life, not just issues of slavery and the plantation.

Another interesting version of the black clown was to be found in Reynolds’ play \emph{Laugh When You Can} (1799) The character of Sambo, again shown as the servant of a disreputable master is complex. He enters the play dressed as the Carnival fool. The stage directions are explicit in his appearance. “He wears a white coat, silver shoulder knot, white waistcoat, glaz’d round hat, gold band, cockade and boots of leather.”\textsuperscript{91} However, as the play progresses he appears, not only as sensible and loyal, but able to shift in and out of his stock carnival image of clown. One moment he is studying the law books and doing his master, Delville’s, homework in the Temple, and when it suits him, he is playing at the trembling fool under the shadow of his ‘Massa’. In the character of Sambo, the image of the dull black servant is transformed into the central character of the play, around which the other characters work. He is sympathetic and philosophical, crucially reflecting that, “Black men are not the only men that are bought and sold. Everybody has their price.”\textsuperscript{92} The figure of Sambo is positive, and arguably presents a stronger voice for the black subject than those that were promoted by contemporary abolitionists. He is even represented as the moral corrective to the immoral British society. When Delville is about to seduce Mrs. Mortimer, it is Sambo who, by recognising her husband as one who once

\textsuperscript{90} Mungo’s Medley, p.233.


\textsuperscript{92} Reynolds, Act I, sc.II, p.9.
saved his life, intervenes in the elopement before it is consummated. Sambo is clearly a better man than his master, and in a scene unconsciously symbolic of events in the Caribbean, he is asked why he would stay with Delville. His response is one loaded with reflection on the planter class, but crucially spoken by the character of a ‘slave’. “My masters bad conduct makes it incumbent on me to stay with him- Who else would bear his follies and labour to correct them- and spite of all?”93 The characters of Mungo and Sambo, represent the first re-importation of the carnivalesque, which having gone through a period of cultural exile in Britain, was re-introduced to the metropolis through the figure of the black clown. However, like the other characters of Creole woman, pirate and planter the black clown drew heavily on carnival conventions that had been displaced from British identity and relocated in the medieval characterisation of the Caribbean.

(v). The Punished Slave.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, Carnival was the unofficial, sensual second life of the people in medieval society, which was expressed through a set of festivals that existed on the boundaries of legitimacy within a feudal structure, and which gave perspective on and release from the strict social organisation.94 The reading of the Caribbean as the space of the Carnival ‘second life’ that Bakhtin describes is complex, primarily because although Carnival was excessive and full of the imagery of violence and excess, the Caribbean was in a perpetual state of transgression and misrule. Carnival in the Caribbean was not a periodic expression of excess and hedonism, but a general condition of life. What the mediaeval European society experienced as a festive and potentially destabilising release from the strictures of feudal life, was the distorted reality of the Caribbean society, with its continuously overloaded tables and everyday violence, and in consequence it became far more sinister and destructive. Lady Maria Nugent, Matthew Lewis, Edward Long and Bryan Edwards produced accounts of medieval societies in which the carnival

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94 See Bakhtin, Rabelais, pp.213-221.
transgressions had overcome the boundaries, and become reality, and accepted as everyday Caribbean life rather than confined to specific times and occasions. The Carnival-kings on their estates, the great planters like Rose-Fuller, and the Beckfords, held court in the most carnivalesque manner. Their houses were often ill-constructed and the households were in disorder, but their reputations for feasting and drinking was exemplary. According to Bryan Edwards,

There are some peculiarities in the habits of the white inhabitants, which cannot fail to catch the eye of the European newly arrived; one of which is the contrast between the general plenty and magnificence of their tables (at least in Jamaica) and the meanness of their houses and apartments; it being no uncommon thing to find, at the country habitation of the planter, a splendid side-board loaded with plate, and the choicest wines, a table covered with the finest damask, and a dinner of perhaps sixteen or twenty covers; and all this in a hovel not superior to an English barn.\(^95\)

Even whilst trying to defend this position Bryan Edwards demonstrates the planter’s social dependence on excessive consumption. It is interesting that Edwards description of the genial and generous Creole host with his overloaded table and dilapidated barn of a house mirrored the popular image of the mediaeval carnival court with its emphasis on consumption and immediate gratification of appetite. This picture also echoed the accounts of pirate feasts, and was also related to common images of the sexual appetites of the Creoles, which was popularly supported by the presence of numerous mixed race children. Jen Schaw reports, “the indulgence they give themselves in their licentious and even unnatural amours, which appears too plainly from the crowds of Mulattos.”\(^96\)

Similarly, the levels of physical violence that were commonplace in the planter society belong to a disturbing manifestation of the uncontrolled Carnival brutality that was often depicted in the mock violations of Carnival festivals. The Caribbean society of the eighteenth century “lived out” the fantasy of excessive violence, which was symbolically


\(^96\) Jen Schaw, p.112
represented in medieval popular festival forms. The Caribbean site, with its planters and pirates, became a mythical place of Carnival excess that had overflowed acceptable boundaries of decency or morality. This corruption became increasingly intolerable to British society and can be suggested as one of the reasons for the founding of the abolitionist movement in the eighteenth century. However it is arguable that the accounts of the slaves lives, promoted to evoke support and sympathy for the cause of emancipation were also involved in perpetuating the image of the Caribbean as a site of Carnival.

As Wylie Sypher notes in his text *Guinea's Captive Kings* "there is a morbid interest in the obscene and violent from which anti-slavery literature is not exempt." 97 Moreover, anti-slavery literature written for British society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and designed to inform and outrage the complaisant regarding the abuses of slavery, was replete with lurid descriptions of sexual abuse and violence which reveals an underlying fascination with the body and other Carnival themes. This style of literature, however was not unique to the Abolitionists and Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) provided an early example of how a text designed to gain sympathy could easily degenerate into a disturbing description of Carnival excess. Oroonoko’s execution is an effective example of how a scene designed to evoke horror instead raises ambiguous fascination with the mutilation of his body.

The executioner came, and first cut off his members, and threw them into the fire. After that, with an ill-favoured knife, they cut his ears, and his nose, and burned them...Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up and held his pipe. But at the cutting off the other arm, his head sunk, and his pipe sunk and he gave up the ghost. 98

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Oroonoko is anatomically executed. He is laid open, quite literally, by Behn, for the curious eyes of the readership. The terms of address used in the text to negotiate the black body are intrusive, and this is repeated in many other later texts which were used in the Abolitionist Movement. British society had become increasingly prudish with regard to the notion of the body and sexuality. There was little physical description in most mainstream literature, which was obsessed with notions of modesty and courtly behaviour. The impact of the accounts of sadism and sexual abuses in anti-slavery literature were undoubtedly shocking, and the images of men and women suffering physical torture and degradation raises its own problematics of voyeurism in a readership who would otherwise not encounter such material.

Mary Prince’s narrative is an effective example of how the descriptions of her tortures might be read ambiguously. She says, “To strip me naked- to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow skin, was an ordinary punishment.” Her description of Hetty’s death is equally disturbing. “My master flew into a terrible rage and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and the cow-skin, till she was streaming all over with blood.”

The physicality of these descriptions is the central focus, the two women are described as both naked and powerless in order to raise sympathy, however the descriptions are also disturbing because of their overtly sexual imagery. The relation of the slave ship given in Equiano’s story is also heavily loaded with the images that appeal to the physical senses. “The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate added to the number in the ship, being so crowded that each scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us...the

shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered it a scene of horror almost inconceivable. 100

It could therefore be suggested that the chronicles of degradation with their very accurate and detailed narrations of real events on the plantations operated not only as texts to evoke sympathy and understanding, but, with their concentration and focus on the physical abuses which were described in the most explicit terms, they also formed a cannon of voyeuristic literature which was readily accessible to the British public. Mary Prince’s narration contains a particular scene which demonstrates the potential for a libidinous reading which, in this case, is intentional and related in order to clarify the extent of psychological as well as physical abuse. “He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering me to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse than all the licks. Sometime when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. He would then come and beat me.” 101

These authentic narratives were also problematic because they were rarely the work of the slave, and were more often the work of an abolitionist who would write the story from a verbal account, either taken from dictation or from notes. This calls into question the way in which the sexual theme within the text was presented as the voice of the naïve slave who has no idea how outrageous these images of sadism would be for a British audience. The narratives often conformed to a repetitive pattern, and were produced to a formula which undoubtedly contained a Christian sub-theme, and were quite consciously written with the readership in mind. As Robert Burns Stepto suggests, “slave narratives are full of other voices which are frequently just as responsible for

100 Equiano, p.19.

101 Mary Prince, p.77
articulating the narrative's tale and strategy." It is therefore possible that these literary texts, like the tales of pirates, Creole women and planters, responded to a British cultural agenda that connected the Caribbean with the Carnival and its emphasis on the body and transgressions.

The inscription of the slaves as "bodies" is also ironic because tracts that claimed to be promoting the humanity of the slaves would often resort to the language of the corporeal to enforce this polemic. Descriptions of the slaves often quite literally revealed their bodies as if to prove their human-ness: while at the same time claiming to have accepted the African as a 'Brother.' The African body was often "presented" as a spectacle within the text, which echoed the action of the slave seller on the docks in the Caribbean. This point is reinforced by Elleke Boehmer, "In colonial representation, exclusion or suppression can often literally be seen as embodied. From the point of view of the coloniser specifically, fears and curiosities, sublimated fascinations with the strange or the primitive, are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images... The Other is cast as corporeal, carnal, untamed, instinctual, raw..." 

The slaves were also characterised as lacking emotional restraint which, by contrast, was one of the fundamental aspects of British identity and was promoted as perhaps the most essential quality of British men and women. In short, in spite of the claims of the Anti-Slavery Movement, the slaves despite proving their humanity through an open display of their bodies in the tracts, could never meet the aspiration to be British because they lacked the necessary and innate British qualities of self-restraint and control. This myth, proved to be extremely enduring in the formation of subsequent British cultural


and social attitudes to black cultures and societies, because blackness had entered the culture defined as child-like at best, and lacking the adult virtues of self restraint and modesty that were the true definitions of civilisation.

Nevertheless, in spite of all its faults, Abolitionist literature, did mark the entry of a black voice into Europe, even if it was not authentic, and through the Anti-Slavery Movement a whole section of Caribbean society that had been silent, was promoted to the centre stage, often quite literally, as lecture tours were organised at which former slaves gave their accounts of slavery. It was also notable that around the time the first black men and women addressed their British audiences, promoting a version of their experiences which was designed to maximise sympathy for the abolitionist cause, there occurred a parallel phenomenon on the British stage with the emergence of two extremely popular characters, both of whom were comic black servants. Mungo, in Isaac Bickerstaff’s play, The Padlock (1770) and Sambo, in Reynold’s Laugh When You Can (1799). It can be suggested that the voicing of the black servants in both plays was a response to the changes of attitude stimulated by the Abolitionist Movement. However, the emergence of the black comic figure can also be read as an extension of the carnival profile associated with the Caribbean that had been established over the course of two centuries. Hitherto the planters and pirates had symbolised the transgression of the Caribbean, with the black slaves as anonymous victims of their abuse or part of the background. However, the Abolitionists brought the focus firmly on the black subject, and if the planter was inscribed as the Carnival king in British culture, then the black subject under his tyrannical control and distorted power naturally fitted the profile of the Clown.
Chapter Four

The Construction of the Romantics and the Myth of Authenticity.

In *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (1959), Karl Mannheim argues that the European Romantic Movement constituted a distinct and conscious rebellion against the strictures of Enlightenment control and empiricism.

The sociological significance of Romanticism lies in its function as the historical opponent of the intellectual tendencies of the Enlightenment; in other words, against the philosophical exponents of bourgeois capitalism. It seized on the submerged ways of life and thought and snatched them out of oblivion, consciously worked them out and developed them further and finally set them up against the rationalist ways of thought. ¹

He specifically suggests that through cultural routes such as literature, music and painting the British Romantics ‘rescued’ attitudes and ways of life that had been repressed by capitalist rationalism. The idea that the Romantics did effectively retrieve a lost British history through their interest in myths and a focus on authentic indigenous voices is a perennial theme, however this chapter will reveal the extent to which this reading of Romanticism is misleading. Instead I will demonstrate how the Romantic Movement reinforced the eighteenth-century notions of British identity by providing a credible, but erroneous, sense of British cultural heritage at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In contrast to Mannheim, this study will aim at revealing how the Romantic Movement complimented the national identity posited by the Enlightenment rationalists, by providing a constructed cultural history complete with legends, superstition and local myths. In other words, a fabricated folk heritage which significantly did not disturb the parameters of an established British identity, and effectively marked the final severance between Britain and an authentic cultural heritage, which had by the early nineteenth century become symbolically associated with colonial regions such as the Caribbean. Having previously demonstrated the complex ways in which the Caribbean had become a token of barbarity, hedonism and transgression in British culture, I examine how the Romantic Movement reintroduces

a sanitised and glorified version of British cultural roots, which was non-transgressive and did not threaten British identity.

The late eighteenth century was a period of intense discussion about the nature of Britain, British overseas expansion and the development of national character and history within an imperial framework. The ideological project of national invention, set in motion by the Act of Union (1707), and accelerated by British imperialism, entered a period of self-reflexivity. This was, generally speaking, the result of two main factors. Firstly, the consolidation of a British identity which was successfully produced throughout the course of the eighteenth century, and secondly due to the temporary halt in new imperial expansion at the beginning of the nineteenth century which engendered an atmosphere of re-evaluation with regard to the shape and meaning of the empire. As Patrick Brantlinger in *The Rule of Darkness* (1988) has noted, imperialism continued to operate successfully during the early years of the nineteenth century but this expansion was less dramatic than in the preceding decades.² The opening of the nineteenth century, however, marked a time when Britain, free from the immediate upheaval of war with France and large-scale imperial campaigns could enter a period of self-examination and come to terms with the results and effects of a century of re-definition.

The ideological combination of providential Protestantism, aggressive imperialism and the philosophical codes of the Enlightenment, as I have previously demonstrated, had successfully created a society that could define itself through homogeneous and monolithic symbols. Nonetheless, in cultural production, this superimposed identity became increasingly subject to question and a sense of dissatisfaction with the rootlessness of British identity and opposition to the harsh empiricism of the Enlightenment philosophy had murmured throughout the course of the eighteenth century. Having exiled her carnival and folk heritage on to zones such as the Caribbean, Britain experienced a significant reaction to the non-existence of her own cultural foundation, which resulted in the popularity of the Romantic Movement and its thematic longing for a folk voice and the resuscitation of an authentic cultural history.

However, this re-invigoration of British culture through traditions and historical retrievals, was problematic because despite their claims to rediscover an ancient, authentic folk history for Britain, the Romantics were discriminating in what that ‘authenticity’ should constitute. They represented a carefully policed concept of nature that was distanced from any vestiges of savagery and barbarism. Therefore the Romantics consciously reworked the folk customs and traditions of the British Isles, selecting the mythic and elevated and rejecting the distasteful.

Wordsworth and the Failed Experiment.

This conscious choice and selection of the content of Romantic poetry was made explicit by William Wordsworth in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, written in 1800. In his attempt to create a theoretical framework for his poetry, Wordsworth explains that the whole project was underpinned by an intention to revive an authentic voice in British cultural expression that was natural and unsophisticated, and therefore, more closely reflected a traditional and submerged essential Britishness than most eighteenth century poetry, which was too sophisticated and elitist. He was deeply concerned with presenting his poetry in a language that unified or created a link between his contemporary enlightened society and a more liberated and natural world. For Wordsworth, this was located in the unchanged and unchanging prospect of British peasant life.

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that state our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elemental feelings; and are from necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and the permanent forms of nature.³

By expressing his disaffection with the restraints of his contemporary society, Wordsworth highlighted the Romantic sensitivity to the baselessness of British identity that, for him, was problematic. The *Lyrical Ballads* attempted to re-engage with the authentic and traditional forms of British culture by foregrounding the existence of an oral culture and the ballad form, which although located in ‘low’ society, provided a connection with the roots of British culture, which had been consciously rejected by the Enlightenment.

Wordsworth was very aware of the revolutionary nature of this inclusion of low culture into the medium and language of poetry, and took great pains to emphasise the experimental aspect of this collection within the ‘Preface’. However in the wake of the French Revolution, Wordsworth was conscious that the image of the working classes that he wanted to create should be apolitical and non-threatening, and it is significant that he effectively utilised the image of the rustic and simple peasant to manufacture a Romantic identity for the lower orders that was pathetic, and significantly posed no ideological threat to British social order. There was no transgressive edge to the simple folk that Wordsworth characterised in poems such as ‘Simon Lee’ and ‘We Are Seven.’ Instead the unsophisticated voices present a fantasy of pastoral life, distinct from the violent and sensual aspects of nature and contemporary politics.

Overall the *Lyrical Ballads* had less to do with the presentation of a realistic folk culture, and much more to do with evoking emotional and sympathetic reactions to an idealised and mythical British class who were and always had been part of ‘Nature’ and who provided a framework and context for Britishness. Indeed, it was his anxiety about the crisis of British culture that Wordsworth suggests was the stimulus for the *Lyrical Ballads*.

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all the voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events, which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves.4

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4 *Lyrical Ballads*, p.249.
The reality of urban populations where masses of workers were reduced to a state of savage torpor was incongruous within an image of Britishness predicated on greatness liberty and freedom. Therefore the folk culture that Wordsworth promoted was created to shore-up the unstable roots of Britishness, by ultimately providing an optimistic picture of rural order and stability. He was openly hostile to what he referred to as the application of “gross and violent stimulants” and strongly critiques the popular culture of “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies and deluged of idle and extravagant stories in verse” which constituted a more realistic image of working class popular culture, and ignored those aspects of traditional life that was connected with Carnival and transgression, instead presenting an artificial image of rural life that was tranquil and ordered.

This point is clearly demonstrated in Wordsworth’s treatment of the concept of spontaneity. On more than one occasion he refers to the importance of spontaneity, or the “overflow of powerful feelings,” as one of the most central aspects of poetry. He is acutely aware of it in terms of its significance for folk culture, and for his new form of Romantic poetry, which he claims is much more meaningful than formal and sophisticated writing. He demonstrates an understanding of the necessity for the chaotic liberation of the spontaneous expression found in Carnival. However, he immediately undermines his statement by suggesting that it is only through serious reflection and contemplation of the spontaneous eruption that it can have meaning. Here was the central paradox of Wordsworth’s Romantic revolution; that liberty required order and that spontaneity required reflection.

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibilities had also thought long and deeply.5

As a Romantic poet, Wordsworth was therefore prepared to select and sample aspects of the folk and carnival culture in an attempt to recreate an authentic archive for British culture; however the tranngressive and chaotic elements of that culture, such as spontaneity, were viewed through a lens of intellectual reflection.
In many ways what Wordsworth presented was an inversion of the traditional poetic expectation. By reversing the subject of his ballads from the elevated, and foregrounding the dispossessed, the insane and the criminal, he attempted a carnivalesque challenge to the convention of eighteenth century poetry. However this inversion was severely limited because Wordsworth provided a shadowy and ineffective version of the anarchic potential of this reversal. This point was perhaps the origin of Coleridge's later criticism of the Lyrical Ballads, that Wordsworth merely succeeded in presenting inauthentic and tedious subjects for his poetry which might, in the case of The Idiot Boy, be reduced to 'laughable burlesque'. Both Robert Southey and S.T. Coleridge suggested that the experiment, misguided in its initiation and execution, had failed.

Southey and Coleridge responded to the fact that although the Ballads claimed to represent a natural perspective provided by the low rural classes, Wordsworth's expectation that they would be an uncontaminated source of natural philosophy, was a grave error that undermined the logic of the anthology. Coleridge in Biographia Literaria (1817) was very clear that the choice of the rural peasant was a mistake because "the notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate." Coleridge effectively lampooned Wordsworth's image of natural man by proposing that a man divorced from education and society would inevitably be a brute, without the faculties to respond to the sublime or awe inspiring in nature, or the power to express himself. It is interesting to note that Coleridge makes a comparison between British peasantry and the 'uncivilised tribes' who had perplexed the 'progress of some of our most zealous and adroit missionaries', and in so doing ironically juxtaposes the place of the British peasant with that of the uncivilised inhabitants of overseas colonies.

The idealised version of folk culture that Wordsworth depicted in his Romantic poetry, although intended to raise sympathy in the reader through its moving and sentimental content, faltered because the characters that he represented, such as the mad mother, Simon Lee, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, were inauthentic. Robert Southey ironically raises this point in his critique of Wordsworth.

5 Lyrical Ballads, p.246.
The author should have recollected that he who personates tiresome loquacity, becomes tiresome himself. The story of an old man who suffers the perpetual pain of cold, because an old woman prayed that he might never be warm, is perhaps a good story for a ballad, because it is a well-known tale: but is the author certain that it is 'well authenticated'? And does not such an assertion promote the popular superstition of witchcraft?\footnote{Robert Southey, *Critical Review*, xxiv (Oct. 1798) in *Wordsworth Lyrical Ballads: A Casebook*, (ed.), A. Jones and W. Tydeman. (London: Macmillan, 1972), p.53.}

Southey challenged Wordsworth’s ability to replicate a folk voice and also crucially raises the whole debate about the way in which British society had chosen to reject the carnival and pagan aspects of its folk culture, and had no real wish, even through the Romantic Movement, to have it revived. In this respect Wordsworth was seen to be effectively marginalized in his flawed attempt to introduce an authentic version of the folk voice, and in fact the criticisms of Southey and Coleridge demonstrated clearly that for the Romantic poets overall, the interest in myth and folk culture was acceptable only as an archive, firmly envisioned in the distant past. This limited approach to folk culture was shaped by the work of ethnographers such as Henry Bourne, who had produced archives of folk culture that were used by the Romantics, but which had already been selected and censored by antiquarians earlier in the century.

**Ethnology and Romanticism.**

Although there had been interest in the folk culture of Britain since the sixteenth century, the work of Henry Bourne’s *Antiquitates Vulgares* (1723) provided the foundation of a comprehensive study of disappearing customs that would be used during the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. However as Richard Dorson in the *History of British Folklore* highlights the Enlightenment antiquarians such as Bourne used their detailed researches to demonstrate the dangers and futility of old superstition and customs. Like the ethnographers of the colonies, Bourne investigated these pagan overhangs in British culture in order to highlight Britain’s progress from such barbaric practises. Dorson states that,
Their attitude towards these survivals tended to be purgative. The Rev. Henry Bourne’s collection of Antiquitates Vulgares of 1723 included ‘proper reflections’ on each custom ‘shewing what may be retain’d and which ought to be laid aside’. In general, ‘popular antiquities’ represented the continuity of error and superstition to an enlightened age, and were explained in terms of the impact of Roman Catholicism on prior pagan belief. This attitude dominated the re-working of Bourne’s compilation published in 1774 by the rev. Jo Brand, then secretary to the society of Antiquarians.8

The whole basis of Bourne’s work hinged on the concept of civilisation and the need to dispense with old savage customs that were no longer part of a new enlightened order. However, when this work was re-edited by John Brand in 1774, a significant shift in perspective had occurred. Although he echoed Bourne’s sentiments about the absurdity of superstition, Brand acknowledged that the interest in folk heritage was both fashionable and of general value because it could now be viewed as posing no tangible threat to the sense of Britishness, which had imaged itself as removed from such “Papal and Heathen Antiquities.”9 By describing these customs in the language of history and as belonging to a distant past, Brand demonstrates how the late eighteenth century society found the means by which to investigate its own transgressive heritage, without troubling its new enlightened identity. Brand points out that,

A Profusion of childish Rites, Pageants and Ceremonies diverted the Attention of the people from the consideration of their state, and kept them in humour, if it did not make them in love with their slavish modes of worship.10

However it is significant that the descriptions of the pagan past of Britain mirrors those that were used in contemporary discussions about race and other cultures in the colonies. This notion of civilisation in terms of Enlightenment principles was used to create a hierarchy among races, in which Britishness was seen to have moved beyond the superstitious and pagan ‘stage’ which was now the state of the primitive and backward races of the colonies. The antiquarian interest in folk culture in Britain, as in other European countries, therefore influenced and to an extent organised the

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9 John Brand, Observations of Popular Antiquities: Including the Whole of Mr. Bourne’s Antiquitates Vulgares (Newcastle Upon Tyne: J.Johnson, 1777)
10 John Brand, p.11.
ethnographic and anthropological studies of other nations and races, in which for example Africans, Arabs and Asians could be classified on a hierarchical 'scale of civilisation' which, to a large extent, indicated their respective retardation in terms of social and cultural development.

This assumption of hierarchy was enormously influential on contemporary discussion about race. According to George Stocking, many highly regarded writers such as Adam Smith, Rousseau, and Condorcet, believed that by viewing races in terms of a linear development of civilization the whole evolution of humanity could be studied.

[They] shared a belief in human progress, a notion of civilization as it encompassed expression, and the idea that its basic development might be studied philosophically. They also shared the basic assumption of what is often referred to, somewhat anachronistically, as the comparative method; the idea that in the absence of traditional historical evidence, the earlier phases of civilization could be reconstructed by using data derived from observation of peoples still living in earlier "stages" of development. 11

One of the main reasons why black Caribbean culture was couched so firmly in the language of carnival transgression and barbarism was directly related to this linear construction of ethnographic development. This theory was also long-lasting. Over one hundred years after the work of these enlightened philosophers and ethnographers, the claim that the 'savage nations' could unlock the secret of man's progression to civilisation, was still credible. Texts such as Edward Tylor's Primitive Culture, Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom. (1871), and John Lubbock's Pre-Historic Times, as illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages (1870), both relied on the fact that non-European culture was to be viewed as regressive or primitive.

However, it was the influence of this ethnographic perspective on the Romantic Movement that was most striking in cultural terms, because, for the Romantics, there was no question of reviving the sordid squalor of barbarism and paganism with traditions and mythology. Although myths could be viewed as positive antiquarian relics specific to Britain, the Carnival culture of pre-Reformation Britain was viewed as the unfortunate condition of the primitive, uncivilised and naïve. Sir
Walter Scott exemplified this view in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830). "Those who practised the petty arts of deception in such mystic cases, being naturally desirous to screen their own impostures, were willing to suppose to derive from the fairies, or from mortals transposed to fairyland the power necessary to effect displays of art which they pretended to exhibit."\(^{12}\) Scott described how the ignorant were manipulated by dishonest shamans and witches in a patronising tone could be explained by the prevalent contemporary opinion that British culture had progressed and evolved to the point where belief in superstition was ridiculed. However this censure was not extended in examining the myths of British history which Romantics, such as Scott drew on, and occasionally this nostalgia for a mythic past meant that some completely ignored the facts of history. According to Stocking,

> When James MacPherson discovered the fraudulent odes of *Ossian* (1761), Lord Kames and Adam Ferguson became staunch defenders of these foundational documents of the Romantic movement, with their picture of ancestral Scots—otherwise quite primitive—whose manners were, "so pure and refined as scarce to be paralleled in the most cultivated nations."\(^{13}\)

The Romantics often failed to critique the way in which myth was used to create an illusion of cultural heritage that was, in the case of Ossian, as groundless as a belief in magic. However this view of the folk history of Britain which sanitised and selected areas of inclusion, was viewed as a progressive step for culture, and this point is emphasised by M.H.Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1975).

> It is only by extreme historical injustice that Romanticism has been identified with the cult of the noble savage and the cultural idea of a return to an early stage of simple and easeful nature which lacks conflict because it lacks differentiation and complexity... Not back to Arcadia, but onward to Elysium.\(^{14}\)

The racial context of the Romantic Movement was implicit, because although authors such as Wordsworth and Scott were interested in old cultural myth and beliefs, they

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13 Stocking, p.17.
had no wish to 'regress' to the state of nature that would put them on a level with the barbarous races of the colonies. Through ethnology, Britain had resolved its crisis of authenticity by demonstrating how its own savage past was merely a previous stage in civilisation.

By reading the rise of the Romantic Movement in conjunction with the contemporary interest in ethnology it therefore creates a different perspective on their use of myth and tradition, which were negotiated within a context of imperialism and Protestantism. Mannheim states that Romanticism embodied an eclectic collection of suppressed cultural forces that had been ridiculed and denigrated by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. He states,

Thus Romanticism may be interpreted as the gathering up, a rescuing of all those attitudes and ways of life of ultimately religious origin which were repressed by the march of capitalist rationalism, - but a gathering up and conserving at the level of reflection. What the romantics did was not to reconstruct and revive the Middle Ages, religion or the irrational as the basis of life, it was something completely different: a reflexive and cognitive comprehension of those forces ... It worked out suitable methods, modes of experience, concepts and means of expression for all those forces which were forever inaccessible to the Enlightenment. 15

Mannhein correctly identifies the way in which the Romantics intellectualised those aspects of culture that they felt had been suppressed by the Enlightenment. However, this intellectual revival of Carnival merely reflected British society's contemporary abhorrence of the transgressive elements of folk culture from which British culture had, by the early nineteenth century, permanently distanced itself. In other words, despite the Romantic claim to locate an aesthetic British voice, distinct from the imperial, religious and rational components, it failed to achieve this because from its outset, the Romantic Movement operated within a framework of British national identity which had exiled its sensual, libidinous and violent characteristics beyond the scope of retrieval through both racial and spatial distance. This becomes evident through poems such as Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* (1800) in which he chose to inscribe the sensual through images of racial Otherness, because through this context he could

15 See Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Psychology*, p.90
use sensual imagery freely. This poem with its luxurious details of the pleasure dome, fertile grounds and incense-bearing trees as well as the bewitching Abyssinian maid is located in a foreign land that evokes the dream-like images of tropical colonies. Coleridge also associates the black woman with physical seduction, “Her symphony and song ...’twould win me. (1.44). Coleridge framed his sensual poem in a colonial location because it is only outside the parameters of British national identity that such physical and sensual ‘visions’ find appropriate expression.

The restriction of working within the construction of British culture not only limited the work of the Romantic poets, but also created anxieties in other literary production. For example, novelists such as Jane Austen also debated the problematics of British national identity, and the need to root this identity in meaningful traditions in order to create an authentic concept of Britishness. She, like Scott and Wordsworth, is implicated in the ideological movement to create a British identity that has a depth beyond the image of Protestant ideals and superficial adherence to society’s moral codes, and her novels interrogate those questions of appearance and reality.

Jane Austen and the Mimetic Nature of Britishness.

In his recent study of the ideological content of Jane Austen’s canon, Edward Neil effectively demonstrates the commonplace view of the author as not only deeply conservative, but actively involved in the process of promoting and reinforcing a reactionary political polemic through her fiction. He suggests that this image of Austen, which has been relatively unchallenged by critical studies of her work, has resulted in the ready association of Austen with a mythical vision of Englishness in which “Jane Austen has become something of a Tribal Totem,” entrenched in notions of British traditions. This view of Austen, “on all fours with those who wish to form Tory administrations, reactionaries who write pamphlets, or bad, long forgotten novels by strident Conservatives saying something rampantly ideological (and unsubtle) which is not part of any subsequent intellectual currency,” is a view that Neil is at pains to dispel. Indeed, his alternative readings of the political content of the

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novels, attempts to cast doubt over the too easily accepted view that Austen’s own politics were hand in glove with the sentiments of Conservative Middle-England.

However, even readings as self-consciously critical as Neil’s fail to fully investigate what is perhaps the most obvious thematic anxiety which is repeatedly raised in all six of Austen’s major works: the problem of British identity.

At the root of Jane Austen’s texts is a deep and unresolved tension, which continually confronts and irritates the accepted notions of Britishness in a style that echoes the work of early eighteenth-century social critics such as Jonathan Swift and Henry Fielding. Her novels, which are almost always received as romances in which the heroine protagonist achieves fairy-tale happiness, are underpinned by a vein of unresolved anxiety, which lies much deeper than conventional political dialectics and which constitutes a serious and cynical critique of the state of Britishness as it existed in Austen’s contemporary society. Marilyn Butler demonstrates how the idea that Jane Austen moves between two plots in which the heroines are either “Wrong” or “Right” in their relative positions with regard to conservative orthodoxy, is valid at a superficial level, but she also highlights the enormous complexity of Austen’s perspective. Butler argues that although Austen is seen as simply a conservative, her writing is far more sophisticated, having been influenced by the complex literary scene, which occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century. She also demonstrates how Austen perennially poses questions about authentic identity and the nature of the individual role in society.

The plots of Jane Austen’s six novels begin in the conservative camp and, very significantly, remain in it. She may experiment by placing her heroine in a different role in relation to the key process of self-discovery. The action itself remains essentially the same, a single all-revealing fable through which she reflects the individual’s life in society.

The question of the individual and a relationship with British society is complex because, as Butler suggests, Austen was writing at the end of the eighteenth century for a society, which was influenced by both Jacobin, and anti-Jacobin models of social organisation. However I will examine how Austen is deeply critical of the complacent British identity, which she repeatedly shows is insubstantial, and how she

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demonstrates the failure of her heroes and heroines to provide role models for British society that, based on inauthentic constructed images of Britishness, had not been challenged by the Romantic Movement.

In the light of this reading, Austen's own comment on her work as confined and limited to "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour" is ironic. Her range consciously surpassed these narrow boundaries and included topical commentary on Britain as an imperial centre, contemporary views on class and the clergy, and also extended to interrogate the condition of national consciousness, and the romantic agenda of cultural authenticity. Indeed her choice of ivory, with its associated overtones of empire and Britain's colonial trade, alerts her reader to the fact that her work stretches well beyond the boundaries of domestic, romantic fiction.

One indication of Austen's wider agenda is to be found in the anti-climax at the close of her novels. It is of significance that for a novelist purportedly involved in writing romantic fiction, Jane Austen systematically dispenses with the romantic conclusions of her central protagonists with an abruptness, which borders on disinterest, which I suggest indicates that Austen's focus was not, as is commonly assumed, on debates around romance and marriage, and the place of women in the marriage market place of the eighteenth century.

By the end of the eighteenth century novels of courtship and marriage were written to a fairly standard formula. As Marilyn Butler illustrates, the subject of marriage and authorised and unauthorised sexual relationships provided a central tool in the ideological debates between the progressive and anti-Jacobin writers. Austen brought a vibrant, critical edge to the arguments about the commodification of young eligible men and women, and despite the fact that the subject occupies much of the plot, and is the dominant theme of all her narratives, there is a sense in which it seems to operate as a convenient vehicle for other more contentious issues, the most prominent of which was the discussion of appearance and reality. The sneering attitude of Mary Crawford when she describes marriage as "of all transactions, the one where people expect most in others, and are least honest themselves," mirrors

19 Butler, p.293
Austen’s own cynical use of the ‘romantic-marriage’ plot as a familiar structure for more interesting projects.\textsuperscript{22}

It is in exploring the dialectic of appearance, of pretence and the concealment of the true nature of the individual, that Austen reveals the site of both her attention and anxiety. Characters who seem to be one thing and are revealed, through the course of their own actions, to be other than they first appear, or those who do not know themselves but believe in their own public image without recourse to self-reflection, are Jane Austen’s focus. Her texts are replete with examples of these characters who are skilfully and pleasurable unpeeled to reveal their true nature.

This exploration of characters achieved in several instances by the introduction of a transgressive and Carnival threat that not only destabilises the status quo, but symbolically threatens the foundations of British identity. For example, Tom Bertram is an anarchic force in \textit{Mansfield Park}, (1814) and Susan Vernon in \textit{Lady Susan} (1805) can be read as a transgressive figure, and I shall examine how both threaten the stability of social organisation and interfere with notions of propriety and British identity.\textsuperscript{23} I will also demonstrate that although Austen was highly critical of Britishness as it existed in her contemporary society, she utilised images of anarchy and chaos, through the carnivalesque figures of Tom Bertram and Susan Vernon, to project the horror of social transgression.

Jane Austen reflected a sensitivity to the condition of national identity, which she recognised as essentially problematic. However Austen is unprepared to ignore and gloss over the fractures in her contemporary society and instead, through her characterisations presents numerous examples of Britishness that consciously fail, because they are purely social constructs. Upstanding and socially respectable characters, such as Sir Thomas Bertram and General Tilney, are shown to be merely the shallow images of the British characteristics of sobriety and control. Sir Thomas in particular, embodies the British identity that evolved in the wake of the Act of Union (1707), and is a stereotype of the landed gentleman, and the centre of a circle of economic power at home with his ability to give the Norris’ an income, but also a

\textsuperscript{21} Butler, p.108-110.
\textsuperscript{23} The dating of Lady Susan has been taken from the editorial notes of John Davie in \textit{Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, the Watsons, And Sanditon}, (ed.), John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.xxxvii-xlili.
conduit to the wealth of overseas colonies, as indicated by Mrs. Price at the outset of
the novel, in her appeal to send her son William to make his fortune in the colonies.
Austen however, raises questions about the credibility of Sir Thomas and General
Tilney as examples of British nationalism. This questioning is also extended to the
next generation, exemplified by Julia and Maria Bertram, Isabella and John Thorpe
among others, who are represented as disconnected from any genuine sense of
propriety, the simulacra of a set of national ideological values, which operate as
structure and give context, but which fail to give the individual character real meaning
or support.

In other words, the most important and significant aspect of Jane Austen's
fiction is its ethnographic element. The anthropologists Howard Handler and Daniel
Segal have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate the value of Austen's work in
its relation to the cultural realities of her society. They foreground the perspective that
Austen adopts as she presents the complexity of the social relations which are
fictionally presented.

Austen's narratives engage her characters and readers alike in a common
problem: the eventful, though conventional, process by which men and women
make exclusive and mutual choice of a partner. Like many ethnographers of
'exotic' societies, Austen focuses our attention on the rules of courtship and
marriage. However her understanding and depiction of social rules differs
crucially from the positivist notion of behavioural norms that has dominated
both anthropological theory and Jane Austen criticism, concerned, as it has
been, with Austen's relationship with social order. 24

Her texts, therefore form a critical study in British national identity, and written, as it
were, from within, they clearly demonstrate the failure of domestic ideology, which is
reduced to a set of powerful but codified social frameworks, which while clearly
organising her contemporary world, are shown to be deeply flawed. What Austen
highlights is the way in which real cultural values have become as abstract in her
contemporary society as they are for many of her characters within her novels. These
can then be viewed as texts of social criticism and nationalist polemic. It is the
abstract sense of society, which becomes the organising force within Austen's work,
and all her interest is focussed on exploring the relationships of her characters with
regard to this concept, because she is extremely aware that this is what underpins the whole notion of Britishness. As Handler and Segal state, "The exemplary characters in Austen's novels are distinguished by their ability to discuss and analyse cultural conventions even as they participate in them. These characters use the metacommunicative aspects of language and culture to make visible, discuss and play with their own social codes." This self-conscious relationship with regard to the cultural systems, as Handler and Segal demonstrate, gives Austen's main protagonists interest. However it is her own parallel awareness of the way in which these codes provide the structure of British domestic identity, which is of great significance.

Although all Jane Austen's texts are underpinned by this same anxiety with regard to true identity, *Mansfield Park* (1814) is perhaps the most striking example of her awareness of the fictive nature of Britishness, and the way in which notions of performance and artificiality are incorporated into her own culture. As Edward Said rightly notes this narrative is "the most explicit in its ideological and moral affirmations of Austen's novels," and in its exploration of the Bertrams' and Crawfords' both typical British families of the landed class, it engages with the domestic failure of national identity. The British identity that evolved over the course of the eighteenth century, which was composed of values that were capitalist, imperialist and Protestant and which had effectively marginalized any authentic cultural identity had become a form of monstrous reality in the society of *Mansfield Park*.

Austen clearly demonstrates that the domestic British structure, comprised of a combination of those formative aspects of British identity, was failing to sustain itself within a domestic setting. Sir Thomas, the patriarchal focus of the text, is introduced as a good example of eighteenth-century Britishness. At the outset of the text he is the proprietor of a large country estate, which he has inherited, thus establishing his links with the traditions of England and the land, as well as owning a town house which confirms his metropolitan status. He is a Member of Parliament and is implicated in the imperial profile of Britain through his sugar estates in Antigua. To all extents and purposes Sir Thomas represents the interests of eighteenth-century Britain, both in

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25 Handler and Segal, p.5
terms of his capitalism, imperialism and his morality, which is defined along firmly Protestant lines.

However, as Jane Austen gradually reveals in the text, Sir Thomas is flawed, and his typical British identity, is revealed to be merely a conflation of stereotypical, patriarchal images. He is also faulty because he is unable to discriminate the superficial from the genuine. Therefore Sir Thomas marries the physically beautiful Maria Ward of Huntingdon, who having been chosen for her appearance alone, brings him neither genuine love, wealth nor intellectual companionship. This is only the first of a catalogue of errors that Sir Thomas commits, because his criteria of judgement are attuned to the level of impressions. The choice of Mrs. Norris as a guardian to his two daughters, his ready acceptance of Henry Crawford as his friend, and his advocacy on the part of the latter with Fanny, regarding his proposal of marriage, all illustrate how Sir Thomas, the patriarchal centre, is without the discernment needed to read beyond the superficial.

It is therefore unsurprising that he is unable to comprehend Fanny's rejection of Crawford. As Austen says, "her emotions were beyond his discrimination. He did not understand her; he felt that he did not."27 It takes the near destruction of his family for him to realise that he had not known his own children, but had happily accepted their tailored manners in his presence as a substitute for their real characters, and that he was lacking the ability to develop genuine relationships with them.

Bitterly did he deplore a deficiency which now he could scarcely comprehend to have been possible. Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character or temper.28

Nevertheless Sir Thomas is by no means exceptional in his inability to distinguish the real from the forgeries. In fact, one of the most significant aspects of Mansfield Park is that all the characters share Sir Thomas' lack of judgement, and none of them is fully able to resist the appeal of the inauthentic.

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27 *Mansfield Park*, p.361.
28 *Mansfield Park*, p.448.
Edmund, the fallen hero of the text, is made the dupe of Mary Crawford who, with her sparkling dark eyes and playful smile, proves too much for his clerical resolve. Her carefully choreographed harp playing, against the backdrop of the French windows—through which he cannot fail to glimpse a view of the tranquil garden, is a lesson in seduction. Even Fanny is not impervious to Crawford’s charm, despite her very accurate and often scathing appraisal of his personal character. It is Fanny, after all, who condemns Henry as “odious”. Nevertheless she reveals her wavering resistance on more than one occasion, particularly during his display of sensitivity toward her embarrassment with regard to her family in Portsmouth, which culminates in her reflection that his company in that place “was the nearest to administering comfort of anything within the current of her thoughts.”29 It is in fact made explicit that she would most probably have married him, once Edmund had been put beyond her hopes. In this matter Austen is explicit: “Fanny must have been his [Crawford’s that is] reward—and a reward voluntarily bestowed—within a reasonable period from Edmund’s marrying Mary.”30 This constitutes a radical reversal in the narrative, because despite the token gestures that Henry Crawford makes at reform, such as his brief interest into the affairs of the peasants on his estate, or his calculated assistance given to William, there is really little convincing evidence to suggest a transformation of his character, and surely not enough to convincingly alter Fanny’s opinion of him radically enough for her to conceive of matrimony. This instability problematizes the character of Austen’s protagonist and raises questions about the commonly levelled criticism that Fanny is a prudish, one-dimensional character. Tony Tanner is far from unique in identifying Fanny as an unsympathetic heroine who “does not put a foot wrong”, but this version of Fanny is incomplete, because she is subject to errors.31 In fact Austen goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate that none of the characters within the text are exempt from criticism.

This is further supported by Fanny’s lack of resolve in resisting the pressure to take part in the theatricals, because it is ultimately the arrival of Sir Thomas who prevents this, not Fanny’s determination. When unaided by Edmund, Fanny’s integrity is placed in considerable doubt by the author. The very real values of

29 Mansfield Park. p.405
judgement and morality that Austen endows Fanny with, which are used as a device to highlight the failure in her other characters, are severely undermined, and the text is therefore more complex than it would seem at first. In fact, the whole novel becomes enmeshed in the dialectic of appearance and reality, in which nothing, not even the heroine, is what she appears.

Austen also provides a number of stereotypes which provide more conventional images of the eighteenth century. However even these simple, one-dimensional characters reveal Austen’s ideological position. For example, the Rushworths, both mother and son, are described in language of the burlesque. Mrs. Rushworth is symbolically a wholesale destroyer of tradition and piety, a fact which she herself reveals as she gives her pompous guided tour of Sotherton. She has broken with tradition through the neglect of the chapel at Sotherton, a custom which a more reflective character, like Fanny, regrets. The young Mr. Rushworth is treated no better and is reduced to a caricature, representative of a wealthy and extremely stupid class who have more money than sense. This is made explicit where he is described as “an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books, with opinions in general unfixed and without seeming much aware of it himself.” Added to this his vain delight in wearing his pink and blue satin cloak as Count Cassel in the theatricals, and Mr. Rushworth can be read as irretrievable, because despite his experience with Maria Bertram, he learns nothing and is as ready to be ‘duped’ at the close of the text as he was at the beginning.

If Austen provides unsympathetic portrayals of the aristocracy, then her treatment of a certain type of clergyman is equally merciless. Dr Grant described as a glutton who is very much more interested in the condition of his turkey, than those to whom he ministers, undergoes a similar acerbic attack. However Austen’s main targets are the Crawfords, Mary and Henry. If Sir Thomas represents the failure of a British national identity that is limited because of its constructed nature, then the Crawfords’ embody a next stage in that failed identity as they exist in a perpetual state of re-invention: adapting and mutating as circumstance requires and in the process, losing any sense of themselves.

32 Mansfield Park, p.214.
There are several key moments within the narrative, which emphasise this, and the most revealing involves Henry Crawford’s reading of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*.

In Mr Crawford’s reading there was a variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with. The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey and Cromwell all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always light at will on the best scene, or the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity or pride or tenderness or remorse or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty...she gradually slackened in the needle work which, at the beginning, seemed to occupy her totally; how it fell from her hand while she sat motionless over it- and at last, how the eyes which had appeared so studiously to avoid him throughout the day, were turned and fixed on Crawford, fixed on him in short until their attraction drew Crawford’s upon her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken.\(^{33}\)

Crawford is adept at transforming himself, and his skill lies in a chameleon-like ability to adapt. Unfortunately for him, as Austen demonstrates, this is the sole basis for his identity. He listens to sermons in church, only to imagine himself a preacher who might “touch and affect a heterogeneous mass of hearers,”\(^{34}\) and the accounts of William’s adventures at sea make him imagine “the glory of heroism, of usefulness and exertion, of endurance” that momentarily cause him to reflect on his own life and wish that he too had experienced such excitement.\(^{35}\) He appears to be as at home at Mansfield Park as he is at the Price’s chaotic home in Portsmouth, and despite his attractiveness and his genuine qualities of taste and manners as well as discernment, Henry, by being unstable in his identity, represents a tangible danger to himself and those around him. He lacks sincerity, and therefore true sensibility.

Likewise, Mary Crawford who is talented, perceptive and beautiful is also able to manipulate those around her, undermining their firm commitments and creating confusion. This is most obviously revealed when Mary directly encourages Edmund to play in the theatricals and to contradict everything that he openly stands for. It is also clear in her pseudo-friendship with Fanny, and her calculated deception in the symbolically charged episode of the chain, where she attempts to foist Henry’s gift onto Fanny. Julia, Maria, Tom and Yates are shown to be lacking in education and guidance, but Mary and Henry are actively dangerous because of their self-conscious

\(^{33}\)Mansfield Park, p.334.  
\(^{34}\)Mansfield Park, p.338  
\(^{35}\)Mansfield Park, p.245.
awareness of their faults, which they continue to indulge to the point where they really lose sight of their identities.

The portrayal of a flawed British national identity, which is established by Sir Thomas’s generation, and which is open to dangerous revisions because of its preoccupation with appearance, is perhaps the most powerful sub text within *Mansfield Park*, and although Austen restores each to their proper place at the close of the novel, it is of immense significance that it takes an outsider, an interloper like Fanny Price to effect that restoration which, right up to the close of the text, seems uncertain.

The Play Within the Play

There have been numerous interpretations of the theatrical interlude within *Mansfield Park*, covering a diverse variety of readings of the performance of Kotzebue’s *Lovers Vow’s*, which had been translated from its German original by the radical Elizabeth Inchbald in 1798. These range from an allegory of the Regency crisis, and an Evangelical warning of the dangers of private theatre, to a coded recreation of French assaults on the British during the Revolutionary Wars, all of which can find support within the text. However, the most striking aspect of this dramatic moment in the novel, and one which all interpreters are sensitive to, is that it stands out. Not only is it a crucial moment in the text because it marks a turning point in the narrative which enables Austen to expand Fanny’s character, but more interestingly, the reactions of disapproval from Fanny and Edmund seem over emphatic and misplaced, jarring the reader to search for an underlying explanation for their horror. As Lionel Trilling has suggested,

The great fuss that is made over the theatricals can seem a mere travesty on virtue. And the more so because it is never made clear why it is so very wrong for young people in a dull country house to put on a play.  

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The question as to why the intention to perform a play at Mansfield Park should create such a disturbance within the text has been the subject of much critical debate. Marilyn Butler's analysis is among the most comprehensive, recognising as she does the subversive aspects of Kotzebue's play with regard to contemporary ideas in religion and morality, which she suggests Fanny embodies within the novel. Butler's close reading of the play, (which is never actually quoted in the novel) gives the reader some insight into the impropriety of this choice of drama, particularly as it both mirrors so closely the relationships between the lovers of the narrative, as well as creating a degree of intimacy between characters, such as Henry and Maria, that later facilitates the tragic downfall of several of the players. According to Butler,

Ideologically the choice of play is crucial. Kotzebue's Lovers Vows counterpoints what the rehearsals have revealed of the actors selfishness and reckless quest for self-gratification, since its message is the goodness of man, the legitimacy of his claims to equality, and the sanctity of his instincts as a guide to conduct. It is in fact the dangerous foreign reading matter, which so often appears in anti-Jacobin novels, though wonderfully naturalised. Nor could any literate reader of the period be unaware of the connotation of the play. 38

However a close reading of the novel reveals that the main objection to the theatricals is made some time before the choice of play is made. Trilling's point, that he can see no concrete reason why the theatre should cause such a wave of alarm in the text, remains unanswered. Butler makes the assertion that Jane Austen's readership would be aware of contemporary concerns voiced in Evangelical tracts about the dangers of amateur theatricals. Pamphlets such as an Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, (1797) produced by Thomas Gisborne, which stress the immorality of acting, were widely read and might therefore made any explanation of the impropriety of the theatricals at Mansfield Park unnecessary. Nevertheless this remains a contentious assumption and one that is not really supported by evidence from either the novel or Austen's own biography. As Christopher Brooke has noted, Jane Austen was an active participant in just the sort of domestic theatricals, which are so disparaged by her heroine in Mansfield Park.

38 Butler, p.233.
It has often been taken for granted that she shared Sir Thomas Bertram’s disapproval of private theatricals; she has sometimes been taken severely to task for her puritanical attitude... It is indeed extremely improbable that Jane Austen was as firmly set against private theatricals as Fanny Price. There had been plays at Steventon in her childhood; her eldest brother James had written and directed parts of them; in her late twenties she wrote a short play Sir Charles Grandison, for the family to perform. There is no hint in her letters of the kind of prejudice represented in Mansfield Park.

In the novel, Edmund represents the most vocal critic of the theatre, yet even he, does not, for example, stress the moral danger that Butler seems so sure is “taken as read.” In fact he merely points out that,

In a general light private theatricals are open to some objections, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious to attempt anything of the kind. It would show a great want of feeling on my father’s account, absent as he is, and in some kind of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering every thing, extremely delicate.

However in the face of these relatively weak objections, the Miss Bertrams’ comment that to object to them was “scrupulousness gone mad” would seem the more convincing argument, particularly as both Edmund and Fanny are ultimately involved in the play, not as critics but as actors. This over-reaction to the notion of acting is in fact completely undermined in the text at a later point, where Fanny remembers being captivated by Henry Crawford’s performance of Frederick. Butler’s explanation is unconvincing as the sole reason for the enormous textual tension created by the introduction of the theatricals. Nevertheless, when considering the theatricals within the subtext of appearance, the whole notion of playing and acting takes on new significance. It is the danger of disrupting already fragile and constructed identities that causes the disproportionate anxieties within Mansfield Park, and it is a danger which is related and emphasised by Sir Thomas’s absence.

There are two main factors at work in this episode, which, although connected, can be examined separately. The first then is the fact of Sir. Thomas’s absence, and his relocation to his other estate in Antigua. Edward Said makes a convincing analysis of the underlying importance of the Caribbean sugar plantation and the related slave

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trade and clearly demonstrates how the capitalist and imperialist themes not only provide the framework for the novel, but also how they underpin the structures of economic wealth in Austen’s contemporary society. “The Bertrams’ would not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar and the colonial planter class,” and this interpretation relocates Austen’s canonical text within its imperial context. Indeed this relationship between Sir Thomas and his position as an imperial capitalist has other more specific relevance within the novel, which becomes clear in the theatrical episode. Sir Thomas can be read as a compilation of recognisably British characteristics and his identity is formed through a collection of stereotypes that are never fully fleshed out within the text. If Sir Thomas is the personification of the polarised identities of Britishness, his journey to Antigua, to protect his overseas dominions and his reassertion of control over the source of his wealth, is a highly symbolic act.

This reading might go some way to settling the anxiety of why Austen insists on Sir Thomas being a slave owner, and why he lacks any perspective on his own behaviour, until he undergoes the trial of the near destruction of his family. As Neil suggests “Sir Thomas clearly has considerable destabilising force or potential.” In recognising the absence of integrity in her contemporary national identity, Austen presents their embodiment, Sir Thomas as deeply flawed. Sir Thomas is an absentee landlord in every sense; both physically in his imperial context, and domestically in his failure to provide real guidance to those who follow him, and her censure of his valuing of appearance over reality, is strongly evoked on his reaction to the theatricals.

Sir Thomas has returned from Antigua to perform the role of concerned father. However, he is more interested in restoring his domestic estate and theatrically burning the play texts, than in enquiring into the real state of his family. Jane Austen is emphatic that,

Had Sir Thomas applied to his daughter within the first three or four days after Henry Crawford’s leaving Mansfield, before her feeling were tranquillised before she had given up every hope of him, or absolutely resolved on enduring

40 Mansfield Park, p.151.  
41 Said, Culture and Imperialism p.100-114  
42 Neil, The Politics of Jane Austen p.79
his rival, her answer might have been different, but after another three or four days, when there was no return, no letter, no message-no symptom of a softened heart-no hope of advantage from separation-her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self revenge could give.43

In response, Sir Thomas, for his part was glad to “escape the evils of a rupture” and was more than content to “secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence.”

The argument that the Mansfield theatricals merely reflect and emphasise the artificial nature of everyday life in Austen’s contemporary society is extended when viewing the second main aspect of the Lovers Vows episode, which explains why the theatre appears so contentious and dangerous within the text. The intention of playing fictional roles draws attention to the fictional social identities, which all the would-be performers already labour under. In other words, what the scene reveals is that Maria, for example, already lives a fiction as a dutiful daughter and eligible young woman of society and is in danger of exposing that unreality through the self-conscious performance of the play. The unspoken terror within the scene is the threat that she will acknowledge her constructed reality. Jane Austen is crucially aware of this, and her choice of the play, Lovers Vows, which so closely parallels the events within her novel, is therefore significant. The lovers of the play, Amelia and the clergyman, Anhalt, are played by Edmund and Mary, and there is an irony in the fact that Maria and Henry take the roles of a socially outcast mother and her son, a relationship which is based on illegitimacy, and which prophetically acts as a rehearsal for their own expulsion from the society of Mansfield Park. The blurring of the characters of the novel, with those of the play, really highlights the whole notion of artifice, which Austen presents, as a layering of identity construction. With the assumption of roles, which so closely mirror their characters, the characters of Mansfield Park are in danger of losing their ‘realism.’ The play within the play succeeds because Austen’s own players are ironically recognisable as real.

This realism is noted by Handler and Segal, who go as far as to argue that “for Austen, the world of the text and the world of the world are not separated in this way...It plays with the fictive rules of social life.”44 However her stratification of

43 Mansfield Park, p.216.
44 Handler and Segal, p.165.
fictional identity ultimately, like her observations on Sir Thomas, reflect deep anxieties about her own culture, that is definitively portrayed as unfixed and shallow. This critique is extended to all her characters and not even Fanny, with her wavering resolve is spared her share of implication in this.

Tony Tanner’s observation on the theatricals is astute, when he asks: “Which is Yates’s true acting—when he is ranting at Sir Thomas as a braggart Baron, or when he is apologising to him as the well-bred son of a lord?... Where does the acting stop?” The ironic message from the text is however that there is no one within the world of Mansfield Park who is not a construct, and symbolically Austen demonstrates how acting permeates the whole of the British national identity.

A third feature of the theatrical scene relates specifically to the licence that the absence of Sir. Thomas’s constraint allows. This is highlighted by the transformations which occur in the players themselves, who freed from the strictures of his British identity, create a Carnival scene of misrule and transgression. “It was all bewitching, and there were few who did not wish to have been a party concerned, or would have hesitated to try their skill.” It is significant that it is Tom, the wayward and profligate son who threatens to gamble away his inheritance and to drink away his health, who is the controlling character within the scene. He attempts to quieten Edmund’s criticism by assuming responsibility for the enterprise, and is uncharacteristically an active presence within the text. Tom, who has hitherto been a distinctly marginal figure with his fool, Mr Yates, takes advantage of Sir Thomas’s absence to assume authority which results in the transformation of Sir. Thomas’s own library into a stage, complete with a green baize curtain. The symbolism of this assault on the actual structure of Mansfield Park is heavily emphasised, and Tom who is prepared to undertake women’s roles and the role of the peasant, both traditionally linked to carnival inversion, is in his element.

He is depicted as a transgressive Carnival force. It is his suggestion to open the group to outsiders that pushes Edmund into accepting a part, and he who provides the energy to get the whole project off the ground. Added to this is the image of Mr. Rushworth strutting about in his costume, and the sudden activity of all members of the household including the servants, and the liberating drive of this misrule is

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45 Tony Tanner, p.167.
46 Mansfield Park p.147.
complete. There is also a considerable degree of humour generated by Tom and his co-transgressor Yates. The appeal to Lady Bertram's disquietened state, and the confrontation of Yates by Sir. Thomas, are moments of burlesque, a point that definitely implicates Austen in the delight of transgression.

Indeed, there is a real sense of anti-climax on Sir. Thomas's return, and the text underlines, albeit unconsciously, how the strictures of Britishness have exorcised the natural appeal of the folk subversion, typified by the Carnival atmosphere of the theatre. On the reverse, however it also warns how transgression threatens the national identity, and will undermine all the structures of society, if it is not firmly repressed. Ultimately, Jane Austen clears the library, casts the baize curtain in the direction of Mrs. Norris and restores the characters to their unhappy situation of "sitting and doing nothing." However the imminent danger of chaos has been introduced, and the appeal of transgression which had, during the course of the eighteenth century, been acknowledged in the popularity of masquerades was still shown as an undercurrent in society in the nineteenth century.

Austen's perennial theme is her exposure of the artificial and those who would present a different image of themselves to the world, rather than the reality. However in Mansfield Park, the ironic evaluation of the concept of imaging, that is present in texts such as Sense and Sensibility (1811) and Pride and Prejudice (1813), develops into a cynical reflection on the state of her contemporary society. Austen suggests that the picture of Britishness represented by Sir Thomas, is a failure. He, like the identity of Britain, exists as an ideological image whose only real success is to be had in the colonies, in the course of imperial activity. This highlights one of the main functions that Sir. Thomas's identity was created to achieve. Sir Thomas can be a successful absentee landlord of his plantation because his superficial identity is only required there as an image. As a sustaining domestic example, he is revealed to have a sham identity.

Nevertheless and despite her dissatisfaction with his obvious failings, Austen demonstrates how his principles are preferable to the chaos which would undoubtedly ensue in his absence. The fact that he quashes so completely any symptom of the Carnival on his return from Antigua, puts this beyond debate. Having returned from the site of real transgression, worn out by his ideological battle with those that exist in
a framework of disorder in the Caribbean, he is intolerant of even the palest image of Bacchanalian disruption in his metropolitan environment.

Austen is acutely aware that the principles on which this identity is formed are worth sustaining; if only because they form an alternative to chaos, as exemplified by the Mansfield theatricals, and although deeply critical of Sir. Thomas’s errors, Austen does not put his character beyond hope. In this respect Austen satisfies her label as a conservative, supporting as she does the foundational principles of her national identity.

However this is far cry from the more general image of her as a blind supporter of the Tory values of the landed class. Nowhere in her texts is there an acceptance of the status quo which parallels Burke’s faith in Britishness. Instead, Austen generates a scorching critique of her contemporary world, which, she demonstrates, is in great need of reform. Although it is worth noting that the reform she calls for is not the outward display of change, that is symbolised by the architectural improvements that are suggested for Sotherton. Her focus is the repair of a British identity which is a façade, an effective impression for colonising the world, but which is ineffectual as a domestic identity.

The overall tone of Mansfield Park is one of pessimism. Despite Austen’s assurance that those who have not done much harm are restored, we cannot overlook that they are the few survivors of what has been a devastating set of events; and the fact that Fanny now views Mansfield Park as “thoroughly perfect in her eyes” is little consolation, because we can put scant faith in the views of a heroine whose resolve has proved so unreliable.47

Lady Susan: The Voracious Widow of Austen’s Fiction.

The character of Tom Bertram in Mansfield Park operates as a Carnival figure of disruption within the text, which threatens to undercut the whole structure of life within the novel. However, this is not the only instance of this kind of symbolic threat in the work of Jane Austen. In fact, Lady Susan (1805), is a novel that centres on the theme of carnival and is entirely generated by the exploits of the transgressive and

47 Mansfield Park, p.457.
chaotic, Lady Susan Vernon who, like Tom Bertram, has the potential to permeate the moral core of Britishness, symbolised by Mansfield Park and Churchill respectively, and expose the fragility of morality and social order, where they are solely based on social convention. *Lady Susan*, to a large extent, is the expanded version of the carnival episode of *Mansfield Park*, and the themes of undermining and challenging the society of middle England through the action of a single Carnival figure, is the central focus of the whole text, and not a catalyst within a more complex work, as in *Mansfield Park*.

However, as the central figure of the entire narrative, the recently widowed Lady Susan, is many times more dangerous than Tom, because she is, from the outset of the novel depicted as a mature and practised gold-digger who, strong, extremely beautiful and with great ambition is a caricature of all the destabilising elements that posed a threat to a moral social order at the close of the eighteenth century: a carnival reversal of British feminine identity.

Her depiction as a ‘Carnivalesque queen’ is established from the very outset of this epistolary novel, in the two opening letters. The first letter is a fawning application to her brother-in-law for refuge from the social whirl of her present situation, which introduces her as a retiring and care worn woman who, having nursed her husband through illness, is now the single parent to a spirited daughter and simply appeals for stability and quiet, surrounded by the family support that she craves. Nothing therefore prepares the reader for the next letter, which is addressed to her friend Mrs. Johnson, in which Lady Susan drops all pretence of the unfortunate widow, and we are immediately given a glimpse of the unmasked Susan, who speaks of her brother in law as her ‘aversion’ and her staying with his family as her last resort. In fact, we learn that she is having to escape the imminent scandal of an adulterous affair. In a short letter Lady Susan reveals that she has been widowed for only four months and has spent three of these months flirting with and sifting through various potential suitors, both for herself and her daughter, Frederica. Unfortunately Frederica, her moral and exemplary daughter, refuses to marry. Lady Susan writes,

Frederica, who was born to be the torment of my life, chose to set herself so violently against the match, that I thought it better to lay aside the scheme for the present. I have more than once repented that I did not marry him myself, and were he but one degree less contemptibly weak I certainly should, but I must
own myself rather romantic in that respect, and that Riches only, will not satisfy me. 48

This is what Lady Susan refers to as her ‘sacred impulse of maternal affection.’

She has begun an affair with the husband of Mrs. Mainwaring, a friend whom she was staying with, and created a state of ‘war’ in the household. Susan, therefore expresses her necessity of making a quick exit to her relatives, until something better comes into view. Thus the whole comic tone of the novel is set through the juxtaposition of these two versions of Susan. However, as the plot unfolds, Susan, in attempting to overcome the resistance of Mrs. Vernon’s brother, Sir Reginald De Courcy, to trifle with his affections, actually falls in love with him, only to be rejected when he finds out what a calculating schemer she really is. And at the close of the novel Austen consigns Lady Susan to a marriage with Sir James, the rich but contemptible suitor of her daughter.

What is interesting however is the way in which Austen uses the anarchic force of Susan, like that of Tom Bertram, to emphasise how the threat of Carnival misrule can potentially destabilise British order and morality, as symbolised by the thoroughly respectable household of Churchill, and demonstrates Austen’s recurrent question about the nature of authenticity and British identity. Lady Susan like Mansfield Park, raises the same issues and anxieties about the solidity of a national identity created by idealised projections of morality, imperialism and capitalism, and demonstrates its underlying problems by introducing an anarchic figure to both challenge and destabilise the accepted order and, in this case, Austen uses the stock Carnival convention of the appetite driven widow to demonstrate how ill-fitted British morality is to cope with a challenge to its order, particularly when that challenge is issued by a woman.

Susan Vernon is depicted as unnatural. Henry Malchow, demonstrates how folk tales often saw the figure of the sexually alluring widow, with her conscious awareness of her body and sexuality, as a social threat. “Here we have the popular trope of Gothic literature, woman as man-eater, who threatens to entrap and destroy innocent youth, a characteristic reversal of the “naturally” gendered roles of feminine

victim and masculine villain.”  

What is significant about this text is that Susan is to a large extent, a conflation of such carnival caricatures, which challenge gender expectations and interrogate the structure of power in British conservative society.

Susan Vernon fits neatly into this Carnival stereotype as she attempts the seduction of Reginald. She says, “There is exquisite pleasure in subduing an insolent spirit, in making a person pre-determined to dislike, acknowledge one’s superiority.”

Susan is sexually experienced, manipulative, and physically misleading as her outward appearance belies her real character. She is described as looking at least ten years younger than she is, and Reginald, despite his foreknowledge of her character, is disarmed by her physical charms. In fact, it is through Reginald’s fascination with Susan that Austen relates her own textual debate about the allure of transgression for a society that is founded on constructed notions of propriety, a theme she develops to great effect in the theatrical scene in *Mansfield Park*. Reginald who is predisposed to disapprove of Susan, is at the same time fascinated by the thought of her, even before seeing her. In Letter 4, this excitement is clear. Reginald writes to his sister:

> What a Woman she must be! I long to see her, and shall certainly accept your kind invitation, that I may form some idea of those bewitching powers which can do so much, ...Lady Susan possesses a degree of captivating Deceit which must be pleasing to witness and detect.

Susan as a transgressive force is therefore presented as a temptation for Reginald and he is excited at the fantasy which her reputation has created. For him she already occupies a mythic stature, she is the “most accomplished Coquette in England” and, like the performance of *Lover’s Vows* in *Mansfield Park*, she is potentially dangerous and exhilarating.

Susan also, however, incorporates another recognisable folklore figure in her relationship with her daughter. Lady Susan is the wicked and unnatural (step)mother figure of the classic fairy-tale. It is clear from the text that she has neglected Frederica during her childhood having foisted her onto a governess. Nevertheless, Frederica has natural qualities and according to Mrs. Vernon,

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50 *Lady Susan*, p.217
51 *Lady Susan*, p.213
She is by no means as ignorant as one might expect find her, being fond of books and spending the chief of her time in reading ... There cannot be a more gentle and affectionate heart, or more obliging manners, when acting without restraint. Her little cousins are all very fond of her. ⁵³

Having come of age, Susan now sees Frederica as a counter in her own plots of social advancement, and she is determined to have her marry the wealthy and foolish Sir James Martin, whom Susan holds in utter contempt. In true fairy-tale style however, Frederica refuses to marry him, and Susan punishes her daughter by sending her to a boarding school which she is sure will be "very humiliating to a girl of Frederica's age." ⁵⁴ She spells out her hopes to Mrs. Johnson when she comments on education. "I do not mean therefore that Frederica's acquirements should be more than superficial, and I flatter myself that she will not remain long enough at school to understand anything thoroughly." ⁵⁵ Nevertheless Frederica is not as plastic as Susan hopes and makes a daring, if feeble, escape from the boarding school in an attempt to avoid the necessity of marriage to Sir James. This provokes a tirade from Susan that echoes the wrath of the conventional 'wicked queen' of children's fables.

I lost no time in demanding the reason of her behaviour and soon found myself to have been perfectly right in attributing it to my own letter. The purport of it frightened her so thoroughly that with a mixture of true girlish perverseness and folly, without considering that she could not escape from my authority by running away from Wigmore Street, she resolved on getting out of the house, and proceeding directly by the stage to her friends the Clarkes, and really got as far as the length of two streets in her journey, when she was fortunately miss'd, pursued, and overtaken. ⁵⁶

The obvious Carnival elements of Susan's character help to reveal other more contemporary concerns about women and their position in society, and it is interesting to note that *Lady Susan*, lacks the playfulness and irony with regard to the Carnival disruption that can be found in *Mansfield Park*. The text does not have a patriarchal authority figure in the shape a of Sir Thomas Bertram to restore order, and therefore

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⁵² *Lady Susan*, p.213  
⁵³ *Lady Susan*, p.235  
⁵⁴ *Lady Susan*, p.216  
⁵⁵ *Lady Susan*, p.216  
⁵⁶ *Lady Susan*, p.235.
the narrative presents a society that is far more exposed, and in which Susan’s anarchic challenge is far more serious.

Susan Vernon is the strongest character in the text, it is she who really dictates situations and as such she occupies the space of authority, which is only arrested when her own feminine feelings undermine her scheming designs. Nonetheless, Austen depicts her as a strong woman who, like her friend Alicia Johnson, is forced to make the best of matrimonial situations in which they have been trapped mentally as well as physically, highlighting the very constricting nature of relationships which are founded on financial arrangements and the need to progress within social hierarchy. This underlying concern is revealed in the oppressive description of marriage presented in Letter 26, from Mrs. Johnson to Susan.

Mr Johnson leaves London next Tuesday. He is going for his health to Bath, where if the waters are favourable to his constitution and my wishes, he will be laid up with the gout many weeks. During his absence we shall be able to chuse our own society, and have true enjoyment. I would ask you to Edward Street but that he once forced from me a kind of promise never to invite you to my house. Nothing but being in the utmost distress for Money, could have extorted it from me. I can get you however a very nice Drawingroom – apartment in Upper Seymour Street, and we may be always together, there or here, for I consider my promise to Mr. Johnson as comprehending only (at least in his absence) your not sleeping in the House. 57

Through the text Austen critiques the prevailing trend to use marriages as market transactions, and in effect demonstrates how Susan only replicates the process which she has endured, in trying to match Frederica for purely financial considerations. Susan and Alicia might be at fault for wishing to be rid of their encumbering husbands, who they see merely in terms of their wealth, but Austen seems to be more concerned in criticising a society that creates such disastrous marriages, and causes both men and women to be so cynical. Lady Susan is a widow, and therefore has an independent income and is without the need to be married, she has paid her debt to society having been attached to a sick husband for years and is ready to enjoy herself. She may be the biggest coquette in the country, but there is a sympathetic undertone in Austen’s picture of Susan’s attempt at female liberation, that only really founders on her inability to recognise that she has overreached herself in trying to gain the
heart of the truly virtuous Reginald, which to a large extent replicates the Edmund-Mary Crawford relationship in *Mansfield Park*.

It is also an error to believe that Austen restores order by having Reginald marry Frederica, and the ostracised Susan marry the despised Sir James, because the text, like *Mansfield Park*, has raised questions about the nature of British society that remain unresolved. Austen's Carnival queen, with her masks and abilities to create havoc is undiminished at the close of the text, she hints that although no one could be certain as to Susan's state of happiness, she portrays Susan as unchanged, and potentially still a danger. Far more revealing is the way in which Austen chooses to describe the wooing of Reginald. In another example of the carnival reversal in this text, it is Reginald, not Frederica who is described as being, "talked, flattered and finessed into an affection" by Frederica. Despite the fact that *Lady Susan* is a much less sophisticated representation of the debate about appearance and reality than *Mansfield Park*, it is far more explicit in demonstrating Austen's own understanding of how British identity, founded on constructed images of propriety and morality was vulnerable to the influence of transgression and disruption. Throughout the text, particularly as we watch Susan squirm her way out of awkward situations by covering up her manoeuvres and engineering the relations between those around her, Austen continually highlights the dangers of superficial identity that is so much part of British society, and which certainly through social relationships such as marriage, is not only accepted, but condoned.

In fact the society which Austen describes at the close of *Lady Susan* is crucially one in which the carnival transgression remains strong. Although Reginald, the representative of British respectability, takes a least a year to recover from his experience with Susan, his ability to substitute mother for daughter as the object of his desire, resonates with the same incestuous overtones as Susan's transgressive marriage to the 'almost husband' of her own daughter. Significantly, Austen closes the text with carnival inversion in both the major relationships of the narrative, the respectable as well as the chaotic. Crucially, neither stands untainted by the carnivalesque, and through this device Austen explicitly draws attention to the underlying problems of authenticity in the authorised relationship of Frederica and

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57 *Lady Susan*, p.255
Reginald, by demonstrating its parallel with the Carnival marriage of Susan with Sir James.

**Social Critique in *Northanger Abbey***

Austen utilises the disruptive characters of Tom Bertram, and Lady Susan Vernon to subtly debate the vulnerability of British identity and social organisation. However her mock-gothic text *Northanger Abbey* (1817) is far more direct in its polemic concerning Britishness, and the necessity to consolidate and preserve those characteristics of sobriety, control and conservative morality, that distinguish British identity.58 The central narrative is created by Catherine Moreland, described as a fairly typical and unexceptional girl of her class who, gifted with a lively imagination and informed by a diet of novels and Gothic tales, has the tendency to interpret the world around her as if it were fantastic fiction, and allows herself to be carried away by day dreams, rather than seeing the reality of people and situations around her.

*Northanger Abbey* essentially charts the progress and development of Catherine from a misinformed and unrealistic young woman, through an educational experience in which she begins to be able to discriminate between appearance and reality, guided both by her own natural morality and the taste and understanding of the exemplary characters, Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor. In fact what Austen presents the reader with in the narrative is a series of situations in which Catherine is placed in order to learn a lesson about the nature of her society, and to demonstrate how the naïve and unworldly Catherine is forced to continually reassess her first impressions, through her increasing knowledge and understanding. She learns, for example that the Allens' are not reliable as guides to her conduct, that her firm friend Isabella has used their friendship to gain access to her brother, and that the rules of society by which she feels everyone must be governed, are by no means as universally adopted as she has always assumed. Hence her shock at General Tilney's bad manners and the conduct of Captain Tilney in trifling with the affections of Isabella, with no intention of marrying her. What Austen emphasises, through the experience and

disappointments of Catherine, is how the stereotypes of Britishness, the fiction of 
order and propriety, often fall short of the reality.

In contrast to these failures however, Austen not only creates reliable 
characters in Henry and Eleanor, but sets them up as the educators of Catherine. If she 
has been flawed in her viewpoint, Austen provides prescriptive episodes in which the 
heroine is taught to view things differently. Two of the most blunt of these are firstly, 
when Henry Tilney symbolically teaches Catherine how to view a landscape: in 
effect, how to see.

In the present instance, she confessed and lamented her wont of knowledge: 
declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw; and a 
lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which the instructions were 
so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her 
attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great 
deal of natural taste. He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances-
side-screens and perspectives-lights and shades; \(^{59}\)

The second, on the nature of Englishness perhaps reveals the most important polemic 
of the whole text. Having guessed the nature of Catherine’s fantasy about the death of 
Lady Tilney at the hands of her gothic-villain husband, Henry effectively cures 
Catherine of her romantic delusions by giving her another lecture, but this time on her 
identity as an English woman, clearly defining how sensationalism and extremity is 
antithetical to Britishness.

If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have 
hardly words to-Dear Miss Moreland, consider the dreadful nature of the 
suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember 
the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that 
we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, you own sense of the 
probable, your own observation of what has been passing around you- Does our 
education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could 
they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and 
literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a 
neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay 
everything open? Dearest Miss Moreland, what ideas have you been 
admitting? \(^{60}\)

\(^{59}\) Northanger Abbey, p.87  
\(^{60}\) Northanger Abbey, p.159.
The ridiculousness of Catherine's imaginings and the impossibility that anything extreme could occur in Britain is forcefully emphasised by Henry in this episode. However, Austen's commentary voiced through Catherine's subsequent reflection reveals a much more critical attitude to these accepted versions of national identity, and one which suggests Austen's own comparison of Britain with her colonies. The key to this is found in Catherine's reflection about British character because despite admitting a doubt as to the perfection of British people she can, with equanimity, reflect that Britain is secure from extremity. "Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist." In other words England can be judged through comparison with the very factors that mainstream British society associated with life in the Caribbean colonies. It is indeed highly probable that Jane Austen would have been familiar with widely disseminated texts such as Bryan Edwards, *History, both Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793) and other texts that reflected with the growing interest in the Caribbean and the slave trade. Claire Tomalin, has uncovered the fact that Austen's own family were involved with the West Indies not only through the naval careers of her brothers, but also due to the fact that her father had been the trustee of a sugar plantation in Antigua since 1760. "The Revd George Austen became in 1760 a trustee of a plantation in Antigua belonging to an Oxford contemporary, James Nibbs...The Austen's thus had a link with slavery even if a remote one; and indeed few English families of any means in the eighteenth century did not have connections or some link with slavery." It is reasonable to assume that through the work of the Abolitionist poet William Cowper, whom she acknowledged as one of her favourite poets, Austen would have read about with the conditions of slavery. Poems such as, 'The Negro's Complaint' (1793), 'Pity the Poor Africans' (1800) and 'Sonnet to William Wilberforce' (1792) indicated how fervent Cowper was in his polemic. However she also read widely about the nature of empire and conditions in the colonies. David Nokes, in his biography notes that Austen was politically well informed. "She read *Carr's Travels in Spain*, Clarkson's *Abolition of

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the Slave trade, Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia* and Captain Pasley's *Essay on the Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire.*

However, through texts such as Bryan Edwards’ *History*, tales of murder, estate poisonings connected with Obeah and the plight of slaves in the Caribbean, would have been familiar topics for Austen. The fact that she would specifically refer to these ‘Caribbean problems’ in *Northanger Abbey* highlights her own sensitivity to the way in which Britain defined itself in contrast with the moral and social excesses of the Caribbean, as well as other colonies, again supporting the notion that the imperial context was vital to the definition of Britishness as a national identity.

Gothic horror, with its transgressive and anarchic potential is therefore firmly and definitely separated within the text from British identity, and Catherine in order to assume her maturity must obliterate all thoughts of the fantastic and extreme, all interest in the Carnival and the horrific, in order to embrace her identity as a true British woman. The constraints, not only on her behaviour, but also on the range of her imagination, are defined by Henry Tilney. Catherine is mortified into complying with his definitions of respectability.

Nevertheless, Henry’s view of Britishness, like his views on landscape, are challenged in the text. Despite his seeming validation of Britain, what he actually presents is a damning critique of the restrictive nature of a society that is policed from within. What at first sight looks like a defence of Britain is actually complicated by the implication that it is only peaceful because it is subject to incapacitating controls, both by “neighbourhoods of voluntary spies” and secondly “where roads and newspapers lay everything open.” Austen implies that Britain is only peaceful because there is no liberty to be otherwise. Likewise, Henry’s education is also implicitly flawed, because he repeats ‘parrot-like’ contemporary views on taste and style that lack original thought. Austen is severe in the way that she shows Henry to consider Catherine to have progressed only because she agrees with him. He is patronising and over-confident, and in many ways echoes the faults of John Thorpe, who also regards his interests as universally fascinating. What Austen presents us with is the gradual socialisation of Catherine, which is achieved at the cost of a good deal of intellectual conditioning, a fact which Austen is uncomfortable with, because

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64 *Northanger Abbey*, p.159.
her spontaneous and imaginative heroine is literally crushed by Henry's very British views, and there is a critical tone in the description of Henry's influence over Catherine, which cannot be overlooked.

Henry's astonishing generosity and nobleness of conduct, in never alluding in the slightest way to what had passed, was of the greatest assistance to her; and sooner than she could have supposed it possible in the beginning of her distress, her spirits became absolutely comfortable, and capable, as heretofore, of continual improvement by anything he said.65

If Catherine had lived her life previously under a "self-created delusion" of Gothic fictions, Austen raises the uncomfortable prospect that she may have substituted one form of delusion for the fantasy of British identity, which is not only restrictive and stifling, but is in the patriarchal control of the overconfident and patronising Henry Tilney.

Miss Lambe, the Creole focus of Sanditon

The most potentially explicit of Austen's texts with regard to the theme of the Caribbean, remained a fragment. Sanditon (1817) introduced the character of a rich and sickly Creole heiress Miss Lambe who is the focus of attention in the newly created spa-town of Sanditon, and whose supposed wealth has already created a great stir among the local investors.66 Unfortunately not much remains of the novel, although it does include a critique of the fashion for hypochondria, which Austen exposes with her customary satire. However it does confirm Austen's sensitivity regarding the stereotype images of the plantocracy of the Caribbean in the late eighteenth century.

It is assumed, by Mr. Parker and Lady Denham, that all West Indians are fabulously wealth and in the fragmented conversation between the avaricious Lady Denham and Mr. Parker, Austen condenses the prevailing attitudes and fears of the British toward the Creole planters.

A West Indy family and a school. That sounds well. That will bring money.'- No people spend more freely, I believe, than W. Indians' observed Mr Parker, - 'Aye -so I have heard- and because they have full Purses, fancy themselves

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65 Northanger Abbey, p.161.
equal, may be, to your old Country Families. But then, they who scatter their Money so freely, never think of whether they may not be doing mischief by raising the price of Things-And I have heard that's very much the case with your West-injines.\(^{67}\)

In fact, Lady Denham voices the concern that the wealthy sugar planters might undermine the whole economy of Sanditon, and perhaps symbolically the nation. Therefore *Sanditon*, is set up by Austen as a narrative in which the relationship between Britain and the Caribbean could symbolically be debated. However, so little remains of the text that it can only be assumed how this debate would have been played out. Nevertheless, Austen established the way in which Caribbean Otherness in the figure of Miss Lambe, drew attention to the theme of British identity and colonial relationships.

\(^{67}\) *Sanditon*, p.347.
Chapter Five

The Image of the Caribbean as Implicit and Explicit Horror

I have investigated how British identity was constructed as an image of Protestant morality and imperial greatness, in which notions of Carnival excess and transgression were rejected and re-located to form a Caribbean identity. Through figures such as the planter, the pirate and the black slave I have established how the Caribbean zone operated as a symbol of a displaced Carnival heritage which was not only antithetical to Britishness but constituted a site of horror and disturbance. However in this final chapter I will examine how the Caribbean, becomes a metaphor for instability and Carnival transformation. By examining texts such as Dacre’s Zofloya and Shelley’s Frankenstein, I will demonstrate how a Caribbean subtext is implied through the figures of Zofloya and the creature respectively, before moving on to examine Bronte’s Jane Eyre, which I will argue has an explicit theme of Caribbean horror.

I will demonstrate how the monstrous figures in all three texts evoke terror through their unstable identities, Zofloya, the obedient servant metamorphosises in the course of the text into the Devil, Frankenstein’s monster changes from a child-like innocent into a vengeful fiend and Bertha Mason degenerates from a Creole beauty to a raving beast. The characters of Zofloya, the monster and Bertha Mason are confusing and unpredictable which, I will argue, reflects the contemporary stereotype of the Caribbean slave, whose character was a conflation of incongruous characteristics. Indeed, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the image of the Caribbean slave was composed from several conflicting and incompatible representations. Firstly, with the waning of the West India interest’s power during the early nineteenth century, the Caribbean slave ‘inherited’ these stereotype images of debauchery and licentious misrule Maria Nugent, for example, expressed her own fear that the habits of the planters would prove a disastrous example to the slaves who would inevitably copy them. Secondly, contemporary accounts of the slaves as barbarous, were widely circulated by pro-slavers such as Edward Long, who
suggested that the slave was by nature deceptive, lazy and treacherous. The
*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1798) confirmed this in the entry under 'Negro,' which
after an adverse description of physical characteristics continues to describe the nature
of the Negro.

Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race:
idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity,
debauchery, nastiness, and intemperance are said to have extinguished the
principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience.
They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful
example of the corruption of man when left to himself.1

This ‘analysis’ of the Negro was compounded and extended in reports of rebellion,
such as Tacky’s Rebellion in 1760 and at Morant Bay in 1865. For example, images
of blood drinking at Morant Bay that were reported in Britain, described their
cannibal tendencies and also focussed on their lust for revenge and inhumanity to
those who were sacrificed to their barbarism and taste for blood. For example one
report told of how the rebels gouged out the eyes of their victims and mixing their
brains with rum and gunpowder, drank the gruesome mixture.2

Thirdly, these negative accounts of the Caribbean slave appeared throughout
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries while simultaneously equally unrealistic
depictions of the slave as a pitiable, childlike figure, totally dependent on the
philanthropy of the Abolitionists, were commonly found in the descriptions of Anti-
Slavery literature. As Henry Malchow has effectively discussed, the pathetic portrait
of the slave was problematic.

While the intention of the Evangelical abolitionists may have been to portray
the black slave as a “man and brother”, the actual effect of their propaganda-
rendered vivid on canvas, medallions and chinaware, in cheap prints and
ballad sheets, on mementos of all kinds- was to reiterate the Other as a special
kind of childlike suffering, and degraded being, rarely heroic, that became part
of the common coinage of popular culture.3

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2 The Reports of the Morant Bay Rebellion were printed in *The Times*, 20th Nov. 1865; Gad Huemann,
3 H.L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century in Britain* (New York: Stanford
Therefore the Caribbean slave represented a site of slippage and uncertainty for British culture, and came to embody the Carnival through the transgression of a fixed and stable identity, remaining an undefined and therefore potentially destabilising challenge.

Both the positive and negative inscriptions of the slave were fictions that were conveniently produced to support diametric views on the issue of slavery and the images of the Caribbean slave were stereotypical chimera, located in sensationalised and emotive images that were never created to realistically depict the Caribbean population, and in fact were utilised by metropolitan interests in ways that were unapologetically and coarsely exploitative. The crucial point is that the Caribbean Other was only ever utilised as a symbol, and entered British culture as a malleable and plastic concept that could represent the extreme emotions of both terror and pathos. It is the consciously fictional nature of the representation of black identity in British culture that became most significant, because both the pro and anti-slavery factions set up a dialectic in which blackness was made available as a site in which to debate definitions and limits of humanity and progress. The fact that this cultural counter was always overshadowed with ambiguity meant that the reading of blackness was associated with Carnival transgression, and existed on the periphery of humanness, civilisation, and authority, and continually threatened to slip over the boundary of the authorised, into the area of misrule and transgression.

In fact, the identification of the Caribbean slave with Carnival was generally accepted in British culture, irrespective of political faction. For many supporters of the Abolitionist Movement, the black slave was in the paradoxical position of being an equal in theory while at the same time being characteristically distinct, which was in part due to the contradictory images of Caribbean identity. According to Douglas Lorimer, the example of the introduction of a black political leader’s family to London society reflected precisely the problem that was faced by abolitionists who, when confronted, were comfortable only with blackness as an abstract concept.

Not even the most ardent abolitionists were free from these feelings of aversion. Thomas Clarkson recalled that ‘When Christophe’s wife and daughters, all
accomplished women, were brought or introduced by him to Wilberforce, and others in High Life, there was a sort of shrink at admitting them into Society."4

This aversion perhaps demonstrated the way in which the Carnival identity of the Caribbean slave, as insecure and threatening, overwhelmed the logic of even the most publicly sympathetic members of British society.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, and particularly after the interest in abolition had waned in the wake of the Emancipation Act, this trope of blackness, with its contradictions and excesses was still a hugely important cultural symbol in Britain. The Caribbean region remained the repository of the exiled Carnival of British identity, and the symbol of the Caribbean slave, as the embodiment of transgressive and extreme emotion, was clearly consolidated in comparison with the British cultural image of restraint. However, it is the explicit connection between the horror that the black Other embodied for British culture in the Caribbean, and how this corresponds with the representations of transgression in the Gothic texts of British literature, that really indicates how the cultural symbol of the Caribbean site, continued to have far reaching effects on the imagination of mainstream British culture in the nineteenth century.

Zofloya and the Carnival Masquerade.

The racialisation of the gothic terror that is found in Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya The Moor (1806), in which the black slave is finally revealed to be the Devil, was among the texts that openly acknowledged the interchangeability of the symbols of black slave identity with that of a transgressive threat. Although his physical description does not clarify his racial characteristics as a Moor and he is not explicitly described as a Negro, the novel, however, repeatedly emphasises his blackness and the colour of his skin as a mark of difference, which makes him unreadable and unsettling.

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In this Gothic story (which reveals an important debt to Lewis's *The Monk*) Dacre creates a central character, Zofloya, a black manservant, who aids the noblewoman, Victoria, on her path to revenge and moral destruction. The text, follows the conventions of many gothic novels and is set in a historical, southern European context, in this case Venice in the sixteenth century, and in the course of the narrative Zofloya transforms, becoming increasingly disturbing and powerful. However, Dacre's text, specifically draws on the image of Zofloya's blackness to highlight his innate evilness, which is later confirmed when he is revealed as the incarnation of Satan. The Carnival image of the masquerade is evoked through the way Zofloya's blackness becomes a symbol of disguise. His original identity as a loyal and reliable servant is shown to be false, and Dacre uses his black identity to signal the suspect nature of Zofloya's character, which is confirmed as counterfeit.

There are several ways in which Dacre uses a Caribbean subtext as a 'code of horror' in her Gothic novel that operates as a shorthand way of building Zofloya's transgressive identity. Firstly, Dacre self-consciously draws on a racist discourse that associated blackness with horror. This argument, first voiced in Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), demonstrates how colours and skin tones range from the beautiful, found in the appeal of whiteness to the fearsome which is the natural response to blackness. This discourse is used to great effect in Dacre's descriptions of Zofloya. For example, she heightens the tension of Lilla's abduction by Zofloya with a vivid description of the way in which her virtually naked body, described as having the whiteness of "sculptured alabaster" is draped over the shoulder of the black servant, with her golden hair falling down his back. The image of Zofloya's blackness polluting Lilla's body through physical contact is implicit in Dacre's description. This point is reinforced through Victoria's attraction to Zofloya, which shows her to be morally vulnerable. Dacre implies that despite his blackness Victoria is drawn to him even though he is 'awful and indescribable,' signalling her corruption that culminates in the

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suggestion that she becomes his mistress. The sexual theme present in Zofloya's physicality is also evocative of the way in which Caribbean slaves were described in terms of physiognomy, he is strong and agile but is also, like the Caribbean slaves, physically threatening and potentially dangerous.

Secondly, his knowledge of poisons and ability to read Victoria's mind echo contemporary descriptions of the Obeah men in the Caribbean. According to Brian Edwards,

> The truth is that the skill of some Negroes in the art of poisoning has been noticed ever since the colonists became much acquainted with them. Sloane and Barham, who practiced physic in Jamaica in the last century, have mentioned particular instances of it. The secret and insidious manner in which this crime is generally perpetrated, makes the legal proof extremely difficult.

Zofloya is skilled in the art of poisoning, and describes how he can distil various types of poison which can be made to induce specific effects, in which the crimes are undetectable. He also exhibits supernatural attributes, such as the ability to appear when Victoria needs him. This is explained at the close of the text when his true identity is revealed, however throughout the narrative his uncanny skills are associated with his black identity, which is also reminiscent of the practice of Obeah.

Another connection between Zofloya and a Caribbean sub-text is to be found in the overlaps between the language of the Gothic horror narrative and the descriptions of Caribbean society found in the work of historians such as Bryan Edwards and Edward Long. The sensational and imaginative aspects of Caribbean commentators remained unquestioned by their contemporary readers, mainly due to the authors' claims to report facts. Bryan Edwards, for example, goes to great lengths to foreground his history by emphasising the reliability of his sources.

> After all my first object has been truth, not novelty ... From living rather than written information however, have I generally sought assistance when my own resources have proved deficient; and it is my very good fortune to boast acquaintance with men, to whom for local and common knowledge, our statesmen and senators might resort with credit to themselves and advantage to the public.

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6 Zofloya, p. 151
7 Edwards A History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies (Dublin: White, 1793), vol. 1, p. 93.
Nevertheless Edwards’ typically sensationalised the descriptions of the black slaves made them truly terrifying using a language of hyperbole and exaggeration. Indeed historians such as Edward Long and Bryan Edwardes collectively inscribed the Caribbean within a discourse of horror using language that would only otherwise be read in contemporary texts of the Gothic genre, and it can be suggested that Dacre’s text *Zofloya* demonstrated this overlap between the discourse of Caribbean slavery and the discourse of Gothic fiction, both of which are predicated on descriptions of the horrible and terrifying. Edward Long’s reflection on Caribbean slaves is a good example of this shared language. He describes them as, “everywhere degenerated into brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful and superstitious people,” and the evil Moor Zofloya of Dacre’s text with his agenda of corruption and destruction mirrors Edwards image of the slave who can “murder with the most outrageous barbarity.”

**Mary Shelley and Abolition Man**

One of the best examples of this language of monstrosity shared by the discourse of the Caribbean and the Gothic genre in literature is found in Mary Shelley’s text *Frankenstein* (1818). There have been many critical readings of the text, ranging from the feminist critique of Frankenstein’s attempt to usurp the biological function of women, by ‘birthing’ his own offspring, the reading of Frankenstein’s monster as a political symbol of the working classes, and as an allegory of the French Revolution or the contemporary debates surrounding the ‘monster of Irish Nationalism.’ However, there is perhaps another equally plausible interpretation of the text to be found by contextualising the narrative within an

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10 Edwards, vol.1, p.81,
imperial framework, and specifically a Caribbean discourse. In this text the Gothic narrative and the descriptions of the Caribbean are fused.

Henry Malchow suggests that *Frankenstein* can be read within an explicitly Caribbean context and that it is directly related to the slave rebellions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He suggests that the contemporary racial stereotypes in Shelley's society have a direct influence on her portrayal of the monster and cites the similarity between Shelley's Gothic monster, and the Gothic representations of the black in contemporary journals.

In the portrayal of her monster, it is at least plausible that Mary Shelley drew upon contemporary attitudes toward nonwhites—in particular, on fears and hopes of the abolition of slavery in the West-Indies—...Indeed, the particular horror of the monster owes much of its emotional power to this hidden, or "coded," aspect, and the subsequent popularity of the tale through several nineteenth-century editions and on the Victorian stage derived in large part from the convergence of its most emotive elements with the evolving contemporaneous representation of the ethnic and racial difference.  

Malchow suggests that there is overwhelming evidence that Mary Shelley was not only influenced by the political debates around slavery in *Frankenstein*, but also drew upon precisely the shared language of Caribbean monstrosity to present a tale of Gothic terror. In this section, I will develop Malchow's argument further by showing that that Shelley had a comprehensive knowledge of the Caribbean, gained through her own research and which I suggest informed her creation of the monstrous presence within the text.

The primary evidence for an imperial sub-text within *Frankenstein* is that both prior to, and during the writing of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley read the West Indian histories of Bryan Edwards, and Mungo Park’s *The Journal of a Mission into the Interior of Africa, in the year 1805* (1815) and that echoes of these works can be seen in her novel. 16 The main body of evidence for Shelley's interest in the Caribbean is found in her journals, which detail the books which she and Percy Bysshe Shelley read, both together and independently. In 1814 for example, she read William Smellie’s

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15 Malchow, p.9.
The Philosophy of Natural Science (1790). There is a specific reference to his text in the entry for Tuesday 25th October, which records how Shelley "read elements of Morality and Smellie."[17] Smellie was a biologist who presented the argument that man had been graded by nature, and that by a process of natural evolution the Negro was indeed far removed from the European. In his popular analysis of races Smellie stated, "What a difference between an enlightened philosopher and a brutal Hottentot. Still, however Nature observes, for the wisest purposes, her uniform graduation."[18] In the December of this year, Mary and Percy also read Mungo Park's travels, prompting her diary entry on Wednesday 14th of December.

Read and finished Mungo Park's travels - they are very interesting and if the man were not so prejudiced they would be a thousand times more so, but those Institutions must always have Christians-.[19]

The following week she and Percy read Bryan Edwards' text, and there can be little doubt she was familiar with the language of Gothic horror that both these texts rely on to communicate their experiences of the Caribbean. The depth of the impression these texts made on her is revealed in an absent minded drawing or doodle on the opening page of her next journal. This page has the word Mary depicted on a drawing of a little island, and by the side the names Mungo Park and Bryan Edwardes. This might suggest that of all the many books she lists as having been read by her and Percy, these two accounts seem to have made a more personal impression on her.

There is also evidence that Mary Shelley's interest in Caribbean events continues while she is in Geneva, a few weeks after she began to think about writing her ghost story. Matthew Gregory Lewis came to visit the house where Byron and the Shelleys were staying. Lewis had just returned from a visit to his own plantation in Jamaica. What is particularly interesting is that during his short stay Lewis asked Percy Shelley to witness an amendment to his will that provided for the welfare of his slaves.

a tablespoon of the spirit of aniseed with a small quantity of spermaceti —
9 drops of human blood — 7 grains of gunpowder
1/2 an oz. of putrefied brain — 13 mashed grave worms —

The Pecksie Doormouse
The Maie & her Elfin Knight

[two leaves torn out here]

1 'Pecksie' and 'Dormouse' were both nicknames for Mary.
2 Shelley used 'Elfin Knight' as a pseudonym on several occasions; in October 1816 he sent his 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' to Leigh Hunt for publication in the Examiner with this signature, and the critique he wrote for Godwin's novel Mandeville in December 1817 was published over the initials E. K. In February 1821, when writing to Peacock of his Defence of Poetry, he described himself as 'the knight of the shield of shadow and the lance of gossamere'. (PBS L 11.26 1.) Shelley may have taken this name from Spenser's Faerie Queene, where the Red Cross Knight is also described as the Elfin Knight, but it may be derived from one of the many folk-ballads on the theme of the Elfin Knight. These ballads fall into two main groups: those in which the Elfin Knight abducts a lady, who eventually outwits and kills him, and a second group where the Knight asks his lady to perform a certain task to win him, and she in return sets him a task no less difficult as a condition of her acceptance of his suit. The lady in the ballads of the first group is usually named Lady Isabel, but in at least two versions of the story is actually called May. (The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Francis James Child (1882), Parts I and II.)
The journal entry of the 20th of August 1816 is as follows;

On this evening, Byron, Shelley and Polidori witnessed and signed a codicil to M.G. Lewis’ will in which he stipulated that the heirs to his Jamaican estates must, in order to inherit, promise to visit the estates for at least 3 months in every 3rd year. He also stated that Negro slaves belonging to him at the time of his death must not be sold.  

It is therefore possible to surmise that the horror story that Shelley attempted was, in fact, influenced by her knowledge of the Caribbean as well as through the first hand accounts of the Caribbean from information provided by an influential writer of Gothic texts, Matthew Lewis.

I have suggested that in British culture, the identity of the Caribbean slave was a conflation of often starkly contradictory characteristics, and I will examine how, Mary Shelley reflected parallel antagonisms, through Frankenstein’s creature. The creature projected characteristics of extreme violence and affection that are echoed in many histories of the black populations. For example, Mungo Park suggested that most savage races displayed this contradiction.

They are of a gloomy disposition, and are supposed never to forgive an injury....This fierce and unrelenting disposition is, however, counterbalanced by many good qualities: they display the utmost gratitude and affection toward their benefactors.” This combination of vengefulness and affection was, in fact a stereotype commonly applied to any savage or primitive races.  

Frankenstein’s monster, like the Caribbean slave, is capable of barehanded murder. In fact the language used by the monster to describe the murder of William as the symbol of innocence, “I gazed upon my victim and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph” is similar to that used by Bryan Edwards to describe the destruction of the planter family.  

At Ballard’s valley, they surrounded the overseers house at about four in the morning, in which about eight to ten White people were in bed, every one of which was butchered in the most savage manner and literally drank their blood mixed with rum. At Ester and the other estate, the exhibited the same tragedy

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20 Feldman and Scott-Kilvert, p.125.
21 Malchow, p.21.
22 Frankenstein, p.137.
and then set fire to the buildings and canes. In one morning they murdered between thirty and forty Whites, not sparing infants at the breast, before their progress was stopped.\textsuperscript{23}

However, Shelley also demonstrates how the creature is child-like and sensitive and searches for his 'father,' Victor Frankenstein, in the vain hope of experiencing affection. The whole episode in the cottage demonstrates how the creature is capable of generosity, love and understanding, which is inconsistent with either the attack on William, or the calculated framing of the servant who is consequently accused of the child's murder. Significantly, the actions of the monster, such as his destructive impulse to burn his enemies property, and lust for vengeance, seem to have been lifted straight out of Edwards' text, and feeds into the stereotype of arsonist tendencies which Edwards claimed was a characteristic of the Caribbean slave, a commonplace belief that would later be used by Charlotte Bronte, when Bertha Mason sets light to Thornfield in \textit{Jane Eyre} (1847).

The Monster's repellent form also picks up on the common interpretation of the Negro as terrifying. Edmund Burke, as previously described, in his \textit{Philosophical Enquiry} (1757) provided a typical example of the horrific nature of the black features in his anecdote of Mr. Cheselden's blind boy, which again finds echoes in Shelley's text. There is a definite similarity between the natural response of the blind boy's terror at encountering the black woman for the first time related in Burke's \textit{Enquiry}, and William Frankenstein's exclamations of horror produced on first sight of the monster.\textsuperscript{24} There are two very specific incidents in which the physical appearance of the monster evokes terror. The first is where the monster appears in a village.

\begin{quotation}
At sunset I arrived at a village. How miraculous did this appear! The huts, the neater cottages, and the stately houses engaged my admiration by turns. The vegetables in the gardens, the milk and cheese that I saw placed at the windows of some of the cottages, allured my appetite. One of the best of these
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{23} Edwards, \textit{History}, p.73.

\textsuperscript{24} Edmund Burke relates the anecdote of a boy who having regained his sight is "struck with horror" on his first sighting of a black woman, in order to demonstrate how distaste for blackness is natural and not learned behaviour, Edmund, Burke, \textit{A Philosophical enquiry into the Origins of our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful} (1757), (ed.), Boulton (Oxford; Oxford university Press, 1990), p.15.
I entered; but I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted.  

The second occurs in his meeting with William Frankenstein.  

At this time a slight sleep relieved me from the pain of reflection, which was disturbed by the approach of a beautiful child, who came running into the recess I had chosen, with all the sportiveness of infancy. Suddenly as I gazed on him, an idea seized me that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. ...As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream.  

William, like the blind boy is said to be unprejudiced and therefore their reactions are judged to be natural, and not the result of social conditioning.  

The reading of the Caribbean sub-text in Frankenstein can also be supported by the obvious parallel within the texts between Bryan Edwards's description of the slaves and the physiognomy of Frankenstein's creature who is described as physically large and threatening, with the ability to survive adverse conditions. The apologists for slavery such as Edward Long and Bryan Edwards advocated the use of slaves because they were physically better able to withstand the punishing temperatures of the tropics which they thought would have been fatal to the European.  

Negroes imported from Africa, are born of enslaved parents, are bred up as slaves themselves, and as such have been habituated to labour from their infancy. On this account we are told that one able Negro was capable of performing the work of four Indians.  

Indeed, one of the more generally accepted reasons for the continued use of African slaves was that they were more adapted to working in hostile conditions, and could subsist on the rough food of maize and vegetables for which their digestion was 'more suited.' It was commonly circulated that a sophisticated diet which included meat and luxuries, that is the diet of the European, would actually prove detrimental to the Negro health. According to Richard Dunn,

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25 Frankenstein, p. 102  
26 Frankenstein, p. 138.  
The slaves ate decidedly less well than the agricultural labourer in England. Their diet consisted of meager rations of corn, plantains, sweet potatoes, peas and beans supplemented by a little salt fish. The custom in all English islands was to give the carcasses of diseased cattle and horses to the Negroes.\(^{28}\)

Therefore the monster's description of the berries and forest-foraged food that he survived on would automatically connect a reader of the novel with those accounts. His physical description is reminiscent of those of the Africans in the narratives of the West Indies. He is depicted as abnormally strong and for the most part of the narrative is demonstrably more bodily able than Frankenstein, which again echoes the narrative of Edwards.

**The Creature in the Metropolis.**

The reading of Frankenstein as an interrogation of the image of Caribbean slavery is also supported by the way in which Shelley places the creature in a contemporary European context. Unlike other gothic texts, the monstrous presence of Frankenstein is a direct threat to nineteenth-century northern European society, and I suggest that through this, Shelley acknowledges the arguments about the acceptance of the emancipated slave as an equal. The creature moves in secret and is capable of travelling freely and practically unobserved through the length of continental Europe, as well as the whole of Britain, even being able to access the remotest islands of Scotland with apparent ease. The fear engendered by the monster is therefore that this 'alien' being is not an external threat kept at a safe distance in a colonial hinterland, but that he exists in the midst of European civilisation, potentially causing chaos and disruption at will.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Mary Shelley would have been aware of the many debates surrounding the shared humanity of all men which was a vital constituent within the 'man and brother' rhetoric, and it is possible that through her novel she raises fundamental questions as to how far this brotherhood extended. Frankenstein explores the reaction of post abolition British society and the reality of

negotiating with the Caribbean slave on equal terms. Shelley demonstrates that the Caribbean black, the cultural symbol of carnival transgression within British culture, would inevitably prove too transgressive for British national identity. By allowing this symbol of Carnival back into British culture the fictions of British identity could potentially be destroyed, and this is what Shelley appears to illustrate through her narrative, because the monster does destroy the imperialists, Frankenstein and Clerval, frustrates the efforts of Walton and wreaks havoc on civilised society, represented by Frankenstein’s family.

Shelley also allows the creature to speak, which again supports the Caribbean subtext of the novel, because it mirrors the way in which abolitionists had allowed slaves to speak of their experiences. Shelley provides the space in which her gothic terror can address those who have assumed his monstrosity: Victor, Walton and the reader of the narrative. In fact, by giving the monster a voice, Shelley forces the reader to interrogate the notion of perspective. Her monster is no longer a plastic concept to be interpreted, and cannot easily be dismissed merely as a symbol of gothic terror. He has an identity and a voice. This is most effectively shown through the monster’s own accounts and commentary, which has generic echoes of the slave narrative and shares the heritage of the spiritual autobiography made popular by Defoe in the early eighteenth century. There is a similarity, for example, with Frederick Douglass’s narrative in which he describes his early life. Douglass states, “I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having been any authentic record containing it,” and on discussing his childhood in the midst of white children he states pathetically “I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privileges.” Comparing these with the monsters description of his first reminiscences, certain similarities arise. The creature says, “It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct.”

By having the monster speak, Shelley allows him to confront Frankenstein. To make him give accounts and justify why he created him and to ask him to take

responsibility for his existence. If the monster represents the Caribbean slave, within this narrative, Shelley presents her nineteenth-century readers with the horror of having to justify the existence of slavery, which within the rhetoric of abolition was now viewed as unjustifiable and morally wrong. As Chris Baldick recognises in his analysis of the imperial interpretation of Frankenstein,

As Frankenstein’s monster demands acknowledgement of kinship from his creator, who is in turn recognised as a brother by Walton in his letters home to his sister, so the impossibility of disavowing the monstrous consequences of imperialism is brought home to the metropolis itself. 31

Frankenstein makes his own monster, in the same way that British society has created its own monsters of Caribbean black identity and the fear of the repressed Carnival forces of violence and sexuality, social transgression and misrule, which were transferred onto and contained within that identity.

Through Victor, Clerval and Walton, Shelley critiques those who represent the dependence of Britishness on an imperial identity that cannot exist outside of exploration and colonisation. The actions of Victor Frankenstein, in particular, reveal the problematics of ‘creating’ subjects and slaves through imperial power. Frankenstein makes his monster from a thirst for conquest over nature, this is clearly presented alongside Walton’s exploration of geographical territory, and demonstrates the parallels between their imperialism. This is also echoed by the presence of Clerval, who intends to become an Orientalist, and Shelley reveals an anxiety about the consequences of blind ambition. She centralises the way in which the imperial subject is treated as plastic material in her contemporary society, particularly in the discussions over slavery, and uses the symbol of the monster’s body, which is a collection of parts from many sources, to highlight how the identity of the Caribbean Other, at any one time, can be a random selection of characteristics, from many different subject identities, put together piecemeal, but ultimately making an incongruous whole. It is interesting that Franco Moretti, highlights precisely this point when he refers to the whole project of creating the monster as intentionally flawed,

30 Frankenstein, p.98.
and that Frankenstein's will to create a man is a lie. "Even before he begins to live, this new being is already monstrous, already a race apart. He must be so, he is made to be so: he is created, but on these conditions."  

What Shelley seems to identify is the way in which the Caribbean identity was perceived in Britain as a problematic area of fused cultural and racial identities. The symbol of the natural man, the wild pagan in Africa, was simple to negotiate because in such a construction he was from a different continent and spoke a different language. The problem with the Caribbean, for British society, was that the former slave had begun through the abolition movement, to speak, both literally and also politically, through the increase of rebellions in the early nineteenth century.

Caribbean identity was the result of a fusion of cultures both European and African: a 'mulatto identity'. Frankenstein's creation can therefore be read as the monster of racial fusion for British culture, an unwanted and demonised progeny, the illegitimate brother whose claims for justice threatened to destabilise and destroy the sanctioned and legitimate.

Gothic Half-Breed The Caribbean as a Site of Cultural Fusion.

Edward Long's *Candid Reflections upon the Judgement lately awarded by the Court of the King's Bench...On what is commonly called the Negroe-Cause* (1772) discusses at length the physiological problems that inter-racial relationships would cause. He discusses particularly the physical degeneration which he associates with mixed blood, but more specifically the mental corruption that he felt was inevitable.

The Lower classes of women in England, are remarkably fond of the blacks for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the law permitted them. By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. This in the course of a few generations or more, the English blood will become so contaminated that this mixture, and from the ups and downs of life, this alloy may spread so extensively, as even to reach the middle and then the higher orders of the people till the whole nation resembles the Portuguese and the Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind.

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31 Baldick, p.147
This is a venomous and dangerous ulcer that threatens to disperse its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it.\textsuperscript{33}

This analysis highlights the anxiety over miscegenation and Long also elaborates on the subject of the mental problems he sees as a natural result of inter-breeding. This profile of the mixed race Other in the Caribbean sets up a resonance with the image of the monster's instability, and extremely violent rages. The Caribbean mulatto was a conflation of contradiction and barbarism, but had a specific disposition of unpredictability and insanity. The black Other was a known danger, but the mulatto was an ambivalent and confused mixture of races.

Contemporary writers, like Long, Edwards and even Matthew Lewis suggested that interracial mixture resulted in unnatural offspring. Lewis noted that "Mulattoes...are almost universally weak and effeminate persons, and thus their children are difficult to rear."\textsuperscript{34} They were often described as sickly and yellowish in complexion, which strongly echoes the description of the monster in his first appearance within the text. However, in the absence of significant physical evidence for this abnormality, which went beyond the superficial comments on skin-colour, the common association of the mixed race Other with mental dysfunction, was enforced. The correlation between the unstable passion of the monster and the monster as an unnatural product of symbolic or cultural miscegenation therefore suggests a reading of its extreme and violent anger as an example of the madness inherent in the 'half-breed' who is caught between two worlds and cannot exist in either. Indeed, this common term used to describe those of mixed race suggests a being that is not quite complete, or perhaps a confused amalgamation of incongruous components.

Frankenstein himself voices his surprise that his work, constructed from beautiful parts, should have resulted in a form so hideously revolting.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his

\textsuperscript{33} Edward Long, \textit{Candid Reflections Upon the Judgement lately awarded by the Court of the King's Bench...On what is commonly called the Negroe-Cause} (London: n.p, 1772), pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{34} Matthew Lewis, \textit{Journal of a West Indian Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica,} 2 vol (London: n.p, 1834) p.94-95
hair was lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. 35

Despite the fact that he attempted to create a perfect creature, Frankenstein is horror-struck by the overall result, in which beautiful features stand out only to emphasise the hideousness of the whole.

Another similarity can be located in the anxiety around the notion that these Gothicised half-breeds, as they were commonly depicted, might engender another generation who would replicate and even increase the already abhorrent racial mixtures. The degree of horror at the prospect of future mixed generations is enormous and the vision of being overrun by aliens is a terror in most contemporary accounts of the Caribbean and Victor Frankenstein shares this fear. When he considers the future consequences of making a female, a mate for his monster he reflects on the potential horror.

Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?...I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race. 36

The race of devils can be read as the inter-racial mulattos who threaten to pollute the ‘pure races’ of the world. Frankenstein’s anxiety reflects Long’s opinion that miscegenation would eventually lead to the eradication of the ‘purer strains’ of the species. The monster represents the horror of cultural miscegenation, and his refusal to create a female creature is his attempt to prevent the realisation of this nightmare.

35 Frankenstein, p.55.
36 Frankenstein, p.161
Frankenstein and the Discourse of Slavery.

This reading of the language of race, racial difference and miscegenation in Frankenstein also notes the novel's use of the vocabulary of slavery. For example, Walton describes how Victor, "appeared to despise himself for being the slave of passion,"\(^{37}\) and Victor himself compares himself to slaves of antiquity, "I was like the Arabian, who had been buried with the dead," when he relates how he becomes obsessed with creating life.\(^{38}\) However perhaps the most significant aspect of this use of the concept of slavery is the way in which it fluidly moves between the monster and Frankenstein. Initially, and problematically, it is Victor who is enslaved by his desire to create the monster. The idea, of constructing a being from dead matter is his obsession. He even describes himself as enslaved by his own ambition. Then, once having achieved his scientific breakthrough, he is condemned to follow his monster until death, bonded to his pursuit, and again, enslaved. The monster, by contrast is not free; but although he is trapped within his hideous body, and the slave to his declarations of revenge, he is paradoxically more autonomous than his creator.

It is Frankenstein's slavery that is not only more clear-cut within the text, but also less within his control. In an ironic inversion of the usual relationship between master and servant, Frankenstein becomes the bondsman for the monster, who ultimately overhelms his life, which is made explicit, when the creature says,

\[
\text{Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have the power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator but I am you master; obey!}^{39}\]

This also resonates with the image of the way in which slaves were presented as paradoxically unsympathetic to those who they gained control over. Bryan Edwards discusses at the length how to be subject to a slave was the most miserable condition he could imagine,

\(^{37}\) Frankenstein, p.27.
\(^{38}\) Frankenstein, p.50.
\(^{39}\) Frankenstein, p.162.
Of all the degrees of wretchedness endured by the vices of men, the greatest assuredly is the misery which is felt by those who are unhappily doomed to be the Slave of Slaves, a most unnatural relation...when inverted with command the Negro give full play to their revengeful passions and exercise all wantonness of cruelty without restraint or remorse. 40

Although Frankenstein and Walton are linked to the imperial subtext of the narrative, it is through the character of Clerval, that Shelley really debates the blindness of imperial ideology. He is after all a man of empire, the embodiment of that national appetite of expansion and conquest. Victor states,

But in Clerval I saw the image of my former self; he was inquisitive and anxious to gain experience and instruction. The difference in manners which he observed was to him an inexhaustible source of instruction and amusement. He was also pursuing an object he had long had in view. His design was to visit India, in the belief that he had in his knowledge of its various languages, and in the views he had taken of its society, the means of materially assisting the progress of European colonization and trade. In Britain only could he further the execution of his plan. 41

Here Shelley is explicit. If Victor's project was the creation of the monster, and is symbolic of the Caribbean mulatto, then Clerval similarly designs to repeat the process in the 'New Empire' in India. Throughout the text, as Frankenstein battles with his nemesis, Clerval is depicted going about his preparations for a career in the colonies. Frankenstein and Clerval share a passion for exploration, exploitation and control, which neither of them critiques or sees in a negative light, and Shelley reveals deep concerns about the significance of slave emancipation, and the difficulty of reconciling a future for British identity of imperialism, whilst acknowledging the rights and humanity of former slaves.

In short, by humanising the Caribbean black, through emancipation, Shelley indicates that at least two problematic agendas were raised. The first was the complication this posed for colonisation, because the subject races could no longer be seen merely as a subhuman workforce, and the second was that the Carnival identity

40 Bryan Edwards, P.78  
41 Frankenstein, p.153.
which had been dismissed as an essentially a black characteristic, threatened to expose
the repressions of British national identity.

Shelley's novel draws heavily on conventions of folk tradition and stock
carnival themes to create its apprehension, for example the return of the dead, and the
traditions of monsters and unnatural spirits are all evoked in the narrative. However it
is as the carnival trope of the 'rag-man', the folk figure traditionally dressed in shreds
and patches that the creature is most clearly evoked. Although in the macabre
gothicised revision of the tradition, his rags and patches are not made of material, but
are body parts. These traditional mummers of British carnival, had their faces
blackened to prevent recognition, and were disguised in clothes of rags and during
May Day festivals they caused disruption and occasional rioting. Their anonymity
meant that they were often the most disturbing figures of a Carnival, and were
particularly associated with ritual of regeneration and rebirth. Therefore, the monsters
presentation as, "the work of muscles and arteries,"42 mirrors the transgressive image
of the mummers who were, "disguised either by a poor attempt at dressing in
character or by strips of paper or ribbon sewn to their everyday clothes and hanging
from hats over their faces."43

Several other parallels can be drawn between the creature and figures of the
pagan folk and Carnival traditions of the British Isles and Europe. He can be read as a
combination of the Green Man, who was the original personification of the process of
regeneration experienced through nature, the Wicker giants who were effigies of men
of enormous stature who would be burned at the end of fertility festivals and also the
Wild Man. The latter is particularly interesting because this ancient character,
traditionally located in Switzerland always underwent a ritualised death from which
he is revived by a fraudulent doctor. According to Alexander Helm,

The wild Man is known as a character in Folk Ceremonial from an early
date...In Switzerland the character is known as the protector of cattle and at
Obertsdorf in the Bavarian Alps a Wild Man dance is still performed with its
roots in what appears to have been an original cattleman celebration.

42 Frankenstein, p.55.
Frequently the festivals involved the death of the Wild Man who is brought back to life by a quack doctor.\textsuperscript{44}

The crudeness of the monster's physiognomy and behaviour suggests a connection with this older mythology of ritual and carnival.

Another character of the Carnival that is revived through Shelley's monster is that of the 'hobgoblin' a mischievous spirit that is reputed to revel in creating great misfortune and unpredictable chaos.\textsuperscript{45} In his own gleeful account the monster describes how after murdering the William Frankenstein, he effectively frames the innocent servant by placing the evidence of a stolen locket in her pocket while she lies asleep. "Thanks to the lessons of Felix and the sanguinary laws of man I had now learned now to work mischief."\textsuperscript{46} The servant after a mistrial is sent to her death. This image of the monster as a gruesome and sinister imp is continued throughout the text. He mockingly leaves a trail for Frankenstein to follow to ensure that he maintains his desperate pursuit. Frankenstein tells of how, "he left marks in writing on the barks of trees or cut in stone that guided me and instigated my fury," the monster constantly teases and goads him until he is certain of his destruction. The face of the monster at the window, distorted and hideous presents the Carnival image of terror induced by the monster that creeps up and surprises its victim from the darkness. As Shelley herself described, it was her intention to create a story that would, "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror-one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the heart."

Anne Mellor in Mary Shelley, makes the point that the Frankenstein myth is unique, both in content and in origin.

Frankenstein invents the story of a man's single handed creation of a living being from dead matter...Mary Shelly created her myth single-handedly. All other myths of the western or eastern world's whether of Dracula, Tarzan, Superman or more traditional; religious systems, derive from folklore or communal ritual practices.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Helm, p.37.
\textsuperscript{45} According to the Oxford English Dictionary 2nd edition, the hobgoblin was an 'object with which to inspire dread or apprehension
\textsuperscript{46} Frankenstein, p.38
\textsuperscript{47} Anne Mellor, Mary Shelly, p.76
However, what Mellor overlooks is the way in which the text does derive from the traditions of Carnival, because, the Monster, made as it is from the shreds and patches of inanimate corpses, is the embodiment of the Carnival force, which is set up within the narrative as the opposition to progressive Enlightened thought. The enlightened reason of Victor Frankenstein ultimately produces a release of those very carnival transgressions which he is so intent on dispelling.

Frankenstein's reliance on a discourse of Carnival is further revealed through Victor's account of his education. Victor's interest in the works of ancient philosophers suggests his knowledge of necromancy and magic. "I read and studied the wild fancies of these writers with delight; they appeared to me treasures known to few besides myself...In spite of the intense labour and the wonderful discoveries of modern philosophers, I always came away from my studies discontented and unsatisfied." Therefore Victor alerts the reader to the sterility of modern science in terms of the imagination. Although Frankenstein later learns the error of studying these fantastic and ancient texts, the possibility of breaking with the strictures of empiricism always remains attractive. He refers to it as a 'fatal impulse' and although both his father and his professors at the University of Ingolstadt undermine alchemy as unscientific, it remains an important discourse in the novel. These alchemical myths are a central component of the novel's imagination because they indulge the idea of transgression. Disrupting the natural order that was so important for Enlightened thinkers. The transforming of lead into gold and the raising of ghosts and devils, while being diametrically opposed to the rationalism of the contemporary world still held a fascination for society overall. In his discussion of the decline of magic in society, Keith Thomas, suggests that contemporary anthropologists recognise the importance of the concept of magic within a social environment, "Anthropologists today are unsympathetic to the view that magic is just bad science, they stress its symbolic and its expressive role rather than its practical one."

Shelley, through her own use of the supernatural Gothic genre certainly highlighted the culturally importance of the magical tale. Through the mixing of rational science and

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48 *Frankenstein*, p.38.
alchemy Victor produces his monster and Shelley demonstrates how the folk myths with their transgressive themes of the supernatural, the beastly and the violent have not really been exorcised by modern rationalism, but have merely been suppressed. This can be read in stark contrast to the work of her contemporary author Jane Austen, who is compelled ideologically to remove the possibility of a Carnival resurgence in a contemporary context, as represented for example by the theatrical at *Mansfield Park*.

Despite Victor's attempt to steer his interest away from superstitious studies he is fatally attracted to them, almost against his will. He attempts to repress his desire for the outlawed study of the alchemists, but it is too strong a force to deny. Here Shelley is explicit in her anxieties that surround the whole notion of the exclusive dependency on rational thought, which ultimately leads to a wholesale rejection of that which is irrational. She demonstrates a particular sensitivity to the way in which these transgressive imaginings recur, and the power they exert over the subconscious of individual, despite their intellectual rationalisation.

She is also one of the first authors to represent this struggle as a clearly psychological, internal dilemma, in which Frankenstein is seen to be divided between his rational self, which rejects the possibility of the validity of myths such as the raising of the dead, and his subconscious which is deeply fascinated by the study of these outlawed texts, and which causes his frustration with the dry study of empirical science. This division of the self recurs later in the century in a more developed form in texts such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1895) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1899), novels that clearly investigate the psychological fracture between the image of the respectable, civilised and rational man and his demonic alter ego. Shelley's text therefore prefigures this idea, but instead of Victor undergoing the physical process of transformation, the monster he releases takes an externalised form. His repressed Carnival urges lead him to create the nameless monster, who, while not representing his alter ego, does reflect those stock characteristics of Carnival such as

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excessive emotion, violence and the disruption and inversion of the naturalised order of relations with his master.

His objectification of nature and the natural, which is his overwhelming characteristic as a scientist has caused Victor to deny that he himself is part of nature. He has, through his obsession with empirical study, rejected his own implication as a natural being, in a quest to be outside or beyond the range of study. The monster is therefore not an alter ego within, but a representation of a natural Carnival self, not objective but completely subjective.

Part. II: The Horror of the Caribbean Carnival.

The first part of this chapter examined how the identity of the Caribbean slave occupied a site of transposed Carnival for the British culture that was predicated largely on conflated and contradictory characteristics, particularly those that were advanced by factions involved in question of Abolition and Emancipation. The next section of the chapter will develop this argument through two routes. Firstly, I will examine the way in which British travel writers and commentators began to uncover evidence for a cultural fusion between Europe and Africa that, first noted in the wake of the emancipation by religious zealots and missionaries who went to convert the freed slaves to Christianity, presented a very different image of the Caribbean to the one that had been assumed by the Anti-slavery groups in the metropolis. Secondly, I will reveal how, and to what extent this new Creole identity was negatively inscribed in British literature as impenetrable, highlighting how Creole culture, with its central focus on African myth and the supernatural, gave rise to its re-inscription within British culture as a zone of fear and terror.

The Post-emancipation "Brother".

The British Abolition movement constructed a fictional representation of the Caribbean slave in order to generate support for their political movement. The image of the "Noble Slave" child-like and innocent, denied basic human rights and
significantly kept in ‘heathen’ immorality through lack of access to Christianity, was the popular fantasy around which the Abolitionists built their agenda. This contrasted starkly with the image promoted by those with slaving interests, who had created a diametric image to that of the Abolitionists and framed the Caribbean slave in the language of the animal, as a debased savage who was unrecognisable as human. The crucial point for this discussion is that both sides of the argument were based on fantasies. Irrespective of the argument, Caribbean slaves provided a mere source of material and meant that they could be exploited as effectively in the cultural imagination of Britain as they were physically on the sugar plantations. The slave was voiceless and therefore free to be (mis)interpreted by whatever faction chose to involve itself in this highly emotive political debate.

Paradoxically, however it can be argued that the most definite, long-term damage to the rehabilitation of the Caribbean slave’s image was done by those well-meaning Abolitionists whose stated aim was to alleviate the sufferings of the Caribbean slaves. They, like the slavers, presented fictitious arguments about the people of the Caribbean, which revolved around the notion that the black slave was essentially the same as a British worker, but one who had also been denied personal freedom and access to the truth of Protestantism. For the Abolitionist these lost souls were devoid of any culture, existing in a permanent condition of childhood from which, given the two things that they had been denied, that is proper religious instruction and the dignity of paid labour, they would then automatically blossom into black-skinned versions of the lower classes in Britain. This highly contentious line of argument was seemingly evidenced by the presence of former slaves whose narratives were published and widely distributed, as well as those such as Mary Seacole and Frederick Douglass who toured giving lectures and seminars on the slave trade, and who presented the acceptable face of blackness which embraced both Christianity and British culture. Henry Louis Gates, in the preface to his anthology, Classic Slave Narratives (1987) has called these representatives “a small group of talented and articulate ex-slaves.” However, these exemplary former slaves often presented constructions of themselves that had been edited by the emancipators and abolitionists
and were not representative of the majority of the black population in the Caribbean. Nor were they typical of the growing black communities in cities such as Liverpool and London.\(^5\) The ‘visible’ and voiced black presence in British society was small and confined to ex-slaves who were recruited into the antislavery lecture circuit, ‘pet’ black boys kept for exotic decoration, or the occasional black servant, such as Gory, Lord Monboddo’s manservant, of whom Boswell commented that he could see “little or no difference” between him and the native Scots.\(^5\)

It is significant therefore that the image of brotherhood that was sustained through these high-profile images of the articulate ex-slave was unsustainable in the post-Abolition period when the freed slaves, despite the hopes of the emancipators, fell far short of expectation. Instead of transforming into a model region of Christian piety and moral progress, that was the fantasy that had been projected, the reality of Caribbean culture presented a starkly different picture. The difficulties were aptly summarised by W.P. Livingstone in his text *Black Jamaica* (1899), which although deeply problematic in its own racist interpretations of the Caribbean, provided a striking retrospective analysis of this post emancipation period.

If however the owners had been wrong in treating them as brute stock, the British public made a mistake in considering them fit to be ordinary subjects of the State. Throughout the agitation there had been no intention to provide for their future direction, the idea had been simply to give them their freedom at any cost.\(^5\)

The notion that the interest of the Abolitionists did not extended beyond the political action of emancipation is interesting because it raises questions about the overall motivation of the movement, which after having achieved its stated aim of the emancipation of the slaves, was unprepared to deal with the legacy of slavery as it existed in the reality of the Caribbean. Moreover it resulted in the Abolitionists having to finally face the fact that the black population was not culturally and socially blank.

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It was not waiting for the metaphorical gifts of 'Christianity' and 'British culture', but over the two hundred years of slavery, had evolved an identity that was not only distinctly Caribbean, but would prove obstructive to their smooth passage to full "brotherhood" in the eyes of their supposed Christian liberators.

The picture that had been so long promoted by the emancipators was shattered, particularly by the Baptist and Methodist ministers who travelled to the Caribbean in the post-Abolition era in order to convert the unfortunate heathen. J.M Phillippo, a Baptist missionary, gave his own accounts of Jamaica, which he called, a "slave cursed sink of abomination." He was among many ministers who were surprised and horrified by the enduring nature of African customs among the freed slaves, and also the way in which Christianity had been incorporated into existing African customs. His reflections on the Baptist minister James Coulthard reveal this cultural clash.

The difficulties he had to encounter were such as few men could have been adapted to meet. Crowds of people flocked around him calling themselves Baptists—many had already made a Christian profession: but their notions of Christ were very often associated with the most absurd superstitions54.

There evolved in the 1820s for example, a sub-branch of the Baptist church, which became known as the Native Baptist church, which was an important missionary venture. It was led by black Baptist ministers who were, for the most part, freed American slaves who practised in Jamaica. In the post emancipation period the European missionaries were horrified at the way in which this sect had deteriorated. As William Gardner claims,

> With few exceptions Native Baptist churches became associates of men and women who, in too many cases mingled the belief and practise of Mialism with religious observance... Their leaders or "daddies" as a class were overbearing, tyrannical and lascivious and united the authority of the slave driver with the darkest forms of spiritual despotism55.

55 William Gardner, *History of Jamaica from its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the present Time* (London: Elliot Stock, 1873), p.358
Gardner's views were typical of those missionaries who were forced to confront the reality that Caribbean culture was a hybrid, and that their religion had become, as they saw it, polluted with superstitions and overhangs of savage African customs, which they negatively reported as evidence of corruption.

There were numerous other examples of the way in which the British image of the slave was shattered by the reality, and in many cases this revisioning led to a hostile backlash, from those anti-slavers who had previously been supportive. The freed slaves were now unsympathetically portrayed as unable or unwilling to take what was generally seen as the philanthropic opportunity for civilisation and Christianity that had been offered to them. They were vilified as perverse and wantonly savage. Anthony Trollope in his travelogue of the Caribbean was among those who reflected this change in sympathy. His journal is replete with comments on the Negro's return to "monkeydom." 56

The friend of the Negro when he puts his shoulder to the wheel and tries to rescue his black brother from the degradation of an inferior species hopes to see his client rise up at once with all the glories of civilisation around his head. "There, Behold my work; how good it is". That is the reward to which he looks. But what if the work be not yet as good? ... After all, what we desire first and chiefly- is it not the truth? It will avail nothing to humanity to call a man a civilised Christian if the name be not deserved. 57

Trollope travelled through the Caribbean (even staying at a hotel run by Mary Seacole's sister in Jamaica) and everywhere his commentary on the freed slaves was a repetition that they were atavistic, receding from civilisation and reverting to their natural savagery. He emphasised that far from living up to the popular image of unfortunate victim, the Negro was inherently regressive. "He is a man, and if you will, a brother; but he is the idlest brother with which a hardworking workman was ever cursed, intent only on getting his mess of pottage without giving anything in return." 58

57 Trollope. p.59
58 Trollope. p. 66.
This image of the black slave rejecting white society and therefore losing the influence of civilisation became the new stereotype image of the black Caribbean population.

It is also significant that the early nineteenth century saw the virtual collapse of the Caribbean sugar trade. This was the result of several factors. Firstly, the plantations had suffered from a lack of investment in either farming techniques or mechanisation. There is evidence to suggest that the majority of plantation owners focussed on getting as much profit in as short a possible time through the trade, and therefore had neglected to maintain their estates. Secondly, that other sources of sugar were now available through colonisation of islands such as Mauritius where sugar was not subject to such high taxation, and also that cane sugar was proving to be an expensive crop in comparison with the sugar-beet, which could be grown and processed in Europe. A third factor was the problem of labour and with the agitation of European anti-slavery movements, it became increasingly difficult to envision how the labour-intensive plantations could be run without slaves, and therefore the value of the estates as commercial enterprises sank. This was also exacerbated by the reluctance of the estate owners to break up large plantations for sale as small lots to be farmed by free men in the islands, and therefore after emancipation, many plantations were simply abandoned, and their former slaves left without even the basic necessities of survival. John Amphlett in his journal describes the miserable conditions of the emancipated slave, "in groups were scattered collections of wretched huts in which live or should I say exist, lots of Negroes, I should think rapidly retrograding into barbarism." 59 The Reverend Underhill who investigated the events that led to the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 was horrified by the conditions that prevailed in Jamaica after emancipation and reported in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies how disease and starvation was endemic. 60

However the image of the freed slave leaving the large scale plantations which fell into decay, preferring instead to scratch a living through subsistence

farming was powerful, because it evoked images of the black slave as degenerate and regressive. The Caribbean situation might therefore have been read as an example Johann Blumenbach's much debated theory of degeneration which considered that from an original species of primeval Caucasian man the various races degraded, moving from a higher to a lower form of civilisation. According to Blumenbach, the original man was Caucasian. "We May fairly assume this to have been the primitive colour of mankind, since... it is very easy for that to degenerate into brown, but very much more difficult for dark to become white. Indeed, the conditions of the post-emancipation Caribbean islands was used to support various racist theories concerning the failure of the freed slave to live up to 'civilized' standards of living. One of the most influential was John Hunter's belief that the black races were uncivilised and could never be brought up to the standard of the white European. In his Address Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting of the Anthropological Society of London, in 1866, Hunter made it clear for the members (of whom General Eyre was one) that it was an "absolutely impossibility" to apply the civilisations and laws of one race on another, and stressing the point that the Negro was a lost cause.

Lord Stanley was among those who voiced his concern at what he described as a tragic situation in the Caribbean, the blame for which was solely located on the slaves' atavism, and the way in which they reverted to ancestral primitiveness. "Their life is the life of savages- shunning the face of white man, ever seeking to escape further into the primeval forest and casting off alike the restraints and the decencies of civilisation." Interestingly Lord Stanley's extended this image of reversal to the land itself, in a highly symbolic image of Britain's failure to effect an enduring system with which to colonise the Caribbean.

Unless something is done very shortly, travelling by land (in Guyana) will entirely cease. In such a state of things it cannot be wondered at that the herdsman has a formidable enemy to encounter in the jaguar and other beasts

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of prey ... It may be worth noticing that this district, now overrun with wild beasts of the forest was formerly the very garden of the colony. 63

In the face of such accounts, the projection of the slave as a helpless victim of injustice, just waiting for the opportunity to prove himself to his British liberators literally melted away. Instead the profile of the black slaves, as bestial and violent, re-emerged to replace that of the Abolitionists’ fiction. In the post-emancipation era this image of the “savage black” was now influenced by the popular misconception that the slaves had been given an opportunity to “make good”, and had chosen instead to wallow in barbarism, and spend their time in “idleness and rioting”.

The Abolitionists had failed to achieve a significant long-term alteration in the common perception of the Caribbean and its black people, but more significantly they had also failed to tackle the deep seated fear that was associated with the Caribbean as a site of carnival and transgression, and in the wake of the Emancipation movement, this image became increasingly concrete.

Black Magic: The Vocabulary of the Supernatural in the Caribbean

I have previously investigated the way in which the Caribbean came to represent a site of Carnival that was used as a cultural shorthand, which was generally understood to stand for an archaic barbarism and a state of uncivilised chaos which co-existed temporally with the advanced cultures of Europe. As it was depicted by British culture, the region was a crucial gauge for British identity, as it could be a constant source of reassurance, often demonstrating how far Britishness had progressed from its own barbaric and carnival past.

Typically, these images of the Caribbean as a site of horrific brutality and debauched hedonism were a conflation of facts and fictitious accounts, and were used mainly to support British self-image of restraint and cultivation. However, the association of the Caribbean with the horrors of Carnival transgression that post-emancipation society represented revived its association with extremity, the fear of

The image of the Caribbean as the location for the unreasonable, the magical and all the supernatural terrors that were no longer acceptable in rational nineteenth-century British culture was, from the first accounts of the region, a powerful component of the Caribbean identity. However this aspect evolved and gradually became the central focus of the whole Caribbean identity in British culture, particularly as the focus shifted away from the planter to the black slave in the post-Abolition period, and therefore inevitably included more information about the creolised folk culture of the black slaves that had been evolving for almost two centuries, and which was essentially rooted in African custom, superstition and magic.

Before examining the impact of the supernatural imaging of the Creole culture in British culture, it is necessary to foreground the discussion with an analysis of how this impression arose. As we have argued, British culture rejected its own Carnival heritage and transposed this onto the Caribbean, which it portrayed as a suitable site for all the excesses of violence and other social transgressions, which it no longer wished to include in its identity. There are numerous, and often patronising, accounts of the black slaves enjoying their periodic holidays by holding carnivals. The journals of Matthew Lewis and Lady Maria Nugent, both contain descriptions of Christmas carnivals, which they witnessed first hand. However, Edward Brathwaite and Philip Curtin both suggest that the Europeans who witnessed these customs over-read their familiarity. Brathwaite emphasises this point by recognising “European adaptations or imitations could never be whole-hearted or complete.” In fact, considering the minimal social relationship that existed between the Europeans and Africans within the plantation system it is not surprising that both Lewis and Nugent, while being attracted to the superficial similarity of folk festivals, were aware of differences which they failed to understand. It is in the unrecognisable aspects of these Carnival celebrations that these journalists begin to become uneasy in their narratives. They are commenting on the unknown and therefore, for them, the unnatural. The curiosity

with which both Nugent and Lewis describe the different musical instruments and dances, as "strange" are overshadowed by a sense of discomfort at the recognition that there are aspects of these Carnivals that go beyond their understanding and which significantly refuse to be analysed in British terms.

This skewed interpretation was common in many commentaries by British travellers who sought to make sense of these creolised African customs that had been incorporated in Caribbean festivals. As late as 1894, the Reverend Thomas Banbury experienced the same difficulties as earlier writers when trying to explain customs in Jamaican society. For example in reference to the significance of the cotton tree for the black Jamaican's he says, "This tree, like the oak in England in the days of druidism, was worshipped in the days of slavery, and sacrifices offered at its roots to the duppies." He was keen to frame the Carnival and transgressive within the parameters of British experience, thus negating its African and Caribbean specificity. Similarly earlier commentators such as Long and Edwards were unable to interpret the aspects of African culture which had survived the Middle Passage, instead reductively suggesting the customs and rituals that they did not understand were merely barbarism and pagan superstition.

Nevertheless, it is of vital significance that there was recognition, even among the most hardened of the pro-slavers that despite being physically enslaved, there were aspects of the Caribbean slave's identity which transcended the slavers control. As Philip Curtin has emphasised, although the economic society in the Caribbean was rigidly controlled, this single-minded focus was not extended to any other aspect of the slaves' lives. In fact, outside of their economic function, the slave owners had little to do with them, a circumstance that had interesting results in terms of cultural preservation and evolution. According to Curtin, the fact that there is no written record of the slave culture has led to a great misinterpretation of the slave culture. He highlights the fact that the slave was not, as has been suggested, Brought to America, culturally naked, to be given whatever cast off cultural equipment the planting society thought fit for him. The black Jamaicans of the nineteenth century had a set of ideas sentiments, habits, irrational responses and

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65 Thomas Banbury. *Jamaican Superstitions or the Obeah Book: A Complete Treatise of the absurdities believed in By the People of the Island.* (Jamaica: M.C. DeSouza, 1894), p.19
preconceptions. All of these went to form the background from which the Negroes would act during the coming revolution (Morant Bay) and afterward in building a new society based on free labour.  

This cultural space within the society of the Caribbean which could not be accessed or accurately interpreted by British observers was, therefore, of great importance, because it often preserved a link with the various African nations, which would be of significance in the whole evolution of Caribbean culture.

It is also important to note that the culture was specifically Caribbean and incorporated the diversity of African cultures as well as European influences to form a hybrid that evolved gradually, concentrated in the infrequent holidays that the slaves were allowed. The occasions such as Carnivals and festivals therefore took on increased importance for the slave culture because they were among the few periods when the slaves were physically separate from the planters, and free to express themselves. As the sociologist Melville Herskovitz has suggested they became,

Occasions when Negroes in close contact with whites could reabsorb Africanisms were when slaves were released from immediate supervision, as when they worked to supplement what was provided them by their owners or when released for holiday celebrations...These occasions were marked by songs and dance and games and tales, many of which were African in character, were thus passed on from one generation to the next.

Herskovitz also highlights how a whole myth was created about the Negro past, which was generated from the misinterpretation of and ignorance about black culture under slavery. He focuses particularly on religion to highlight this problem, because it was in this area that the slaves were allowed the most license, and where old superstitions and rituals of magic and the supernatural were preserved, and hidden from the eyes of the authorities.

Whatever the attention given to religious instruction of the slaves in various areas and at various periods of slavery, the freedom of the slaves to conduct their own services without white supervision was always greater than their freedom to work or organise politically in the African manner. Magic was

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almost by its very nature adapted to going underground and was the natural prop of revolt. \(^{68}\)

However, this cultural space, that resisted explication with its unfamiliar customs and unauthorised religious practises which continued often in secret, resulted in the Caribbean being re-inscribed as a region where the pagan and the supernatural flourished. For British culture therefore, the Caribbean, which had long been associated with outrageous sexual license and violence because of the planters, was further demonised through its association with pagan cults and witchcraft.

**Magic, Vadoux and the Cultural Shock of an Authentic Caribbean Culture**

By the time the Emancipation act was passed in 1838, a powerful religious and cultural society had evolved in the Caribbean with its own language and customs. By the time British authorities noticed it, Black Caribbean culture was already two hundred years old, and was by the very nature of its evolution extremely resistant to interference. Naturally enough amongst those groups such as the Baptists and the Methodists who had fought hard both in Britain and the Caribbean to change attitudes towards the slaves, there was enormous disappointment, particularly after the initial wave of interest in Christianity proved unable to divert the people from their traditions. William Law Mathieson in his introduction to his text concerning the Governor Eyre controversy is clear about the causes of the ultimate failure of the missionaries. He quotes a Baptist newspaper published in 1851,

> Everything seemed to prosper and the future seemed bright with promise. The minds of thousands appeared as if they had been only waiting for the truth as it is in Jesus. But time has proved them in the majority of instances to be hollow. A most painful reaction has taken place. \(^{69}\)

Mathieson, however writing in 1933, was also sure that the main cause of this Christian failure was the Negro's preference for superstition and Obeahism.

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\(^{68}\) Herzkovitz, p.133.

Mathieson's is only one among many commentators that place the failure of Christianity and the British example on this “evil” practice. The Rev. Thomas Banbury was confident that the “people of Jamaica would, no doubt have advanced further in civilisation, in morality and religion, had it not been for this accursed superstition.”

In fact what occurred in the post emancipation period was an, albeit unspoken, recognition that the Negroes had a culture. As Philip Curtin, has suggested this represented not just a few salvaged remnants of African customs, but really had developed over the years into a truly creolised Caribbean culture. He uses Jamaica as an example.

The diversity of national origin was an important factor in making Jamaican Negro culture American rather than African. The great majority of Jamaicans had come from West Africa; their differences were only regional variations of a common culture area. Since the whites were not anxious to force Europeanization any further than was necessary for plantation work, the slaves were left to educate their own children. Consequently there developed a new culture, compounded of the diverse elements of the African heritage and some European elements that were common to all groups. This process of cumulative adaptation and amalgamation of Negro cultures had continued for a century and a half. By the 1830's the Afro-Jamaican culture was solidly established, and it was passed on to each new generation as it had had long been passed by a process of assimilation to new arrival from Africa.

A complete religious and social structure was in place, nevertheless there was no effort to examine the complexity of this Creole culture. It was simply seen as an inability to overcome the power of superstition, and the belief in magic, as well as other heathen and barbaric practices.

Travel writers like Anthony Trollope were deeply suspicious of the inability of Christianity to really permeate the Caribbean society and displace existing beliefs, because the Negro was incapable of understanding Christianity. He stated emphatically that even with access to Christianity they would stubbornly adhere to superstition and follow religion and morality “dog-like” without comprehension.

Obeahism was described as running “like a black thread of mischief through the

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70 Banbury, p.1.
71 Curtin, p.25.
known history of the race" and the crucial argument that emerges from this reaction to Caribbean culture is that it is Obeah, magic and the belief in superstition that was blamed for the failure of the black to live up to the British fantasy of the 'brother in bondage'. The Caribbean, long demonised as a site of transgression and unspeakable depravity, was irredeemably and literally confirmed as a place of darkness, where stubbornly pagan black people practised their black arts.

One of the best examples of this new focus on the Caribbean as a place of terror was provided in Sir Spenser Buckingham St. John. Spenser's travel narrative Hayti: Or The Black Republic (1884). Spenser had travelled and lived in the Caribbean for more than fifteen years, and visited Haiti before taking up a consulate post in Mexico for the British Foreign Office. In the nineteenth century, Haiti occupied an exceptional place in Caribbean history, as it was the first independent black republic in the world, and after America, was the second country to claim its independence from Europe, which it did in 1804. Despite the fact that Haiti was not a British colony, Spenser used it to voice the potential fears of the spread of black independence throughout the Caribbean, which he significantly presented through Carnival imagery. His comments on the black Haitians use Carnival images to emphasize the transgressive nature of Haitian society, which for Spenser a world of inversion in which the slaves had become masters. His description of a black general was typical of his representation of the black authority as unnatural and ridiculous.

It is not possible to contemplate as other than incongruous a black general with heavy gold epaulettes and gorgeous uniform galloping on a bedizened steed, surrounded by a staff as richly apparelled, and followed by an escort of as ragged a soldiery as ever Falstaff was ashamed to march with. The awkward figure, the beast face, the bullet head, the uncouth features, the cunning blood-shot eyes, seen under the shade of a French officer's cocked hat, raise the hilarity of the newcomer.

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72 Trollope, p.56.
73 Livingstone, p.19
Spenser's description of the black general as a clownish figure of ridicule parallels earlier more sympathetic British accounts of Caribbean Carnivals. For example it echoes the humorous description in Lewis's accounts of 'Britannia' the slave girl who, reluctant to be in the Carnival, hung her head "in the most ungoddess-like manner." However, whereas Lewis's descriptions of the Carnival scenes were presented to demonstrate similarity between the culture of the Caribbean and that found in Britain, Spenser's account was intended to horrify and outrage British sensibilities, by presenting the alien images of slaves-as-masters.

The Caribbean folk Carnivals, through which many African religious and cultural customs survived, were no longer read as evidence of 'local colour' as they were in the journals of Lewis and Nugent. Instead, post-emancipation texts such as those of Gardner and Spenser began to recognise the place of these Carnivals as an alternative cultural practice, and there is a sense of realisation in nineteenth-century literature that Carnival is more central to the Caribbean culture than was hitherto imagined. For example Spenser forcefully insists on revealing how the Negroes indulge in transgressive religious ceremonies, with their superstitions and pagan worship, crucially merging the boundaries between authorised Christianity and Vadoux.

There is no doubt that the lower-class Negroes in particular, respects the white man as a superior being and therefore respects his religion as superior to his own; but ... although he follows the white man's religion to a certain extent, he does not in consequence forsake his serpent-worship, which appeals to his traditions, to the Africa of his nursery tales and, above all, to his pleasures and his passions. The Vadoux priest encourages lascivious dancing, copious drinking and the indiscriminate intercourse between the sexes, but at the same time inculcates the burning of candles in the Roman Catholic church. He keeps a serpent in his temple, whilst the walls are covered with pictures of the Virgin Mary and the saints. No other brain but that of the Negro could accept such a juxtaposition of opposing beliefs.

Spenser's text is a good example of the way in which an inability to read Creole culture results in the imaging of the customs and beliefs as terrifying and inhuman.

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75 Lewis, p.57.
76 Spenser, p.139
His central pre-occupation is an anxiety over the consequences of emancipation in British colonies, which expressed through the nightmare images of Haiti, he inscribes as a moral challenge to British notions of progress and civilisation. Like many of the missionaries, who went to the Caribbean after emancipation, Spenser was deeply frustrated by the existence of Creole culture that operated in an antithetical way to Britishness, imperialism and civilising mission of Christianity. The creation of the independent state of Haiti implicitly challenged both the legitimacy and the necessity of a European presence in the Caribbean, and as British identity was inextricably linked to imperialism and protestant religion, Spenser viewed its existence as a moral and political challenge. It is significant, for example, in his discussion of the human sacrifice that was reputed to take place in Vadoux, that the victims would have been slaughtered at Christmas, Easter, New Year’s Eve and particularly on Twelfth Night, which were Christian holidays in the Caribbean. In the context of his narrative it is the appropriation of these Christian festivals, even more than the practise that for Spenser represents almost blasphemous abuse.

Creole culture was essentially based on adaptation and change. It survived through being carnivalesque in its diversity of influences, which merged and coexisted and was in a constant state of change. Spenser is conscious of this aspect of the Vadoux ceremony and even speculates on the way it might have changed in the Caribbean.

The king and Queen of the Vadoux preside, following the forms which they probably brought from Africa, and to which Creole customs have added many variations, and some traits betray European ideas as, for instance, the scarf or rich belt which the queen wears at these assemblies.77

In contrast the values of British culture were by its own definition, fixed and static self consciously defined as an adherence to protestant moral values and a divine right to dominate world commerce. Typically, Spenser read this Creole changeability as a mark of degradation, and the perversion of traditional Christian festivals as outrageous and symbolic of Caribbean depravity.

77 Spenser, p.187.
As long as he is influenced by contact with the white man, as in the Southern portion of the United States of America, he gets on very well. But place him free from all such influence, as in Hayti, and he shows no signs of improvement, on the contrary, he is gradually retrograding to the African tribal customs and without exterior pressure will fall into the state of the inhabitant of the Congo. 78

However it is in Spenser’s detailed accounts of the practise of Vaudoux, and magic that the strength of his antagonism for the resistant black Caribbean cultures are revealed. He represents the secret worship of Vaudoux in the most extreme language of horror and revulsion, he is continually shocked and repelled by his “findings”.

What he in fact reveals is his own cultural pre-occupations with issues of violence, sex and the irrational beliefs such as the supernatural. In confronting the creolised black culture, Spenser like many of his contemporary critics was forced to observe, from a peripheral position, a culture, which seemed to be the very antithesis of British restraint and self-control. The Vaudoux worshippers were at once horrifying and fascinating, and therefore the language used to describe them was reminiscent of that used in the eighteenth century in Gothic novels. The connection between the Caribbean and the gothic was therefore re-established, however the language that was now used to describe black Creole culture was specifically racial and reflected the threats of the new Carnival fusion of Creole culture.

A central theme of Spenser’s text is his examination of Vadoux. He states, “There is no subject of which it is more difficult to treat than Vadoux worship and the Cannibalism that too often accompanies the rites.” 79 One of the main reasons why Spenser prefaced his study of Vaudoux by stressing the difficulty involved in its description was perhaps the way in which, in order to describe the Creole rituals, he recognised the need to establish a language of transgression. Nevertheless, having stressed his reluctance to enter the field of commentary, Spenser set about describing what he felt to be barbaric practices explicitly Gothicised terms which provided the vocabulary with which to convey his sense of horror. According to Spenser, the practice of Vadoux accounted for the drop in population numbers because so many

78 Spenser, p.131
79 Spenser, p.130.
had ‘disappeared,’ no doubt victims of human sacrifice and cannibalism, or openly sold in flesh markets. He cites the anecdote of a missionary’s wife who saw such a market with her own eyes, and assured the reader that although he had never met her, he was sure that it was true because similar stories could be vouchsafed by August Elie, the Secretary of state in Haiti.

However it is in his detail of the Vadoux ceremony that Spenser is at his most descriptive. This description of the rituals resemble scenes of transgression found in Gothic novels of the eighteenth century and particularly evokes William Beckford’s Vathek (1796). Spenser admits that he had never seen the ceremony himself. However he is undeterred from sensationally recounting the experiences of Moreau St. Mery, one hundred years before, which he admits have been ‘freely taken.’

The recurrence of the true Vadoux worship, for that which has least lost its primitive purity, never takes place except in secret, in the dead of night and in a secure place safe from any profane eye...A vase in which there is the blood of a goat still warm, seals on the lips of those present the promise to suffer death, rather than reveal anything and even to inflict it on anyone who may forget that he is so solemnly bound to secrecy.

Spenser continues to give his extremely vivid descriptions of the rituals, which he presents as factual accounts of an underground religious cult. Using the language of the horror story, he purports to give his reader a factual commentary on an example of black culture.

The ceremony over the King places his foot or his hand on the box in which the serpent is confined and soon becomes agitated. This impression he communicates to the queen, and from it gains the whole circle and everyone commences certain movement, in which the upper body, the head and the shoulders appear to be dislocated. The queen above all is prey to the most violent agitation. The excitement goes on increasing. This is augmented by the use of spirituous liquors; which the adepts do not spare.

With some fainting fits follow, with others some species of fury, but a nervous trembling seizes them all, which they appear unable to master. They go on spinning round, and in their excitement some tear their clothes, others bite their own flesh; then again many fall to the ground utterly deprived of sense, and

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80 Spenser, p.199
81 Spenser, p.187.
are dragged into a neighbouring dark apartment. Here in the obscurity is too often a scene of the most disgusting prostitution. At length lassitude puts an end to these demoralising scenes.\textsuperscript{82}

Not content, however with giving this highly sensual description of the Vadoux ceremony, Spenser also writes at great length regarding the other demonic practises of cannibalism and vampirism. He is convinced that the island of Haiti was populated in the main by blacks who, under cover of darkness, would commit the most excessive acts of violent anthropophagy. He cites several examples, including the disturbing story of a girl who is butchered by her own aunt and uncle and eaten. In a vivid account Spenser describes how she was strangled after having been held hostage for four days until New Year's Eve.

Then Jeanne handed him a large knife with which he cut off Clairine's head, the assistants catching the blood in a jar, then Floreal is said to have inserted an instrument under the child's skin and detached it from the body. Having succeeded in flaying his victim, the flesh was cut from the bones and placed on large wooden dishes, the entrails and the skin being buried near the cottage. The whole party then started for Floreal's house, carrying the remains of the victim with them. On arrival Jeanne rang a small bell and a procession was formed, the head borne aloft a sacred song sung. Then preparations were made for the feast\textsuperscript{83}.

Spenser's account of these cannibal rites, was graphic and replete with the language of fictional horror narratives. However, most accounts of Creole culture were equally exaggerated and also drew on the narrative language of the sensational story.

The Reverend Thomas Banbury, for example, was genuinely disturbed by the practise of Obeah in Jamaica, which he saw as widespread and very powerful. He saw the presence of Obeah as the single main opposition to progress and truth and he described the practices as satanic. Of the Obeahman he says, "He is the agent of Satan...the embodiment of all that is wicked, immoral and deceptive. You may easily at times distinguish him by his sinister look and slouching gait. An Obeahman

\textsuperscript{82} Spenser, p.189
\textsuperscript{83} Spenser, p.197-8.
seldom looks anyone in the face. Generally he is a dirty looking fellow with a sore foot.\(^8^4\)

There was clearly a pattern emerging in the negative description of the freed black which was centred almost exclusively on their prior achievement of creating and preserving traditional cultural practises which were not only misread by those who commented on and recorded them, but resulted in the whole culture being demonised, specifically in language that evoked the horror and supernatural fictions of the gothic period in literature.

Again it is important to note that the practice of Obeah had continued throughout slavery, and had not, until the post emancipation period caused any real concern. All the major authorities on the Caribbean had included descriptions of the African belief in superstitions and magic, and many such as Edward Long had noted their knowledge of poisonous plants and herbs. Jen Schaw was specific in her comment that there was a “seer on every plantation to whom they (the slaves) have recourse when taken ill.”\(^8^5\) Nevertheless, these customs were on the whole seen as quaint folk traditions and were patronised as the child-like belief in magic and fantasy. It is only after this Caribbean black culture proved so difficult to overcome in the post emancipation era that the accounts of it became openly hostile. Even those such as Gardner (1871) and Banbury who attempted to give a more anthropological slant to their descriptions of Creole culture were clearly disturbed by its strength and adaptability. William Gardner, for example, gives a lengthy analysis of the origins of Obeah.

Of all powers, temporal or spiritual, the one the Negroes stood most in awe of was that of the Obeah man. The word was sometimes spelt Obia or Obi; the latter term refers rather to the practise of the art than to the practiser. This dread superstition is evidently a perverted form of one far more ancient, and may probably be traced back to Egypt. There the name of the serpent was Ob, Oub, or Obion. The Israelites were commanded not to inquire of the Ob, and accomplished Hebrew scholars state that the literal translation of the words in 1

\(^8^4\) Rev. T. Banbury, p.8.

It is crucial to note that his genealogy of the practise of Obeah, tracing it back to a taboo of biblical dimension, serves to reinforce the position that Obeah was antithetical to Christian morality and therefore could not be tolerated in any form.

Likewise Myalism, the religious aspect of Obeah, was connected with a mobile set of superstitions that had been transported, 'disease-like' from Africa and had proved endemic among the black Creoles. The effects of Obeah and Myalism were described as having an effect similar to mental illness in the victims and worshippers alike. According to Gardner those who were the object of curses, often died through fright induced by an irrational belief in superstition. Similarly, contemporary accounts of Myalism, demonstrated the way in which the belief in spirits and the supernatural was capable of inducing physical loss of control. Banbury was dismayed to find that a group of myalists had "worked themselves into violent animal excitement and fanaticisms, jumping about, bawling, yelling like so many demoniaces. It was frightful to hear them." The overall effect of these accounts was to frame the Caribbean within parameters of barbarism, paganism and magic, and despite the deeply critical attitudes demonstrated by the narrators, the overwhelming impression of the Caribbean was as a site where not only these practices occurred but where they were practised without control, and where significantly the attempts to introduce Christianity and British civilisation had failed.

**Jane Eyre and Myalism.**

The Caribbean theme of Charlotte Bronte's canonical text *Jane Eyre* (1847) has been explored in some depth through Jean Rhys's fiction *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). However, the extent to which the novel is influenced and implicated in the

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86 Gardner, p.187.
87 Banbury, p.7.
nineteenth century discourse of the Caribbean needs further examination. I will
discuss the way in which the novel is rooted by an underlying theme of magic, the
supernatural and the way in which Jamaica operates as a cultural symbol of Obeah
and sorcery. This theme is signalled through the discourse around Bertha Mason as
the spectral presence that haunts Thornfield, and her madness, which is the result of
Creole inbreeding. However I will focus primarily on the figure of Edward Rochester,
because it is he who arguably represents most intensely the dialectic of magic, myth
and the supernatural. Rochester’s character is set up from the outset, as ‘peculiar’ and
the root of his strangeness is identified as the nightmare experiences he has had in
Jamaica. According to Rochester, he was, an ingenuous young man, duped into a
marriage with Bertha Mason and, having been driven to the point of suicide by her
madness, becomes permanently altered. Rochester is jaded and cynical, for example,
speak flippantly of slavery as the “bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an
assortment of black eyes.”

However a more satisfactory way of reading his character, which is complex
and unpredictable, is to frame it within the dialectic of Caribbean culture. Rochester
has been creolised, transformed by his Jamaican experience, and significantly
changed into a figure who is associated with Caribbean characteristics which are both
mythic and supernatural. His marriage to Bertha Mason is, for example, described in
the most fantastic terms. As in a fairy tale, no sooner does he marry the heiress of a
great Caribbean sugar estate, than she is changed into a monster. He states

her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang
up rank and fast: they were so strong, only cruelty could check them, and I
would not use cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant
propensities...Bertha Mason the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged
me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man
bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste.

This reading of Rochester, as a Creolised character, implicated with the supernatural
is well supported by evidence from the text. In fact Jane’s whole relationship with

88 Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre (1847), (ed.), Q.D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985)
89 Jane Eyre, p.304.
Rochester is prefigured by the episode that occurs shortly before her first meeting with Rochester.

A horse was coming; the windings of the lane yet hid it, but it approached. I was just leaving the stile; yet as the path was narrow, I sat still to let it go by. In those days I was young, and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memory of nursery stories were among the rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond which childhood could give. As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie’s tales, wherein figured a North-of England spirit called a “Gytrash”; which, in the form of horse mule, or large dog haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me. ⁹₀

The Gytrash turns out to be Rochester, however his character is foregrounded by this supernatural connection. It is significant that at a later point Rochester reflects on this same incident and recalls Jane as being like an elf, and in fact recounts most of his experiences in language that evokes magic, and myth.

During his recollection of his encounter with Celine Varens, Rochester has what can be described as a hallucination. He breaks off his account abruptly, and Jane is witness to his wild interlude. He explains,

During the moment I was silent, Miss Eyre I was arranging a point with my destiny. She stood there by that beech trunk- a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath at Forres. “You like Thornfield?” she said, lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento, which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house front, between upper and lower row of windows, “like it if you can! Like it if you dare!⁹¹

Rochester is both metaphorically and literally in communion with witches and spirits from another world. Those are the terms with which he describes Bertha and significantly his choice of masquerade costume, as the seer, or the old gypsy woman who tells the fortunes of the women in Thornfield also reflects this witch-like identity.

The whole episode with Rochester disguised as the fortune-teller is revealing in terms of a Caribbean subplot, because it is while dressed as a gypsy, a traditional

⁹₀ Jane Eyre, p.113
figure of the Carnival who is in touch with the supernatural and magical, that Rochester allows the unchallenged entrance of Richard Mason into Thornfield. The house, already symbolically accessed by the magical figure of the gypsy is open to the intrusion of the Caribbean figure of Mason, who coming directly from Jamaica, therefore arrives within the text under the tension of a supernatural interlude. The success of Rochester’s Carnival costume highlights his Creolised construction because he succeeds in convincing the whole household with his disguise. In fact his ability to transform raises questions about his stability as a character. Rochester is quite literally metamorphosised into the gypsy and then re-transforms into Rochester before Jane’s very eyes. Jane says, “where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman’s voice had changed; her accent, her gesture, and all, were familiar to me as my own face in a glass-as the speech of my own tongue.”

It is Rochester’s Caribbean experiences that have destabilised his character within the text and which allow him to “change shape” mirroring the way that Bertha Mason has transformed from a Creole beauty to a beast that “grovelled seemingly on all fours: it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered in clothing, and a quantity of dark grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.” This portrayal of Rochester as magical and dreamlike is connected with the contemporary ideas of the Caribbean and the notion that those of this region were tainted by the supernatural and the pagan. He occupies the space between reality and a dream world. Jane herself often refers to him as a fantasy, “you sir are the most phantom-like of all; you are a mere dream,” and the image is sustained throughout the text. There is Rochester’s description of Jane as a fairy who will live on the moon with him, dressed in gowns made of clouds and scarves cut from rainbows. He calls her a “mocking changeling –fairy-born and human bred,” but it is he who seems to straddle the world of reality and fantasy, mixing and creating slippage between the two, and as such the text seems to combine both the cultural identity of Britain with

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91 Jane Eyre, p.144.
92 Jane Eyre, p.201
93 Jane Eyre, p.297
94 Jane Eyre, p.277 and p.144
that of the Caribbean, both within Rochester as well as within the walls of Thornfield, through the presence of Bertha.\textsuperscript{95}

However, Rochester is a tainted hero. Within the novel, Bronte is clear in demonstrating how he made the error of attempting to mix his own British culture with the transgressive and supernatural Caribbean culture personified by Bertha, and he, as a result, is forever marked. It is interesting to note that his experiences at the edge of barbarism, serve to help him reinforce his essential good qualities of morality and restraint, in other words his Britishness. He never completely succumbs to the Caribbean infection. This is noted in two instances, and the first occurs when he contemplates suicide in Jamaica. During the episode in which, driven to despair by the oppressive Caribbean weather and Bertha’s demonic raving, he unlocks his trunk to get a gun with which to shoot himself. This episode is highly symbolic because Rochester understands his moral limitations, which ultimately overcome any temptation and as if to remind him of his innate Britishness at that point, “a wind fresh from Europe blew across the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, steamed, blazed and the air grew pure."\textsuperscript{96} The second instance occurs when he is roving around Europe in search of a wife. It is significant that despite his own self-conscious moral descent, Rochester preserves some vestiges of his British identity, which again saves him from ruin. His Britishness prevents him from reaching the depths that Bertha, as Creole, has sunk to.

“Disappointment made me reckless. I tried dissipation-never debauchery; that I hated, and hate. That was my Indian Messalina’s attribute: rooted disgust at it and her restrained me much, even in pleasure.”\textsuperscript{97} He is salvageable, but this can only come about after he has been symbolically rid of his contagion, and for Rochester this occurs through a cleansing of fire. Predictably, for a Caribbean subject, Bertha chooses fire as the means to destroy Thornfield. The pyromaniac tendencies of the Caribbean slaves was well documented, and so it meaningful that Bertha Mason should attempt Rochester’s life by means of fire on more than one occasion. It is only once he has exorcised his demon, and paid a penance by losing a hand and being

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Jane Eyre}, p.433.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Jane Eyre}, p.305.
blinded, that Rochester can begin his life with Jane, free from the horror of the Caribbean.

Within Bronte's text Rochester embodies the rhetoric of the supernatural and the magical that became commonplace in post-abolition discussions of the Caribbean. However, the portrayal of Bertha Mason makes this central theme even more explicit, because her presence, which seems to be a conflation of older images of the excessive planters and the barbarism of the slaves, evokes the underlying hysteria that was associated with British narratives of the region. There are several points of coincidence which can be identified. Firstly, there is the issue of Bertha's unreadability. She is faceless and voiceless and dehumanised, more often than not referred to as 'it' within the text. She cannot be understood, and seems to be more like an unreasoned beast than a human being having been driven mad by a combination of inherited mental problems, exacerbated by her own excess.

This lack of personal detail fits into the contemporary views of the black Caribbeans who were never described as individuals but were referred to as a group, a collective mass whose only characteristics were their barbarism and animosity. In effect what Bertha represents is the irredeemable aspect of the Caribbean culture, the way in which, despite Rochester's intervention she is too corrupted to be saved. Within this Rochester/Mason relationship, the whole debate over the failed missionary attempts to Christianise the emancipated slaves is allegorised. This reading is supported by the strong theme of evangelical missionary work, that is a central part of the novel. St. John Rivers, and the whole episode that Bronte describes in detail about his preparation for spreading the word of God in the colonies, suggests that there is an implicit critique of the way in which fanatical Christians pursued their calling.

Rivers is a truly unsympathetic character. Jane describes him as "One, who in the discharge of what he believed was his duty, knew neither mercy nor remorse." In effect within the novel are the two major themes of the post-emancipation debate, personified on the one hand by Bertha, the savage and regressing Caribbean; and on

97 Jane Eyre, p.308.
98 Jane Eyre, p.401.
the other by the fixed and severe missionaries bent on civilising ‘the natives’ no matter what the cost.

However, another important aspect of Bertha’s presence is the way in which it feeds off the contemporary images of the Caribbean as being a site of barbarism and witchcraft. Bertha occupies the place of a supernatural changeling within the text. At first, a beautiful woman she collapses before Rochester’s very eyes into a beast, a hardly human mass of hair and clothes. She is wild, and shrieks like an animal, and significantly is homicidal and bloodthirsty. There are significant similarities between the representation of Bertha and the accounts of the demonised blacks that had become commonplace in the wake of the Christmas rebellion of 1831, and the unrest that fermented in the Caribbean in the late 1840s leading to another major rising in 1848, a year after *Jane Eyre* was published. As Gad Heuman has noted, in an explanation of the 1848 risings in Jamaica.

The late 1840s was a particularly difficult time for Jamaica. The British government had announced the equalisation of the sugar duties in 1846, resulting in the ultimate loss of protection for sugar produced in the British colonies. In Jamaica this created an economic crises for the planters. They therefore sought to depress wages on the estates, often as much as 25 per cent. However many ex-slaves regarded this development as a first step toward the reintroduction of slavery.

The subject of Jamaica and the continuing crises in this region were widely discussed, as was the profile of the freed slaves, due to a plethora of accounts produced by missionaries like J.M. Phillippo, who despaired at the heathen intractability of the slaves. However it is the image of Bertha as she attacks her brother that really creates the link between the text and the changed image of the Caribbean, because despite the fact that she had a knife, the doctor, is certain that the bloody wound was not inflicted by such an instrument. “But how is this? The flesh on the shoulder is torn as well as cut. The wound was not done with a knife: there have been teeth here!” In fact they are Bertha’s teeth marks. Bronte, had her savage Caribbean monster rip her own brothers shoulder apart with her bare teeth.
This fits extremely well with the graphic accounts of savagery of the Caribbean people, as well as feeding neatly into the cultural anxieties about cannibalism, and blood drinking. Mason is horrified as he recounts how she, "sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart." Returning to Sir John Spenser's text, there are many accounts of the practise of Caribbean cannibalism, but a few that focus specifically on the frenzied appetite for blood drinking to be found in the islands, which seems to be Bertha's penchant. Spenser speaks of the instances where the blood had been sucked from a corpse, which is the body of "an unknown youth of about 20 years of age who had a weapon piercing his heart and attached to that a thin hollow cane. It was supposed that he was assassinated in order to suck his blood".

However in the figure of Bertha, the myth of the Vaudoux practise of vampirism is made shockingly real in the context of the novel. Long and Edwards both reported anecdotes in which rebel slaves were said to have drunk the blood of their victims in Tacky's Rebellion in 1760. However, the fact that Bertha quite literally gores her brother with the stated intention of draining his heart, demonstrates how the novel builds on this impression of Creole blood-lust established by the commonplace stereotypes of Caribbean identity. Jane Eyre refers to Bertha Mason as the 'vampire', and despite the fact that the vampire is specified as the figure of German romance, the overall link of the Creole with notions of bad-blood, the mixing of blood through miscegenation and the identification with wild blood-drinking 'savages' serve to extend the reading of the vampire beyond its European traditions, mirroring the way in which Bertha has extended the range of her madness from the Caribbean to Britain. "The lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrow widely raised over bloodshot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me? ... Of the foul German spectre-the vampire." Bertha evokes the German spectre, but the horrific associations of this folk figure are transferred onto the Creole. Her face is also described as goblin-like, and her voice as wolvish howling. All the stereotype language of folk lore, the vampire, evil imps and werewolves, were called upon to

100 Jane Eyre, p.211-212.
101 Spenser, p.202
describe the central Caribbean presence within the text, and Rochester assures Jane that the seemingly ‘normal’ Richard Mason would soon degenerate into the condition of his sister. “the elder one whom you have seen,… will probably be in the same state some day”\textsuperscript{103}

Charlotte Bronte's novel reveals how commonplace stereotypes of the Caribbean had altered by the middle of the nineteenth century. Firstly, the Caribbean was now identified with the Creole folk culture, that was seen as a version of pagan superstition and belief in magic which was barbaric in its rites and customs. Secondly, that the planter class were, not only no longer threatening to notions of Britishness, but had in fact degenerated to the point of extinction. Bertha and Richard are described as the issue of corrupted stock, which inevitably will fail. In the case of Jane Eyre, Bronte seems to have drawn heavily from these common projections of Caribbean identity. In this way Bertha Mason can be inscribed as a collection of Caribbean stereotypes, degenerated planter, immoral black slave as well as Vaudoux vampire which are all stereotypes of her Caribbean identity. Likewise, Rochester's instability, with his mood-swings and his disturbing mind-games, where he withholds his identity, and sadistically toys with Jane’s affection for him, demonstrates how Bronte uses the fact that he has been in the Caribbean, as a means of easily explaining his psychological disorders.

However, the most significant point raised in Jane Eyre, is the way in which the Caribbean became reinscribed as the site of folk-tale horrors, such as the vampire and the werewolf. The tales that abounded about the bloody rituals of Vaudoux and Obeah created the association between the Caribbean and a place of supernatural horror, and Bronte's novel, was among the first to make this connection explicit. The figure of Bertha Mason: the demonic beast, the Obeah possessed creature and the vampire of the Caribbean brought from the satanic islands of the West Indies was a powerful image, and one that entered British culture readily, linking as it did with the new inscription of the region as a site of pagan barbarism, that had rejected both Christianity and British culture.

\textsuperscript{102} Jane Eyre, p.281.  
\textsuperscript{103} Jane Eyre, p.303.
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