Imperial Looting

Gem-Theft in Victorian Popular Fiction

Meleena Leon

Hertford College

University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English



Acknowledgements

Without the generous support from supervisors, Professors Ushashi Dasgupta and Helen Small, my journey to submission would have been impossible. Their thoughtfulness when reading every draft, their commitment to keeping me moving forward even at the most stagnant phases of my writing, and their kindness when I needed encouragement will be remembered with the utmost fondness and respect.

♦

Held together by pieces of fraying duct tape carefully placed alongside the well-worn binding, my maternal grandmother's dictionary used to sit just alongside her recliner—always in reach. After her passing I opened to a random page, careful not to rip the impossibly thin paper. On bits of stationary paper bookmarking pages throughout, she practiced spelling words in impeccable cursive: 'beautiful, upholstery, surprise, especially'. She finished the third grade and left school to work with her family in the fields. On the inside of the dictionary, she wrote: 'Bought this book for the kids Sept 24, 1978 on a Sunday'. She had ten children, but I'd like to think the dictionary was for her.

Every day before high school, my mom would drop me off at my paternal grandmother's house. Every day after high school, I would walk back to my grandmother's house, and my mom would pick me up. Every day—in these gaps of time that I now look back on with so much gratitude—my grandmother would tell me stories. She would take her time, sometimes taking days to finish a single story. She never told me that she left school in the fifth grade, but she told me so very often as I walked out of her house: 'keep going to school'.

My grandmothers were matriarchs who seemed to me as a child to perform miracles. They were miraculous. I wrote this dissertation in their memory because I was given the opportunity to keep going to school when they could not.

I thank my parents for their infinite wisdom and their perpetual support in my pursuit of education. Years and years of school have taught me many things, but my parents taught me how to be myself—how to learn from people and look for the good in the world.

I thank my godparents for showing me what it looks like to be relentlessly dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Their willingness to invest in my future—whether by bringing me to England for the first time when I was ten, or by their generosity in making Oxford a reality—has been the greatest gift.

To my aunts, uncles, and cousins, thank you for your unwavering support and for enveloping me back into the fold whenever I come home.

To my brother and sister-in-law, thank you for showing me that it's always cool and never lame to be enthusiastic about what you like, and for bringing Olivia into the world. I hope to be a role model to her the way you both have been for me.

To Kayla, Kristen, and Macy, thank you for showing me that friendships sustained across oceans are always, always, always worthwhile.

To my housemates: Alice, Kiran, Sarah, and Fiona, thank you for making a home with me. Our Girl House will always hold a special place in my heart.

To my friends in Oxford: Julyan, Michelle, and Gerwin, thank you for our study dates, our coffee chats, and our time spent together in our doctoral journey.

Jericho Cheese Company fuelled study sessions with top-tier cheeseboards and also gave me the opportunity to become a part-time cheesemonger, a role I will always hold in the highest esteem. To my cheese family, thank you for helping me balance my studies with new friendships, copious amounts of cheese-knowledge, and three perfect Cheese Christmases.

Lastly, thank you to the Chess family, the Bailey-Batts family, and Todd for seeing me through every step of graduate school with such profound kindness and care, and for your curiosity in all the strange corners of research I have found myself in.

Sincerely,

Meleena Leon

Table of Contents

Abstract 6

List of Illustrations 7

Introduction 8

I. The Crown of the Last Mughal Emperor: Bahadur Shah Zafar II 8

II. The (Il)Legalization of Looting in the Regency and Victorian Era 15

III. Zones of Interest 19

IV. Ethnographic and Anthropological Approaches 22

V. Material Culture and the Museum 30

VI. The Study of Victorian Things 35

VII. The Study of Victorian Gems 39

VIII. Overview of Chapters 46

Chapter One: 'A legacy of trouble': Giving and Taking in *The Moonstone* 50

I. 'Conquering Mohammedans': *The Moonstone's* Prologue and the Impact of Expropriation 53

II. 'A little legacy': Gift-giving throughout the Novel 67

III. "Let us remain cousins still": Cousin-Marriage as Familial Reparation 78

IV. 'The cycles of time': In Conclusion 86

Chapter Two: James Payn's *By Proxy* (1877) and Looting in Nineteenth-Century China 89

I. Payn and Dickens 91

II. The History of Victorian China 99

III. The Study of Victorian China 102

IV. The Character of the Thief 106

V: Cultural Consequences of Theft 112

VI: Pennicuick's Fate 119

Chapter Three: Spent Treasure: Robert Louis Stevenson and Expropriative Violence 123

I. 'The Raja's Diamond': 'a wonder that explained itself' 124

II. 'Treasure not yet lifted': Hoarded Gold in *Treasure Island* 132

III. In the South Seas: Blackbirding and Pearling in the Pacific 137

IV. *The Ebb-Tide* 148

V. In Conclusion: 'Horrible and grotesque'? 156

Chapter Four: Gem-Theft in Detective Fiction at the Fin de Siècle 158

I. Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* and Other Sherlock Gem Stories 162
II. Catherine Louisa Pirkis and *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* 173
III. L.T. Meade's Detective Oeuvre 178
IV. Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's Gem Narratives 191
V. From Launderer to Broker: In Conclusion 199
Conclusion: 'Plunder is chaos; prize is organized' 201

Abstract

This thesis examines literary depictions of gem-theft in colonized spaces or spheres of British influence, focusing on popular fiction from India's First War of Independence (1857) to the turn of the century. I consider how looted gems operate within fiction as trophies of imperial conquest or as items of fungible and portable wealth. Identifying how gems are either converted from plunder to prize or are disposed of when that conversion cannot be satisfactorily maintained, I illustrate how popular fiction articulated and reacted to looting when a cultural conversation about the ethics of expropriating objects of high value from other countries was (at best) nascent. Each chapter loosely corresponds to a different genre of what is now considered middlebrow fiction. Reading detective, romance, adventure, and New Woman fictions I identify how specific generic conventions inflected the portrayal of looted gems.

Chapter One examines Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* by tracing historical sources that informed Collins's depiction of Indian history in the preface, considering how gift exchange constitutes attempts to renegotiate illicit ownership, and exploring how cousin-marriage comes to stand in for cultural reparation. Chapter Two reads the novel *By Proxy* by James Payn in relation to Victorian British-Sino relations, including the 1860 destruction of the Old Summer Palace. Noting how Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* influences Payn, I consider how literary inspiration can become literary looting. Chapter Three analyses Robert Louis Stevenson's career-long interest in hoarded treasure, reading *New Arabian Nights, Treasure Island,* and *The Ebb-Tide*. Interrogating how treasure is converted into money, wasted, or otherwise spent, I ask how Stevenson differentiates priceless objects from the commodity, and how this relates to systems of extraction. Chapter Four reads Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction alongside that of Catherine Louisa Pirkis, L.T. Meade, and Beatrice Heron-Maxwell. I ask how shifting gender politics at the fin de siècle inform views of the gem as corrupted property in need of laundering, with particular attention to the recurring symbolic association of gems with young women.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. [Anon.] *The Grand Vestibule: Windsor Castle*, photograph, 1902 [presumed], The Royal Collection Trust. https://www.rct.uk/collection/stories/grand-vestibule-the-british-monarchy-and-the-world/history-of-the-room.

Figure 2. [Anon.] *Crown of the Emperor Bahadur Shah II*, 28.5 x 23.5 x 23.5 cm, gold, turquoises, rubies, diamonds, pearls, emeralds, feathers and velvet, second quarter nineteenth century, Grand Vestibule, Windsor Castle, The Royal Collection Trust. https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/67236/crown-of-the-emperor-bahadur-shah-ii.

Figure 3. David Wilkie, *General Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo Sahib after having Captured Seringapatam, on the 4th May, 1799,* 46.50 x 29.30 cm, oil on canvas, 1839, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/5685/general-sir-david-baird-discovering-body-sultan-tippoo-sahib-after-having-captured-seringapatam-4th.

Figure 4. [Anon.] *Tippoo's Tiger*, 178 x 71 x 61 cm, painted wooden semi-automaton, 1790, Mysore, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O61949/tippoos-tiger-mechanical-organ-unknown/.

Introduction

I. The Crown of the Last Mughal Emperor: Bahadur Shah Zafar II

In 1888 what had been a sparsely decorated vestibule in Windsor Castle was dedicated to displaying gifts that Queen Victoria received for her Golden Jubilee the previous year. Shortly after her death in 1901, King Edward VIII redecorated and displayed instead what the Royal Collection Trust describes as 'spoils of war'.[1] Today, an amalgamation of the two remains: oak cabinets are filled with items given as diplomatic gifts, collected during exploration missions, or looted in war. As the largest privately owned art collection in the world, nominally owned by the British Royal Family, some objects are the outright property of individuals,[2] while the vast majority of the over one million objects are simply listed as belonging to the Crown.[3]



Figure 3. *The Grand Vestibule: Windsor Castle*, with permission from The Royal Collection Trust

In the Grand Vestibule, one object—a small golden crown laden with gems—is nearly lost amid a sea of other curiosities. The crown's skull cap is made of dark red velvet, with intricate gold floral motifs laid over the top; turquoises, rubies, diamonds, pearls, and

---

[1] Royal Collection Trust, 'Grand Vestibule: The British Monarchy and the World', https://www.rct.uk/collection/stories/grand-vestibule-the-british-monarchy-and-the-world/history-of-the-room, accessed 14 April 2026.

[2] '[The Royal Collection] includes works held by the [late] Queen in trust for the public as well as those owned personally by Elizabeth Windsor, such as valuable paintings by Monet and Paul Nash that were bought by the late Queen Mother and not taxed as part of her estate'. See Jack Wakefield, 'Nationalise the Royal Collection!', *The Spectator*, 4 June 2022.

[3] The Royal Collection 'is held in trust by The King as Sovereign for his successors and the nation. It is not owned by him as a private individual.' See Royal Collection Trust, 'About the Collection', https://www.rct.uk/collection/about-the-collection, accessed 14 April 2026.

emeralds are set within the brushed gold or delicately strung onto extending, almost wing-like adornments on either side.



Figure 4. *Crown of the Emperor Bahadur Shah II*, with permission from The Royal Collection Trust

This was the crown of the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II. The once vast expanse of the Mughal Empire was, by early 1857, confined within the walls of what is now known as Old Delhi, an area of just over 6 square kilometres. This zone was already ceded land, as Zafar was made a subsidiary ally to the British after decades of encroaching Company rule.[4] At the outbreak of the First War of Indian Independence, sometimes referred to as the Indian or Sepoy Rebellion, Mutiny, or Uprising (1857-8), Zafar was eighty-two years old, and the title of Emperor was honorific at best, his domain limited to the little fraction of India the East India Company had yet to claim.[5] The war was largely (though not exclusively) fought by Muslim sepoys, who saw Zafar as their symbolic leader. Named Emperor by the resisting Indian soldiers, Zafar was a figurehead of the eighteen-month war which saw an estimated 800,000 soldiers and civilians dead—the vast majority of whom were Indian.[6] The British

---

[4] In the decades following the establishment of Diwani rights (a method of collecting taxes) agreed upon in the Treaty of Allahabad (1765) between the East India Company (EIC) and the Mughal Empire, control or direct rule was established to limit Mughal power to subsidiary alliances that the British largely governed. See Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47.

[5] Sepoys were native Indian men employed as soldiers by the EIC and later the British government after the dissolution of the Company in 1874. The First War of Indian Independence included troops from both the British Armed Forces (BAF) and as well as the East India Company's armies. The Government of India Act 1858 led to the British Crown assuming direct control of present-day Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Myanmar in the form of the new British Raj.

[6] The number of lives lost is both unclear and highly contended; I refer to the estimates by Douglas Peers and he uses census data from 1871 to inform his estimates. See Douglas Peers, *India Under*

suppressed the rebellion by way of staggering violence and retribution.[7] Zafar was put on trial, then exiled to modern day Myanmar. His golden crown, along with two throne chairs from one of his many palaces, was looted and sold at auction, purchased by an officer named Robert Christopher Tytler (remembered, with his wife Harriet, as one of the most important photographers of the rebellion's immediate aftermath).[8] Tytler brought the jewel-laden crown to Britain.[9]

This thesis examines literary renderings of the expropriation of gems from colonized spaces or spheres of British influence in the age of High Imperialism—sometimes preserved within artefacts, as in the case of Zafar's crown, but more often forcibly removed from their artefactual as well as cultural settings.[10] Famously, the sensational plot of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) is instigated by a rogue East India Company soldier looting an Indian gem of great religious significance after killing several Indian guards at the Siege of

---

Colonial Rule, 1700-1885 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 64. Regarding Zafar a symbolic leader, see William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (New York City, Vintage Books, 2008), 6.

[7] Prior to 1857, the EIC's armies and the BAF operated separately in terms of governance and were funded differently, with the BAF funded by parliament and the Company armies by Company revenue. However, the two sometimes joined forces. The EIC's armies are also known as the Presidency armies and included the Bengal, Madras, and Bombay armies. Following the events of 1857, the Company armies were officially incorporated in the British Armed Forces and were therefore under direct Crown rule. The BAF includes the British Army and the Royal Navy (and would later include the Royal Air Force). Where the Company's armies were designed specifically to protect commercial interests, the BAF were responsible for the defence of the nation, overseas territories, and Crown-sanctioned imperial expansion. From a literary vantage point, the distinction between the two is crucial and provide a cultural shorthand for either a mercantile and colonial enterprise or a more nationalistic, imperial endeavour with more governmental oversight. This dissertation focuses on the time period that includes the transition from Company rule to Crown authority, as well as the eventual dissolution of the Company in 1874, literary depictions of British soldiers during these decades necessitate situating these characters along the timeline of this complicated period which saw commercial interests and sovereign power inextricably intertwined. This will be a recurring topic through the dissertation.

[8] Along with the final portrait of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Tytler's photographed dozens of sites of imperial significance. Among the several historic Mughal landmarks they recorded were the Red Fort (where Mutiny trials were held for nearly a month following the end of the conflict) and Agra Fort (where Arthur Conan Doyle describes looting of great proportions during the rebellion in *The Sign of Four* (1890), which will be discussed in Chapter Four). Ironically, Tytler, like Conan Doyle's gem-thieves, ended up in the Andaman Islands after the rebellion. With Tytler granted the role of Superintendent of a convict settlement, he would have overseen the imprisonment of men like Conan Doyle's characters charged with looting and murder.

[9] Tytler was a member of the EIC, not the BAF.

[10] The object of this study is not to pinpoint the exact start and end points of the period of High Imperialism; however, largely in keeping with Thomas and Thompson, Hevia, and Daly, I position High Imperialism between the mid-1860s and the start of World War I. See Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, 'Empire and Globalisation: From "High Imperialism" to Decolonisation', *The International History Review*, 36 (2014), 142-170, James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century* China (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), and, Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Seringapatam (Srirangapatna) in 1799.[11] Much less well known, James Payn's *By Proxy* (1877) imagines another corrupt officer stealing a venerated gem, a Buddhist relic in rural China. These are just two of the innumerable Victorian works of fiction focused on egregious plunder and imperial havoc. Far from being jingoistic stories of imperial might, the stories this thesis is interested in treat gem-theft as opportunistic, often violent, and—in complex ways—immoral. My interest is in the particular status of gems among the objects looted from colonized spaces or spheres of imperial influence as trophies of imperial conquest and/or items of fungible wealth. Where other commonly looted objects such as money, weapons, furniture, and artwork are targeted for their economic value, anthropological significance, or beauty, gems in the Victorian novel tend to be characterized as having non-obvious cultural (and often religious) significance in the culture of origin as well as high monetary value, exceptional beauty, *and* a fetishized fungibility once in British hands. Where cultural or religious significance is easily identifiable in (for example) an ornate crown, such as Zafar's, or elaborately carved gates (as my first chapter will detail), unset gems have a significance that is less straightforwardly apparent. All the more mysterious, these gems are susceptible to their histories being rewritten. The fictions I examine are attempts to do just that. The contest over the meaning of expropriated gems demonstrates how the significance ascribed to an object in one cultural context renders it vulnerable to fetishization and commodification in another.

Beginning with novels and short stories published in the wake of India's First War of Independence (1857) and finishing in the cultural aftermath of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, this thesis considers how popular fiction reacted not only to instances of expropriation, but to acts of repatriation and efforts at reparation.[12] Examining detective, romance, adventure, and New Woman fictions, and considering thefts from Asia and across the Pacific, I position these writings as sites of significant moral and political reflection on the looting of gems and the case for their repatriation. In the fiction examined here, expropriation tends to take the form not of a single act but of an extended process in which dispossession is enacted, registered, often repeated. In this way, it generates narratives of moral recognition and attempted restitution whether by force, as when the dispossessed *take back* their objects, or by diplomacy, when an individual, institution, or government

---

[11] Seringapatam is the Romanised, and now outdated spelling of Srirangapatna. I use Seringapatam throughout only to minimize potential confusion, not to perpetuate the misnomer. The Siege of Seringapatam was conducted by the EIC.

[12] I have chosen the cultural aftermath of Queen Victoria's death in 1901 (and not explicitly the Boer Wars (1881 and 1899-1902) or the start of World War I in 1914) as an end point for the material I examine as my study does not include Africa within its purview.

intervenes (as in *By Proxy* when Chinese officials arrest the British culprit on the verge of escape and reclaim the gem).

Looking beyond the central act of theft, I focus on the cultural, religious, or communal significance when the object changes hands—even or especially when something of the aura or mystique of its significance is still present. Whenever a person or a group dispossesses imperial subjects of property, a gap emerges between its original significance and its reconfiguration as loot. A gap may be created intentionally: a thief may treat a revered gem solely as prize to be sold regardless of any understanding of cultural import. Alternatively, a lack of awareness of cultural abuse or a refusal to consider the ethical consequences of gem-theft may create a more passive or inadvertent gap within the text, where the gem's cultural significance fades or is lost entirely, even if the thief does not *actively* attempt to expunge it (as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Ebb-Tide*, where pearls come to represent slave labour, which the reader understands will become invisible the moment they appear on the market). This potential for reconfiguration gives rise to moral disturbance, which may be sensed by the agents of expropriation or, more commonly, ramifies through the receiving culture and society. The exploration of cultural dissonance in the evaluation of stolen gems, then, prompts questions of property, place, and morality as the same object comes to be seen in different—often opposing—lights.

Crucially, the novels and short stories I consider were written in a period of British history that did not yet have an articulated legal or ethical framework for treating stolen artefacts as anything other than the spoils of war or the plunder of individual miscreant imperialists. As far as history tells us, Robert Tytler—who purchased Zafar's crown at auction—murdered no native guards to pilfer treasure troves. Instead, he participated in an organized, systematic, and (as far as the British occupying forces were concerned) legal process whereby plunder was turned to prize.[13] Such a prize—he hoped—would garner him favour within the Company and afford him a higher station, and so after a series of failed negotiations, calculated gift offerings, and unkept promises, he offered the crown and throne chairs of Zafar to Queen Victoria who purchased them for £500 in 1861.

Tytler's role in India at the time of the rebellion did not put him in the military frontline. Responsible for the Military Chest, he was—in essence—an accountant.[14] Tytler

---

[13] I employ James Hevia's concept of converting plunder to prize throughout this study. See *English Lessons,* 83.
[14] Anthony Sattin, 'Afterword' to *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 175-183, 177.

and Harriet each wrote detailed accounts of their experiences during the rebellion. While Robert's brief account was published only a year after the conflict came to an official end, Harriet's would not be penned until nearly half a century later and published well after her death as part of the revival of historical interest accompanying the rebellion's centennial anniversary, in 1986.[15] In his introduction to Harriet's memoir, Phillip Mason explains: 'Like every other young wife in India at the time, [Harriet] thinks that the Mutiny was a deep-laid plot, instigated by the sons of [Bahadur Shah Zafar]… and spread by wicked Muslims who played on the fears of the simple and gullible Hindus'.[16] Such assumptions riddle an entire sub-genre of Victorian fiction: the Mutiny Novel. Mutiny Novels most commonly depict imperial valour whereby the British conquer mutinying forces with brute strength and unquestioned integrity.[17]

Harriet's memoir is instructive because she speaks directly to the notion that violent retribution against the revolting soldiers was entirely warranted and that looting in such an environment was a matter of British soldiers getting what they were *owed* in return for their bravery. Her memoir is at times highly sensational: eight months pregnant at the start of the rebellion, she imagines herself as almost another Virgin Mary, giving birth to her son during a Massacre of Innocents, not in a manger but in a 'bullock cart'[18] under a temporary thatching of straw, while 'the bell of arms'[19] and the cries of dying soldiers continue. Harriet describes witnessing a dead Indian soldier while en route to Delhi and contemplating her lack of sympathy for him.

> I could not help saying, "Serve you right for killing our poor women and children who had never injured you." At any other time my heart would have been full of pity and sorrow at such awful sights, but after all we had suffered at the hands of our

---

[15] Published in 1859 in N.A. Chick's *Annuals of the Indian Rebellion*. See Anthony Sattin's editor's note to *An Englishwoman in India,* xxiii.
[16] Philip Mason, 'Introduction' to *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858,* ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix-xvii, xvi.
[17] In line with the bulk of Mutiny fiction and nonfiction famously including Philip Meadows Taylor's *Seeta* (1872) and Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), Harriet points to the Enfield rifle's use of cartridges smothered with pork and beef fat as a catalyst for rebellion. Moreover, she believes Zafar's sons opportunistically employed Muslim soldiers to 'poison the minds of the Hindu soldiery' (109). The 'greatest safeguard' for the British, she argues, was the fact that 'the Indian army consisted of two-thirds Hindus and one-third Mohammedans', (109) meaning that—as she understood it—the 'ignorant and gullible' Hindus making up the majority of the sepoy army were easily controlled until the 'Mohammedans [sought to] drive us out of the country' (110). See Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009) for an extensive review of Mutiny novels.
[18] Harriet Tytler, *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 147.
[19] Tytler, 154.

> treacherous sepoys, pity had vanished and thirst for revenge alone remained. Such are the effects of warfare upon the hearts of gentle, tender-hearted women.[20]

As she portrays it, this was no longer a defensive war strictly waged by soldiers but involved an entire empire of 'tender-hearted women' and their helpless children whose fathers had done nothing to provoke such barbarous aggression. The chaos of the scene provides a curious contrast to the formalized record-keeping of artefacts looted, purchased, or sold during wartime. Proud of her husband's integrity and his determination to follow orders that designated all property of the Mughal Empire as prize, Harriet also appears to have resented the official ban on personal looting put in place by the Company.[21] Robert's role dealt directly with misappropriated funds and artefacts, and Harriet condemns the fact that Gurkha and Sikh soldiers openly looted and were not punished, for reasons of lack of evidence or witness identification.[22] However, in implying that other—presumably British—soldiers, were either outrightly punished for the same crime, or benefitted in particular cases from superior officers being willing to turn a blind eye, Harriet inclines to the side of the looters.

> [The] Government had issued orders against looting by men or by officers, as the contents of the city was [sic] all to go for prize money, which I think was a great and an unjust mistake. The men had fought hard by the side of their officers to conquer that city and should have been allowed to loot to their hearts' content and take all they could get. When the prize money was distributed, it was portioned out according to rank… I believe it would be a wise policy and a just one to let the soldiers know they would be allowed to loot, if not then let every man from the highest to the bugler boy get an equal share of the prize money he had fought so well for. I know some officers intimately who did loot and made a good thing of their looting in the palaces, which was done openly and winked at by their superiors.[23]

For Tytler, the opportunity for unchecked looting becomes a reward for valour—the right to profit from the danger they have been forced into by mutinying soldiers. Forbidding such a profit favours the Company (which then amasses all prize) and its upper echelon over the soldiers Harriet sees putting themselves on the frontline. Imagining underpaid Company men as victims of the war, she reconfigures looting as rightful retribution.

---

[20] Tytler, 145.
[21] Harriet refers to a specific order given by General Barnard to her husband to move 'the treasure from Alipore' (145). She also refers to order against looting (164). In his own account, Robert mentions his orders placing him 'in charge of the Military treasure chest' (196).
[22] Tytler, 165.
[23] Tytler, 164-65. References to the 'government' orders implies that the regulations established by the BAF prohibiting personal looting were to some degree enforced within the EIC.

II. The (Il)Legalization of Looting in the Regency and Victorian Era

An in-depth exploration of the changes to laws relating to plunder and prize is largely outside the scope of this dissertation; however, a brief account is necessary to expose the grey areas within the law that were often exploited. From 1754, the Mutiny Act and Articles of War specified the repercussions of unpermitted plunder—that is, plunder for personal gain.[24] In a presidential address to the Royal Historical Society in 2018, Margot C. Finn succinctly chronicles the evolution of Prize laws, beginning with the seventeenth-century Admiralty courts which 'oversaw the distribution of so-called prize'. She continues, 'military prize as it developed in seventeenth-century Britain was… ramshackle, partisan, Byzantine and tortuously slow'.[25] Finn describes the 'labyrinthine bureaucracy' required to process Prize for sale, with proceeds distributed according to rank (the practice begrudged by Harriet Tytler). Finn notes that such 'delayed gratification', could—of course—be simply ignored, and many individual soldiers clearly went on looting for personal gain with or without the tacit approval of their superiors.[26] The Regulating Act of 1773 and later Pitt's India Act of 1784 further delineating the treatment of Prize, established a process for the private purchase of objects sold at auction, in a move that Finn describes as 'cleans[ing]' the 'taint of corruption through a market transaction, whilst conveniently swelling the Company's coffers'.[27]

Throughout Victoria's reign, while 'technically all plunder taken in war belonged to the Crown… the Victorian army had the sovereign's sanction to regulate the division of the remainder as prize money'.[28] *In situ* auctions, like those following the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1855) and the destruction of China's Old Summer Palace (1860), involved prize being sold almost immediately upon collection, with the distributions of proceeds laid out there and then, instead of in London at the Royal Chelsea Hospital as per custom.[29] While not entirely solving the problem of inordinate delay in realizing the full value of goods taken, this

---

[24] Raffi Gregorian, 'Unfit for Service: British Law and Looting in India in the Mid-nineteenth Century', *South Asia*, 13 (1990) 63-84, 66. These acts are specific to the BAF (not the EIC).
[25] Margot C. Finn, 'Material Turns in British History: I. Loot', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), 5-32, 17.
[26] Finn, 'Material Turns in British History: I. Loot', 17.
[27] Margot C. Finn, 'Material Turns in British History: II. Corruption: Imperial Power, Princely Politics and Gifts Gone Rogue', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (2019), 1-25, 11.
[28] Edward M. Spiers, 'Spoils of War: Custom and Practice', in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 19.
[29] Christine Howald, 'The Power of Provenance: Marking and Pricing of Chinese Looted Art on the European Market (1860-1862)', in *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets*, ed. by Benedicte Savoy, Charlotte Guichard, and Christine Howald (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 241-265, 245-46.

process did grant soldiers the prompt cash reward many felt they were owed. Historian Christine Howald speaks to this financial imperative, noting that auctions essentially 'function[ed] as a financial bonus, since [the soldiers'] salary alone did not make participation in war sufficiently attractive'.[30] James Hevia's 2003 study of British imperialism in nineteenth-century China elaborations helpfully on the psychology behind the legalized auctioning of loot. He explains, 'Prize law was based on the notion that without the promise of an equitable distribution of plunder, armies would become undisciplined mobs. To avoid such a possibility, authorities treated loot as the natural fruit of victory. They converted plunder, with its threats to order, into prize, the lawful reward of righteous warfare, while transforming the stolen objects themselves into private property'.[31] The logic of conversion, and the moral disquiet it gave rise to, is integral to this dissertation.

In 1857, attempts were made to either limit or forbid drinking alcohol as it led to *ungovernable* looting. In such cases, the problem was not necessarily the looting; it was that the items were not being checked in as prize according to protocol. Any moral high ground then quickly dissolved into justification of possession. The complexities here reflect the rapidly changing attitudes toward policies attempting to ban looting. In his published account of the Siege at Delhi, Captain Charles Griffiths is initially horrified by gross demonstrations of what he refers to as 'evil'[32] perpetuated against native soldiers and civilians.[33] Though he credits much of the 'whole destruction' to 'the sepoys and rabble of the city,' he admits that anything that 'had escaped the plundering and devastating hands of the sepoys was most effectually ruined by our men'.[34] Initially approving of the 'moral scruples' of the men who refrained from looting, he goes on to explain that such scruples 'were cast to the winds' as soon as men saw their superiors looting while prize was 'lying at [their] feet'.[35] Ultimately, he describes the moment that he commits the act he condemned just a few pages prior.

> …the brightness of the jewels, the dazzling gold, the nerves wrought to the highest pitch of tension while waiting in eager expectation for the result of a search. These episodes of my life appear more like a fairytale or a legend of the "Arabian Nights" than true history and sober reality. What opportunities of accumulating a small fortune were thrown in my way! The treasure lay at my feet, only wanting to be

---

[30] Howald, 247.
[31] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 83.
[32] Colin Campbell quoted in Chakravarty, 41.
[33] Charles John Griffiths was part of the BAF, not the EIC armies.
[34] Charles John Griffiths, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi*, ed. by Henry John Yonge (London: John Murray, 1910), 198-199.
[35] Griffiths, 235.

> picked up, and many will say that I was a fool not to take advantage of the prize! I can, however, certainly aver that I showed great moderation in possessing myself of only a small portion of the plunder—the amount I appropriated was but an infinitesimal part of the Delhi prize money.[36]

As with Harriet Tytler's claim that violence and looting were warranted, and indeed deserved, because of the apparent treachery of rebelling soldiers, Griffiths's call for righteous retaliation rang loudly. He writes, 'to all of us (putting aside the morality of the question), the loot of the city was to be a fitting recompense for the toils and privations we had undergone'.[37] The 'morality of the question' was not put aside for long: in the aftermath of the widespread looting, a government order required that 'natives' 'faithful to the English cause' should have their objects returned to them.[38] Viewed as overly sympathetic, this order caused consternation amongst military personnel who no doubt feared *all* Indians might now present themselves as 'faithful' while privately wishing for the British Empire's demise.

In 1869, following instances of egregious looting like those in 1857 in India and 1860 during the Second Opium War in China, Sir Garnet J. Wolseley, then Deputy Quartermaster-General in Canada, and later Commander in Chief and Viscount, wrote the *Soldier's Pocket Book for Field Service*, a practical guide to conduct in warfare, issued to every British soldier.[39] Frustrated by the lack of explicit regulations relating to the treatment of Prize, his handbook has a dedicated subsection on 'Prize Money'. The fifth and final edition distributed to soldiers in 1886 included the following entry: 'Booty taken in war legally belongs to the Crown, and should not under ordinary circumstances be appropriated or distributed without the Sovereign's sanction. This view of the subject has not always been acted upon, but no G.O.C [General Officer Commanding] in the field should depart from it except under most peculiar circumstances'.[40] The entry lists the specific processes governing the handling of acquired property.[41] Although Wolseley's guide further legalized the process of turning plunder to prize—to use Hevia's useful formulation—such action was increasingly attracting reprobation, with parts of the 'rising bourgeois elite… denouncing plunder as a transgression of civilised behaviour'.[42] Despite Wolseley's explicit intention of disseminating information, there is evidence that his mission failed entirely. Priyasha Mukhopadhyay traces the

---

[36] Griffiths, 253-54.
[37] Griffiths, 227.
[38] Government Order no. 1499 of 1858 quoted in Gregorian, 76.
[39] Spiers, 19-20. Wolseley worked for the BAF, not the EIC.
[40] Garnet Wolseley: General Viscount, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service*, 5th Edition (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 165.
[41] Wolseley, 165.
[42] Howald, 245.

(in)effectiveness of the book and notes, 'despite its ubiquitous presence, the Pocket-book was commonly represented as a text that soldiers did not – and were actively encouraged not to – read, even though they commonly carried it around'.[43] She also pinpoints references to the pocket-book in two of Rudyard Kipling's short stories from 1887 and 1890, where he specifically remarks on it *not* being read by soldiers.[44]

On occasions where military retribution is framed as necessary—as with the aftermath of 1857, or in the destruction of China's Old Summer Palace in 1860 (discussed in my second chapter)—looting is depicted as warranted, acting as both a financial bonus and rightful vengeance against an enemy. In India in 1857, vengeance was to be had for the deaths of British civilians; in China in 1860, reprisal against the Qing Empire was seen as imperative for the torture of British hostages. There are far fewer examples of criticisms of looting in these cases when compared with non-punitive expeditions.[45] For example, at the Siege of Seringapatam, soldiers were informed that 'prize should not be expropriated from religious institutions… in accord with British premises assigning church and state to separate domains';[46] moreover, the army did not interfere with local funeral ceremonies for Tipu Sultan as a way of 'signalling their concern not to interfere in native religious customs'.[47] This siege was notably *not* a punitive expedition, despite occurring during the ongoing Anglo-Mysore Wars. Such respect for religious custom was nowhere to be found in the wake of the 1857 rebellion. The development and introduction of formalized policies surrounding loot at the end of the nineteenth century suggests a widespread acknowledgement of the (im)morality surrounding the dispossession; however, in practice formal restrictions on looting were largely borne out of a desire for more effective control of belligerent soldiers. Accounts of British soldiers 'sewing Mohammedans in pig-skins, smearing them with pork-fat before execution',[48] and Hindu 'rebels [being] polluted with cows' flesh before being hanged or blown from the mouths of guns'[49] made their disrespect clear.

---

[43] Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, 'On Not Reading The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22, (2017), 40-56, 41.
[44] Mukhopadhyay, 51-55.
[45] Punitive expeditions involve explicit retaliation for an earlier offence, i.e. the taking of hostages by the Qing Government. Non-punitive expeditions, therefore, do not have a specific retaliatory aim.
[46] Davis, 154.
[47] Davis, 155.
[48] Chakravarty, 41.
[49] Peers, 71.

The Hague Conventions formulated in 1898, under the leadership of Tsar Nicholas of Russia, initiated international agreements to outlaw plunder and further regulate looting.[50] Article 28 of the 1899 Laws and Customs of War on Land reads: 'the pillage of a town or place, even when taken by assault, is prohibited'.[51] These were amended in 1907, with articles 28 and 47 explicitly prohibiting 'pillag[ing]', and specifying that 'Private property cannot be confiscated',[52] respectively. It would not be until 1954 that the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, agreed upon at the Hague Convention of 1954, thoroughly prohibited looting of artefacts, specifying 'that armies may only take as booty objects which were military in function, such as weapons, uniforms, military vehicles etc'.[53] The earliest piece of fiction considered in this study is *The Moonstone* which began its serialization in 1868 and the latest is Conan Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons', published in *The Strand* in 1904. They correlate with the publication of Wolseley's *Pocketbook* (1869) and the amended Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907) respectively. This correlation supports the perception that popular fiction of the time engages with and even anticipates the development of legislation relating to the legal handling of loot.

III. Zones of Interest

It is unsurprising that a small central cast of characters dominates the history of cultural expropriation under British imperial rule, around the globe and across several decades. The Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, famed for his victory in the Napoleonic Wars (ending in 1815), was also a key figure in the British takeover of the Deccan region of southern India from Tipu Sultan in 1799.[54] In 1852, more than fifty years later and only two months before he would pass away at the age of eighty-three, the Duke of Wellington was present alongside Prince Albert at the cutting of the Koh-i-Noor.[55] He is one of a handful of political figures

---

[50] James Hevia, 'Plunder, Markets, and Museums the Biographies of Chinese Imperial Objects in Europe and North America', in *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, ed. by Jan Mrazek and Morgan Pitelka (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 129-141, 130.
[51] 'Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague II); July 29, 1899', https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague02.asp, accessed on 14 April 2026. The Hague Convention of 1899 occurred 25 years after the dissolution of the EIC.
[52] 'Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp, accessed on 14 April 2026.
[53] Moira Simpson, 'The Plundered Past: Britain's Challenge for the Future', in *The Dead and their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice*, ed. by Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, and Paul Turnbull (London: Routledge, 2002), 199-217, 201.
[54] The Duke of Wellington was, in 1799, a member of the BAF, though his time in India involved the BAF and the EIC Armies working together, especially in 1799 as the Siege of Seringapatam was conducted by the EIC.
[55] Danielle C. Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor: Empire, Diamonds, and the Performance of British Material Culture', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009) 391-419, 416.

whose military histories are thoroughly intertwined with the instances of looting that inspired the fictions examined in this study. Sir John Lawrence, who aided Robert Tytler in 'gifting' Bahadur Shah Zafar's crown to Queen Victoria, was also linked to the famed Koh-i-Noor. Before his installation as Secretary of State, he was a member of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and oversaw the transfer of the diamond from the treasury in Lahore across the ocean to England.[56] Generational familial ties are also repeatedly evident; the eighth Earl of Elgin, whose father notoriously removed the Parthenon marbles to England in 1812, was appointed as Her Majesty's High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary to China in 1857.[57] General Sir James Hope Grant, famous for his role in the Indian Rebellion in 1857, also came to China in 1860 to command British forces.[58] Both Elgin and Grant would watch as the Chinese Old Summer Palace was looted and burned later that year.

The timings of military conflicts also show significant patterns of coincidence and inter-relationship. The Indian Rebellion and the Second Opium War coincided, with additional aid to the latter made impossible by the increase in the military presence needed in India.[59] Prior to the Rebellion, the Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-1805) and the Napoleonic Wars (1802-1813) overlapped. At the end of the century, the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) and the Second Boer War (1899-1902) overlapped. Although not coinciding seamlessly, the British led Mohmand campaign of 1897–1898 in modern day Pakistan was a punitive expedition (involving a young Winston Churchill) that occurred less than half a year after the sacking of Benin City (in modern day Nigeria) where the Benin Bronzes were looted.[60] I note these intersections not simply to point out the coincidences, but to trace the confluence of an ever-expanding empire whose possession of colonial treasures would inspire literary depictions of rogue militants and egregious looting across Victoria's long reign.

India was for nineteenth-century Britain the epitome of successful imperial expansion until 1857. Moreover, it was for centuries the prime location for both mining and pilfering gems from colonized regions including famed diamond regions such as Golconda, where some of the world's largest diamonds including the Koh-i-Noor, the Hope, the Great-Mogul, the Orlov, and the Nizam Diamonds were mined.[61] Concentrated across kingdoms

---

[56] Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor', 402.
[57] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 34. This appointment was made by the Crown, not the EIC.
[58] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 43. Grant was a member of the BAF, not the EIC army.
[59] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 35.
[60] The sacking of Benin City was a punitive exhibition led by the BAF, not the EIC.
[61] Ian Balfour, *Famous Diamonds* (London: Collins, 1987), 8, 28.

and empires including but not limited to the Mughal, the Maratha, and the Sikh empires,[62] gems were inextricably part of the story of Britain's gradual takeover of the entirety of India, beginning with the East India Company's trade operations at the start of the seventeenth century and culminating with Queen Victoria claiming the title of Empress of India in 1876. While the British Raj maintained direct rule over the subcontinent until it gained independence in 1947, with the nominal exception of various princely states, other zones of imperial expansion were less well-defined. This thesis considers, in addition to India, mainland China (specifically its deterritorialized trading port zones) and the dozens of islands across the vast Pacific (in the North Pacific, notably the Hawaiian Islands; in the South Pacific, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, French Polynesia, and the Cook Islands)[63] as each region was shaped by both imperial expansion and the looting that came as a result.

The rapid growth of global trading networks between the United States and Australia,[64] the rise of protectorates and settler colonies by other expansionist nations including the French, the Germans, and the Dutch,[65] and the continued presence of missionaries throughout the Pacific in the 'so-called Bibles-and-muskets phase' of imperialism,[66] rendered the vast majority of islands across the expansive Pacific at risk of exploitation. Speaking specifically about the route between the 'Sandwich Islands' and San Francisco, historian Gerald Horne remarks, 'this was a trade route, a migration route, and thus, a political route'.[67] Considered more broadly in its Pacific manifestations, British expansion—whether official, as in the protectorate established over Fiji in 1874, or informal as with the widespread trading and missionary posts—can be read in conjunction with other areas of informal empire such as certain zones of overlapping economic and political interest within China.[68] Unlike the hundreds of islands and micro-islands across the Pacific that had come to be under the official control of larger global powers, China was the 'largest territory

---

[62] The borders of these empires were not exclusively contained within those of modern-day India, but also included parts of modern-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and China.
[63] The colonial constructions naming of most of these islands, while touched upon in chapter three of my study, is largely outside of the scope of this study. The indigenous names are acknowledged, with the more commonly used names referenced most often. For an in-depth discussion regarding the use of colonially constructed names including Polynesia, Oceania, the South Pacific, and the South Seas, see Rod Edmond's *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15-16.
[64] Gerald Horne, *The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 7.
[65] Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific*, 12.
[66] Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific,* 9.
[67] Horne, 7.
[68] Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific,* 12.

in the world not to fall under direct European control during the nineteenth century'.[69] James Hevia points to the sheer size and population of the Qing Empire as the primary reason no single European player attempted to officially divide or control Chinese trading zones; instead, as he notes, 'European powers chose to manipulate, modify, and work through existing political authorities'.[70] As Chapter Three explores, China in the nineteenth century, and especially during the Opium Wars, presented an opportunity for reimagining imperial expansion not through direct control as in India, but through continued military presence, trade negotiations, and conflict resulting in some of the most notorious looting in the Victorian era. India, the Pacific, and China, in short, offer three distinct vantage points for considering literary depictions of looting at the height of Empire. The consideration of Africa is the undeniable gap in this study, and it is made with due consideration. Despite the continent's obvious importance to imperial fiction, with hugely popular novels set in Africa from the fin de siècle, such as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) which overtly includes gems, and other African-based adventure stories by Kipling or G.A Henty, the exclusion of Africa was a decision largely based on scope. Brief references to Africa appear in the margins of my final chapter with allusions to the Boer Wars; however, I have prioritized an in-depth analysis of lesser studied areas of informal imperial expansion, namely China and the Pacific, to meaningfully contribute to the literary study of informal empire and to bring into discussion lesser read examples of popular fiction, including *By Proxy* and a range of detective stories by New Woman writers.

IV. Ethnographic and Anthropological Approaches

If the status of jewels seized in the course of imperial adventure abroad was subject to disagreement 'on the ground', the question of how they could be disposed of back home could be equally fraught. Robert Tytler may have officially purchased the crown and throne chairs in the Company-sanctioned prize auction; however, in his notes to Harriet Tytler's memoir, editor Anthony Sattin reveals that she managed to "'unearth'" several 'beautiful ornaments… thought to have belonged to the King'.[71] With relatively unfettered access to some of the residences of the deposed Emperor, and having sought refuge during the conflict in a palace she claims was built by 'Kamuran Shah', Harriet seems to have been willing to bypass the regulations her husband staunchly adhered to. Sattin quite clearly implies that

---

[69] Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.
[70] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 13.
[71] Sattin's Afterword to *An Englishwoman in India*, 176.

she looted without compunction.[72] Her husband, by contrast, continued to act in open view and in accordance with the law. Back in London, Tytler looked to sell Zafar's jewel encrusted crown and silver ornamented thrones for as handsome a profit as he could obtain. In 1860, he visited a jeweller on Bond Street in London to negotiate a sale of his Indian artefacts (Harriet's were not included). Unhappy with the £1,000 offer from the jeweller, he at last offered Queen Victoria his purchases, ostensibly as a gift to garner favour. There were, of course, precedents for gifting the spoils of war to the Crown. Most famously, about a decade earlier, Governor-General Dalhousie presented the Queen with the Koh-i-Noor after the second Anglo-Sikh War which resulted in the annexation of the Punjab.[73] Dalhousie's personal presentation of the diamond to the Queen directly flouted the Company's policy requiring all prizes to be systematically processed; however, his risk paid off, as the Queen later bestowed on him the title of 'First Marquis of Dalhousie'.[74] The authenticity and cultural importance of Zafar's crown and two thrones were confirmed to the Queen and Prince Albert by Sir Charles Wood, who would become Secretary of State of India in 1859, and by Sir John Lawrence, who would go on to become the Viceroy of India.[75]

Whether Tytler still expected payment for his so-called 'offer[ings]' or whether the Queen (or Wood, as her representative) refused them as a gift and instead insisted on purchasing them so as to deny Tytler any claim for additional favour is unclear.[76] Believing the Queen's initial offer of £500 to apply only to the crown, Tytler agreed, only to be informed that the offer was for the crown *and* the throne chairs. 'Convinced he had been swindled', Tytler only acquiesced when Wood assured him that accepting would garner favour and that he would see to a 'fine appointment on his return to India'[77]—the implication, of course, being that refusing would work against him. He agreed. When Tytler returned to India, Wood was no longer present, and the newly appointed Secretary of State knew nothing of previous promises or agreements.[78] Unlike Dalhousie, Tytler was given no

---

[72] The reality of moral dissent regarding the propriety of looting may, to the modern reader, seem in line with the disagreement over the overall imperial mission to simply amass land and property, but it is crucial to keep in mind the sense of betrayal on the part of British residents in India. Harriet's memoir highlights the lack of sympathy for the mutineers, even in cases of egregious British violence.
[73] The history of the Koh-i-Noor and Dalhousie's role in its acquisition will be further detailed in chapter one of this study. Dalhousie was appointed Governor General by the EIC, not the BAF.
[74] Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor', 393.
[75] In 1857, Wood was the First Lord of the Admiralty in the BAF, but his role as Governor General would be with the EIC, specifically. While the EIC appointed the Viceroy until 1858, it would be the BAF that appointed Lawrence in 1864.
[76] Dalhousie, conversely, did not buy the Koh-i-Noor; therefore the 'gifting' to the Queen was—at least in some regard—freely given, even though it would have officially belonged to the Queen regardless, as it would have been treated as Prize from the Treaty which ceded the Punjab.
[77] Sattin's afterword to *An Englishwoman in India*, 176.
[78] Sattin's afterword to *An Englishwoman in India*, 177.

formal title, and granted no additional favours. Sattin includes a snippet from Harriet's diaries (not her official memoir) in which she criticizes both Queen Victoria and Sir Charles Wood.

> [Robert] was very loyal… which made it very difficult for him to understand how Her Majesty could lend herself, for the sake of filthy lucre, to deprive one of her subjects, a poor military man who, she should have known, had lost his all in the mutiny… I am now satisfied that Sir Charles Wood did it all. I feel sure he either kept the chairs himself or presented them to the Queen in his own name.[79]

This anecdote helpfully sketches out a specific attitude, characteristic of certain sections of the East India Company, its armies, and the British regiments across the empire, that saw the looting of gems—here set in a Mughal crown—as just recompense for an otherwise unprofitable but extremely dangerous job beset by distinctions of rank and class that rarely favoured the rank-and-file soldier or the bureaucratic functionary.

The personal histories that lie behind the 'spoils of war' are nowhere to be found in the cabinets of the Grand Vestibule. Bahadur Shah Zafar's golden crown with twinkling gems and lustrous feathers can be traced and laid out, not just to provide historical context for a period of imperial expansion, but to demonstrate how objects of desire—imperial treasures—reveal anxieties about cultural possession and dispossession. If we are to understand the moral complexity of the sequence of events and actions that brought looted objects into Britain's royal collections (or indeed any British museum or private collection), we need access to the stories that proliferated around them—not least the supplementary narratives provided by fiction. The authors of the popular texts this dissertation examines were undeniably inspired by the personal testimonies, military histories, as well as the public moralism attached to instances of cultural expropriation that abounded in the wake of 1857. The fiction I engage with dramatizes reactions to expropriation and illustrate a recurring compulsion to reposition illegitimate ownership as permissible or otherwise unproblematic. In almost all cases, the attempt at legitimisation is seen to fail. Possession alone is inadequate, and the crux of the matter lies in the (in)ability to produce a narrative demonstrating legitimate ownership—or even the perception of it. Selling or gifting the stolen gem to others does not overwrite, negate, or neutralize earlier histories of theft, but perpetuates an often futile felt imperative to eradicate the original cultural significance of the object and bolster or legitimize the new claim of ownership. Such undertakings underscore

---

[79] Sattin's afterword to *An Englishwoman in India*, 176.

the desire of the imperial expropriator to achieve legitimacy and finality. In cases where the transfer of ownership is disputed, we see recurrent patterns of anxiety attaching to the relationship between people and things.

Modern anthropological theories of the gift encourage us to reimagine gifting and theft as opposite sides of the same coin—gifting requiring a kind of giving away and theft entailing dispossession. My understanding of gift theory and of exchange systems more broadly is informed by ethnographic and anthropological studies of giving and receiving objects, including influential work by Marcel Mauss, Annette Weiner, and Arjun Appadurai. An ethnographic touchstone, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1925) by Marcel Mauss established sociological perspectives on how reciprocity between gift-giving and taking creates and maintains social dynamics, establishing gift theory and theories of reciprocity as fields of study.[80] Mauss sees the 'multiplicity of social things in motion' manifested in every instance of gift exchange. He sees a kind of power imbued in each object that transforms something that is 'voluntary' and 'apparently free and without cost' to something that requires reciprocation. An action that takes on the 'appearances of a present, of a gift (*cadeau*)' is only, according to Mauss, a formality aimed at securing the principle of equal exchange.[81] Gift theory cannot always smoothly apply to instances of cultural expropriation, and Mauss did not imagine it as doing so. It is most obviously applicable when gifting has a secondary role—the thief/expropriator attempting to pass on the expatriated object as a gift in order to evade the moral (and potential legal) consequences of theft. This is where the dichotomy of giving and taking gains traction.

Annette Weiner's 'Inalienable Wealth' (1984), *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (1992), and 'Cultural Difference and the Density of Objects' (1994) build upon *The Gift* and subsequent theorizations indebted to Mauss, focusing not exclusively on reciprocity, but instead on what distinguishes certain objects from others in instances of exchange. Weiner develops the term 'density' to characterize the historical and cultural weight attributed to 'inalienable' objects that sit outside a marketplace economy. For Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986) and in his later essay 'The Thing Itself' (2006), the preferred term is 'singularity'.[82] These

---

[80] Mauss builds upon previous work examining gift-giving in indigenous societies, including: Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea* (1922). Mauss and Malinowski's work would go on to influence other canonical works of anthropology including Claude Levi Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949).
[81] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift:* Expanded Edition, trans. by Jane I. Guyer (Chicago, Illinois: HAU Books, 2016), 58.
[82] Arjun Appadurai, 'The Thing Itself', *Public Culture*, 18 (2006), 15–22, 20.

terms will be defined at length later in this introduction. What brings together Mauss, Weiner, and Appadurai's interpretations of objects that circulate outside of normative commodity exchange is not just the potential for these objects to be identified or labelled as different from or more special than others, but the sense of some inalienable quality that distinguishes them. Mauss speaks of the *hau*[83] of a gift—a kind of soul of an object that remains inherent to it no matter its owner. Weiner speaks of the 'ancestral histories' that are 'written into the object, increasing its symbolic densities'[84]—Appadurai of the 'profusion' and 'enchantment'[85] of objects of distinction. For all three, the sense of an object's peculiar value is intensified by fear of its loss and the consequences of dispossession.

Weiner's work in the Guatemalan and Papua New Guinean contexts considers an array of different objects and materials including pots, yams, kula shells, cloth, and mats.[86] Her conceptions of density, inalienability, and keeping-while-giving are critical to my understanding of gem-theft as her theories consider not just the object itself, but the power it might wield in an exchange system that values gems beyond their monetary worth. In the case of gems, their history is *not* legible in their form, as the history of other kinds of object often is (though it may be legible in their material setting). They are vulnerable not just to theft and market circulation but to being broken up and resold as something distinctly other than the cultural form in which they were found. Weiner explains: 'Density accrues through an object's association with its owner's fame, ancestral histories, secrecy, sacredness, and aesthetic and economic values'.[87] She notes that the greater the density of an object, the less likely it is to be found in normal systems of exchange and describes this as a continuum.

> At one end of the continuum are inalienable possessions—objects that should be kept within the closed context of family, clan, dynasty, or corporation, for example. Other, less prized possessions vary in their symbolic densities and, therefore, in their degree of interchangeability. Like commodities, things at the other end of the continuum without much symbolic density are exchangeable merely in terms of the value of their replaceability.[88]

---

[83] Mauss, 70.
[84] Annette B. Weiner, 'Cultural Difference and the Density of Objects', *Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 21 (1994), 391–403, 398.
[85] Appadurai, 17.
[86] See Annette B. Weiner's: 'Inalienable Wealth', *American Ethnologist*, 12 (1985), 210-27, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1992), and 'Cultural Difference and the Density of Objects', *Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 21, (1994), 391–403.
[87] Weiner, 'Cultural Difference', 394.
[88] Weiner, 'Cultural Difference', 394.

Weiner's conception of inalienability attaches, as we have seen, to a particular category of objects that must be kept out of circulation because they are fundamental to the identity of its owner(s). The 'power these objects have to define who one is in an historical sense' brings past and present together within the object that so concretely represents a 'person's present identity'.[89] The loss of such an object is disastrous to the community of origin. The notion of permanence is, as Weiner imagines it, critical to a lasting society, and through objects, such permanence is manifested, 'making the past a powerful resource for the present and the future'.[90] The permanence of gems is especially precarious as they are vulnerable not just to theft but to a remaking or unmaking (when a gem is reset or, far more damaging to its cultural value, cut).

To navigate and withstand such vulnerability, Weiner identifies a paradox she refers to as keeping-while-giving. She explains, 'Value is created by trying to keep certain possessions out of exchange in the face of obligation to engage in exchange… It is through this paradox of keeping-while-giving that we follow the human strategies working to create densities in objects as these objects resist exchange and as their value is enhanced by the exchange of other things'.[91] She identifies it as a paradox due to two 'fundamental contradictions: one, the challenge to give is at the same time a challenge to the ability to keep, and two, the challenge to surrender the documentation of difference between exchange participants is, at the same time, a challenge to the guardianship of autonomy'.[92] Weiner's concept of keeping-while-giving largely indebted to Mauss's understanding of reciprocity. While Mauss maintains that 'competition, rivalry, display, the search for greatness and self-interest… underpin all these acts',[93] Weiner's paradox of keeping-while-giving offers a more cleanly logical explanation. One must give to receive, and one must receive to give; both are at least in part a sacrifice. When these exchange systems are disrupted by theft, the unreciprocated loss stands alone.

By Proxy, for example, illustrates a clear exchange system whereby Chinese devotees of the venerated Buddhist gem may pay a small offering to the shrine to see the relic.[94] When the novel's antagonist steals the gem and boldly claims that he is—in essence—trying to get his money's worth, he disrupts this system and leaves the shrine without its prized

---

[89] Weiner, 'Inalienable Wealth', 210.
[90] Weiner, 'Inalienable Wealth', 224.
[91] Weiner, 'Cultural Difference', 395.
[92] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 150.
[93] Mauss, 101.
[94] James Payn, *By Proxy,* A New Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1892), 24.

possession. To cover up, explain away, or justify such actions requires a reinscription of the object's inalienability in the face of evidence to the contrary. Like Weiner, I see the striving for repossession and repatriation that follows from expropriative violence as driven primarily by the need to avoid or 'overcome the destruction of loss', and the desire to 'kee[p] some things' or restore them to a position in which they can be seen as 'transcendent and out of circulation'.[95] Weiner's explanation recognizes that maintaining an item's status as inalienable requires work: there is maintenance required to keeping certain communally valued objects separate and therefore safe from traditional exchange systems—work that is at all times 'a burden, a responsibility, and at best, a skilful achievement'.[96] Weiner's work is not overtly political; but considering her work in the light of empire provides for a better understanding the ramifications of dispossession.

Reflecting on Mauss's conception of the potlatch, John Frow notes Mauss's refusal to regard any gift as freely given; in its 'pure form', a 'gift is absolute loss, consumption without profit'.[97] Seeing only loss for the giver and greedy acquisition for the receiver, Mauss understands reciprocity to be the equalizing force of an inherently imbalanced gift exchange. As mentioned, gifting and taking are—essentially—the two sides of the same coin. (This will be further discussed in Chapter One.) Mauss maintains, 'to refuse to give, to neglect to invite, as to refuse to take, is equivalent to declaring war. It is to refuse alliance and communion. As a consequence, one gives because one is forced to do so, since the recipient has a kind of right of property over everything that belongs to the donor'.[98] Mauss implies that the threat of dispossession happens by inaction—by a kind of reluctant passivity toward the demands of others that in turn encourages them to take the object in question, when dispossession might otherwise be avoided.

Weiner's object-centred approach implies that dispossession does not necessarily come just by way of someone taking a thing, but rather through a deeper non-compliance with normative exchange systems. Applying this theory to straightforward instances of theft can allow for a reading of popular fiction that considers gem-theft not just as taking, but as a refusal to comply with normative exchange systems that are no longer applicable within the sphere of Empire. Weiner notes that 'failure of memory' and 'political maneuver[ing] are among the irrevocable forces that work to separate an inalienable possession from its

---

[95] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 10.
[96] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 7.
[97] John Frow, *The Practice of Value: Essays on Literature in Cultural Studies* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2013), 81.
[98] Mauss, 74-75.

owner,'[99] implying that the object is lost because its inalienability is not properly valued. She continues, 'As glorified as an inalienable possession may be at one point in time, its successive owners may destroy it, lose it in battle, or tarnish what it stands for'.[100] Weiner's description of dispossession focuses, helpfully for this dissertation, more on the consequences of the loss for the larger group rather than the individual or the object itself, whereas Mauss's focuses largely on the 'incentives' to gifting, not necessarily the outcomes of exchange. She explains that the loss of an inalienable object 'diminishes the self and by extension, the group to which the person belongs',[101] and continues, 'A loss is not merely the loss of something in a social sense, or even in an economic sense, but a loss may indicate a perceived weakness in a group's identity and therefore in its power to sustain itself for future generations'.[102] Weiner's conception of loss differs, then, from Mauss's in that it is not necessarily spurred by a refusal to act or a refusal to *give*, but instead comes as a result of not successfully *keeping* hold of the thing in question.

If we compare objects under threat from *external* forces as Mauss describes to those under threat by an *internal* kind of negligence as Weiner describes, the potential for loss of inalienable objects becomes staggering. Mauss's conception of dispossession imagines an external threat, such as the potential for theft by neighbouring communities or their refusal to participate in otherwise mandatory exchange, like the potlatch. Weiner's internal conception of dispossession instead frames the loss as coming from *within* the group. The group might not, for example, respect the inalienability of an object and allow it to fall into exchange when it should be kept out of circulation. Appadurai speaks to this perpetual state of precarity arising from the operations of both internal and external forces. Like Weiner, he focuses on the notion of permanence, asking how the 'corrosion of history' might create a 'new state in [the] social lives' of objects.[103] I am by no means the first person to employ the studies of Mauss, Weiner, or Appadurai to literary criticism.[104] Applying gift theory and more general theories regarding inalienable objects and their exemption from systems of exchange, to instances of cultural theft may sound contradictory insofar as theft involves an

---

[99] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 6.
[100] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 39.
[101] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 6.
[102] Weiner, 'Inalienable Wealth', 212.
[103] Appadurai, 16.
[104] A few examples include Jean Arnold's *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture* and John Plotz's *Portable Property* and '*Materiality in Theory: What to Make of Victorian Things'* making use of Mauss, Weiner, and Appadurai. John Frow's 'A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole' makes use of Weiner and Appadurai. Mary Jean Corbett's *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* makes use of Weiner's concept of keeping-while-giving.

explicit refusal to respect what should be inalienable or to comply with established exchange systems. However, positioning gem-theft within the Victorian novel as a refusal or betrayal of cultural values and with normative rules of exchange will elucidate the complexity and self-reflexiveness of the unethical treatment of cultural objects.

V. Material Culture and the Museum

The anthropological study of object exchange has closely influenced the study of museum culture and the specific ways of approaching material culture within literary studies that are associated with the term 'thing-theory'. This thesis considers questions of ownership posed by experts in material and museum culture who frequently position museums as, at best, receptacles for loot, and at worst sites for the perpetuation and 'whitewashing' of imperial agendas. Appadurai's concern about the 'corrosion of history' turning 'one kind of thing into another kind of thing'[105] is both representative of a now widespread sense of the precarity of inalienable objects, as well as an explicit warning that 'action [to] resist' such degradation can be by no means passive. In the wake of Weiner's and Appadurai's work, more scholars of material culture have begun to consider what might be required if our treatment of objects is to be answerable to more progressive ideas of cultural justice. Nicholas Thomas's *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (1991) engages with Weiner's early publications, noting the 'difficulty' arising from what he views as too generic a concept of '"inalienability"'.[106] He crucially identifies what he refers to as the 'creative recontextualization' or 'reauthorship'[107] that objects from colonized spaces undergo, regardless of whether they are stolen or purchased. Comparing museums to world's fairs, he asks how far we may 'step outside' the 'entanglement'[108] of histories rewritten to satisfy a less problematic narrative, implying that a world fair is more concerned with entertainment and sheer novelty rather than the assumed pedagogical agenda of the museum.

Thomas's work, primarily focused on Pacific material culture in general (and not just as they function within a museum), was an early contribution to a rapidly intensifying critique of museums as receptacles for contested artefacts. Edited collections centred on the ethics of colonial collecting and the modern museum handling of objects with an imperial past include *Thinking about Exhibitions* (edited by B. Ferguson, R. Greenberg, and S.

---

[105] Appadurai, 16.
[106] Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 24.
[107] Thomas, 5.
[108] Thomas, 5.

Nairne, 1996), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (edited by T. Barringer and T. Flynn, 1998), as well as *The Dead and their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice* (edited by, C. Fforde, J. Hubert, and P. Turnbull, 2002). Each grapples with questions of ownership and value.

At a time when the beginnings of conversations about repatriation were becoming normalized, if not always acted upon, these works took the largely legal discussions regarding ownership and crucially, protests against gross dispossession, and began a cultural discussion about how best to move forward. In her contribution to *The Dead and their Possessions*, 'The Plundered Past: Britain's Challenge for the Future', Moira Simpson acknowledges that the 'cultural and political climate' of the 'late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century' simply did not 'allow' for productive conversations about reparations, let alone a formalized process for handling requests of repatriation.[109] The distinction must be made that the 'conversations' Simpson refers to are *legal* discussions, and not, as I discuss, popular narrative fictions where consideration is indeed given to repatriation. There may not have been a comprehensive legal framework in which to broach this topic, but (I argue) 'conversations' were demonstrably being started within popular fiction.

The historical processes of colonial collecting and the contemporary processes of managing their lasting impact (both on the dispossessed and on the establishments still in possession of them) revealed that before these conversations could make any meaningful headway, a discussion was needed of the cross-cultural mediation of meaning and value. Drawing explicitly on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn's introduction to *Colonialism and the Object* succinctly identifies the 'question of legitimacy' 'underlying the entire process of colonial collecting' indelibly representative of the 'severe imbalance of economic and political power between coloniser and colonised'.[110] Following Barringer and Flynn, Simpson also points to this imbalance, noting that some museums' refusals to repatriate objects to previously colonized spaces were bold enough to argue that 'artefacts collected during the colonial era are a part of the heritage of the collecting nation as well as that of the nation from which they originated'.[111] As Mieke Bal notes in her essay, 'The Discourse of the Museum', for the museum to be bestowed with the power to present or rather *represent* colonial collections means that they are granted custody not just of the

---

[109] Simpson, 203.
[110] Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn's introduction to *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1998), 6.
[111] Simpson, 204.

object, but of the entire 'process of making meaning'.[112] Published in 1996, Bal's essay declares anthropology to be '[today] the most self-critical discipline'[113]—this at a time when anthropology was largely disparaged for its presumed (over)investment in objectifying or oversimplifying cultural difference. The potential for self-criticism that Bal identifies has gained traction throughout more recent studies of colonial collecting as the case for repatriation and/or restitution has gradually strengthened.

The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation (2010), as well as the previously mentioned more military-focused histories of looting in *Diving the Spoils* (2020) and *Museums, Societies, and the Creation of Value* (2021) offer much needed further scrutiny of the history of museum acquisitions, cumulatively starting to articulate a basis for the repatriation of looted objects. Liz Bell's chapter, 'Museums, Ethics and Human Remains in England' in *The Long Way Home* traces the progression of formal museum protocols regarding the treatment of human remains. The repatriation of human remains has largely taken precedence over the repatriation of objects in recent years, on the grounds that the respect for physical bodies is widely recognized as having priority over the restoration of objects (calling to mind a scene from *The Moonstone* in which the house steward suggests 'put[ting] the Person before the Thing, which is but common politeness').[114] Referring to the 2005 document provided to UK Museums called *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*, Bell lays out the primary concerns often attached to items requested for repatriation. [115] Similarly, Henrietta Lidchi traces ongoing museum policies in the UK and Europe regarding repatriation and other regulations regarding the display of artefacts from 2020, primarily using London's National Army Museum as a case study.[116] Lidchi identifies a 'blind spot' in 'current debate on the question of military spoils': a 'relative neglect of military history and an apparent lack of interest in how military codes and conventions have historically framed and legitimized the taking of objects during military campaigns'.[117] While I agree that there has been something of a blind spot in how the military itself has viewed the

---

[112] Mieke Bal, 'The Discourse of the Museum', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Bruce W. Ferguson, Reese Greenberg, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 145-157, 149.
[113] Bal, 145.
[114] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. with intro. and notes by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21.
[115] Liz Bell, 'Museums, Ethics and Human Remains in England: Recent Developments and Implications for the Future', in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 29-34.
[116] Henrietta Lidchi, '*Material reckonings with military histories',* afterword to *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire,* ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 276-280.
[117] Henrietta Lidchi and Nicole M. Hartwell, 'Colonial Collection in British Military Museums: Of Objects, Materiality, and Sentiment', in *Museums, Societies, and the Creation of Value*, ed. by Howard Morphy and Robyn McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2021), 64.

legality of cultural expropriation, growing political calls to decolonize museums have brought this debate to the fore.

Laura Van Broekhoven places the inception of the movement to decolonize museums in the 1970s, and notes that it gained substantial traction in the 1990s and came to prominence in the 2010s.[118] This politicalization of museum collections has not been without its critics. Hicks refers to the 'contemporary rhetoric of "decolonising" museums' as an 'attempt at the cancellation of debts that arise from the colonial past'.[119] His primary objection, as I understand it, is that repatriation in this context is (or risks being) merely performative. If this is this case, then treating 'western museums' as sites of conscience and remembrance, in which to tackle the ongoing effects of racial violence, paying a debt, rebuilding… relationship[s]'[120] is, from the start, self-serving. Similarly sceptical, Lidchi warns of the potential 'consequences of this revisionist impetus' which may 'even result in new asymmetries of power or new forms of convenient historical erasure.'[121] From a more abstract philosophical perspective, Elizabeth Burns Coleman asks how 'debates about repatriation and inalienable possession' might 'highlight the different ways in which we value things'.[122] She considers Paul Turnbull's cautionary tale that within colonial collections objects 'potential[ly] have very differently enculturated meanings'.[123] Turnbull warns of the 'real danger of construing Indigenous cultures much as they were in colonial times: frozen in time and unsusceptible to change', noting the potential for misguided intervention to haphazardly 'diminish [the Indigenous culture's] rights to determine freely the fate of ancestral objects'.[124] In short, he warns of the danger of patronizing interference.

Burns Coleman differentiates helpfully between what she describes as "'Constitutive" and "Noncontingent" Ownership', stating that 'Repatriation laws should not be viewed as recognising an "inalienable" right, or "indigenous" (as opposed to western) values. [They] should be thought of as the creation of a framework through which indigenous values can be expressed'.[125] This insight is fundamental to my understanding of the value attached to

---

[118] Laura Van Broekhoven, 'On Decolonizing the Museum in Practice', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 32 (2019), 1-8.
[119] Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 19.
[120] Hicks, 234.
[121] Lidchi, 273.
[122] Elizabeth Burns Coleman, 'Repatriation and the Concept of Inalienable Possession', in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 82-95, 94.
[123] Paul Turnbull's introduction to *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1-11, 7.
[124] Turbull, 8.
[125] Burns Coleman, 82.

expropriated gems: as she argues, it is shortsighted and even dangerous to assume there is only one way the value of these stones can be 'expressed'. Value shifts when an object is expropriated; the ideal inalienability of an object for one group of people, especially when there are religious or deeply communal attachments, is violated at that moment—the original value of the object forcibly commuted into symbolic and/or market value elsewhere. Valued on other terms entirely, these objects take on new 'enculturated meanings'—most commonly as jewellery but also as trophies of imperial encounter.

The result of so much turbulence in the museum curatorial world over recent decades is significant as they diverge in current practice. Considering how and where some of the world's most famous jewels are currently displayed in London can shed light on the ongoing debate. Each year an estimated three million people visit Britian's Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.[126] As visitors enter the Jewel House, they first enter a small room in which a half-dozen or so crowns are displayed *without* any of their famous gems; the startling absence of gems underscores how barren crowns are without them.[127] In the next room, replicas of some of these missing gems are presented on large, well-lit pedestals as a film documenting the provenance of the most famous of them plays on a loop. The Koh-i-Noor is granted pride of place: replicas show what the gem looked like before it was cut at the behest of Victoria and Albert—another replica shows what it looks like today. The interpretation placard explaining the provenance of this gem notes: 'The 1849 Treaty of Lahore *compelled* ten-year-old Duleep Sign to *surrender* it to Queen Victoria' [my emphasis]. The film deploys moral terms throughout such as 'taken', 'passed down', and 'given to', suggesting a deliberate decision by the museum not to shy away from the violence and complexity of plunder. Additional placards refer to the diamond's vast social history involving a 'reputation for bringing bad luck'. Both the placards and the film refer to specific empires (The Mughal, Durrani, Sikh empires); the effect is to place these histories within multiple contexts, thereby avoiding the danger of over-Orientalizing the object. However, as visitors leave this room and eventually enter the Treasury, those histories retreat again as the State crowns, orbs, sceptres, and more are presented without any inscription. A fast-paced people-mover ushers visitors past each crown where they may marvel (briefly) at the glimmering gem-encrusted objects without delaying to read their histories.

---

[126] 'The Story of the Tower of London', Historic Royal Palaces, https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/the-story-of-the-tower-of-london/, accessed 14 April 2026.
[127] Jewels from these crowns have been removed so that they might be reset into newer crowns.

VI. The Study of Victorian Things

As museums, private collections, and auction houses grapple with contentious and culturally sensitive discussions of how to process, handle, and represent artefacts of imperial conquest, conversations anticipated and engaged with in the Victorian novel allow us greater insight as to how we have arrived at this political and moral dilemma. Many cultural historians, critics of Victorian fiction, and scholars of cultural expatriation and restitution have observed that looting in the Victorian period was multifaceted and the stories through which its meaning was explored and negotiated are complex, sometimes contradictory. In his 2020 study of the Benin Bronzes, anthropologist Dan Hicks regrets that, 'to our collective disciplinary and professional shame, no anthropological theory of looting, plunder, dispossession has been written'.[128] Hevia's *English Lessons* (2003) and more recent studies including *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire* (2020) and *Museums, Societies, and the Creation of Value* (2021), and the several articles on Victorian gems by Danielle Kinsey have begun to rectify these critical omissions.[129] Although historical and ethnographic fields of study have made significant progress in examining the nuances of looting, there are significant remaining gaps in literary scholarship, which has tended to neglect expropriation as a particular subset of the history of high-value cultural objects.

In Victorian literary scholarship, the study of material things has provided an influential critical frame for the study of fiction since the 1990s. Jeff Nunokawa's *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (1994) traces the woman-as-property trope that positions a woman's love and care as a guarantee of personal safety in and against a volatile marketplace.[130] The 'catastrophe' of financial and social 'ruin' is the ultimate 'calamity'[131] in Nunokawa's interpretation of Victorian property loss, important here as it points directly to perpetual anxiety of dispossession. In my readings of novels, I extend Nunokawa's theory that 'everything taken will be taken away',[132] and his observation that women and portable property tend to be held in close association in the nineteenth century, as having special pertinence to the imagined consequences of gem-theft and cultural expropriation. I ask what—beyond the stolen item itself—is taken from a culture when a

---

[128] Hicks, 21.
[129] See Danielle Kinsey's: 'Koh-i-Noor: Empire, Diamonds, and the Performance of British Material Culture', 'S. M. Tagore's Maṇimālā and the meanings of diamonds in late Victorian Britain and India', and 'Diamonds and Emotions in the Minerals Gallery: Civilizing Emodities in the Age of Liberal Empire'.
[130] Nunokawa touches on the subject of Empire in his chapter on the Orient and Dombey and Son, see *The Afterlife of Property*, chapter 3.
[131] Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7.
[132] Nunokawa, 8.

jewel is looted. One answer is suggested by Andrew Miller's *Novels behind Glass: Commodity, Culture, and Victorian Narrative* (1995) which focuses on the preoccupation with and ambivalence toward commodity culture in nineteenth century Britain.[133] Miller's brief discussion of heirlooms informs my understanding of the supposed permanence that objects offer to owners: 'it is not the material nature of the heirloom but its form that represents the family; and an object with an alterable form cannot represent the ostensibly unalterable family'.[134] I apply Miller's understanding of an 'alterable' 'material' to popular fiction (whereas he focuses exclusively on realism) and apply it to heirloom gems, some of which sold despite their implied communal importance.

Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006) has much more to say about empire, taking an expansive approach to uncovering the 'unseen connections between historical knowledge and fictional form' in relation to 'novelistic things'.[135] Drawing on Bill Brown's depiction of thing theory in his foundational essay 'How To Do Things With Things: A Toy Story' (1998),[136] Freedgood takes 'a novelistic thing materially or literally and then follow[s] it beyond the covers of the text through a mode of research that proceeds according to the many dictates of a strong form of metonymic reading'.[137] Freedgood provides us with a new kind of interpretive methodology not dissimilar to those established by Mauss and Weiner in that she identifies what makes certain objects more important than others. Freedgood diverges from a more straightforward ethnographic or anthropological approach by interpreting these distinctions via metonymic readings of objects. She maintains that these objects must be 'investigated in terms of its own properties and history'[138] to 'recuperate historical links that are anything but random'.[139] For Freedgood, what matters is not only *what* the object stands for or comes to represent in a metaphorical sense, but also the lengths to which metonymic readings can extend. She explains, 'metaphor defines and stabilizes; metonymy keeps on going, in any and all directions'.[140] Freedgood's metonymic study of things, by contrast with more

---

[133] Like Nunokawa, Miller briefly comments on Empire in his chapters on the Great Exhibition and Cranford, respectively, though his attention is focused more on commodity culture rather than imperialism. See Andrew H. Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity, Culture, and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapters 2 and 3.
[134] Miller, 167.
[135] Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 29.
[136] Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological approach to objects in *Being and Time* (1927) and Lacan's psychoanalytical conception of the 'objet petit a' developed in the late 1950s informed Brown's framework of things and Thing Theory as a whole.
[137] Freedgood, 12.
[138] Freedgood, 12.
[139] Freedgood, 16.
[140] Freedgood, 14.

straightforwardly metaphorical readings, such as Miller's or Nunokawa's, paved the way for later Victorian scholars interested in contextualizing things with a much keener eye for the origins of materials and the routes taken from the source of production to the place or places of consumption.

Taking a cue from both Miller and Freedgood, Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (2008), identifies an inevitable entanglement of objects and associations, arguing, 'if material objects have a subtext in the cultural imaginary, their meanings will not be free of affective life or ever rinsed clear of desire'.[141] I follow Armstrong in assuming a permanence not easily written over or erased, try as any thief might. In the same year, John Plotz's *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008) and his subsequent essay 'Materiality in Theory: What to Make of Victorian Things' (2016), treat objects on a similar basis to Freedgood's, insofar as he traces highly particularised object-histories. Plotz is less concerned with metonymy, and more interested in how objects which Weiner would describe as inalienable are represented in the text. 'Recent philosophical "object-centred" approaches are', he suggests, 'generally unproductive when applied to the literary realm, while the anthropological bias towards rendering all study of objects the study of their social/communal function misses important, and distinctive, aesthetic features'.[142] He focuses on objects he describes as 'dually endowed' with 'the rare fruits of a highly sentimentalized realm of value both domestic *and* spiritual, a realm defined by being anything but marketable'.[143] Like Weiner, he regards objects as imbued with their own kind of power: 'objects are capable of circulating as mere reified value, and yet simultaneously are endowed with a kind of sentimental energy that allows them to mean something particular, often even inarticulable, to individuals'.[144] Looking to trace this ineffable quality as it attaches to specific objects in Victorian novels, Plotz comes to a critical conclusion that my study is indebted to: 'In Victorian novels, almost all truly valuable objects come to be endowed with… double meaning, the appeal of which resides precisely in the disjunction that arises between the broadly shared, interchangeable, impersonal meaning and the poignantly personal aspect, which coexists with the former invisibly, or in ways accessible only to those who are already attuned to the sort of

---

[141] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.
[142] John Plotz, 'Materiality in Theory: What to Make of Victorian Things', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 522–38, 522.
[143] John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2. My emphasis.
[144] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 11.

resonances that such personal associations produce'.[145] Reading gems as the epitome of the kind of object Plotz describes, I aim to cast light on the disjunction between the commodity and the expropriated object, which stands apart from normal market exchange.

Suzanne Daly's *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels* (2010) blends the study of material culture and gender studies to provide a historically rich reading of Indian commodities consumed in British domestic novels. Examining tea, Kashmiri shawls, and gems, Daly's work frames Indian objects as 'mediat[ing] in novels' the 'complicated and evolving relationship'[146] between English people and Indian commodities within a largely undisrupted sphere of feminine English domesticity where the imperial project is at both times far away and yet close to home by way of imported goods. Similarly to Freedgood and Plotz, Daly states that her book is written to 'registe[r] and analayz[e] numerous moments at which inanimate objects are made to come to life and "speak," although such speaking almost invariably tells the story about their English possessors'.[147] She argues that 'making Indian things, which may be owned without complications or ramifications, stand in for India […] works to create the illusion of absolute possession',[148] suggesting that objects become symbols for a nation, in much the same way that Miller reads objects displayed at the Great Exhibition.[149] Daly's chapter on *The Moonstone* treats the novel as an example of domestic fiction—not as an adventure, detective, or imperial narrative—and therefore treats the diamond as an example of 'gendered thematic material' that is inextricable from 'the trope of jewelry as identification or identity'.[150] Reading the diamond as both 'property' and 'plunder', she imagines the Rachel/Moonstone interrelationship as 'invok[ing] England's vexed and vastly complicated relationship to India [whereby the diamond] illuminate[s] class and gender axes of property ownership and the ways in which belief systems regarding who is fit to own and administer wealth come to possess the force of law'.[151] I follow in Daly's steps in parsing the logic of the ties to British imperialism inevitably attached to gems, asking just how long the illusion of absolute possession can typically be maintained in the novels under scrutiny. Daly's focus on

---

[145] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 12.
[146] Suzanne Daly, *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 2.
[147] S. Daly, 8.
[148] S. Daly, 3.
[149] 'The technologies of display and exchange, the shop windows and crystal walls, as they themselves circulate out of the Exhibit, help to define what is valuable and worth representing; from being a mimetic copy of the external world, realistically presenting the objects of that world for view'. See Miller, 89.
[150] S. Daly, 67.
[151] S. Daly, 67.

domestic novels provides a robust commentary on the relationship between 'English people [and] what were understood to be Indian things'.[152] I diverge from Daly by looking across different genres of popular fiction, and across a wider geographical span to identify how each responds to the recurring theme of stolen gems.

As this brief account of the Victorian criticism of things demonstrates, the loose category of 'things' to which gems belong has largely been studied in relation to selected objects exemplifying either the commodity form or the role of that object within a commodity culture. While the body of scholarship outlined above has laid critical groundwork for reading things in Victorian novels, gems require more to be said. A question Plotz asks has particular relevance for the looting of jewels: 'are we stuck, forced to choose between two approaches, one anthropological (the object as concretized social codes) and the other philosophical (vibrant and recalcitrant matter twisting free of any human efforts to pin it to mere signification)?'[153] Plotz's conundrum, paired with the problem that Hicks identifies—that no theory of looting has been written—helps to define the space this thesis is looking to fill. In what follows, I expand upon the foundational work of Nunokawa, Miller, Freedgood, Plotz, and Daly as it has taught us to read things in Victorian literature, asking how the circulation of stolen gems resembles and departs from the circulation of other kinds of objects.

VII. The Study of Victorian Gems

In her study of the Koh-i-Noor, material historian Danielle Kinsey remarks, 'Victorian consumers—of products, spectacles, and ideas—were in many ways hyperaware of where things came from and the networks of exploitation that were in place to deliver these goods. This knowledge inhered in the meanings of things within imperialism and imperial culture'.[154] I agree with Kinsey that there was a profound awareness of object provenance; however, there was no thoroughly articulated system of treating stolen gems as anything other than hard-earned prize or misbegotten plunder that exposes its new owner to potentially hostile scrutiny. The pirates of *Treasure Island* dig for their loot as if 'possessed';[155] by contrast, *The Moonstone's* matriarch Lady Verinder wants nothing to do with the pilfered diamond, nor does Mary Morstan in *The Sign of Four* want her father's portion of plunder. The response to stolen gems in Victorian literature is almost never

---

[152] S. Daly, 2.
[153] Plotz, 'Materiality in Theory', 528.
[154] Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor', 392-93.
[155] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island and The Ebb-Tide* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), 208.

consistent: the jewel is never *only* good as prize or *only* bad as stolen property. When a narrative is attached to the gem—like the lore surrounding the Moonstone that Rachel hears at the dinner table—it creates moral and dramatic quandaries. Each work of fiction that I examine affixes such a narrative to a gem, whether it is explicitly articulated to the possessor or not. While Rachel is told about her uncle's misdeeds, the antagonist of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Ebb-Tide*, for example, withholds the dark story behind valuable pearls as they enter the marketplace: no purchaser knows the devastation the pearl mining has caused, while the reader is—of course—painfully aware. While Kinsey and other historians of loot draw astute conclusions regarding Victorian consumers' critical alertness to provenance, I maintain that literary critics have not sufficiently recognized the role of the novel as a vehicle of moral, political and psychological reflection on the cultural significance of gems.

In *Portable Property*, Plotz's brief discussion of gems is essentially limited to diamond jewellery. He establishes an important intersection between the 'sentimental object and cash instrument', that comes to represent a 'world of fungibility', where esteem can be translated readily into property'.[156] Diamonds possess, for Plotz, 'quintessential[ly] portable properties [with] their unsettling capacity to carry more than one sort of value at once'. A diamond is simultaneously a 'sentimental object and [a] cash instrument'.[157] I consider jewellery as just one form of setting for gems, with other, typically culturally-laden settings including religious idols (the Moonstone is initially set in the eye of an idol) or a dedicated space of sanctity within a temple (the Shay-le in *By Proxy* is secreted away within a temple and only brought out for select viewings). When gems are transformed into jewellery in the culture of appropriation they become easily identifiable as a 'cash instrument', as Plotz suggests. The mysterious or sanctified lustre of the gem is marred or forgotten the minute it is worn like a bauble.

Plotz and Daly discuss diamonds specifically in relationship to India, confining their treatment of the subject to a single chapter. Jean Arnold's *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture* (2011) and Adrienne Munich's *Empire of Diamonds: Victorian Gems in Imperial Settings* (2020) are focused exclusively on gems. Arnold's readings of authors including Collins, Thackeray, Eliot, and Trollope follows similar lines of inquiry about commodity fetishism, material studies, and gender studies previously examined by Plotz and Daly. Like Freedgood, Plotz, and Daly, she looks to the history of objects to contextualize and deepen the recognition that 'Victorian jewelry may function as a symbolic

---

[156] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 32.
[157] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 37. Stefanie Markovits comes to a similar conclusion in her article 'Form Things: Looking at Genre through Victorian Diamonds', *Victorian Studies*, 52 (2010), 591-619, 596.

representation of the individual's relation to the society'.[158] Arnold's statements offer little by way of meaningful historical contextualization (at times misconstruing critical junctures between British and Indian relations).[159]

A much greater depth of historical research informs Adrienne Munich's *Empire of Diamonds* (2020), which examines gems in Victorian novels and poetry largely neglected since Arnold's monograph. Munich's readings of Tennyson, Kipling, Collins, Stevenson, and Conan Doyle, take her from India, Australia, Africa, to the Americas. Her expansive study of gems in Victorian literature draws on Freedgood, especially in its recognition of an almost haunting presence of imperial violence associated with diamonds. The troubled distinction between licit and illicit consumption is essential to my project, and while I focus on a smaller subset of imperial locales, I view the 'Diamond Empire' similarly: as haunted by imperial violence.

> Victoria's realm, eventually labelled the British Empire, included all the diamond-producing locations in the world: India, South Africa, and Australia. For a while, boundaries of the diamond empire in the cultural imagination and its place within the British Empire are congruent. Without mentioning that congruity, or perhaps not being conscious of it, print literature in English provided many and varied accounts of the stone itself, increasing in this period and endowing it with rare fervor.[160]

My interest lies with gem-theft, and not gem-consumerism. I position the specific instance of theft (and its consequences) as the event generating the most telling commentary on illicit

---

[158] Jean Arnold, *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 20.

[159] Arnold repeatedly refers to Indian 'customs' that seem to dictate complex dynamics relating to agency and ownership. She states, 'The fact that diamonds became so prominent in the Victorian era can be traced in part to these customs of India and the reflexive influence that British colonial endeavours in India exerted upon Victorian domestic culture' (79). The only customs she specifies are 'material signs' of Indian 'power and prestige' (79). Later, in describing the East India Company's exploitative treaty agreements which saw the young Duleep Singh sign away his rights to both the Punjab and his treasury, Arnold only notes, 'According to Indian custom, the British victors could take possession of the Maharaja's jewels' (81). Completely omitting any discussion of the evolving treaties, subsidiary alliances, the role of the recent wars, or the fact that, while legally the East India Company was permitted to appropriate the jewels of the state, Arnold brushes over essential historical context and simply gestures toward Indian custom. She uses 'custom[s]' in two different capacities in these examples, though both are unclear. If material signalling of power and prestige is a custom in and of itself, as are customs which apparently unquestioningly allow for the possession of state treasures to be handed over by a child—the ten-year-old Maharajah—to an imperial force, then conquest, hoarding, plunder disappear as significant subjects of political protest and historical inquiry.

[160] Adrienne Munich, *Empire of Diamonds: Victorian Gems in Imperial Settings* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 6.

possession. Moreover, I am looking beyond diamonds specifically and considering gems as a broader category, including pearls and unidentified varieties of stones such as the Shay-le in *By Proxy*, described as 'not an opal',[161] but something entirely different—something unknown. Enigmatic gems of an unknown classification are commonplace in these texts, granting the idea of the gem an additional power to inspire awe in its ineffability. By contrast, pearls, being highly commoditized, only garner special attention where one stands apart from the rest for either its size or its colour. I am indebted to Nunokawa, Freedgood, Plotz, and Daly for establishing thought-provoking and interdisciplinary frameworks in which to read these Victorian objects, as well as Munich for a diamond-specific reading of Victorian fiction.

With the exception of *The Moonstone* and *The Sign of Four* all the works studied here belong to the now largely forgotten reaches of popular fiction. My interpretation of what constitutes popular fiction in Victorian writing is informed by Nicholas Daly's understanding of middle-class culture as creating a specific consumerist market for fiction.

> While middle-class culture at the end of the nineteenth century was more homogeneous than it is now, we can see that at both the level of production and consumption it was marked by some degree of aesthetic stratification. To this extent the phrase "popular middle-class culture" does not seem to me to be oxymoronic. Thus … I shall continue to use the term "popular", *faute de mieux*…[162]

Though Daly favours the term 'popular' over 'middlebrow', both are helpful to me in parsing the specific readership of the texts under discussion. The Victorian middlebrow is a subgenre of literature, described by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch as characterized by 'the development of an ever-wider reading public after the educational reforms of the 1870s': 'there emerged a kind of literature that operated between the avant-garde and the popular and which claimed an essential position in the emerging literary markets of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century'.[163] Ehland and Gohrisch's edited volume *The Imperial Middlebrow*, reads middlebrow writing as 'sometimes directly and often indirectly map[ping] the inherent fissures in the colonial endeavour and its frequently disconcerting

---

[161] Payn, 30.
[162] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture*, 1880-1914 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.
[163] Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch, 'Cross-colonial Encounters and Expressions of Power in Middlebrow Literature and Culture, 1890 1940 and the Present', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 1-21, 5.

realities. With regard to such aspects as … colonial legitimisation, middlebrow writing can be conceived of as a form of "anxiety management" which allows unsettling issues to be raised while maintaining at least a superficial impression of narrative stability and security'.[164]

This positioning of popular fiction is crucial to my work. The politics of each author covered here are not always among the most sympathetic offered by Victorian literary practice, and it simply cannot be contended that each piece of fiction was written with the intention of making a liberal case or pursuing a sophisticated political agenda with respect to cultural reparation.[165] While not *all* the texts I examine demonstrate an especially radical positioning around the theft of gems, the degree of sophistication and nuance in the politics of many of them indicates an attunement to the intricacies of a mid-to-late nineteenth century cultural debate concerning the ethics of looting. Popular works of fiction can neither be dismissed en masse as reactionary, as some previous scholarship has often claimed, nor praised for collectively anticipating a future in which repatriation would emerge as the ethical solution to historic dispossession. I read popular fiction as providing a dedicated space within which writers represented, and readers contemplated, forms of imperial expropriation, its moral rights and wrongs, and—not always, but not infrequently—began to make an imaginative case for repatriation and restoration. My chapters detail how each text engages with this capacity for reflexiveness.

---

[164] Ehland and Gohrisch, 6.

[165] In December 1857, only five months after the official end of the First War of Indian Independence, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dicken's coauthored the *novella The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, which documents an eighteenth-century mutiny in Central America leaving English men, women, and children to defend themselves from pirates. While Dickens's chapters were more explicitly xenophobic, Collins's incorporated a slight degree of sympathy toward the indigenous population within his chapters. However, the novella as a whole is in keeping with most Mutiny Novels insofar as framing the mutiny as egregiously violent and often aimed toward innocent women and children. The following year, Collins released his 'Sermon for Sepoys' in which he concludes by calling the rebelling forces 'Betrayers and Assassins [who ought] to be taught!' (247) despite a largely sympathetic (if also patronizing) tone advocating for them to 'purify their minds' (244). He is largely remembered as progressive in his political views. Conan Doyle's politics, while complex and nominally attached to the Liberal Unionist party, were often on the side of British imperial expansion, as he authored works defending the Boer Wars and advocating for British involvement in the First World War. Less is known about the politics of James Payn. In his collection of essays *Some Private Views* (1881) he makes his indifference toward politics known, mocking, though not condemning women's rights and trade unions. Catherine Louisa Pirkis's liberal politics first came by way her involvement in the Anti-Vivisectionist Movement (cofounding the National Canine Defence League) and continued throughout her written work where she often championed the working class as well as women in vulnerable positions. L.T. Meade was also a staunch advocate of women's rights and was a member of the Pioneer Club, a progressive women's club that campaigned for social reform. She advocated for marriage reform, women's professionalism, and education for women. Of the three women authors I discuss in this study, Meade tended the most toward Christian-based views. Beatrice Heron-Maxwell was a prominent suffragist and was closely associated with the Liberal Party, participating in public debates about women's voting rights. She was also the Vice President of the Society of Women Journalists.

Each chapter of my study loosely corresponds to a distinct genre that comes under the broad umbrella of middlebrow mid-to-late Victorian fiction. Surveying in turn detective, romance, adventure, and New Woman fictions I explore how specific generic conventions inflected the portrayal of stolen gems. Where late-century adventure stories tend to depict hordes of treasured gems ripe for imperial plucking, for example, roughly contemporary New Woman fictions tend to pair the threat of gem-theft with the threat of physical harm to women. In addition to surveying different generic conventions, I consider how popular fiction allows for this debate to be staged in a way that other literary forms could not offer. The New Woman detective fiction that described the threat of violence against women wearing or storing gems on their person was written almost exclusively for literary magazines such as *The Strand* or *The Harmsworth Magazine*.[166] Women authors of 1890s detective fiction followed the slightly earlier hugely successful examples of Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Louis Stevenson who regularly incorporated gem-theft within their stories written for periodicals, and who were in turn reworking successful formulae established by sensation writers including Collins and Payn. By the end of the century the periodical short story offered a ubiquitous vehicle for often formulaic stories of gem-theft: L.T. Meade's detective series *The Sorceress of the Strand* (1902-03), for example, extends to six instalments, four of which include gem-theft or buried treasure, demonstrating the market for a level of repetition that would not be as welcome in a novel, regardless of genre.

Nicholas Daly and Pablo Mukherjee's work on genre and popular fiction is fundamental to teasing out these genre-based patterns to the treatment of looted gems. Daly's *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (1999) and Mukherjee's *Crime and Empire: The Colony in Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Crime* (2003) ask their reader to consider how empire functions within the novel, particularly how popular fiction creates a 'working knowledge of Britain as a modernizing imperial society'.[167] I ask how this working knowledge changes—both across the second half of the century but also across genres—and ultimately suggest that in working and reworking conceptions of how an imperial society operates both at home and abroad, an articulation of ideas such as the call to repatriate objects becomes more defined. While legal frameworks were being formalized to further legitimize military prize, fiction began questioning the morality of it. Daly notes that the popular fiction that sold best was noticeably impacted by

---

[166] These were only later published as collections.
[167] N. Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle,* 25.

the 'colonial imaginary'.[168] Playing to the market, the writers I consider made the moral ambiguity of colonial gem ownership staple imaginative fare. Mukherjee's monograph concentrates on the 'colonial imaginary' of detective fiction. His insights into the framing of Indian criminality as a key to critical reflection on cultural dominance are applicable to other genres engaged with the anxieties around expropriation and extraction. As he observes, 'nineteenth-century popular novelists used the rhetoric of crime to sustain [the] conflictual, rather than consensual, nature of culture',[169] and '[by the 1860s] there was already a long tradition of British writing that used "criminal India" to interrogate, rather than empower, colonialist/ imperialist ventures'.[170] In my study, depictions of stolen gems replace Mukherjee's focus on the discourses of criminality; where he prioritizes how the figure of the criminal was used to 'interrogate colonial ideology, [and] also to outline a critique of British domestic society',[171] I frame the figure of the stolen gem as accomplishing a similar feat.

Mukherjee's treatment of 'Victorian Empire' for *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature* (2012) speaks to a self-reflexiveness typically assumed only to develop well after the Victorians.

> This historical awareness of their possessions being contested and their wealth being dependent on absolute force, helped fuse the trope of treasure (or wealth) with guilt and trauma in the writing of the Victorians. In their most successful imaginative acts, writers saw such treasure or wealth as a disruptive force in domestic Britain, exposing the structures of inequity that lay at the core of their contemporary society.[172]

I look at how, as a cultural product and privileged site of information, the (popular) novel is laden with ideological intent but also ideological self-reflection of varying kinds. Victorian literature was, of course, riddled with imperialist assumptions; but it also admitted a degree and complexity of self-reflexiveness in relation to imperial looting that makes it a significant cultural precursor of the formal political and legal reforms of the twentieth century.

---

[168] Nicholas Daly, 'Colonialism and Popular Literature at the Fin de Siècle', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, ed. by Richard Begam and Michael Moses (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 19-40, 36.
[169] Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire: The Colony in the Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.
[170] Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire*, 3-4.
[171] Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire*, 9
[172] Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, 'Victorian Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 641-661, 654.

VIII. Overview of Chapters

Chapter One, 'A legacy of trouble': Giving and Taking in *The Moonstone'*, examines Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel starting with a close reading of the prologue. Here, Collins rapidly chronicles eight hundred years of South Asian history, interspersing fact with fiction as he charts the complicated provenance of the eponymous gem. Tracing the historical source texts informing Collins's semi-fictionalized portrait of India and reading the novel's conclusion which sees the Moonstone's Indian protectors forcibly repatriating the diamond, I consider Victorian conceptions of repatriation by reviewing two differing contemporary accounts of repatriative action by the British government preceding and succeeding the publication of *The Moonstone*. Following this, I examine instances of 'gift' exchange in the main narrative that amount to a series of unsuccessful attempts to renegotiate and, in effect, decontaminate the diamond's ownership. The final section considers the love relationship (ultimately a marriage) between first cousins Rachel Verinder and Franklin Blake, as necessary symbolic reparation for a family divided by a decades-long conflict between cousins, in which the theft and 'gifting' of the Moonstone is the central act of violence.

Chapter Two, 'James Payn's *By Proxy* (1877) and Looting in Nineteenth-Century China', examines another novel centred on the theft of a religious gem. The plot of this briefly successful but now rarely read novel is divided between mainland China and England and follows a bigoted English soldier who opportunistically steals a Buddhist gem, the Shay-le, initiating a pattern of displaced revenge and deferred justice. Situating *By Proxy* in relation to Victorian and later critical conversations about cultural restitution, I contextualise it in relation to a crucial political moment in Britain's relations with China. Using the destruction of the Old Summer Palace in 1860 as a case study of British aggression and opportunistic looting, I examine that historical event as the background to the complicated return of the Shay-le—forever marred by its brief expropriation—to its original guardians. By contrast with other stories treated here, *By Proxy* has relatively little to say about the ongoing impact of the gem's (attempted) cultural alienation, though it does point to a telling thinness around the initial act of expropriation. Noting the stark similarities between *By Proxy* and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), this chapter considers whether or when literary inspiration may itself be a form of looting—whereby authors pilfer

character archetypes or even entire storylines as part of an opportunistic attempt at profiting from the literary marketplace.[173]

Chapter Three, 'Spent Treasure: Robert Louis Stevenson and Expropriative Violence', examines *New Arabian Nights* (1878), *Treasure Island* (1881-82), and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894). In this chapter I extend my study of looted gems to include other treasured items such as gold bars and coins. These objects are treated in much the same way as gems, demonstrating both an interesting narrative function as well as an opportunity to reimagine gems as synecdochical with treasure. I maintain that Stevenson's career-long fascination with hoarded treasure entails a distinctive interest in treasure that exists in precarious and intermediary spaces where it might either be converted into money or wasted; in each of the instances considered, it is (finally) spent. I question when and why, as Stevenson travelled throughout the Pacific, his romancing of treasure became more sceptical of European economic interests in the region, increasingly probing the distinction between the priceless object and the commodity. I argue that a spectrum emerges: on one end, the hoard of diamonds or overflowing chest of gold, surrounded by an aura of intrigue and opportunity, and on the other, a chest full of pearls ready to put on the market, no longer enchanting the viewer but instead becoming the product and symbol of racially exploitative labour and the lucrative stuff of trade.

Chapter Four, 'Gem-Theft in Detective Fiction at the Fin de Siècle', reads Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890) alongside lesser-studied detective fiction by women authors. I argue that *The Sign of Four* crystallizes a pattern in which acts of gifting that follow from violent male theft essentially 'launder' looted gems by passing them on to women who are unaware of the gem's imperial origins.[174] Considering how the formulae of detection fiction evolved after *The Moonstone*—both across a period of colonial expansion and with regard to New Woman fiction—I ask how and where stories of gem-theft at the end of the century repeat and/or critique contemporary views of property and repatriation. I expand upon the concept of literary looting which sees women writers cleverly recasting formulaic detective stories as well as superficially incorporating evergreen plotlines well-

---

[173] Monica F., Cohen coins the term 'literary looting' in *Pirating Fictions: Ownership and Creativity in Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture* (Charlottsville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 32. Where she uses the term primarily in relation to illegal or unauthorized reprinting of works or stage productions, I extend the use of her term by applying it in a broader sense by considering how similar plotlines or character archetypes can constitute literary looting.

[174] Hyungji Park refers to women as 'the ultimate metropolitan money-launders, neutralizing and domesticating colonial treasure'. I extend her use of the concept of laundering to consider how female characters throughout Victorian popular fiction are exploited in the service of converting plunder to prize. See Park, 'Empire, Women, and Epistemology in the Victorian Detective Plot', Korean Modern Anglo-American Literature Society, vol. 15.1 (2008), 133-56.

proven to be popular. I do not suggest that women authors exclusively churned out derivative plots, but instead aim to trace how these stories occupied a particular niche in the market, taking familiar conventions of stolen gems 'cleansed' by association with women and reworking those conventions—joining them to political consideration of the rights of women. Evolving gender politics concerned with the right to own property and the right for women to choose when or whether to marry recast stolen gems from a symbol of imperial conquest to that of a means to renegotiate personal or financial independence. In many stories, young brides sell family heirlooms to purchase a new life with a spouse deemed unsuitable by their fiscally controlling family. In others, the *loss* of priceless gems removes a financial disparity between bride and groom, affording an equal footing upon which to marry. Where adventure or male-centred detective stories were designed to appeal to a largely male audience, stories written by women authors were marketed toward the newly burgeoning female readership of literary magazines. Comparative attention will be paid to works by Catherine Louisa Pirkis (*The Experiences of Loveday Brooke,* 1893-94), Beatrice Heron Maxwell ('His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond', 1899 and *Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker*, 1899), and L.T. Meade (*Stories from the Diary of a Doctor,* 1894-96*, Stories of the Sanctuary Club,* 1899*,* and *The Sorceress of the Strand*, 1902-03).

A brief Conclusion starts with a reading of the 2023 novel *Loot* by Tania James. I consider how contemporary depictions of looting (here targeting the late eighteenth-century rule of Mysore, Tipu Sultan) have emerged from the earlier, nineteenth-century literary tradition identified by this dissertation—a tradition that identified and grappled with the ethical connotations of illicit possession of cultural artefacts. The Conclusion draws out some general observations about how Victorian popular fiction understood and reacted to the theft of gems from sites of imperial conflict in the latter half of the century. Treating each novel or short story as a symbolic case-study of expropriative violence and of cultural dispossession more broadly, I regard these thefts as prompts to cultural self-reflection—identifying material and emotional effects of looting as they track the renegotiations of ownership following from the theft that initiates the story. These are at once imperial fantasies and, in several cases, critiques of imperial fantasy, inviting their readers to imagine repatriation and reparation as a moral response to extractive force and imperial looting. Accordingly, I read these imperial fictions as dealing in the ethical dilemmas prompted by cultural theft as much as they deal in the adventure of international crime. By paying closer attention to Victorian fantasies of illicit cultural dispossession, this thesis engages with and adds to the ongoing critical conversation about the significance attached to acts of cultural expropriation in the Victorian era that formed the fabric and content of so many of our institutions of culture. Whether characterized by a fearful, sometimes frenetic urge to get rid of the burden of illicit

possession *or* tending rather toward a measured self-reflexiveness that promotes repatriation or reparation to the dispossessed cultures, these are, I suggest, social and political fictions which contributed to a wider cultural conversation, still incomplete, about the ethics of looting and the case for cultural restitution.

Chapter One: 'A legacy of trouble': Giving and Taking in *The Moonstone*

In 1846, the first Treaty of Lahore compelled the seven-year-old Maharajah, Duleep Singh, to sign away authority of the state into the hands of the British until his sixteenth birthday, when the British promised to 'leave as friends'.[175] Three years later, having seized Lahore and its treasury from the Kingdom of Punjab, Governor-General Dalhousie—without first consulting or informing the East India Company's Court of Directors—staged a durbar with the now ten-year-old Maharajah.[176] A newly amended treaty demanded that Duleep sign away more of his (already largely symbolic) sovereign power of the Punjab. Having just lost thousands of men in the fight for Lahore, he had little option but to sign. The third term of the treaty read: 'The gem called the Koh-i-Noor… shall be surrendered by the Maharajah of Lahore to the Queen of England'.[177] The ceremonial meeting ended with the child's forced hand presenting the Koh-i-Noor to Dalhousie, to be given as a so-called gift to Queen Victoria.[178] In a letter penned later the same year, the Governor-General boasts of his recent acquisition, attesting: 'The value of the Koh-i-Noor is that whoever holds it is victorious over all his enemies. And so it is. The Koh-i-Noor has been of ill-fortune to the few who have lost it… it has been the symbol of victory and empire'.[179] Another of Dalhousie's letters concludes: 'It is not every day that an officer of their Government adds four millions of subjects to the British Empire, and places the historical jewel of the Mogul Emperors in the Crown of his own Sovereign. This I have done. Do not think I unduly exult'.[180]

Nearly ten years later, sepoys rebelled against British rule, recaptured Delhi, and attempted to reinstate a Mughal Emperor—Bahadur Shah Zafar II. Despite the thousands of sepoys who gathered to defend the Mughal capital, the British seized back the city, dealing a decisive blow to the Indian rebellion that would end the following year with the transfer of rule to the British Crown and the formal end of the Mughal Empire. Reflecting on the Siege of Delhi, Captain Charles Griffiths—whose personal plundering I detailed in my introduction—recalls witnessing egregious looting committed by British soldiers: 'Interference or remonstrance with these men would have been useless, if not dangerous; in their excited states they were no respecters of persons, and we deemed it the better judgment

---

[175] William Dalrymple and Anita Anand, *Koh-i-Noor: The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 177.
[176] A durbar is a formal meeting by the Indian noble court for administering affairs; these became increasingly ceremonial as British colonial rule increased.
[177] Dalrymple and Anand, 185.
[178] Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor', 394.
[179] Balfour, 28.
[180] Kinsey, 'Koh-i-Noor', 395.

to take no notice of their actions'.[181] Considering the seizures of Lahore and Delhi and placing the words of Dalhousie and Griffiths alongside one another provides a window on imperial hubris. The same arrogance that exulted in controlled looting turns a blind eye to it when it becomes ungovernable.

The Moonstone is the most influential novel in the British literary canon about the theft of gems amid imperial violence. Wildly popular from the start of its serialization in Charles Dickens's journal *All the Year Round*, the novel not only cemented the role of the detective in popular fiction but paired it effectively with the tradition of Mutiny Novels following the events of 1857. While pinpointing *The Moonstone's* allusions to real-life events is hardly novel, this chapter aims to do more than add to existing recognition of Collins's critical imaginative response to gem-theft as an imperial crime.[182] Ilana Blumberg, writing on the complexities of exchange in *The Moonstone,* notes that 'the novel's transactions embody… the ethical challenges faced by […] a Victorian novelist […] attempting to organize a socioeconomic order whose coherence was threatened by the competing forces of a still-pervasive puritanical Christianity… and a burgeoning individualist capitalism'.[183] Blumberg's application of this insight both to gems and to the novel itself—'a personal, sacrificial offering, labored over in anxiety, whose value, still undetermined, lay in the willingness of discerning readers'—resonates with my own reading.[184] I diverge, however, from Blumberg's focus on Christianity and capitalism by focusing on and contextualizing Collins's role as a literary historian of Britian's imperial dealings with India.

Tracing the reading that Collins undertook in preparation for writing *The Moonstone* should alert us to a level of sophistication in his characterization of the British response to the First War of Indian Independence a decade later. Some of the source material that Collins made use of has less to do with India and more to do with the attribution of cultural value. Charles William King's *The Natural History of Precious Stones and Gems* (1865), for example, chronicles the history of the Koh-i-Noor, which Collins would employ in his historicizing of the Moonstone in the Preface to his novel. King laments that the Koh-i-Noor—'the most ancient gem in the history of the world'—has been reduced to 'a mere lady's bauble'[185] following its cutting in England in 1852: in his view, this 'ill-advised' act 'deprived

---

[181] Gregorian, 72.
[182] See the notes accompanying Oxford University Press's 1998 and 2008 editions of *The Moonstone* edited by Anthea Trodd and John Sutherland respectively.
[183] Ilana Blumberg, 'Collins's Moonstone: The Victorian Novel as Sacrifice, Theft, Gift, and Debt', *Studies in the Novel*, 37 (2005), 162–86, 163.
[184] Blumberg, 183.
[185] Charles William King, *The Natural History of Precious Stones and Gems* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), 74-75.

the stone of all its historical and mineralogical interest'.[186] King's regard of the Koh-i-Noor as a 'historical relic'[187] resonates through the events of *The Moonstone,* as this chapter will argue.

Collins's other research materials pertain more directly to Indian history. Theodore Hook's *The Life of General Sir David Baird* (1832) depicts the Siege of Seringapatam in 1799 and James Talboys Wheeler's *The History of India from the Earliest Ages* (1867) chronicles three eras of India history: 'Hindu, Mussulman, and British', from the 'dawn of history' to the mid-nineteenth century.[188] In that context, Wheeler's account of the events of 1857 is limited to a single footnote asserting: 'In the present day the paramount power of the British government is on a firmer footing than that of any previous suzerain in India [despite] many trying occasions during the mutinies of 1857'.[189] It is vital to note that some of the most integral sources Collins depended on were published *before* the mutiny, and therefore are not characterized by the same degree of nationalistic fervour that came to define later texts.

William Baker's reconstruction of Collins's library confirms that Collins referred to the eighth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (published in ten volumes between 1853 and 1860).[190] Collins's preparatory notes and his description of the city of Benares (modern day Varanasi) in the novel suggest that he made ample use of (at least) the tenth volume, published the year *before* the mutiny. The first volume of the ninth edition would not be published until 1875, meaning that Collins was—to some degree—filling in a gap in the current scholarship or—at the very least—engaging with an ongoing conversation about how England envisioned India after the mutiny.

Where revision of a longform multi-entrance reference work like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *The History of India* to incorporate the events of 1857 took time, there was a rapidly evolving and widespread print-media debate elsewhere. Readily printed and ephemeral media including, newspapers, pamphlets, and periodicals, and an increased availability of political documents such as parliamentary papers changed the way in which British readers viewed their role in India. Collins clearly had his finger on the pulse. Cultural conversations regarding looting and the notion of repatriation in an imperial military context began much earlier than many readers of Victorian popular fiction would assume, in part

---

[186] King, 74.
[187] King, 76.
[188] James Talboys Wheeler, *The History of India from the Earliest Ages* (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1867), 1.
[189] Talboys Wheeler, 413.
[190] William Baker, *Wilkie Collins's Library: A Reconstruction* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 65.

because authors like Collins were quick to incorporate these ideas into popular fiction. By imbuing the Moonstone with an articulated cultural history in which it is repeatedly alienated from its culture of origin, Collins begins the work of cultural self-scrutiny and instigates a serious discussion about the rights and wrongs of spoil, prize, and plunder.

The novel's prologue foregrounds a repeated history of expropriation of the Moonstone, mapping out a succession of imperial regimes that attempted to turn plunder into prize, to use Hevia's formulation once more. The novel considers this historically elongated process of prize-making as dependent upon the repeated erasure of cultural meaning in favour of a new attribution of imperial significance.[191] Collins introduces gift-giving as a further complication to an already complex pattern of possessions and dispossessions to illustrate that *giving* can be just as charged—just as damaging—as taking. By blending fact with fiction, Collins's histories of expropriative behaviour imagine how contested possession might give way to the formation of new histories, potentially resulting in restoration of the plundered gem to the community most deeply invested in its symbolic value. Collins's treatment of the Moonstone illustrates that, when the gem is imbued with specific cultural weight and historicity, it may become a token—a surrogate—for the culture it represents. Collins identifies and puts in question a false dualism that would have us see giving and taking as opposing acts. His novel asks us to reimagine exchange systems whereby gifting becomes threatening, and (ironically) to be the victim of theft affords relief, because stealing circumvents the obligations of gift-exchange. Surveying several instances of gifting—the most notable being Herncastle's gift of the Moonstone to Rachel—the reading that follows formulates the relationship between giving, taking, and retaking within the novel.

I. 'Conquering Mohammedans': *The Moonstone's* Prologue and the Impact of Expropriation

> *Here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond—bringing after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man… Who ever heard the like of it—in the nineteenth century,*

[191] The Moonstone is described as initially (pre-eleventh century) owned and revered by 'Indian' (1) (the implication being Hindu, specifically) adherents to the god who 'typifies the Moon' (1). The prologue documents a series of exclusively Islamic thefts from that point on, until Herncastle (British), steals it from Indian Islamic ownership in 1799. Collins does not conflate or muddy the difference between Hindu or Islamic ownership, creates a powerful divide between the two by incorporating a partially factual history of Islamic, then British violence against Hindus. This chapter traces this divide.

> *mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution?*[192]

Wilkie Collins sets nearly the entirety of *The Moonstone* between 1848 and 1849, twenty years before its publication in *All the Year Round* during the first eight months of 1868. In his introduction to the 1999 Oxford World's Classics edition of the novel, John Sutherland stresses that the 'action' of the narrative is situated well before 1857.[193] The novel meticulously dates each of its major plot points, drawing close attention to the short period of time in which the eponymous Moonstone changes hands before (according to Murthwaite's testimony (466)) it is restored to India in 1850. At the point where the Moonstone's theft from a 'quiet English house' is first narrated by Gabriel Betteredge, house steward in the employment of Lady Verinder, the contemporaneity of the story is underlined: '*… in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress'* (33). In the prologue, by contrast, Collins recounts a much lengthier history framing this 'age of progress' by reference to approximately eight hundred years of rapacity and religious fervour. Within the span of just a handful of pages, the Moonstone changes hands (at least) three times, its provenance much less a story of origin than a murky history of appearances and disappearances. As I will discuss, it is moved by the Brahmins from Somnath to Benares to protect it from Mahmud's invasion, then stolen by Aurungzeb, and from there it moves an unspecified number of times from 'one lawless Mohammedan hand to another' before ending with Tipu Sultan (3). Centuries pass in just a few lines. The resulting concentrated 'history' imbues a fictitious diamond with a past that emulates but also goes well beyond the history of the most famous Indian diamond in Britain: the Koh-i-Noor. Collins narrates a series of thefts by rival rulers and invading Muslim forces from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries, ending with the killing of Tipu Sultan by the British at the Battle of Seringapatam in 1799.

Sutherland's introduction underscores that Collins was 'quite precise' in dating the 'adventures' of the Moonstone alongside the real history of the Koh-i-Noor.[194] The authorial preface accompanying the first 3-volume edition of *The Moonstone* (July 1868) states explicitly that the Koh-i-Noor is a major source of inspiration, though the historical elements introduced in the prologue exceed those relating to either the Koh-i-Noor or the Orlov

---

[192] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. with intro. by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[193] John Sutherland's introduction to *The Moonstone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii-xxix, xii.
[194] Sutherland, xv.

diamond, which Collins also acknowledges as influencing his story. He says nothing, however, to clarify the potential confusion caused by his mixing of fact with fiction: of the three historical figures (Mahmud, Aurungzeb, and Tipu Sultan) mentioned in the prologue, only Aurungzeb (r. 1658-1707) *actually* possessed the Koh-i-Noor. Although Mahmud and Tipu Sultan did *not* possess it, their inclusion as owners of the fictional diamond is telling, as will become clear.

The Moonstone has been read and reread through post-colonial and historicist lenses. Ian Duncan, for example refers to a 'colonial darkness'[195] haunting the novel; Ashish Roy, meanwhile describes the parallels between the blatant misconduct of the British Armed Forces and the armies of the East India Company and the 'eight centuries of Indo-Islamic lawlessness'.[196] Jean Arnold agrees, noting the 'uncontrollable greed' that characterises 'the officially sanctioned battle [of Seringapatam]'.[197] Similarly, in an astute reading of the prologue, Lillian Nayder argues that 'Collins prefaces *The Moonstone* with an instance of British violence against Indians and suggests that their later acts of violence against Britons are marks of retribution triggered by an original, imperial crime'.[198] Helpful though they are, these readings shortchange the temporal reach of Collins's only fractionally accurate history, which does indeed *end* with British violence during the Siege of Seringapatam in 1799, but begins at a time where a (British) imperial threat was still centuries away.

> The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the Christian era. At that date, the Mohammedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni, crossed India; seized the holy city of Somnauth; and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries—the shrine of Hindoo pilgrimage, and the wonder of the Eastern world. (2)

Narrowly escaping pillaging at this point, the Moonstone is safeguarded against Mahmud of Ghazni (in modern day Afghanistan) and taken to Benares in the north of India by three Brahmins under instruction from the Hindu god, Vishnu (2). For nearly seven hundred years,

---

[195] Ian Duncan, '*The Moonstone*, The Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 55 (1994), 297–319, 300.
[196] Ashish Roy, 'The Fabulous Imperialist Semiotic of Wilkie Collin's The Moonstone', *New Literary History*, 24 (1993), 657–81, 666.
[197] Arnold, 77.
[198] Lillian Nayder, 'Collins and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139–52, 139.

the Moonstone remains guarded in a temple in Benares, until another 'Mohammedan conqueror' reaches India.

> One age followed another until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzebe, Emperor of the Moguls. At his command havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized by an officer of rank in the army of Aurungzebe. (2-3)

Henceforth, 'the Moonstone passed (carrying its curse with it) from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another,' (3) until the British stormed Seringapatam at the end of the eighteenth century. The narrator explains that from these 'lawless Mohammedan[s]', 'the Diamond fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury' (3). Despite the Moonstone being placed in the hilt of a dagger and kept in a locked armoury, the Brahmins keep watch—this time, disguised to 'conform to the Mussulman faith' (3). During the resulting raid of the armoury, John Herncastle (cousin to the prologue's otherwise anonymous narrator) uses the very dagger in which the Moonstone is set to brutally murder each of the Brahmins (4-5) before taking the diamond as plunder—blatantly disregarding the threat of hanging for anyone caught pilfering during the siege (5).[199]

Splicing fictional and attested history, Collins's narrative is often explicit in its recognition of missing or dubious elements of the story. This deliberately imperfect joining of history and fiction demonstrates David Spurr's sense of the 'logical incoherence of colonial discourse', which 'continually creates its own crisis of authority'.[200] Fictions of colonial power, according to Spurr, cultivate a critical discourse that pulls toward the 'historically localizing fictional narrative and, conversely, [...works to] expan[d] the frame of reference belonging to nonfiction'.[201] 'Infinitely adaptable in its function of preserving the basic structures of power', the novel is, all the time, working against the stability of power's authority (11). With this in mind, delving deeper into the histories fleetingly mentioned in

---

[199] Herncastle is employed by the EIC, not the BAF.
[200] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 11.
[201] Spurr, 10.

Collins's Preface can help us to see how the attention to Islamic history (re)positions British authority as one stage in a much longer story of changing power relations.

Collins's chosen starting point for the Moonstone's history is Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion of the Somnath Temple (in the modern-day city of Veraval, Gujarat) in 1026. Sultan of the Ghaznavid Dynasty which ruled modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the state of Punjab, Mahmud had long been portrayed as a Muslim fanatic with a notorious penchant for pillaging Hindu temples and killing all who stood in his path. Stories of his alleged cruelty and religious intolerance lasted centuries and reappeared in the nineteenth century by way of the first translations of Perso-Islamic texts regarding Mahmud and his successors to make their way in England.[202] *The History of India: As Told by its Own Historians, The Muhammadan Period,* translated excerpts of Afghan histories by Collins's contemporary, H.M. Elliot, was published posthumously in ten volumes between 1867 and 1877, with the first volume appearing a year before *The Moonstone*. Historian Ali Anooshahri observes: 'Elliot [saw] the invasions as the embodiment of Muslim encounters with pagan India—violent, fanatical, and always antagonistic'.[203] Similarly, historian George Malagaris notes that in the nineteenth century, Mahmud was known mainly as an 'Oriental despot'.[204]

Although Mahmud's plundering of Somnath occurred in the eleventh century, the story of the temple's destruction was introduced to the English milieu only eight hundred years later. Its relevance to Collins's novel lies in its broader consideration of the propriety of cultural restoration. Historian Richard H. Davis explains that during the period of the Anglo-Afghan wars, the East India Company and British Armed Forces 'gained the idea that Mahmud had looted some ancient sandalwood gates from Somanatha [*sic*] and transported them back to Ghazna'. [205] While no proof has been found to substantiate this claim or determine the basis of this rumoured history, 'by the 1830s it was accepted as fact by virtually all British observers'.[206] In November of 1842, the temple gates that Mahmud purportedly took from Somnath were ostensibly returned to their homeland by Lord Ellenborough, the British Governor General during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-

---

[202] Ali Anooshahr, 'The Ghaznavid Empire of India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 58 (2021), 441–76, 445.
[203] Ali Anooshahri, 'The Elephant and the Sovereign: India circa 1000 CE', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28 (2018), 615–44, 617.
[204] George Malagaris, 'Firishta's Sultan Mahmud: On Beauty and Gold', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 56 (2018), 21-33, 32.
[205] Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 200.
[206] Davis, 200.

1842).[207] Despite the apparent success of the gates' repatriation, it would come to light shortly after Ellenborough's elaborate ceremony between the Company and Indian 'princes and chiefs' that Ellenborough knowingly 'returned' a set of gates that were most certainly *not* the original.

I am not the first to note the significance of Mahmud's invasion of Somnath and the story of the 'repatriated' gates. The two most readily available critical editions of the novel—Anthea Trodd's 1982 edition and John Sutherland's 1999 edition—both refer to the story.[208] Trodd and Sutherland helpfully point out that Collins would have understood the gates to have originally come from Somnath, so that their 'return' by Ellenborough was not duplicitous.[209] Regardless, Ellenborough manufactured a spectacle of quasi-repatriative gift-giving by claiming to restore the stolen gates of Somnath to northwestern India. Ellenborough's 'Proclamation of the Gates' responds to the widespread sentiment that Mahmud's invasion centuries prior remained a particular point of contention between Muslims and Hindus.

> To you, Princes and Chiefs of Sirhind, of Rajwarra, of Malwa, and of Guzerat, I shall commit this glorious trophy of successful war… The insult of 800 years is at last avenged. The gates of the temple of Somnauth, so long the memorial of your humiliation, are become [*sic*] the proudest record of your national glory – the proof of your superiority in arms over the nations beyond the Indus… My Brothers and my Friends, I have ever relied with confidence upon your attachment to the British Government. You see how worthy it proves itself of your love, when, regarding your honour as its own, it exerts the power of its arm to restore to you the gates of the temple of Somnauth, so long the memorial of your subjection to the Afghans.[210]

The patronizing comradery here, promising the British government's friendship in exchange for Hindu 'love', is a clear ploy to ensure continued cooperation with a British imperial

---

[207] As Governor General from 1842-44, Ellenborough was appointed by the EIC, not the British Armed Forces. Ellenborough was the face of the 'repatriation', though General [William] Nott is credited for removing them from Ghazni. See chapter 6 of Davis's *Lives of Indian Images* and the entry for 'Ghizni' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by T.S. Traill, 8th edn, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853–60), 603. [Volume 10 was published in 1856]

[208] See Anthea Trodd's notes accompanying *The Moonstone*, ed. with intro. and notes by Anthea Trodd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 524 as well as Sutherland's notes accompanying his 1999 edition, 501.

[209] Accepting the likelihood that Collins believed the gates to be genuine, I diverge from Trodd and Sutherland by pressing the implication of manipulative restitutive giving. Even if Ellenborough had repatriated the real gates, he only did so to ally himself closer to Gujarati princes during a fraught period of Anglo-Afghan relations.

[210] John William Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, vol. 3, new edition, revised and corrected (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1857), 380–81.

project that promises 'worthy' rewards such as the return of the gates. The obvious implication is that the Company stands between the princes and chiefs continued 'subjection' by Afghanistan. Allyship thus appears more as a veiled threat than as reassurance of a genuine alliance.

Each of the three objects treated in the Preface—the fictional Moonstone, the gates, and the Koh-i-Noor—is imbued with centuries of bloodied history. Only one is repatriated from abroad to India. We must also note that it was not descendants of Mahmud, or even Afghan officials who arranged the spectacle surrounding the gates to Somnath, but the *British*. Ellenborough 'gave back' the gates knowing that they were neither authentic nor his to give, just as Governor-General Dalhousie later presented the Koh-i-Noor to Queen Victoria when it was not his (or the East India Company's) to gift away. If Collins aimed to mimic this type of interventionist fictional staging of repatriation, then the Brahmins, *taking the Moonstone back* and refusing future British involvement, turn the stories of the gates and the Koh-i-Noor on their heads.

The same edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that details Mahmud and the Gates of Somnath includes an entry for Benares.[211] Like the entry for Somnath, this short statement of essential knowledge describes another instance of a Hindu temple demolished by a Muslim force, Aurungzeb—the second ruler included in Collins's list of owners of the Moonstone. The entry details the seizure of a temple by Aurungzeb and the erection of a mosque 'on the [Hindu] site … in order to mortify the Hindus'.[212] Aurangzeb of the Mughal Empire, called himself *Alamgir* or 'Seizer of the World' and reigned for nearly fifty years (1658-1707).[213] According to historian Audrey Truschke, he would eventually rule most of the Indian subcontinent and its population of about 150 million people, and his rule would come to 'typif[y]' a 'zealous' Muslim overtaking of a mainly Hindu population, thereby 'threaten[ing] Indian society by virtue of [his] religiosity'.[214] Collins depicts Aurungzeb's plundering of the Moonstone: 'At [Aurungzeb's] command havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized' (2-3). The depiction of Aurungzeb's ownership of the diamond specifies that it lasted 'generations' (3); but no further names are specified in that

---

[211] 'Benares', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by T.S. Traill, 8th edn, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853–60), 644. [1854]
[212] 'Benares', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 644.
[213] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 3.
[214] Truschke, 1, 6.

period until, in 'the last years of the eighteenth Christian century', the diamond 'fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam' (3). Collins's depictions of Aurungzeb and Tipu Sultan promulgate the notion that Islamic violence repeatedly encroached on an otherwise peaceful Indian—or more specifically, Hindu—space.

The Moonstone's prologue cannot be read as the history of the Koh-i-Noor for reasons that go beyond the obvious historical inaccuracies. While it is telling that there are clear parallels between the history of the fictious diamond and the real one, they diverge significantly in the questions they raise about illicit possession. Collins's account of the Moonstone moving from 'one lawless Mohammedan hand to another' (3) overtly deviates from Charles William King's history of the Koh-i-Noor. The Koh-i-Noor was not owned exclusively by Muslim rulers before it was obtained by the British. The novel sees Tipu Sultan killed by the British in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War in May of 1799; here Collins stops short of including a crucial change of ownership of the Koh-i-Noor. In July 1799, only two months after the killing of Tipu Sultan, Ranjit Singh of the Sikh Empire captured Lahore and began a forty-year rule over the Punjab.[215] A decade and a half later in 1813, Singh overthrew the Afghan Empire and demanded that the Koh-i-Noor be relinquished to save the life of the Durrani Empire's ruler Shah Shuja.[216] This marked the end of Muslim ownership of the Koh-i-Noor.

Given the extensive historical research evident in Collins's prologue, the omission of an entirely different—Sikh—empire can be read as a deliberate decision to reframe and simplify the history of Britain's relations with India to create a fictional lineage of exclusively Muslim ownership over the Moonstone. The fictional reallocation of the diamond from Ranjit Singh to Tipu Sultan raises several questions. Was Collins's exclusion of Ranjit Singh (and the entire Sikh Empire) an omission specifically made to create an undisrupted lineage of Muslim ownership? Or was the positioning of the stone in Mysore with Tipu Sultan primarily a structural decision which granted Collins the narrative opportunity to depict the Siege of Seringapatam, already notorious for horrendous looting? The main events of 1848-49 in *The Moonstone* occupy precisely the same period as the Second Anglo-Sikh War, which resulted in the fall of the Sikh Empire, the annexation of the Punjab to the East India Company, and the forced gifting of the Koh-i-Noor from the Child Maharajah to the East India Company. The killing of Tipu Sultan sets Herncastle's looting of the diamond against

---

[215] See the entry for 'Sikh Wars', *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sikh-Wars, accessed on 15 April 2026.
[216] Romila Thapar, *Somanatha, the Many Voices of a History* (New Delhi: Penguin, Viking, 2004), 174.

the background of a violent British defeat of a Muslim potentate. Had the Moonstone followed the history of the Koh-i-Noor and moved (eventually) from Aurungzeb to the Sikh Empire, Herncastle would have been stealing not from Tipu, but from the child Maharaja, Duleep Singh.[217] Does the Moonstone—whose provenance had otherwise loosely paralleled the Koh-i-Noor until the entrance of the Sikh Empire—diverge here to avoid a reality which saw the young Maharajah egregiously exploited by the British instead depicting the victory of General Baird, famously represented on canvas by Collins's godfather and namesake, the painter David Wilkie?[218] In Wilkie's painting, Baird looms over the lifeless, yet almost Christ-like body of Tipu Sultan, whom Collins names as the final Muslim owner of the Moonstone. My interest in dwelling on the exclusion of Sikh ownership is not to quibble with how Collins's deviated from the history of the Koh-i-Noor, but to scrutinize the implications of why he did so and to consider the resulting narrative function this change afforded.

---

[217] After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, the Koh-i-Noor passed through the hands of Ranjit Singh's wazir Dhian Singh, then *possibly* to Dhian's brother, Gulab Singh. It is known, however, that Sher Singh possessed the diamond when came to power in 1841. Sher Singh's death in 1843 resulted in the child emperor Duleep Singh coming into possession of the stone when he was named Maharajah at only five years old. See chapter seven of Dalrymple and Anand's *Koh-i-Noor*. Dalrymple and Anand do not list Gulab Singh as one of the many owners of the diamond; see Bhai Nahar Singh, and Kirpal Singh, *History of the Koh-i-Noor, Darya-i-Noor and Taimur's Ruby* (New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1985), 166 for an account that places Gulab Singh among those who once possessed the diamond.

[218] Collins was fourteen when David Wilkie finished the portrait Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tipoo Sahib (1839) and only sixteen when Wilkie passed.



Figure 3. David Wilkie, *General Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo Sahib after having Captured Seringapatam, on the 4th May, 1799* (1839) [Oil on canvas, 46.50 x 29.30 cm], National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Understanding the significance of Tipu Sultan's incorporation into the text requires first exploring his role as a historical figure. Following this, identifying what Collins understood to be the relationship between Tipu Sultan and a history of exploitative exchange will shed light on why the novel's description of Tipu Sultan is far more sympathetic than its account of the Moonstone's earlier Muslim owners. Tipu Sultan became Emperor of Mysore in 1782—in the very middle of the second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84) and amid ongoing conflicts with the Maratha Empire that would continue throughout the first several years of his reign. The Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790-92) ended with Tipu Sultan surrendering part of his kingdom to the East India Company, but also saw him allied with the French—an arrangement which would come to play a vital role in the fourth and final Anglo-Mysore War six years later. Britain's decisive victory in Egypt at The Battle of the Nile (1798) against the French would directly impact both Napoleon's campaign against British India and Tipu Sultan's ability to defend the Kingdom of Mysore in the final Anglo-Mysore War (1798-99).[219] Unable to depend on aid from the French, Tipu Sultan's army faced the British as well

[219] See Zak Leonard's, 'Law of Nations Theory and the Native Sovereignty Debates in Colonial India', *Law and History Review*, 38 (2020), 373-407.

as the princely state of Hyderabad and the Maratha Empire unassisted. Tipu Sultan's death defending Seringapatam against British soldiers on 4 May 1799 was followed by an extraordinary display of egregious unsanctioned looting.

Theodore Hook's 1832 biography *The Life of General, the Right Honourable Sir David Baird*—which Collins read closely in preparation for writing *The Moonstone*—depicts countless instances of violent expropriation of artefacts.[220] Hook frames Tipu's death sympathetically, describing it as the unfortunate result of an attempted theft that Tipu was defending himself against. Believing the Sultan to be dead, a British soldier 'seized the sultaun's [*sic*] sword-belt… and attempted to pull it off'; however, the Sultan was still alive, and 'held his sword in his hand, made a cut at the soldier with all his remaining strength, and wounded him about the knee; on which he put his piece to his shoulder and shot the sultaun through the temple, when he instantly expired'.[221] For Hook, this was a heroic death, the 'honour of human nature' fuelling understandable 'rage at the indignity' of the 'attack of the private soldier' and leading Tipu Sultan to act in self-defence. The account not only frames the Sultan's death as occurring outside any formalized code of conduct appropriate to war, but also stands in stark contrast to previous illustrations of imperial progress during Tipu's reign, despite qualifying the act of unscrupulous killing as 'hope[fully]' committed by a 'sepoy',[222] and not—as it is glaringly implied—a white British soldier. Following the killing of Tipu Sultan, any strict adherence to the notion of 'just spoils of war' quickly deteriorated into ungovernable looting, including the immediate removal of the Sultan's personal effects. His 'turban, jacket, and sword belt' were all missing by the time he was officially identified.[223]

Hook's account maintains throughout its pointed respect for Tipu Sultan as well as an implied disapproval of the actions of the unidentified soldier responsible for the Sultan's death. The same disapproval is clearly on display in Collins's portrayal of Tipu's death which pairs his killing with scenes of unbridled and unpermitted looting. But, where Collins explicitly describes the 'rapacity' of Mahmud's capturing of the Moonstone and the 'havoc and rapine' (2-3) of Aurungzeb's seizure of the stone, he asks us to imagine it passively '[falling] into the possession' (3) of Tipu, suggesting that Tipu's ownership was not as egregiously marred by violence or threat. This passivity becomes telling when considered

---

[220] In his notes on *The Moonstone*, Sutherland references this biography—specifically the discontent between Baird and Wellesley, 471-72.
[221] Theodore Edward Hook, *The Life of General, the Right Honourable Sir David Baird, Bart*, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1832), 217.
[222] Hook, 217.
[223] Hook, 218. Hook's account does not specify if British soldiers were identified as responsible for removing these articles. It is also plausible that Tipu's own soldiers took them either out of reverence or to conceal his identity.

alongside Collins's depiction of the Siege of Seringapatam where the focus is on the loss of control of British East India Company soldiers and much less on any violence committed by Tipu Sultan.

Similar to the spectacle of the return of the gates of Somnath, a carefully orchestrated event following the killing of Tipu Sultan would come to illustrate another exemplary instance of exploitative gifting. Three soldiers of differing ranks present at the Siege of Seringapatam played vital roles. General George Harris had overseen all military action on the day. Below him in rank, Major General David Baird organized and participated in the siege. Finally, Major Arthur Wellesley (the future Duke of Wellington) was responsible for one of several commands, instructed to first corner Tipu Sultan and later to restrain the gross excess of looting that followed the Sultan's death. Wellesley described the damage completed before his intervention aided in quelling the chaos: 'Scarcely a house in the town was left unplundered… in the camp jewels of the greatest value, bars of gold, etc. etc., have been offered for sale in the bazaars of the army by our soldiers, sepoys, and followers'.[224] Despite the force with which Wellesley 'restor[ed] order' (he acted with the 'greatest exertion, by hanging [and] flogging'[225]) the actions of the soldiers did not go subsequently unpunished by Company executives. Harris removed the command of Seringapatam from Baird and transferred it to Wellesley, the junior officer.[226] This demotion of Baird was likely influenced by the fact that Wellesley's brother Richard was—at the time—the Governor General of India. Some form of justification was required, and a pretext was conveniently found in the struggle to maintain order in the aftermath of Tipu's death.

It was in this context, where he was looking to improve his damaged relationship with Baird, that Wellesley sent him Tipu Sultan's state sword accompanied by a note asking him to accept a 'splendid trophy' that Baird had 'the best right' to.[227] This act of generosity was short-lived, however. The Prize Committee demanded that the sword be returned immediately as it was not Wellesley's to give. The Prize Committee's intention 'in pressing the immediate restitution of the sword was, that they might forthwith fulfil a resolution which they had formed of presenting it *themselves* to General Baird, by the hand of his excellency the commander-in-chief, himself'.[228] In short, the Company was intent on creating a particular optic in gifting the sword to Baird—perhaps as recompense for his demotion—even as Wellesley, too, desired to give the sword as a kind of olive branch for

---

[224] Davis, 153.
[225] Davis, 153.
[226] Hook, 226.
[227] Hook, 242.
[228] My emphasis.

being given Baird's job. Ultimately, the three men gathered in Harris's tent so that Wellesley might (re)issue the sword to Baird 'in the name of the army'.[229] Whether Baird was required to return the sword to Harris only for Harris to immediately hand it back over to him is not explicitly described in Hook's account, but the ridiculousness of the situation was unlikely to have endeared Baird to either Wellesley or the Company. Once again, a blatantly manipulative theatrical staging of cross-cultural expropriation as a form of gifting failed to fulfil its political purpose and—if anything—worsened the situation, just as the theatrical 'return' of the Gates of Somnath insulted those who were being asked to think of it as a legitimate form of reparation.

Collins's blending of fact and fiction in the prologue's sweeping history of the Moonstone embellishes the provenance narrative of the Koh-i-Noor to draw in major Muslim figures from the East across centuries. In his narration of the Siege of Seringapatam, he sticks much closer to the truth, despite the Koh-i-Noor never being present there. *The Moonstone's* depiction of the siege holds close to Hook's account, at times quoting verbatim.[230] Collins's incorporation of that account positions the fictional Moonstone in an otherwise exact retelling of the historical event—literature looting recent history for inspiration—ultimately, of course, for commercial profit. Collins's prologue narrator recounts, for example that 'General Baird himself had found the dead body of Tippoo under a heap of the slain' (4). Hook's description reads that Tipu was found 'under a heap of the slain'.[231] Collins's narrator continues: 'We were each attached to a party sent out by the general's orders to prevent the plunder and confusion which followed our conquest' (4). Hook describes the 'plunder and confusion'[232] Baird and Wellesley were tasked with suppressing. Finally, Collins's narrator explains that he and his cousin Herncastle were commanded to 'enforce the laws of discipline' (4) on the looting soldiers, which ultimately resulted in Herncastle killing Indian guards to steal the Moonstone. Hook described a 'gentleman' soldier 'actively employed in preventing the pillage' who was seen 'filling his own pockets'.[233] Both Collins and Hook describe the beat of the drum that drew an end to the frenzy by calling attention to the announcement that any soldier found looting 'should be hung' (4).[234]

---

[229] Hook, 242-243.
[230] Melissa Free also notes the parallels between Hook's biography and *The Moonstone's* prologue. See '"Dirty Linen": Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48 (2006), 340–71, 350.
[231] Hook, 218.
[232] Hook, 219.
[233] Hook, 221.
[234] Hook, 226.

Within the terms of the narrative itself, the purpose of the prologue is to give a long international historical backstory to a malicious act of gifting within an English home (an uncle's gift to his niece of a thing of value that brings with it a violent 'curse' (3)) thereby politicizing what the novel's narrators are initially at pains to depict as an apolitical event: a single rogue Company man stealing for personal gain, and for reasons of personal malice toward his sister gifting the gem on to his niece. The adaptations Collins made in drawing on his historical reading offers insights into how he conceives of loot; he pairs 800 years of Muslim violence with the 'deplorable excesses' (4) committed by the British in Seringapatam to depict the Company, in its turn, as equally reprehensible. As he depicts it, looting is not a soldier's right (as Harriet Tytler would suggest), but a violation of morality. Moments where Collins's history of the Moonstone converges with or diverges from the history of the Koh-i-Noor help to bolster his sense of the unethical looting of gems. Tipu Sultan replaces Ranjit Singh in the fictional retelling of the gem's story to provide the Moonstone with a provenance that puts the East India Company in a plainly negative light.

The Moonstone's Gabriel Betteredge points out that Herncastle worked for the East India Company and not the British Armed Forces, stating: 'They are very strict in the army, and they were too strict for the Honourable John. He went out to India to see whether they were equally strict there, and to try a little active service' (30). The reference to Herncastle as 'the Honourable John', Sutherland helpfully points out, is a direct reference to his employment by Company (formally known as The Honourable East India Company).[235] The widespread recognition of the Company's lack of control over its own armies during the Siege of Seringapatam, therefore, affords Collins a setting in which to depict the theft of the Moonstone as a violation of accepted codes of military conduct. Using this historical scene, Collins depicts looting as motivated by personal greed much more than by political interest. Herncastle's looting is not driven by a retaliation for an assault, nor is it driven by financial imperatives, since he never seeks to sell it; instead, his theft is committed solely out of defiance of Company rules and of any social or ethical code that would discourage the theft of a gem that has immense significance in its culture of origin. Betteredge continues: 'He had kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of assassination, in India. He kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of public opinion, in England' (31).

---

[235] See Sutherland's notes to the 1999 edition of *The Moonstone*, 476.

II. 'A little legacy': Gift-giving throughout the Novel

Where the prologue chronicles the Moonstone's provenance by narrating its repeated expropriations committed over centuries in concert with (though strategically departing from) the actual history of the Koh-i-noor, the main body of the novel imagines the consequences of its expropriation to England. What follows narratively is not a stemming of the pattern of cultural theft but a continuing pattern of transferred ownership, starting with a highly ambiguous act of gift-giving whereby the Moonstone is (once again) expropriated—as a birthday present. After this presentation of a clearly weaponized gift, Collins goes on to describe several other instances of gift-giving that can be read as exploitative in varying degrees. Each instance of taking, giving, and receiving is multifaceted. Each exchange instigates a shift in agency and power.

Once venerated for its connection to the Divine, the Moonstone acquires new symbolic value as a result of its imperial 'adventures' (466)—acquiring an association with imperial power, capital, and material beauty rather than spiritual density, to use Weiner's term. This incomplete transfer of significance (for the Brahmins, the Moonstone emphatically retains its original meaning and value) raises questions about the fungibility of the diamond's worth. If Herncastle had stolen it with the intention of utilizing it as a commodity, then one would assume he would sell it on immediately for monetary gain. Alternatively, if this act of larceny was (as Dalhousie puts it) a hostile gesture toward another or others (Tipu Sultan himself; the East India Company's officer class)—then the diamond's meaning exceeds reduction to its market value. It acquires significance as a *thing* capable of usurpation. Initially Herncastle's theft functions simply: immoral expropriation for personal gain, not a politicized act. However, Herncastle's actions become increasingly charged when he begins to use the diamond to shift the growing burden of risk that attaches to what he has done.

To ward off the threat of death from the Brahmins sent to retrieve the diamond, he threatens: 'Kill me—and the Diamond will be the Diamond no longer; its identity will be destroyed' (38). The Moonstone's form—that of a large diamond with a flaw in its centre—does not, and *cannot,* serve any meaningful financial function unless it is altered; it must either be cut, refashioned, or once more exchanged to become profitable to him. Understanding this, his threat to have the diamond cut in the event of his murder turns it into a pawn in what is, in effect, a deadly struggle between him and the three men attempting to recover and restore it to its shrine. Despite Herncastle's best attempts to miser the diamond away, he understands that he is at mortal risk for as long as the diamond is in his possession. He gives it away to perpetuate his control over others, even after death. A note in Herncastle's will is directed to his sister, Lady Verinder, leaving the Moonstone to his

niece, Rachel, as a birthday present: 'I give the Diamond to her daughter Rachel, in token of my free forgiveness of the injury which her conduct towards me has been the means of inflicting on my reputation in my lifetime' (40-41). Exploiting the cultural pressure to accept gifts and apologies alike, this profession of ostensible generosity and forgiveness is plainly intended to induce guilt and effect revenge by transferring the danger of the Moonstone's curse from Herncastle to Rachel and her family.

Betteredge and Franklin deliberate over Herncastle's motive, the former asking: 'Did the Colonel know the conspiracy followed the Diamond; and has he purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, through the innocent medium of his sister's child?' (33). Lady Verdiner herself takes 'the blackest view possible of the Colonel's motives' (62). Blumberg argues that the diamond is—strictly speaking—*not* a gift to Rachel at all, and that the gift/bequest distinction matters. To leave Rachel the Moonstone 'as a bequest rather than to give it to her as a gift emphasizes his desire to escape reciprocity. The death that transforms a gift into a bequest is as audacious as the diamond itself… He leaves the Verinders with a debt in memory that they cannot repay'.[236] While Blumberg is correct that the diamond is a bequest, it is of course the case that a last will and testament is in itself a form of gift-giving, the difference being that the recipient will never have the opportunity to repay the giver. A bequest passes the onus of Herncastle's guilt then onto others—creating an *obligation* on the part of the recipient to decide how, in turn, to interact with the object they find themselves owners of.

The connection with Rachel's birthday matters not because of any goodwill Herncastle has for Rachel (he has none), but because an earlier birthday of hers was the occasion on which his sister last insulted him, declining his admission to her house. 'I shall remember my niece's birthday' (32), Herncastle states ominously as he is turned away. The conditions attached to the bequest underline the emotional difference between a bequest and a gift, as the will makes clear that, if they are not met, the diamond should be sent away and sold. Herncastle specifies that the diamond may be given to Rachel if and only if her mother—his sister—is alive and present. The will continues: 'If [Lady Verinder] was dead, or if Miss Rachel was dead, at the time of testator's decease, [the Diamond should be] sent to Holland… the proceeds of the sale [should be] added to the money already left by the will for the professorship of chemistry at the university in the north' (41). These specifications make clear the control the dead man wishes to assert over his sister, much more than over Rachel. In effect, Herncastle takes revenge on his sister by giving this gift to her daughter, as he

---

[236] Blumberg, 170.

knows that Lady Verinder will not wish for her daughter to accept it. Herncastle opens two distinct futures for the gem. In the first, it is to serve as a weapon—a final act of aggression against his family. Should that scenario fail, it is to be alienated again, not just from its original cultural meaning but from its form: sent to Amsterdam to be cut up into multiple gems that will be set in high-value jewellery.

Rachel's ignorance, and indeed innocence, of the diamond's history does not negate the Moonstone's status as a stolen object with a cultural value in India that exceeds its market value. Herncastle is aware of the curse attached to the Moonstone that is to follow the stone and is aware that his actions effectively make Rachel an accomplice to the initial act of expropriation. By accepting the Moonstone, Rachel continues the process of erasure—even if she does so unknowingly. Despite Herncastle's ostracization from his family, Melissa Free maintains that the entire Verinder family is guilty of compartmentalizing his wrongdoing to avoid confronting their participation in imperialist profiting. She argues that the novel, 'documents not innocence, but collusion with the imperial project, enacted and perpetuated by a family collectively unable to identify imperial assault'. She continues, '[The Verinders] inherit, in effect, that which they refuse to own, and in trying to distinguish the domestic from the foreign, demonstrate not their inevitable but their manifest inextricability.'[237] A refusal to *own* an 'inheritance' is ironic and consequential to my argument, as imperial cruelty and ill-gotten cultural possession are at the core of *The Moonstone*. I differ from Free in seeing Collins's novel not as an illustration of collusion with empire, but rather as a characterization of inevitable and unwanted complicity—certainly at the point where Rachel and her mother are subject to a criminal's vindictive will. Lady Verinder, 'bent on getting the Moonstone out of her daughter's possession at the first opportunity' (62), is hardly an active criminal; but this sensation narrative demonstrates the hypocritical and self-righteous lengths to which English characters will go to maintain a specific fantasy in relation to the Orient.

In these fantasies, India can be both feared and prized for its contribution to British prosperity—where Rachel, 'safe in England, [is] quite delighted to hear of the danger in India' (66) and where she can 'put the Indian diamond in the Indian cabinet, for the purpose of permitting two beautiful native productions to admire each other' (76). Suzanne Daly refers to *The Moonstone* as carrying a 'heavy freight of colonial baggage,'[238] thereby capturing something of the power of the diamond as a dense object (to again employ

---

[237] Free, 340.
[238] S. Daly, 71.

Weiner's term). Daly's conception of colonial baggage, however, does not extend to the dangerous stereotyping of 'Oriental races' (39) that bolsters an English presumption of assumed power over India. Following the ladies' exodus from the dining table, the men in attendance discuss the ramifications of Rachel's gift. Murthwaite, the only character to have travelled extensively within India, is ironically the character who espouses the most vicious, stereotypical views of Indian—and more specifically, Brahmin—men. As the supposed expert on the subject at the table, he offers his opinion on the matter.

> The restoration of the Moonstone to its place on the forehead of the Indian idol, is the motive and the justification of that sacrifice of caste which I alluded to just now. Those men will wait their opportunity with the patience of cats, and will use it with the ferocity of tigers. How you have escaped them I can't imagine… You have been carrying the Diamond backwards and forwards, here and in London, and you are still a living man!… In the country those men came from, they care just as much about killing a man, as you care about emptying the ashes out of your pipe. If a thousand lives stood between them and the getting back of their Diamond—and if they thought they could destroy those lives without discovery—they would take them all. The sacrifice of life is nothing at all. (72-73)

The reported power of the diamond, and the murderous determination of an entire caste to retain that power, belongs to a set of pervasive, damaging, and sometimes laughable stereotypes attaching to India. Through the constant chatter surrounding the diamond, the lore of the diamond retains its exhilarating dramatic appeal. Saliently, it is described exclusively by a White British cast of characters. Its history is filtered to suit a Western Consciousness—[239] if we may borrow Said's term—that aims to perpetuate a singular understanding of India aligning, 'with everything we know about the patience of Oriental races, and the influence of Oriental religions' (39). And yet the build-up of emotion around the bequest (the strong implication of malice) asks us to take the threat seriously. The specific 'Oriental religio[n]' implied here is Hinduism, which is ironic given the fact that the prologue documents an entirely Islamic-based history whereby 'patien[t]' restitution takes over eight-hundred years.

Between the prologue and the epilogue, the diamond shifts hands at least ten times and each stint of ownership extends the social reach of its expropriation within the British Context.[240] Franklin's opium-induced, unconscious theft of the Moonstone from Rachel—

---

[239] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) 5.
[240] [Idol > Brahmins (protected from Mahmud's invasion by being moved to Benares) > Aurungzeb > unspecified 'one lawless Mohammedan hand to another' (3) > Tipu Sultan > Herncastle > Rachel > Franklin > Godfrey > Luker > Brahmins > Idol]

much like Rachel's initial acceptance of the gem despite the warnings of Murthwaite—comes to represent a kind of ignorance attached to unwittingly engaging with imperial expropriation when the gem moves from the place of initial violence into the domestic sphere. Godfrey's theft from the ignorant Franklin transforms the gem (again) from relic to jewellery to a 'cash instrument', to use Plotz's term. Stolen with the sole purpose of using it as a pledge for a loan, and later to sell it for desperately needed cash, Godfrey's theft nearly completes the cycle of full cultural erasure through the planned cutting in Amsterdam (455) where its religious significance would be entirely unmade, just as Herncastle had previously threatened (73). Even Septimus Luker (the moneylender and dealer in gems) exploits his knowledge that Godfrey obtained the diamond nefariously to maximize the interest he earns on his loan. Interspersed between each of the ten shifts in ownership of the Moonstone are several explicit scenes of gift-giving.

Gifting is in principle the antithesis of taking. Gifts are, in principle, not given with an exploitative agenda: a 'true' gift is given and received freely. Moreover, the presumption on the part of those handling the Moonstone in good faith is that gifting may be done without inheriting the taint of imperial violence, because in this overly simplistic formulation, a gift cannot create a burden. If expropriation of a gem asserts power over the culture of origin, giving asserts power over the new recipient. This Maussian insight is commonplace within conversations surrounding gift-giving. Mauss maintains that through the gift, the giver 'has a hold over the recipient in the same way that he, as its owner, has a hold over the thief'.[241]

Four kinds of gifts are of particular importance in Collins's novel. The first involves ostensibly straight-forward demonstrations of gifting, of which there are few: namely, the presents (excluding the Moonstone) that Rachel receives on her birthday. The second concerns what I will refer to as transactional gifts, including Lady Verinder's gifts to Betteredge, and goods that Rosanna purchases from Yolland and gifts (however abstractly) to Franklin. The third involves unwanted and, in several cases, unreceived gifts, including Clack's repeated attempts to give away her religious publications, and the 'little legacy' from Lady Verinder that Clack never received. The fourth category (and I will draw heavily here from Blumberg) entails 'secret' gifts, including: Rosana's replacement of the roses that Rachel gives to Franklin, Rosana's construction of a new nightgown for Franklin, and Rachel's endeavour to keep Franklin's theft a secret.[242] Across each of the four categories,

---

[241] Mauss, 71.

[242] I diverge from Blumberg by considering several other instances of gifting, including Rosana's 'gifted' roses and nightshirt to Franklin, Rachel's birthday gifts from her suitors, and Clack's preoccupation with receiving 'a little legacy' (222) from her aunt. Blumberg's examples are limited to:

these instances of gift-giving support an argument that giving is to be exploited; in *The Moonstone*, to shift the power dynamics associated with the stolen gem, and to manipulate the utility and cultural density inhering in it as an object.

The Moonstone far outshines the other presents that Rachel receives on her birthday. However, Betteredge makes clear that even in their apparent normalcy, the other gifts she receives alongside it mean more than meets the eye. Excluding Herncastle, the only people to give Rachel a birthday gift are her two suitors, Godfrey Ablewhite and Franklin Blake, and the servants of the house.

> An elegant little casket in China accompanied the note, presented to Miss Rachel, with her cousin's (Ablewhite) love and best wishes. Mr. Franklin had only given her a plain locket not worth half the money. My daughter Penelope, nevertheless—such is the obstinacy of women—still backed him to win… We, in the servants' hall, began this happy anniversary, as usual, by offering our little presents to Miss Rachel, with the regular speech delivered annually by me as the Chief. (58)

Though the gifts are afforded only a brief mention, Collins utilizes this scene of gift-giving to establish the contentious rivalry for Rachel's affection. The underlying financial anxiety attached to Franklin's giving is juxtaposed with the apparent ease of Ablewhite's, the 'elegance' of the Chinese casket contrasted with the plainness of the less expensive locket. Moreover, Betteredge's dismissive comment about his daughter 'backing' Franklin 'to win' (58) demonstrates that even the simplest depictions of gifting can weighty with emotion and purpose. The gifts given here are not given without intent. They are attempts to receive something in return—in this case not a reciprocated gift, but Rachel herself. Godfrey's gift is expensive and stylish in its form, however, it lacks the intimacy of Franklin's gift, as Betteredge's daughter likely perceives when she determines the odds are in Franklin's favour. Godfrey's decorative gift is contrasted with Franklin's wearable gift, which in turn may provide a foil to the Moonstone that Rachel later wears as a 'brooch in the bosom of her white dress' (64).

Betteredge's dry affect and feigned disinterest in any romantic vying taking place implies a judgment onto the scene and holds these gifts distinctly apart from those given by the servants. Betteredge places himself at the very centre of his narration, so it is not surprising that he attaches a degree of significance to his speech accompanying the servants'

---

the Moonstone as a gift, Rosana's secret and sacrifice, Betteredge's gift, Clack's papers, Yolland's 'gifts' to Rosana, and Rachel's secret keeping.

gifts. Comparing his annual speech to that of the Queen (58), although self-indulgent, provides a profound insight into the conventions of gifting within the household. Betteredge's narration implies that Godfrey's gift, accompanied by a note, and Franklin's, presented unadorned, are inherently less personal and therefore less meaningful than those of the staff, which are explicitly accounted for as offerings for the 'happy anniversary'. Thus, the outwardly least consequential instances of giving in practice reiterate a power dynamic—between Rachel and her servants—as Rachel's suitors vie for her hand.

Collins pays particular attention to the transactional aspect of gifting. Upon describing his role as the house steward to the Verinder family, Betteredge describes a double-edged gift given to him by Lady Verinder.

> She put into my hands a beautiful waistcoat of wool that she had worked herself, to keep me warm in the bitter winter weather. I received this magnificent present quite at a loss to find words to thank my mistress with for the honour she had done me. To my great astonishment, it turned out, however, that the waistcoat was not an honour, but a bribe. My lady had discovered that I was getting old before I had discovered it myself, and she had come to my cottage to wheedle me (if I may use such an expression) into giving up my hard out-of-door work as a bailiff, and taking my ease for the rest of my days as steward in the house… she put it as a favour to herself. (12)

Betteredge's awareness of the immensely disproportionate power dynamic grants him an immediate clarity about the ramifications of receiving the waistcoat as a gift. This 'bribe' may be perceived by Betteredege as 'wheedl[ing]', but it is still felt as a gift given at some personal cost. He is brought to tears by the notion that Lady Verinder is less goading him into retirement, than providing an almost kind of pastoral care and affection in knowing—even before he does—that he needs rest (or a lighter workload). Blumberg leans toward the more cynical interpretation, arguing that Lady Verinder's gift 'marks disparity and non-reciprocity. As a reward, it depends on the hierarchical relationship for its force; it also perpetuates that relationship'.[243] More than that, this gift 're-charges' the very explicit dynamic of a mistress and her servant.[244] Any attempt to disrupt this dynamic (i.e. Verinder's gifts) only further commodifies gifts and renders the exchange a transaction. Nevertheless, Lady Verinder is in essence honouring the quasi-feudal relationship, her gift

---

[243] Blumberg, 171.
[244] Blumberg argues that, while Lady Verinder may have spent countless hours adorning the waistcoat for Betteredge, her labour cannot match the labour he has spent over his fifty years in service to the family.

designed to convey proper care of her employees while still working in her favour by easing him out in favour of a younger and more vigorous servant.

Lady Verinder is keenly aware of her influence among her staff, and this self-reflexiveness affords her the power to charge each gift with authority over the recipient—her acceptance of the gift being continuous with their service to her. Collins uses this paternalistic form of giving to buttress these relationships but refuses to allow the emotional impact of giving to remain as black and white as the power dynamic Blumberg identifies. Betteredge is moved by his gifts—prideful, even. As Rosanna cries next to him, he calls attention to another gift: 'My bandana handkerchief—one of six beauties given to me by my lady—was handy in my pocket… Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine—cheap cambric' (23). For Betteredge to not only accept his gifts, but to accept his place within the hierarchy of the Verinder estate, he must see his gifts as more than just bribes; and yet Lady Verinder cannot give the waistcoat or even a half dozen handkerchiefs to Betteredge without there being a whiff of livery.

These only partly acknowledged transactional gifts can be set against more explicitly transactional scenes of gift-giving. Knowing that Mrs. Yolland sells miscellaneous materials found at sea, Rosanna goes to Yolland for the materials (tin box, a tarpaulin, and a chain) with which to stow away her letter and Franklin's stained nightgown. Suspecting Rosanna, Betteredge and Cuff visit Mrs. Yolland.

> Mrs. Yolland produced out of her pocket a few shillings and sixpences… She offered the money to the Sergeant, looking mighty loth to part with it all the while. "May I ask you to give this back to Rosanna, with my love and respects?… She insisted on paying me for the one or two things she took a fancy to this evening—and money's welcome enough in our house, I don't deny it. Still, I'm not easy in my mind about taking the poor thing's little savings… Please say she's heartily welcome to the things she bought of me—as a gift. And don't leave the money on the table… don't, there's a good man! For times are hard, and flesh is weak; and I might feel tempted to put it back in my pocket again." (126-127)

Here, Yolland's troubled and wavering speech makes clear the tension between commerce and gift-giving. While I maintain that this is a transaction imperfectly redescribed as a gift, Blumberg posits that it in fact the opposite—a gift that has become a transaction. She argues, 'Commerce is meant largely to circumvent gift and robbery… here commerce has gone on between friends, where it has no place; thus it appears a form of sin and theft… a free gift

becomes the normative obligation'.[245] I agree that commerce creates the possibility for exchange to be completed with minimal to no additional obligation; however, the onus of the obligation need not be on Rosanna. Rather, it lies on Mrs. Yolland, who values (or claims to value) Christian generosity over profit-making. The obligation, then, takes the form of the requirement to *return* payment. Knowing this, Cuff attempts to assuage her subsequent guilt or embarrassment, asserting, 'You have as good as made her a present of the things—you have indeed' (128). Nevertheless, the gift-exchange cannot exist with a clear transaction taking place simultaneously; Yolland cannot afford, so to speak, for the end result to depict the items as gifts since she has already accepted the money. Be that as it may, the scene concludes: 'she appeared to lose all command over herself; and, making a sudden snatch at the heap of silver, put it back, holus-bolus, in her pocket. "It upsets one's temper, it does, to see it lying there, and nobody taking it"' (128-129). Anxious about accepting Rosanna's money which solidifies the exchange as a transaction, Yolland regrets the result and attempts to reestablish the scene as a gift-exchange by returning the money she received for the goods; however, she fails again to establish the scene as a gift by taking the money back.

Transactional gifting is further formalized with the introduction of Godfrey as a philanthropist and executor. Although his role within the Mothers' Small Clothes Conversion Society is not described in detail, as a 'promoter of public charities,' (195) Godfrey is connected to what Miss Clack refers to as 'work of moral and material usefulness' (194). Referring to the name of the society, Trodd notes, '"Conversion" is a double entendre in dubious taste (something analogous to the kipper that was cured at Lourdes)'.[246] I maintain that the significance of this specific charitable society extends further than a double entendre or a tongue-in-cheek allusion to Clack's satisfaction in touching men's trousers. If we consider the process of acquiring trousers (pawned by men who intend to retrieve them) and altering them to suit a Christian purpose (to clothe children whose fathers' money has gone on to pay for alcohol) then Clack's charity makes use of an opportunity not dissimilar to Godfrey's exploitation of his trustee's money. The society takes from one body (working men) to serve another (children). Godfrey takes something meant for one purpose (his trustees' money) and uses it to suit another (his own enjoyment), then takes the Moonstone to use as a means to obtain a loan. In both his roles as a philanthropist and as an executor, he is the middleman claiming to act on behalf of another; he is meant to be neither the recipient nor the formal benefactor. Despite this, each role is afforded a paternalistic power, as they both exist within a formalized sphere of gift-giving that renders

---

[245] Blumberg, 174.
[246] Trodd, 489.

recipients reliant upon the institution or acting body. With the opportunity for expropriation, therefore, Godfrey exploits instances of transactional gifting—be it to a charity or to a trustee—and undermines intentions to give to another.

Drusilla Clack's perpetually unsuccessful attempts to give pamphlets to uninterested would-be recipients situate Evangelical gifting of Christian wisdom as something to be evaded and even mocked. Her determination to give 'gifts' acts as a form of self-serving evangelism and demonstrates an additional method of expropriative giving. The concept of giving to receive, in this case, motivates Clack who anticipates a heavenly reward. Evangelism, as she understands it, requires gifting the 'true riches' (225) of her faith so that she may profit spiritually. The oxymoronic concept of anti-robbery aptly characterizes unwanted gifting; Clack removes any potential to refuse her gifts by hiding them throughout Lady Verinder's home. She exclaims, 'When I reflected on the true riches which I had scattered with such a lavish hand, from top to bottom of the house of my wealthy aunt—I declare I felt as free from all anxiety as if I had been a child again' (225). Thus, she gets as much out of giving as she does by obstructing the option to refuse it. However, neither Clack's egregious conviction nor her conniving gifting imposes a real threat to the recipients. Her gifts are not just ignored: they are refused and returned. Ironically, it is while Clack is expecting to open a gift—'a little legacy' (222) left by her aunt—that she is confronted by the most pointed rejection. She fantasizes about what it is that she may have been given as she opens the package, only to be confronted with the twelve 'precious publications' (226) she left at the Verinder house the day before. Engrossed by the anticipation and expectation of a legacy, Clack is not only refused a gift of her own but refused the opportunity to be, herself, a giver.

Lady Verinder uses only small gifts to create the transactional relationship between herself and Betteredge, but the transaction binding Rosanna to her is much weightier. Arrested and sent to the reformatory for theft, Rosanna's past implicitly connects her to the loss of the Moonstone insofar as it establishes another clear example of theft. Had Rosanna been arrested for an offence other than theft the connection would not be nearly as straightforward. Betteredge explains to Franklin that only his lady and Rachel know of Rosanna's past at the reformatory. Lady Verinder's decision to grant Rosanna the opportunity to leave the reformatory and for paid work is a gift of sorts, not dissimilar to Clack's gifted publications. Both are attempts at Christian charity. However, Lady Verinder's gift comes not just from the initial job offer, but from her willingness to keep Rosanna's past a secret. Betteredge explains: 'None of the servants could cast her past life in her teeth, for none of the servants knew what it had been' (21). If Betteredge's gifted waistcoat and handkerchiefs evoked a suspicion of bribery, then Lady Verinder's willingness to conceal

Rosanna's past could very well be thought of as a veiled threat—blackmail. Be an obedient servant or be exposed as a criminal. While this threat is hardly made explicit, the gifted opportunity requires Rosanna *feeling* the potential for it to turn its head. Although Betteredge avoids butting up against the connotations of bribery, Rosanna effectively returns Lady Verinder's gift—though not without gratitude—by exposing her past to Franklin in her suicide note.

> I had gone to the reformatory from the prison. I was put in the prison, because I was a thief. I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl. My mother went on the streets, because the gentleman who was my father deserted her. There is no need to tell such a common story as this, at any length. (310)

Rosanna does what Herncastle and Godfrey never do: she confesses in full. Her admission has a kind of rhythmic cadence that pairs wrongdoing with an all-too-common history of abuse. Despite providing the reasoning that might justify her actions in the eyes of many, she is explicit in her admission that she has been a thief.

That admission begins a series of secrets kept as gifts, and gifts given in secret. Rosanna's letter divulges more than just fact of her past imprisonment: 'Ah, Mr. Franklin, you wore my roses oftener than either you or she thought! The only comfort I had at the that time, was putting my rose secretly in your glass of water, in place of hers—and then throwing her rose away' (311). For Rosanna to give roses also suggests in part that she is giving herself, given her name. Unlike Godfrey and Franklin who openly give gifts to Rachel on her birthday, Rosanna is afforded so little agency that these moments of taking and giving are her only opportunities to express her love, regardless of it being both unrequited and unknown. The sleight-of-hand exchange of the roses reinforces Franklin's ignorance, unaware not of what he is receiving, but from whom he receives it. Rosanna takes it upon herself to give Franklin another gift to which he remains blind. Having explained that she replaced his nightgown, she reveals her secret-keeping to be the very thing protecting him as her possession of the nightgown 'shield[ed]' Franklin 'from being discovered, and disgraced for life' (316). In both instances, Rosanna quietly shifts the balance of power between herself and Franklin, but she relinquishes all the leverage open to her. In 'shielding' Franklin from discovery, she establishes a similar form of power to that Lady Verinder has over her; unlike in her case, Franklin has no idea what is known about him. While this is not overtly blackmail, Rosanna's secret serves to once more demonstrate the value of information and the obligation to keep, trade, or sell secrets in what is essentially a market economy of information.

From a genre and plot structure perspective, Rosanna's secret must be revealed for Franklin to understand the price she ultimately paid with her life. Her confession not only drives the plot forward insofar as it provides a key piece of information regarding the stolen diamond, but it also crucially provides Franklin with one more written testimonial with which to defend his innocence when all is eventually made clear. Still oblivious to his own role in the Moonstone's disappearance, Franklin is confronted with another instance of someone keeping a secret 'for' him without his knowledge. Echoing Rosanna, Rachel too cries, 'I have kept your infamy a secret… and I have suffered the consequences of concealing it. Have I no claim to be spared the insult of your asking me what you have done? Is all sense of gratitude dead in you? You were once a gentleman' (339). Unlike Rosanna, she is free to address him face to face: 'My heart's darling, you are a Thief! My hero whom I love and honour, you have crept into my room under cover of the night, and stolen my Diamond' (346). Franklin's ignorance regarding his actions being kept a secret (both from himself and from the larger public) therefore grants paramountcy to ignorant possession. Had Franklin remained ignorant of Rosanna and Rachel's secrets, their sacrifice would not somehow free him of his unwitting debt to them or free him from his involvement with the stolen gem. Thus, the impossibility of avoiding debt in gift-exchange is at the very thing that connects taking with giving. Sacrifice, like a gift, cannot exist without imposing a debt. Rosanna gives her life, and Rachel gives her well-being to uphold Franklin's name. Neither gift can be repaid, much as the imperial stain of the Moonstone can never truly be wiped away, however often it is gifted on.

III. "Let us remain cousins still": Cousin-Marriage as Familial Reparation

While *The Moonstone* was at its mid-point of serialization, Members of Parliament were debating and determining the extension of women's right to own property.[247] *The Moonstone's* conclusion sees Rachel and Franklin married in 1849. Everything she possesses therefore reverts at that point to her husband, though the novel makes little of it. In 1868, this was still the case, but the law was coming under pressure: women relinquished to their husbands upon marriage all 'moveable' property including 'money, stocks, furniture, and livestock'.[248] In the event of the husband's death, it was even legal for him to leave his wife's

---

[247] See Deborah Wynne's *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010) for an extensive overview of the evolution of gender politics within the nineteenth century.
[248] Mary Beth Combs, 'Wives and household wealth: the impact of the 1870 British Married Women's Property Act on wealth-holding and share of household resources', *Continuity and Change*, 19 (2004), 141-163, 143.

(former) property to another in his will, with an exception made only for the sub-category of 'paraphernalia'—including clothing, jewellery as well as 'necessaries and personal ornaments', which automatically 'revert[ing] back to her control in widowhood'. [249] Accoutrements—adornments, were essentially all that women had any legal right to own. To potentially safeguard against these legal constraints, trusts were established to give the woman access (although not outright ownership) to personal property by way of trustees appointed power over the property. [250] When Parliament debated the Married Women's Property Bill in 1868, John Stuart Mill made a sweeping denunciation of the degree of power and influence husbands currently enjoyed, suggesting that refusing women additional rights over property would render them 'dependent upon what she can extract from the husband'. He continued by arguing that the granting of rights to women would not impede on the rights of men: 'It is only by doing justice to people that we can hope to prevent their encroaching on the rights of others."[251] It would be another two years before the Married Women's Property Act would be passed, with additional legislation following in 1882 and 1884. Mill's statement concern with the proper limits of what a person may 'extract' from another is complicated by a specific kind of marriage, directly pertinent to *The Moonstone*—that between cousins.

Legalized in England in the 16th century, cousin marriage was commonly practiced throughout the Victorian period, with Queen Victoria herself marrying her first cousin.[252] Historian and sociologist Leonore Davidoff refers to Victorian cousin marriage 'kin alliance'—[253] more specifically 'intra-kin solidarity'.[254] Such strategic unions, Talia Schaffer suggests, offer pragmatic advantages by way of 'social empowerment, familial benefit, caretaking networks, or career access'.[255] The advantages, however, relied heavily upon property distribution inevitably influenced by the fact that the first Married Women's Property Act was not passed until 1870 and did not apply retroactively to women married

---

[249] Combs, 'Wives and household wealth', 143.
[250] Combs, 'Wives and household wealth', 144.
[251] John Stuart Mill, MP, quoted in 'Married Women's Property Bill', vol. 192: Debated on 10 June 1868, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1868-06-10/debates/644b6d95-a513-40ee-9577-b7a1fa041b67/MarriedWomenSPropertyBill, accessed 15 April 2026.
[252] Adam Kuper, 'The Marriage of Cousins in Victorian England', in *Cousin Marriages: Between Tradition, Genetic Risk and Cultural Change*, ed. by Alison Shaw and Aviad E. Raz (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 218-28, 220.
[253] Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 226-27.
[254] Davidoff, 249.
[255] Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.

before 1870.[256] Cousin marriages between the children of two brothers were most common[257] for the very fact that they were often highly financially advantageous. Moreover, the safety and security of marrying an almost sibling-like relative is, within cousin-marriage, entirely legally permissible and without the stigma or suggestion of impropriety. To this point, Ruth Perry notes that, fifty years earlier, those of Jane Austen's heroines who either were offered or ended up in a cousin marriage were specifically between *maternal* cousins so no property was involved.[258] To this end, we turn back to two maternal cousins: Rachel and Franklin.

The Moonstone's conclusion has to accomplish two things typically expected from a middlebrow novel: the discovery of the diamond and an engagement. Rachel's role as a young woman both effectively endangered by her acceptance of a contested gem and later as an active keeper of Franklin's secret (his assumed guilt) situates her as both the victim and the potential solution to each of the novel's major conflicts. Rachel and Franklin's eventual cousin marriage is, essentially, pragmatic and transactional. In that vein, it solves two problems in *The Moonstone*: it redeems the family's reputation from the taint of association with the stolen gem, and it rescues Rachel from the threat of 'ownership' by the wrong man.

Writing about this cousin marriage as a familial union not dissimilar to the bond between the Brahmins sent to retrieve the Moonstone, Joseph Pierce and Manu Chander describe the novel's conclusion as symbolically reparative of familial strife. They suggest that the cousin marriage 'repair[s] the breach of cousin kinship that opens the novel'[259]—referring to the initial betrayal between cousins Herncastle and the unnamed cousin present at the Siege of Seringapatam. That cousin describes at length the division caused between not just himself and Herncastle, but also between his cousin and the larger family following Herncastle's looting of the diamond. The Family Paper in which the provenance of the Moonstone is traced crucially initiates a series of testimonial-like documents written for the sole purpose of setting the record straight about their innocence in relation to the Moonstone; the exposure and condemnation of guilt being crucial to the achievement of a just recognition of what has gone wrong in the past.

---

[256] Combs, 'Wives and household wealth', 142.
[257] Kuper notes that half of aristocratic cousin marriages were between the children of brothers—a higher rate than those between the children of two sisters or the children of a brother and a sister. See Kuper's *Incest and Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 22.
[258] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123.
[259] Joseph M. Pierce and Manu Samriti Chander, 'Cousin Theory: Brown Kinship and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel', *Victorian Studies*, 62 (2020), 474-485, 477.

The unnamed author of the Family Paper implies that documenting his 'private difference' between himself and his cousin has only been done to avoid further 'misinterpret[ation]', and that the 'history' he has laid out should be 'for the information of the family only,' barring any necessity that it be made public (5). He goes on to explain that while he cannot definitively prove or otherwise 'declare' (6) that Herncastle killed Indian soldiers to get the Moonstone, because he did not see it happen, he cannot ignore the obvious evidence against his cousin. Perhaps out of fraternal unwillingness to condemn his cousin, the author of the Family Paper does not report Herncastle's suspected theft to their commanding officer (5), nor does he definitively state whether he believes Herncastle to have committed murder as well as theft. Herncastle's guilt, on both counts, is strongly implied, but the cousin declines to condone or condemn and places the onus of decision on the family who (he fears) may have 'misinterpreted' the stories that inevitably followed the two cousins back from India: 'Let our relatives, on either side, form their own opinion on what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the aversion I now feel towards this man is well or ill founded' (6). He does not ask his family to decide whether, on the available evidence, Herncastle is guilty of murder; he only asks whether his fracturing of the family is warranted. Herncastle, as we have seen, is ostracized by at least this unnamed cousin, and later by his sister Lady Verinder and his brother-in-law. As Franklin laments to Betteredge, "Look at this household now! Scattered, disunited—the very air of the place poisoned with mystery and suspicion!' (181). In the wake of the Moonstone's disappearance, pained by Franklin's betrayal, Rachel's deliberately suppressed knowledge of his guilt thus mirrors the initial refusal of the cousin to say plainly what he thinks he has seen.

With two generations of the same family disjointed by the theft of the same diamond, Rachel and Franklin's marriage functions as more than just a happy ending. As a resolution to an intergenerational conflict, the cousin marriage is characterized as positive and even restorative. A union between Rachel and Franklin makes for a pragmatic partnership—Franklin has come into a large inheritance after his father's death (288) and Rachel's trust affords her the potential for financial independence—but their union is also full of the 'romantic love' typically forfeited in cousin marriages (so Schaffer argues) for the sake of 'rational esteem'.[260] The 'harmonious reparation'[261] of a family effected by the marriage is clear at the conclusion of the novel, and ultimately leads to the production of another kind of Family Paper. Explaining to Betteredge that he is in possession of the original Family Paper, Franklin describes it as relaying the 'necessary particulars on the authority of an eye-witness'

---

[260] Schaffer, 2.
[261] Schaffer, 158.

(8). Two years after the loss and eventual return of the diamond to India, Franklin explains to Betteredge that the family lawyer, Mr. Bruff, has recommended 'the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing' (7). Like the 'eye-witness' account written by the previous generation, Franklin's account must provide a record for posterity. Franklin continues, 'the memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal… Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right way of telling it' (7). While Collins constructed the novel of testimonies to piece together a mystery made of component narratives, the structure also doubles as a clearly self-serving endeavour for Franklin and his new wife. A lawyer wanting a story in writing implies the urgency and necessity to frame a story with one's own reputation in mind. Despite there being no obvious mention of an especially watchful public or a group of litigious distant family, Franklin must—according to Bruff—safeguard his name to essentially keep the record straight. If we read the bulk of the novel as a longform Family Paper written by many but collated by one person for the purpose of documenting a theft, then both the restoration of the Moonstone to India and the marriage between cousins come to represent not collusion with an imperial crime or even an attempt to bridge a family divided, but a joined attempt to safeguard the newlywed couple from public disgrace.

Like the original Family Paper, Franklin's collection of written testimonies defends the family against the reputational threat of owning (if only for a time) a contested and ill-gotten artefact of war, and acts as proof that the family was victimized by the real perpetrators: Herncastle and Ablewhite. Unlike the initial Paper written by a single man unwilling to condemn his cousin, Franklin's document names both Herncastle and Ablewhite in connection with the violence that followed the Moonstone's theft and does so by way of several (9, including his own) eyewitness accounts written by their own hand.[262] Franklin's collection of witness testimonies is collated with the very purpose of exonerating himself and, by extension, Rachel. The document insulates the family, tightening the already firmly regulated flow of information within a network restricted to family and the few outsiders whose employment by the family secures their discretion (the lawyer, private investigator, and household staff). Both those suspected of the theft of the Moonstone at points during the investigation, Franklin and Rachel, benefit from clearing their name.

Rachel's initial refusal to cooperate with the investigation and her willingness to remain silent to even those closest to her can be read as the only way in which she can assert

---

[262] Excluding the epilogue, there are nine 'narratives', or testimonials written by seven people: Betteredge and Blake each have two, and Clack, Bruff, Jennings, Cuff, and Candy each have one.

a measure of agency over her future. With her financial and legal futures carefully decided by others (namely her mother and Mr. Bruff, with the implication that it will then extend to her future husband), her physical safety threatened by the potential attack by the Brahmins in quest for the Moonstone and the vague suggestion that Godfrey is pressing her to unwelcome physical intimacy, Rachel's vulnerability—already exploited by Herncastle—requires her to marry so that she can be adequately protected against further exploitation. Her future as an unmarried woman is dependent on the provisions made for her by her parents before their death. As Rachel's father, Sir John Verinder, has left his entire estate to his wife—Lady Verinder, the responsibility of their only child's future rested on Lady Verinder's willingness and capacity to protect their family assets and provide a comfortable future for Rachel. Mr. Bruff explains that following Sir Verinder's death, Lady Verinder went to great lengths to safeguard Rachel's inheritance.

> Her mother's excellent sense, and my long experience, had combined to relieve her of all responsibility, and to guard her from all danger of becoming the victim in the future to some needy and unscrupulous man. Neither she, nor her husband (if she married), could raise sixpence, either on the property in land, or on the property in money. They would have the houses in London and in Yorkshire to live in, and they would have the handsome income—and that was all. (265)

Although property laws preceding the Married Women's Property Acts (the first of which was being debated in Parliament at the time of *The Moonstone's* serialization) required wives to forfeit their right to sell, rent, or mortgage their property without their husband's consent, the trust that Lady Verinder and Mr. Bruff establish to maintain Rachel's inherited property explicitly counteracts the right to access and sell property acquired by husbands within a marriage.[263] Moreover, Lady Verinder's stipulation that her brother-in-law be appointed Rachel's guardian (240) until she either marries or comes of age, while practically astute, essentially places Rachel in the mouth of the whale. Having broken off the engagement with Ablewhite after Mr. Bruff 'reveal[ed] the mercenary object of the marriage, on [Ablewhite's] side', (268) and infuriating the elder Ablewhite, Rachel is effectively orphaned again when he 'decline[s] to act' (259) as her guardian having taken offense to her ending the engagement that would see his son gain a 'beautiful girl, an excellent social position, and a handsome income' (249). Entirely dependent on the legal arrangements made for her by others, Rachel is rehomed 'under the care of a widowed sister of the late Sir John Verinder—one Mrs.

---

[263] See Combs, 'Wives and household wealth', 143.

Merridew' (290) after an executor of Lady Verinder's will 'request[s] to act as guardian' (290) following Ablewhite Senior's refusal. Rachel's dependence on others is almost total.

From a legal standpoint, Rachel is at the mercy of both her (changeable) guardian and the predetermined trust designed explicitly under an assumption that she may be targeted for financial exploitation. In terms of physical safety, her world is insular and tense with infighting and ulterior motives; those closest to her in terms of proximity and familial relation can, in theory, harm her as they are granted a level of private access to her not afforded to strangers. She is patronized, literally and figuratively, and condescended to, despite almost every person she interacts with assuming the best of her. When the police imply that she is under suspicion for the theft of the Moonstone, her mother declares, 'she is absolutely incapable of doing what you suppose her to have done' (163). When she agrees to a marriage with malicious intent, Mr. Bruff laments, 'Poor thing! The bare idea of a man marrying her for his own selfish and mercenary ends had never entered her head' (269). When Franklin is discovered to be innocent, Mr. Jennings bemoans, 'She even upbraids herself—most undeservedly, poor thing!—for not having divined at the time what the true solution of the mystery might really be,' and notes her 'eagerness to make atonement for a wrong which she has innocently inflicted on another person' (394). When asked if she has anyone to turn to for advice, Rachel tells Mr. Bruff that she does not, and she is valorised despite her desperation: 'She was so young and so lonely—and she bore it so well!' (271). Vulnerable, isolated, and repeatedly exploited—first as an unwitting gem launderer and then as a financially lucrative potential partner in marriage, Rachel is at the symbolic centre of a series of narrative endeavours to insulate the family financially and reputationally from the damage done by the gift of the Moonstone.

It is of the essence of cousin marriage, as distinct from all other forms of legal marriage, that Rachel is both given and kept when she becomes Franklin's wife. In her study of endogamous unions in literature, Mary Jean Corbett positions cousin marriage as an ultimate demonstration of insular behaviour: 'cousin-marriage may indicate a refusal or inability to look beyond the (racialized) limits of the family for a partner or enact a resistance to exchange'.[264] She draws connections between these marriages and Weiner's phenomenon of Keeping-while-Giving, suggesting that in doing so, the 'historical strength of one's natal group' is both affirmed and authenticated by 'its difference vis-à-vis others'. [265] I read the concluding marriage between Rachel and Franklin more simply, as the consolidation and

---

[264] Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Wolf* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 24.
[265] Corbett, 24.

reunification of a family in the face of the profound threat to its integrity posed by the unwanted 'gift' from India. The Moonstone, taken by Herncastle and given to Rachel demonstrates the malign power of a gift not freely given—either at the point where it is expropriated from India or at the point where it is passed on to the woman strictly innocent of the crime from which she now benefits.

Not unlike the stone, Rachel is used to solve a difficult ethical problem with repercussions well beyond the actions and fortunes of the single family. Schaffer describes the female component of a cousin marriage as 'compensat[ing] for a problematic elder generation'—as representing a 'reparative act' seemingly unavailable to or untenable for the previous generation.[266] Pierce and Chander's post-colonial reading of cousin marriage is less charitable; they argue: '[white] cousins serve to a) consolidate—or densify—capital accumulation; b) maintain ethnic purity and/or religious communal cohesion (i.e., marrying within religious minority populations); or c) displace ethnic anxieties regarding hybridity, miscegenation, and other projects of colonial racialization'. [267] In all these ways, cousin marriage works to 'solidify whiteness and the capital accumulation made possible by the expansion of empire and colonial modernity'.[268] As members of an upper-class society inevitably profiting from imperial expansion, the family may not *publicly* concern themselves with their muddied past, but behind closed doors they are effectively endeavouring to insulate themselves from their own past associations; here, the public is not the threat, family is. Crucially, they are no longer Herncastles. The only siblings to have children in the Herncastle/Verinder lines were women, meaning that surname of the 'Honourable John' stopped with him. Assuming that the long-deceased eldest Herncastle son (John Herncastle's brother Arthur) died without issue (and certainly Herncastle himself never married—multiple women having 'refused him' (31)), the Herncastle name came to an end with John.

The Family Paper that opens the novel, as Free has observed, documents more than Herncastle's theft of the Moonstone; 'it reveals the role played by his cousin - purposely unnamed, he could be any British soldier - who, though privately accusing Herncastle of a nameless act - even this charge is elusive - will not make his accusation public… [he] protects the - his - family name'.[269] She concludes, 'family history operates as imperial history writ small, and the murders and thefts that the family tries to keep quiet serve as a cloak for a

---

[266] Schaffer, 157.
[267] Pierce and Chander, 476-77.
[268] Pierce and Chander, 476-77.
[269] Free, 352.

murderous, thieving and purportedly preserving its empire'.[270] While Franklin is hardly likely to publish his own collection of Family Papers to the wider public, I differ from Free by arguing that in actively documenting their involvement with the Moonstone, the family is making a decisive effort not to 'collude' with its imperially-tainted past, but to distance themselves from it. They do, in fact, 'identify' Herncastle's actions as an imperial crime. Referring to the 'wicked colonel,' (29) the family's ostracization of him is made explicit when the elder Ablewhite condemns the Herncastles collectively as 'cut-throat scoundrels who lived by robbery and murder' (257). When their condemnation of his actions does not suffice to protect them from the imperial stain incurred with their acceptance of the Moonstone, the more organized effort to put together a documentary self-justification of everything they have done becomes a necessity. What they 'keep quiet', throughout, is not the original crime, but their own implied shame at having been unable to extricate themselves from the reputational and, indeed, existential risk he has introduced to their sphere. Franklin makes it clear he is merely following his 'legal obligation' (59) in placing his 'cousin's legacy into [his] cousin's hands' (39) but the bloodied legacy of empire and the domestic legacy of family inheritance collide here. Ultimately, a public account will have to be given.

IV. 'The cycles of time': In Conclusion

Collins narrates eight centuries of gem history in terms that strikingly draw together Muslim and Hindu and British looting, challenging each iteration of cultural theft, repeatedly reinscribing the complexities of cultural expropriation, and ultimately pointing us to the resolution that comes only with repatriation. The Moonstone is not freely offered back—the Brahmins take it back. In the final lines of the novel the Moonstone returns to where the prologue saw it begin its story, in the 'sacred city of Somnauth' (464). The epilogue describes Somnath as 'sacked, and destroyed, as long since as the eleventh century, by the Mahometan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni' (463-64). An unappeased power of disturbance attaches to the Moonstone in this context. Even at the moment of its homecoming to India, it is allocated on a terrain marred by expropriative violence.

Murthwaite's voyeurism, as he narrates the epilogue, is both potentially threatening to the Indian adherents of the idol (unaware of his presence) *and* suggestive of goodwill, as if he is choosing not to commit another act of expropriation, but instead approving of the act of repatriation. The Moonstone seemingly obeys not the will of the Brahmins, but the

---

[270] Free, 343.

implications of its own amassed symbolic power. Set not in the 'bosom of a woman's dress,' but in the 'forehead of deity' (466), it in effect looks back at Murthwaite. Thus, India is afforded a profound capacity of endurance and an ethereal, almost unbounded temporality that not only withstands expropriation, but outlasts it. And yet Collins explicitly denies that restored Hindu ownership can be final. Calling back to the prologue, the novel ends with a question: 'So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell?' (466).

Sutherland imagines the Moonstone on its way back to Somnath, and the Koh-i-Noor—moving out of India and toward England, potentially crossing paths in Bombay in 1850. He notes the deliberate irony of one returning to its seat of cultural and religious import, while the other would be displayed to a largely disappointed crowd at The Great Exhibition the following year.[271] Arguing that the idea of cultural restitution was not 'well developed' in the 1860s, Sutherland identifies 1882 as a turning point regarding discussions of repatriation, noting that in that year the former Child Maharajah (forty-four years old at this point), called for the return of the Koh-i-Noor and criticized the Sikh Wars as '"staged" in Britian's interest'.[272] Forty years prior, however—before Duleep Singh was even born—the fraudulent repatriation of the Gates of Somnath proved that not only was the concept of cultural restitution defined by then, but it was weaponized to exploit an already plundered group of people. The East India Company was not responsible for the original theft of the Gates of Somnath; however, their attempt at manufacturing goodwill by way of a fictional theatre of repatriation is not dissimilar to General Dalhousie's eagerness to manipulate an instance of egregious exploitation—forcing a child ruler to forfeit a priceless object as a 'gift' to a monarch who would become the Empress of his country before his death.

Repatriation—especially when manipulated—is not the end of the historical story, given that the possibility of further violence cannot be guaranteed. As Collins represents it in the novel's near-obsessive attention to the transactionalism of gifts, and its acute sensitivity to the power play involved, nothing is freely given. The reaches of expropriation can mar generations regardless of their distance to the initial act of colonial violence. In this way, the novel also grapples with the ethical implications of the impulse to safeguard one's own reputation in the face of a developing conversation about the immorality of imperial theft. Made painfully aware of the family's imperial stain and refusing further complicity, Franklin's gathering of testimonies constitutes a strenuous effort to distance himself (and

---

[271] See Sutherland's notes, xiv.
[272] See Sutherland's notes, xviii.

Rachel) not only from the initial act of expropriation, but from the responsibility to participate in the difficult conversation regarding the terms of ownership of illicit objects. Thankfully for Franklin and Rachel, they do not need to *do* anything with the gem, as their hands are washed of it by the intervention of the Brahmins. Even so, gifts, exchanges, and even partnerships give rise to intense and often imperfectly repressed anxiety about both a giver and a recipient's right to objects that are seen to be precariously owned at best, their utility and symbolic density constantly disputed.

Chapter Two: James Payn's *By Proxy* (1877) and Looting in Nineteenth-Century China

James Payn's *By Proxy* began its serialization in May of 1877, finishing in May the following year. Published in *Belgravia*, an illustrated monthly literary magazine founded in 1866 by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *By Proxy* chronicles the aftermath of a gem-theft resulting in the presumed death of an innocent man and the threat of war between England and China. Almost a decade after *The Moonstone*, *By Proxy* has at the centre of its plot another gem—a Buddhist relic named the Shay-le—which falls victim to British pilfering at the hands of Pennicuick, a bigoted English tourist. Pennicuick travels up the Chinese coast from Shanghai toward 'Keang-soo' (1) (likely Cangzhou, on the north-eastern coast) alongside his old college friend Conway, a captain in the British Army. Imprisoned by Chinese officials for the theft of the Shay-le and sentenced to death for committing sacrilege, Pennicuick boasts that he is wealthy enough to pay off any and all Chinese officials ('even 20,000*l.* would not break me' (86)). Badly in need of money, Conway offers (without being asked) to stand in as a proxy for Pennicuick's death sentence so that he can purchase an easier life for his wife and daughter back in England.

Despite Payn not explicitly placing the novel's action in a specific year, references to the British military presence throughout Eastern China, as well as the 'five treaty ports' (2), the British Consulate in Shanghai (121), and descriptions of widespread port travel suggest that the events at the start occur after 1842.[273] As there is no mention of any immediate conflict, the action presumptively takes place after the end of the Second Opium War in 1860. Placing the British seat of power that Pennicuick and Conway are reliant upon in Shanghai instead of Hong Kong or Guangzhou, limits the degree of power the British government has over Chinese authorities in and around Shanghai. Described in the novel as the 'Mandarin(s)', the Chinese officials are understood to be bureaucrats of high importance, answering only to 'His Celestial Majesty' (20). Unlike Hong Kong, where the British were in control from 1841, Shanghai was an 'extraterritorial zone' in which Britain was one of three Western powers (Britian, France, and the United States) operating under limited jurisdiction

[273] The Treaty of Nanking (also called Nanjing) ended the First Opium War and established four additional extraterritorial trading ports in 1842. See Wanshu Cong and Frédéric Mégret's '"International Shanghai" (1863-1931): Imperialism and Private Authority in the Global City', *Leiden Journal of International Law,* 34 (2021), 915-933 for further detail on the nineteenth-century treaties between China and Britain.

from 1854.[274] Guangzhou (referred to as Canton at the time) had a long history of trade with the West, the Qing Empire having established the Canton System in the mid-eighteenth century to limit Western encroachment on Chinese politics and non-international commercial ventures.[275] Between the early 1840s and Payn's time of writing, Shanghai was thus a liminal space where British authority was present but not absolute, trading was bountiful but divided between multiple imperial powers, and British commercial and political endeavours involved the East India Company as well as the British government and its armed forces.

Referring to the 'International Shanghai' of the nineteenth century, Wanshu Cong and Frédéric Mégret identify 'interimperialist rivalr[ies]' that played out amid a 'system of extraterritoriality' with an 'intrinsic ambiguity' at its jurisdictional centre.[276] By the 1860s—after only two decades of operating as a new trading port—Shanghai 'existed uneasily between self government and the control of imperial powers… fac[ing] constant difficulties in carrying out municipal functions'.[277] In keeping with Cong and Mégret's account of the 'dynamism of the private interests of imperial subjects determined to carve out for themselves a degree of autonomy,'[278] Payn describes in his novel a grey area where British imperial forces do not boast the same unchecked power as they might have throughout India, or in Hong Kong. In that context a sacrilegious theft by a British citizen has the power to seriously disrupt international relations. Shanghai, and more specifically 'Dhulang' (Dulangkou)—the village where the Shay-le has been safeguarded in a shrine for 'ten thousand years' (37)—is clearly a zone beyond the intervention of the British. A 'practical joke' quickly becomes a 'national disaster' that could see 'two great nations' (125) at war.

Pennicuick's theft of the Buddhist gem is entirely opportunistic. Without remorse, he insists that the theft is of no ethical significance—and his arrest a mere inconvenience from which he will have to pay his way out. In what follows, I explore the lack of motivation behind the cultural expropriation of another gem as it reflects a crucial political moment in Britain's relations with China. Unlike the Moonstone, taken from India into England as the latest in a long history of cultural thefts and restored to its Hindu shrine only after 800

---

[274] The Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) was established in 1854 and included Britain, France, and the United States. France left the SMC in 1862, and Britian and the US renamed the conglomerate to the Shanghai International Settlement the following year. See Cong and Mégret's '"International Shanghai"'.
[275] Until 1842, Guangzhou operated as the sole port for Western trade, with the other four opening the following year. See chapter five of Hevia's *English Lessons* for more detail.
[276] Cong and Mégret, 917.
[277] Cong and Mégret, 927.
[278] Cong and Mégret, 932.

years, the Shay-le is stolen, retrieved, and returned within a mere twenty-four hours, never leaving Chinese soil. Even without a centuries-long absence, theft becomes the catalyst for a series of deceits involving the repeated substitution of unsatisfactory alternates for the thing or person that has been displaced. In this respect, the novel's title is crucial to its interpretation, naming a pattern that sustains the plot and generates much of its dramatic and moral interest. Payn constructs a law of inadequate substitutions wherein any one thing ostensibly has an equivalent—an expendable proxy. Crucially, the Shay-le itself seems exempt; it is never proxied. A piece of glass is not put in its stead when it is pilfered, nor is it superseded by a different, unmarred gem following its recovery. It is unique in its local cultural import and irreplaceable; no proxy would be acceptable. With the Shay-le as its key exception, Payn's novel establishes a plot imperative wherein proxies appear as 'fixes' for a series of problems—substituting, exchanging, or simply placating the desire for restoration of the thing lost. Greed *and* the need for justice perpetuate this unsatisfactory cycle. Recourse to proxies generates a fear that everything—even personal identity—may be fungible and therefore vulnerable to exploitation.

Payn's novel operates by the law of substitution only to find that proxies are ultimately (and one might say inherently) lacking, never sufficient replacements for what has been lost. This chapter explores this pattern of thinking in Payn's novel, with particular focus on the implications for its representation of the cultural exploitation and (attempted) expropriation of a gemstone, and the politics of cultural restoration. Calling attention to the clear parallels between *By Proxy* and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) will introduce the concept of literary looting, asking how and when literary inspiration veers into the plundering of character archetypes and storylines for market success. Additionally, positioning *By Proxy* in relation to the sacking of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, I frame looting as not just an opportunistic money-grab, but a highly politicized act that offends against the local culture of origin and does irreparable damage to the value of the object taken.

I. Payn and Dickens

Nearly every *By Proxy* reviewer (there were not many) commented on two aspects of the novel: the unusual Chinese setting, and the obvious Dickensian influences. Upon his death in 1898, *The Spectator* described Payn as, indeed, part of the 'Dickens-like school'.[279] Henry

[279] [Obituary for] 'James Payn', *The Spectator*, 2 April 1898, 474.

James extended the observation: 'What [Payn] "went back" to above all was Dickens and the world of Dickens—I mean of Dickens and [of] the whole Dickens period'.[280] A significant middle-ranked writer in his own time, Payn has largely disappeared from literary history since. Though counting Payn among Dickens's 'Young Men', in the monograph by the same name, Peter David Edwards gives him only the briefest of mentions.[281] Similarly, J. W. T. Ley acknowledges Payn as Dickens's peer of a 'younger generation',[282] and notes that 'no one contributed more frequently to *Household Words*', but gives him only three short paragraphs, largely about his background as a military cadet and his meeting with Dickens during the latter's 1856 reading tour of Scotland.[283] Despite these rare modern mentions of Payn as a prolific admirer and imitator of Dickens, he was regarded differently in the nineteenth century. While it is clear is that *By Proxy* borrows specifically from plot lines and character archetypes established in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), not enough credit has been given to the originality of Payn's adaptation of Dickensian models to new geographic and topical matter.

Records of Payn's writerly relationship-turned-friendship with Dickens reveal Payn's eagerness to imbue *By Proxy* with Dickensian flare. Payn first met Dickens when he was twenty-six and subsequently referred to this initial encounter as marking 'an epoch in [his] existence'.[284] He continues: 'like all young persons devoted to literature, I had had my idols… but the chief figure in my literary Pantheon had been always Dickens'.[285] Payn's admiration for Dickens is a recurrent note in his first memoir *Some Literary Recollections* published in 1884—fourteen years after Dickens's death. He notes that this chance meeting began with Dickens asking if he had a moment to spare to meet with him, to which Payn adds retrospectively: 'If I had had only twenty-four hours to live I should have "spared time" for such a purpose, which did not indeed seem to trench upon my earthy span at all, but to be a foretaste of Paradise'.[286] What followed this first meeting was over a decade of correspondence that Payn regarded both as a sign of mentorship as well as friendship.[287]

---

[280] Henry James quoted in Frederick Wegener's, 'Henry James on James Payn: A Forgotten Critical Text', *The New England Quarterly*, 67 (1994), 115-31, 130.
[281] Peter David Edwards, *Dickens's 'Young Men': George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates, and the World of Victorian Journalism* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1
[282] J. W. T. Ley, *The Dickens Circle: A Narrative of the Novelist's Friendships* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1919), vii.
[283] Ley, 371.
[284] James Payn, *Some Literary Recollections* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1884), 137.
[285] Payn, *Some Literary Recollections*, 179.
[286] Payn, *Some Literary Recollections*, 184.
[287] In both of his memoirs, Payn makes brief mentions to his constant ill-health. *In Gleams of Memory* (1894), he notes that when he experienced a reprieve from his poor health, he required himself to write prolifically, noting, 'I was always afraid of being ill, and unable to perform my promised tasks, and to have written against time would have made me ill at once' (101). The *Oxford*

Payn finishes his memoir stating, 'I feel the same love and admiration for Charles Dickens now as I did then. What indeed astonished even me… was that personal acquaintance with him increased rather than diminished his marvellous attraction for me'.[288]

A decade later, Payn published a second memoir: *Gleams of Memory with Some Recollections* (1894). Here, he says relatively little about Dickens—'whose genius was so superabundant'[289]—and much more (albeit glibly) about the personal and financial hardships that he faced throughout his career. Despite being steadily employed in publishing from his late twenties until ill health required him to retire at the age of sixty-six, he enjoyed little financial stability. Regarding the lack of success both monetary and professionally, he muses: 'I do not suppose that the literary profession has a greater crop of disappointments than any other, but he who is born to follow it feels them more than other people'.[290] Payn had some success with poetry and short articles early in his career, but laments the fact that his shorter pieces had not yet turned a substantial profit.

> The sums I got for my prose contributions at this time were often so infinitesimal that they might, so far, have almost been poetry. One or two of these compositions found their way into respectable channels such as 'Household Words' and 'Chambers's Journal' and were of course duly remunerated; but the majority of them appeared in obscure periodicals all of which are dead.[291]

In his mid-twenties, he notes, he and his wife Louisa 'had little to live upon' but what he earned as an author was 'sufficient for [their] simple needs'.[292] It was not until he received a rejection from a small publication called *The Picture* that he realized he needed to modify his writing style to turn a profit. He soon became aware that the more lucrative option was to write longer-form pieces—a turning point in his career. He explains that from then on, he 'enlarged [all his submissions]… and received five times as much for them as had been originally promised; and a few months afterwards I was a regular contributor to "Household Words", a periodical of a much better class than "The Picture" was ever likely to have been'.[293] Payn went on to publish forty-six novels, eight collections of short stories, and

---

DNB notes that Payn suffered from chronic rheumatism; see Damian Atkinson's biographic entry for James Payn.
[288] Payn, *Some Literary Recollections*, 184-185.
[289] Payn, *Some Literary Recollections*, 93.
[290] James Payn, *Gleams of Memory with Some Recollections* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, 1894), 95.
[291] Payn, *Gleams of Memory*, 87-88.
[292] Payn, *Gleams of Memory*, 91.
[293] Payn, *Gleams of Memory*, 101-102.

dozens of essays.[294] Damian Atkinson's entry detailing Payn's career in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* credits him with a sharp perception of 'what the public liked' and attributes his success to 'catering for their tastes'.[295] Co-editor at *Chambers's Journal* for sixteen years, a reader for Smith, Elder, and Co. for nearly twenty, and *Cornhill Magazine's* editor for over a decade until his health failed, Payn certainly knew what sold.

Although not all the correspondence between Payn and Dickens survives, it seems likely that Payn's introduction to Dickens in 1856 led to an increased discernment of marketable material, especially when placing this milestone alongside his promotion from a contributor to *Chambers's Journal* to one of its editors only two years later. In this context, it appears that Payn's admiration for Dickens and growing business acumen led him write a work of obvious homage. Reviews of *By Proxy* not only noted the clear influence of *A Tale of Two Cities* but suggested that the parallels between the two surpassed mere influence and constituted (for some) an improvement upon Dickens. *The Examiner* contended that Payn 'cannot be counted among the many imitators of his great predecessor', as Payn's characters are 'as fresh and delightful as if Dickens had never succeeded in depicting the same sort of character'; 'Mr. Payn follows the bent of his own temperament'.[296] *The Spectator* heralded *By Proxy* as possessing 'the most important qualities that go to the making of a first-rate novel, originality, strength, ingenuity, the charm of the unexpected, distinctness in character-drawing, and that quality which one feels, but cannot analyse, the power of attracting at once and maintaining an unrealized hold upon the attention of the reader'.[297] When originality is lauded within the same reviews that pinpoint clear elements of homage, it becomes necessary to ascertain why these reviewers could see Payn's reworking as an improvement upon Dickens's model.

The similarities between *By Proxy* and *A Tale of Two Cities* range from the replication of plotlines and character archetypes to the evident superficial similarity between Conway's motivation for self-sacrifice and that of Sydney Carton. Where Dickens paints the French during the Revolution as guilty of 'an inhuman abandonment of consideration not easy to be understood,'[298] Payn writes, 'The Chinese, some say, are not cruel; but this only means that they do not take the same active delight in cruelty as some more savage

---

[294] Damian Atkinson, 'James Payn (1830-1898)' in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008).
[295] Atkinson, 'James Payn (1830-1898)'.
[296] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Examiner,* 4 May 1878, 562-63, 563.
[297] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 15 June 1878, 764-65, 764.
[298] Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), 127.

communities; they are totally insensible to the sufferings of their fellow-creatures'.[299] Further mirroring includes the descriptions of the hotel that Pennicuick stays in during his run for parliament—strikingly similar to Tellson's Bank in *A Tale of Two Cities*. In his hotel room, Pennicuick notes, 'The two black feathers at the corners of the bead-head (for there were feathers there too) looked more like funeral plumes than ever… the state rooms of this ancient inn were provided with inner doors of baize, through which no sound could easily penetrate' (272-273). Tellson's Bank is described as: 'furnished in a funereal manner with black horsehair, and loaded with heavy dark tables… and no light to speak of could be expected from them until they were dug out'.[300] The most obvious parallel between the two novels, is—of course—the swapping of two characters before an execution. The method of execution, while not identical, is graphically described to the would-be executed in both instances. Charles Darnay, condemned to death for treason will 'be drawn on a hurdle to be half hanged', Dickens tells us, 'and then he'll be taken down and sliced before his own face, and then his insides will be taken out and burnt while he looks on, and then his head will be chopped off, and he'll be cut into quarters'.[301] Payn replaces quartering with the 'Ling-chih'[302]—'the most horrible punishments even in their horrible code' (69) likely to draw '50,000 persons to witness' (128). Pennicuick explains to Conway that 'Ling-chih' translates to being '"cut into a thousand pieces" … I believe the poor wretch is tied to a post, and hacked about with a knife' (85). The similarities do not end with these executions.

Drawing extensively from Dickens's cast of characters in *A Tale of Two Cities,* Payn mimics in Conway and Pennicuick a problem of character depth often found in the minor characters of Dickens's. He capitalizes on Dickens's passing reference to Jarvis Lorry as being 'safe as an Englishman'[303] in France and employs it as the crux of his antagonist's arrogance, with Pennicuick flaunting an assumed immunity when he instructs Conway, 'Tell [the Chinese officials] I am underneath the protection of the British flag' (73). Moreover, Payn draws from Dickens's descriptions of Darnay's aristocratic uncle, the Marquis St. Evremonde, who prior to his assassination had an 'air of a gentleman who had accidentally broken some common thing, and had paid for it, and could afford to pay for it'.[304] As with the Marquis, Pennicuick's entitlement knows no bounds.

---

[299] James Payn, *By Proxy*, A New Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1892), 69. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[300] Dickens, 23.
[301] Dickens, 70.
[302] Payn anglicizes Lingchi to 'Ling-Chih'.
[303] Dickens, 30.
[304] Dickens, 129.

> He had always had all he wanted, or almost all; partly, it is true, because his wants had been of a material sort, with which a large fortune inherited when he came of age had always supplied him; but also because of his indomitable will. His wish was as much a law to him as that of his Imperial Majesty the Son of Heaven and Vice-Regent of the Universe, in whose dominions he was now traveling for his own pleasure. (3)

The stammering shift from an insistence that Pennicuick 'had all he wanted' to the hesitant 'almost all; partly', marks the first instance in which the limited omniscience of the text shifts into a free indirect style that conveys clear disdain for Pennicuick's arrogance.

Payn's characterization of Conway conflates Doctor Manette (Lucie's father, unjustly imprisoned in France) with Charles Darnay (Lucie's aristocratic husband, also imprisoned) and Sydney Carton (the man who dies in Darnay's place out of love for Lucie). Doctor Manette's indisputable innocence finds a near match in the calm decency of Conway—'unquestionably innocent of any crime'[305] prior to his nearly two-decade-long imprisonment. Like Manette, he earns the trust of his imprisoned patients who understand him to be 'silent, humane… [and] not suspected or brought in question'[306] for the alleged treason that he is accused of. Like Manette, Conway is protected from suspicion by the faith of those who know him well: above all, his wife and daughter understand him to be entirely law-abiding and respectful of Chinese culture. 'He was not one to defile temples and break down images', Mrs. Conway declares, 'or to risk, for a mere whim, a life that was precious to another' (207). Likewise, Nelly, a veritable replica of Lucie, half-explains to her father's fellow officer Herbert Milburn, 'We could never understand… how my father, of all men, could have committed such an act as the stealing of the Shay-le' (245). Payn layers this Manichean characterization further by adding Darnay's gentle kindness and stoic work ethic to Manette's innocence, further establishing Conway as a sacrifice for the unworthy Pennicuick. Darnay's humility and prudence are seen to reflect a human decency that sets him apart from the aristocratic class he renounced when he moved from France to England under a false name: '[Darnay] had oppressed no man, he had imprisoned no man… [he had instead] thrown himself on a world with no favour in it, won his own private place there, and earned his own bread'.[307] Like Darnay, Conway is well-educated, decent, and yet finds himself 'an exile from his country and his home' (100) having left England to earn a living in China and

---

[305] Dickens, 113.
[306] Dickens, 324.
[307] Dickens, 284.

send money home to his wife and child. Moreover, the relationship between Conway and Pennicuick mirrors that of Carton and the lawyer Mr. Stryver. Carton's aimlessness and lack of financial success are manifested in his admission to Stryver, 'you have fallen into your rank, and I have fallen into mine. Even when we were fellow-students in the Quartier Latin… you were always somewhere, and I was always—nowhere'.[308] Conway is similarly contrasted with Pennicuick: 'Such was Arthur Conway; a man who, under brighter circumstances, would have shone in the world; but who, as it was, would never shine; who, far from shining, would glimmer on, disreputably rather otherwise' (100).

Payn's deviations from his predecessor are most notable when the motivation for self-sacrifice is scrutinized more deeply. *The Spectator* asserts, 'Mr. Payn's story, which is treated so differently [from *A Tale of Two Cities*] that it contradicts the very idea of romance, is a more daring invention than Dickens's, because it is animated by an even more abstract motive'.[309] *A Tale of Two Cities* builds, bit by bit across the duration of the novel, a motive for Carton to die in Darnay's stead. The romance behind the motive (his love for Lucie) is so meticulously established that it alone provides the rationale for Carton's heroic sacrifice and the necessary exit that allows Lucie and Darnay to live happily ever after. *By Proxy* inverts this model. It does not end with a proxied death; it begins with it—frontloading the act of substitution and making of it a moral problem not a sentimental resolution. In this way, the 'abstract motive' that *The Spectator* calls attention to becomes a defining difference in narrative purpose. The reviewer spends the bulk of their allotted space commending Payn for the skill in convincing his reader to accept the 'preposterous' notion that a man would be willing to die not for the love of a woman, but instead for his daughter's future.

> This extraordinary complication [of Conway dying for Pennicuick], where no sympathy is evoked by one of the parties to the transaction of the substitution, and only moderate sympathy by the other, and which is a mere money-bargain, makes a demand upon the faith of the reader beyond that which Dickens made when he asked us to believe in exalted purity of sentiment, heroic courage, and absolute self-abnegation on the part of an habitual drunkard… —a demand extending to the belief that a man would suffer a horrible death as the punishment of a supposed disgraceful deed, in order to secure a fortune for his daughter whom he had not seen for ten years. Thus badly stated, the notion seems preposterous; but Mr. Payn, who has become skilful in method, works up this strange material with such art, that he beguiles the reader into the acceptance of it with faith.[310]

---

[308] Dickens, 104.
[309] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 764.
[310] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 765.

To put the 'badly stated' argument into still simpler terms: the 'sublime conception'[311] of Carton's motive was made possible by removing Darnay's awareness of his alternate's plan to die for him; that is not the case in *By Proxy*. Any 'purity of sentiment' established by Dickens is downplayed or even denied by Payn who imagines a direct 'money-bargain' between the two men concerned—one that he 'beguiles' the reader to buy into. It was Payn's ability to depart from a Dickensian model of idealistic motivation into much more cynical terrain that prompted the *Saturday Review* to call attention to the 'series of rather suggestive psychological studies'[312] that *By Proxy* is comprised of. Two years after *By Proxy's* publication, *The Spectator,* reviewing *A Confidential Agent*, attributed Payn's 'great popularity' to 'his genuine homeliness… and to the sound common-sense that pervades his writings. He does not parade or sentimentalize the one, as Dickens did, nor does he insist upon and lengthen out the other, as Trollope does: but both are always to be found in his books as they are to be found in honest, ordinary English lives'.[313]

Although this emphasis on the honest and ordinary seems not quite right for a novel in which a father decides to die to secure the financial security of his unknowing wife and daughter, it cements *By Proxy* as belonging to a different genre from *A Tale of Two Cities*. When speaking of his friendship with Dickens, Payn notes: 'The subject […] which interested [Dickens]… was the dramatic—nay, even the melodramatic—side of human nature'.[314] His own interest was much more with the strangeness of human motivation. Reading *By Proxy* with this in mind it becomes clear that, while Dickens sought to amplify the romance and melodrama behind Carton's sacrifice, Payn's reworking of key elements (too easy to mistake for mere pastiche) is more slippery and its sense of human psychology to a degree subtler. Not by any means a one-to-one imitation, *By Proxy* picks and chooses elements to heighten, elements to remove, and elements to conflate, regearing Dickensian melodrama for a middlebrow literary market potentially interested in different regions of the globe and new perspectives on familiar plots. Like Pennicuick, Payn saw a window of opportunity and did not hesitate to take it.

---

[311] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 764.
[312] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 17 August 1878, 219-20, 219.
[313] 'Mr. Payn's New Novel', *The Spectator*, 13 November 1880, 1449-50, 1450.
[314] Payn, *Some Literary Recollections*, 185.

II. The History of Victorian China

Payn (much like Collins with *The Moonstone*) did a considerable amount of research before starting work on his stolen gem story. Although his background reading is not made as explicit as Collins's (no specific sources are acknowledged), it is clear from the content of the novel that he troubled, at the very least, to familiarize himself with the recent history of Britain's commercial and political relationship with China—likely (though not certainly) using the library resources of his London club, the Reform.[315] Payn's narrative shows him keenly aware of the precarious relations between England and China following the conclusion of the Opium Wars.

Britain in effect held China economic hostage from the start of the First Opium War in 1839 through the duration of the Second Opium War, which culminated in the British destruction of the Old Summer Palace in 1860.[316] The Convention of Pekin in 1864 legitimized this situation, ratifying unequal trade negotiations and granting Britain the right to exploit its commercial power further by monopolizing trade through key ports.[317] I approach *By Proxy* by way of a brief history of the destruction of the Old Summer Palace—a case study of British aggression and opportunistic looting in China, in which context Payn's novel can be seen as grappling with a larger cultural pattern whereby the expropriation of cultural goods is understood on all sides as criminal and (more surprisingly, perhaps) as lacking in justifiable or even *clear* motivation.

Known in English as the Old Summer Palace or the Imperial Gardens, Yuanmingyuan, in what is now Beijing (previously Pekin), translates to 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness'. It was for centuries a stage of political and cultural spectacle. Situated across an estimated 857 acres, Yuanmingyuan housed multiple palaces and leisure gardens and was the main residence of the Qianlong emperor of the Qing Dynasty.[318] Construction of the palace began at the start of the eighteenth century, with the Imperial Gardens added in 1725 and the additional erection of European-style palaces across the grounds beginning in 1747.[319] The Emperor was said to be able to 'survey the world in microcosm'[320] as he looked

---

[315] The earliest library catalogue from The Reform Club is from 1883 (five years after *By Proxy* was published), so it is unclear exactly which books on Chinese history or foreign relations Payn would have had access to.
[316] The EIC and the BAF fought together against the Qing Empire during the Opium Wars, see Hevia's *English Lessons* for more details.
[317] These came after the already effective Nanjing Treaty of 1842 which opened the other four ports.
[318] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 108.
[319] Geremie R. Barmé, 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness, a Life in Ruins', *East Asian History*, 11 (1996), 111-58, 123.
[320] Barmé, 117.

out across the nine islands that symbolized the '"Nine Realms" (Qiu Zhou) of the empire'.[321] Visitors' sense of participating in an imagined world where everything is within one's reach was made possible by the creation of townships wherein 'eunuchs masquerading as storekeepers engaged the emperor and his ladies' with performances of 'fake weddings, fake courts, jails, police… and retail opportunities'.[322] The Emperor's visible domain extended past the East and into the West, as Yuanmingyuan housed buildings and landscapes in both Eastern and Western styles, thereby manufacturing a space that, however contrived, put the Celestial Empire at the epicentre of the world's power and influence. Far from fantasy, however, were the ultimately devastating relations between China and England that played out there.

In 1793, George Macartney headed Britain's first embassy to China, tasked by Prime Minister William Pitt and East India Company official Henry Dundas with negotiating profitable trade deals.[323] As the embassy made its way to Yuanmingyuan, both sides prepared spectacular gifts for one another. Transporting luxury goods and inventions that showcased the British power of modern invention, the embassy was approached by a Chinese official seeking a quick glance at the presents, 'having heard rumours that the gifts included a [black] chicken fed on coal, a dwarf, an elephant the size of a cat, and a pillow that could transport the sleeper to the place of his dreams'.[324] The Emperor—and presumably the expectant official—were disappointed not just by the absence of the magical, but the apparent lack of consideration and expense. The last gave serious offence. Contemporary accounting estimates that the Chinese spent more than twice the amount of money on their gifts: '[approximately] 173,000 pounds, not including the gifts provided from the palace storehouses. By comparison… the total cost to the British, including the gifts but not the cost to the navy of providing the ship, was 80,000 pounds'.[325] Only a few gifts from the widely disparaged selection sparked interest from the Chinese; the 'planetarium, orrery and globes were put on display in the Observatory of Distant Oceans…in the European-style section of the Yuanmingyuan'.[326] Macartney's inept diplomacy had immediate consequences for trade and, perhaps most concerning to the British government, signalled a decisive win for China,

---

[321] Barmé, 117.
[322] Barmé, 119.
[323] Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Britian and China, 1842-1914', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, ed. by Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146.
[324] Henrietta Harrison, 'Chinese and British Diplomatic Gifts in the Macartney Embassy of 1793', *English Historical Review*, 560 (2018), 65-97, 71.
[325] Harrison, 80.
[326] Harrison, 92.

'who evaded British demands for territory and tax reductions while placating the ambassador with gifts, courtesies and vague promises for the future'.[327]

British success during the First Opium War (1839-1842) established a 'legal foothold and basis of operation' in China. A series of 'treaty settlements' rendered China helpless against the creation of 'opium-driven [deterritorialized zones] via the newly created Euroamerican residence zones in the treaty ports',[328] Shanghai being one of the new main ports. These operated steadily until the start of the Second Opium War. In the spring of 1857, James Bruce, the eighth Earl of Elgin—the son of the man responsible for the removal of the Parthenon marbles to England—was appointed as High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary to China.[329] The younger Elgin was given specific objectives for his time in China. He was to obtain: '(1) reparations for injuries and property losses of British subjects [sustained during the First Opium War]; (2) complete execution of treaty provisions at all Chinese ports; (3) liberation of trade with China through the opening of more ports along the Yangzi River; and (4) provisions for a resident minister in Beijing'.[330] Granted complete control over all British armed forces in China, Elgin was encouraged to 'use force on a graduated scale' should he find the Chinese unwilling to adhere to his demands.[331]

Elgin's objectives reflected the strategic priorities that had clarified over recent years in Britain's dealings with coastal China. A year prior in 1856, Elgin's brother, Frederick Bruce, was appointed British envoy in Beijing. Bruce played a pivotal role in the three battles at the Taku (also called Dagu) Forts in 1858.[332] Swift British victories saw the Taku Forts taken and the Treaty of Tianjin established, which afforded the British further trading rights in return for handing the Taku Forts back to the Chinese. In 1859, Bruce travelled southward from Beijing to Shanghai to ratify this treaty. During his voyage, he attempted to cross a Chinese blockade at the Taku Forts after being told explicitly by Chinese officials that doing so would be considered a direct provocation. As the British gunboats deliberately sailed over the line, they were attacked—this time with the Chinese the victors. Elgin was then tasked with an additional responsibility: to extract an apology for the 'insult'[333] that had taken place. Bruce, meanwhile, acted of his own accord and presented an ultimatum to the Qing

---

[327] Harrison, 67.
[328] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 53.
[329] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 34.
[330] Hevia, *English Lessons,* 34.
[331] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 34.
[332] These battles occurred between 1858 and 1870, see James Hevia's 'Remembering the Century of Humiliation: The Yuanming Gardens and Dagu Forts Museums', in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. by Sheila Miyoshi Jager (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 192-208 for more detail.
[333] Hevia, *English Lessons,* 42.

government: 'unless British demands were met, there would be war'.[334] Bruce stubbornly refused to engage in further negotiations, though the Qing government repeatedly showed willing, and in 1860, Britain declared war.

Further inequitable peace settlements, trade negotiations, and treaties followed, one involving the Qing Court reluctantly 'permit[ting] diplomatic representation within the Imperial Capital'[335] and insisting that the British and French occupy a familiar location: Yuanmingyuan.[336] After additional acts of aggression by each side, the Qing Court detained thirty-nine members of an English delegation and imprisoned them under the same roof they had only recently forfeited. Eighteen hostages were killed, others were tortured, with one succumbing to his injuries following his release.[337] Weeks later, with a combined strength of 143 officers and 4,372 men, the English and French plundered, destroyed, and set fire to Yuanmingyuan on the orders of Elgin.[338] He later reflected: '"The army would go there,"' he began, '"not to pillage, but to mark by a solemn act of retribution the horror and indignation with which we were inspired by the perpetration of a great crime"'.[339] Thus, the act of aggression by the Chinese at the Taku Forts, clearly and deliberately *provoked* by the British, was utilized by them as the perfect opportunity to gain purchase in the ongoing conflict.

III. The Study of Victorian China

There is now an extensive body of historical criticism focused on China in the nineteenth century. Literary critical work in the field, by contrast, remains slighter than the scholarship focused on India or Africa. Several important exceptions have informed my research and prompted questions about the significance of British imperial action in China and back in Britain at the time. Ross Forman's *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (2013) focuses on Anglophone literature set in China, underscoring not just the importance of the opium trade during the nineteenth century, but the significance of treaty ports in both a material and a symbolic sense. A 2015 special issue of the *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*: 'The Victorians and China', edited by Julia Kuehn, combines thorough historical studies of China in the Victorian era with a critical examination of 'The Yellow

---

[334] Hevia, *English Lessons,* 42.
[335] Barmé, 136.
[336] Barmé, 136.
[337] Barmé, 131, and Hevia, *English Lessons*, 47.
[338] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 107.
[339] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 107.

Peril' as a pervasive preoccupation of contemporary literature: 'fictional accounts of Chinese vileness derived from circulating yellow peril fears in turn helped to substantiate and promulgate these fears'.[340] The special issue treats the significance of trading ports, coolie trade, waterways, and British tourism in China—each topic pointing toward how British '"facts" of China become "fictions" of China'[341] that helped to shape cultural attitudes toward Asia throughout the nineteenth century.[342] James Hevia's *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (2003) examines how Euro-American imperialism brought about the humiliation and eventual demise of China's Qing monarchy in the nineteenth century. Hevia's analysis of military campaign documentation includes the treatment of looted objects, proving vital to my work by allowing me to historically contextualize *By Proxy* with specific regard to the destruction of the Old Summer Palace.

Hevia's rendering of colonial movements in China does not venture into literary criticism, but his tracing of the longstanding effects of British involvement in China is especially salient to my discussion of the aftermath of looting. Hevia contends that a 'pedagogical' process was employed by British imperial powers in China to create a quasi-colonial space where British influence could thrive. He identifies the key role played by Colonel Garnet Wolseley, who was present at Yuanmingyuan during its destruction, and who created 'a concise justification for a British pedagogical project in both its destructive and constructive aspects'.[343] This justification depended upon the 'feminization, infantilization, and denigration' of China, imagining it not as an empire in its own right, but as an 'immature civilization' in need of 'social and material intervention'.[344] These justifications play out in countless Victorian novels set in China, as Ailise Bulfin discusses in relation to Guy Boothby's collected works where 'explicit vilification [works by] unthinking, incidental inclusion of stock Chinese characters in British imperial locations who are described with a casual contempt that is staggering, and serves implicitly to reinforce the yellow peril premise'.[345]

---

[340] Ailise Bulfin, 'Guy Boothby and the "Yellow Peril": Representations of Chinese Immigrants in British Imperial Spaces in the Late-Nineteenth Century', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 20.1 (2015), 24-40, 33.
[341] Julia Kuehn, 'The Victorians and China: Travels with Ships, Ideologies and Literature', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 20.1 (2015), 1-4, 3.
[342] Flair Donglai Shi's 2021 Oxford University DPhil Dissertation 'The yellow peril discourse in anglophone and sinophone literatures and cultures, 1895 to the present: mutations, reactions, and reinventions' also considers how China is represented across fiction. Shi's focus on fin de siècle and modernist British fiction raises important questions concerning the stereotypes of Yellow Peril narratives and the assumed threat of a Chinese invasion. His work is currently being adapted into the forthcoming Cambridge University Press monograph: *Yellow Peril Revisited: Mutations, Reactions, and Reinventions* (expected in 2027).
[343] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 102.
[344] Hevia, *English Lessons*, 102.
[345] Bulfin, 27.

Moreover, Forman notes that Yellow Peril Narratives concerning 'the uncivilized behavior of British youth in an alien environment… go so far as to suggest that British naivety invokes the violence it causes as a reaction to what the Chinese rightly perceive as imperialistic incursion on their sovereign space'.[346] Thus, 'British naivety' is plucked out of the grab-bag of possible British justifications—producing a weak rationale which can then be seen to provoke an aggressive response from the Chinese. The logic is, of course, circular: initial British naiveté begets Chinese aggression, begetting in turn 'legitimate' British aggression.

Some of the most famous Yellow Peril narratives came to prominence much closer to the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century: M. P. Shiel's novel *The Yellow Danger* (1898), Jack London's short story 'The Unparalleled Invasion' (1910), Percy Westerman's novel *When East Meets West* (1913), and perhaps most famous of all, Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu series that began in 1912. These fictions illustrated a kind of 'fear/desire for racial miscegenation invasion'[347] and a deep fear of invasion; however, an earlier tradition of incorporating plotlines describing British interference in China began much earlier with novels like Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), and P. W. Donner's novel *Last Days of the Republic* (1880).[348]

Payn does not perpetuate these archetypes of Chinese aggression and diverges from what would become the standard plot structure of a Yellow Peril novel by creating a clear dividing line between how Pennicuick and Conway perceive and treat the Chinese. Pennicuick's constant dismissiveness and disdain for all Chinese people and customs is repeatedly juxtaposed with Conway's understanding and appreciation. Where Pennicuick sneers at women 'hum[ming] a musical gamut', Conway understands that they are in the presence of a 'great shibboleth' (17), a time-honoured custom. Where Pennicuick sees the 'tomfoolery' of 'idiots' (31) attempting to manipulate his 'foolish frolic' (74) into 'extortion' (73), Conway understands the gravity of the sacrilegious theft and—importantly, understands that Chinese jurisdiction has priority over any (limited) British authority. Pennicuick and Conway are also identified by Chinese characters as distinctly different in terms of their personality and their morality. Each time Conway attempts to come to Pennicuick's aid, explaining that he needs—at the very least—to display a degree of remorse or humility, multiple Chinese observers explicitly note that Conway is not their enemy nor do they have any real issue with him. Twang-hi, the 'Mandarin' bureaucrat, calls Conway a 'good man'

---

[346] Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 61.
[347] Shi, 66.
[348] See chapter one of Shi's dissertation 'The yellow peril discourse' for a more comprehensive list of Yellow Peril narratives.

whose feelings he 'honours' (75). Fu-chow, the captain of the boat on which Conway and Pennicuick journey along the coast, explains to Conway: 'the guilty must needs be punished. [Twang-hi]… is one whose justice never fails. I will tell him you are a good man; … and how you revere Buddha, and know nothing of this vile and impious sacrilege' (37). Payn's take on the burgeoning popularity of the Yellow Peril novel, then, becomes an inversion of the conventional depiction of a Chinese threat, describing instead an assault by a single British man: an exception to the otherwise law-abiding British occupation of port zones where the Chinese and British are depicted as peacefully coexisting.

Following the completion of its serialization in 1878, *By Proxy* was, as we have seen, lauded by *The Saturday Review*: 'It is altogether a new idea to carry […] readers up-country in China. We do not know what means the author may have had of informing himself as to the interior of an Empire that has been so very little explored. It is conceivable in these days of promiscuous travel that he may have paid China a flying visit'.[349] Similarly, *The Spectator* announced that the novel included 'scenes laid in China [that] are the result of so much study and care'.[350] A brief biography of Payn included in the 1914 *Selected Essays on Literary Subjects* likewise heralds this achievement: '*By Proxy* has been justly admired for the wonderful accuracy of its local colour, and for a masterly knowledge of Chinese character, which the writer drew exclusively from encyclopaedias and books of travel'.[351] Despite *By Proxy's* novel take on the Yellow Peril narrative, most reviews at the time focused on the despicability of the Chinese characters. The *Saturday Review* concluded: 'The Chinese are sketched just as we can fancy them, cruel, covetous, plausible, and servile[ly] obsequious to any of who can afford to appeal to their cupidity', noting the 'cruel civilities of cold-blooded mandarins'.[352] While Payn does indeed identify Pennicuick's theft of the Shayle as the ultimate instance of misconduct between either British or Chinese characters, there are multiple references to a distinctly Chinese 'indifference' (16) to the suffering of 'their fellow-creatures' (69). The Chinese people the British encounter during their exploits in China are, from the start, reduced to 'John Chinaman on his own dunghill' (1). Reciprocally, Chinese characters refer to the English as 'foreign devils' (1) and 'white devils' (24) and state that they have 'no other name for them' (24). The British understand well how they are seen, with Pennicuick noting that in China, they—that is to say, all persons belonging to 'civilized' communities—are '"The Barbarians" [whose lives] are held not only cheap but contemptible'

---

[349] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 219.
[350] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 764.
[351] George W. E. Russell, 'James Payn', in *Selected Essays on Literary Subjects* (London: J.M. Dent Dutton, 1914), 39-47, 44.
[352] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 220.

(1). In short, prejudices are perpetuated on both sides, straining mutual respect in the general eagerness to garner or protect power. Pennicuick's gem-theft opens a fissure in the tenuous yet functional culture of cooperation between Chinese and British. Unpacking the intercultural play of power, here, requires examining Payn's narrative style and methods of characterization in *By Proxy*.

IV. The Character of the Thief

The theft of the Shay-le is immediately framed as sacrilegious and abhorrent to all the Chinese adherents of Buddhism. The only British man (other than Pennicuick) in the region at the time, Conway is as 'horror-stricken' as the local people, 'for he well knew the heinous nature of such an outrage in Chinese eyes, and also its consequences' (37). Pennicuick's ability to grasp the magnitude of his actions is less explicit. The primary sources of information concerning the sacrilegious import of the gem-theft are Pennicuick's self-disclosures made either when speaking to other characters or when he thinks aloud. The reader is not granted access to the uncensored motivations that a first-person narrative would likely make explicit. Instead, an implied narrative point of view vacillates between ambivalence and self-consciousness—neither supporting nor condemning Pennicuick's behaviour early in the novel, though the shortsightedness of his actions is made clear as he begins to feel the growing weight of his own guilt. Pennicuick's progression over the course of the novel from total detachment to the crushing realization that his opportunistic behaviour has consequences that he cannot evade is chronicled by a narrative voice whose detachment increasingly gives way to ambivalence and then to a progressively more critical free indirect discourse.

The implied criticisms repeatedly come back to a single, underlining point: the lack of motivation for Pennicuick's theft. Pennicuick acts on a whim when he steals the Shay-le and his subsequent references to what he has done involve excuses, denials, and diversions. The moment of theft is not explicitly described; instead, the narrative focus remains on Conway while Pennicuick enters the shrine alone. Conway—'not together at his ease' (25)—awaits Pennicuick's return. Payn constrains narration of the act of looting to a vague acknowledgement that something criminal has been done which seems to have been predicted by Conway and yet is unsubstantiated by concrete detail: 'Without having the good nature that belongs to high spirits, [Pennicuick] had a turn for mischief, which in his younger days had led him into some serious scrapes, and which even now occasionally exhibited itself' (25). Waiting, Conway imagines what Pennicuick might be up to.

> …it was just possible that [Pennicuick] designed to play some absurd trick upon the high-priest to recompense himself for having let the hermit slip so easily through his fingers. Above all it puzzled Conway to account for his friend's giving so large a sum to see a relic—things for which he always expressed the utmost contempt—unless he had some whim of his own to serve at the same time (25).

Conway imagines an 'absurd trick' that might be Pennicuick's childish revenge against the high priest for not letting him toy with a fasting hermit in a nearby edifice; however, Conway's preoccupation with the five-pound sum that Pennicuick pays to see the Shay-le suggests a more damning lack of rationale. *The Spectator* describes Pennicuick's gem-theft as happening 'half in frolic, half in greed,' with Pennicuick simply seizing 'an opportunity of stealing a precious stone'.[353] The *Saturday Review* summarizes this scene in similar terms: 'an insane fancy seizes him; and he acts on an impulse which, it must be admitted, is almost inconceivable in a man of his eminently practical nature. He abstracts the famous relic as a trophy'.[354] These reviews rightly identify opportunism and a haphazard impulse over any real premeditation to commit sacrilege. However, when read alongside Conway's apprehension that a 'trick' or self-serving act might be committed, Pennicuick's theft looks slightly more deliberate. Even if the possession of the Shay-le was not the intended result (as with Herncastle's determination to steal the Moonstone), Conway's concern that Pennicuick had 'some whim of his own' in view suggests that the theft is less about the gem and more about Pennicuick's lack of respect for the Buddhist faith.

Left alone on the evening after he steals the Shay-le, Pennicuick thinks about what profit may follow: 'I wonder what the jeweller will say to it' (30). He wonders idly 'whether is worth the five pounds' (30). This reveals a characteristic tendency to deflect any potential blame that comes his way. By calling attention to the money that he paid to see the Shay-le—the five pounds that he used to bribe the attendant for access to the gem after it was put away until the next feast day—he begins to weave one of several threads that either distance him from accountability or construe a warped reality in which his theft was worthwhile. If the Shay-le is worth the five pounds he spent bribing the attendant, then one of two things must be true: he took the risk of stealing it for good reason (looking to recoup the cost on the open market), or he in effect *paid for it*. If the latter is true, it was the attendant who is corrupt for having accepted a bribe; the Shay-le is owed to Pennicuick in fulfilment of the transaction that took place.

---

353 [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Examiner*, 562.
354 [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 219.

Confronted by Chinese officials, Pennicuick admits that it was he who stole the Shay-le. In a confession devoid of guilt, he confesses to Conway: 'Yes, it's true enough… I was a fool to do it, of course, and I am sorry for it; but not half so sorry as that you made me miss that whey-faced Fu-chow with my first barrel' (37). His careless apology is not directed to the temple priest, nor to the adherents he stole from, but to Conway. What he confesses to is mere folly, and what he regrets is not the theft itself, but his bad luck in getting caught and his indignation in failing kill Fu-Chow, the man who turned him in. Pennicuick's warped apology is further delegitimized as Payn's descriptions, initially somewhat aligned with Conway's perspective, increasingly capture a mixed fear and recklessness.

> It was surprising that so sagacious a man, and one in general so careful of his own well-being, should have given way to a temptation that would only have been attractive, as one would think, to a midshipman or a schoolboy… It was, however, his very love of self… [and] a malicious impulse, that had induced him the steal the Shay-le. The sudden impulse to deprive thousands of ignorant devotees, and scores of lying priests, of the most precious and most ancient relic their temple possessed… had proved too strong to be resisted. When he had done it, his repentance had been as rapid as his crime; he had perceived the extreme danger of his position, and would perhaps willingly have withdrawn from it had retreat been possible… [T]he Shay-le would not be inquired for again till the next feast-day… and by that time he would be safe enough among his fellow countrymen. And with what pride and pleasure would he exhibit this concentration of Chinese sanctity, this crystalized essence of Buddha himself, to admiring friends! (68)

The passage begins in narratorial disbelief—how could a grown man with any sense of prudence behave in such a way? It quickly answers its own question: a sudden impulse has driven him to do it. The implied narrator rejects the notion that Pennicuick's behaviour could be as 'inconceivable' as the *Saturday Review* maintains, and instead characterizes Pennicuick's childlike petulance as a form of desperate self-exculpation that he clings to; *he* has been wronged by those who stood in the way of his murdering Fu-chow (Conway and other officials (36)). If Pennicuick believes himself to be guilty of any one thing, it is that has fallen victim to impetuousness. Across the novel, the increased use of free indirect discourse corresponds with the (marginally) heightened degree of Pennicuick's self-awareness. One might assume that this pattern would imply a growing sense of remorse, but Payn establishes a clear gap between narrative perspective and the character's capacity for self-understanding—a gap that prevents sympathy for Pennicuick and ensures that the reader never wavers in holding him culpable.

Confronted with descriptions of how he will be killed if found guilty by the police court, Pennicuick tells Conway, 'I am not frightened, Conway, by this juggler's threats. And I

will not submit to extortion… Tell him I am underneath the protection of the British flag, and woe betide him' (73). Having committed sacrilege, he threatens those holding him accountable. This refusal of moral responsibility generates the ironic situation in which Conway—the least likely man to commit such an abhorrent offense—agrees to stand proxy for the thief. Pennicuick takes advantage of Conway's vulnerable emotional and financial position by settling upon a sum (£20,000) that will change the lives of Conway's wife and daughter, but—importantly, will 'not break' Pennicuick himself financially. Conway responds, 'if I die for you [Pennicuick], I must be content to feel that, in so doing, I purchase for [Nelly] ease and comfort', and finishes 'I owe her mother, too, some reparation' (108). Pennicuick makes no further excuses; he neither returns to his line of reasoning concerning the desire to get value-for-money from his five pounds, nor does he lament the fact that he has lost the opportunity to gain prestige and profit financially by returning to England with the Shay-le. He expends no moral or emotional energy in compassion with is friend over what will be a hideous death. Instead, he pivots to determining how Conway's proposal to swap places might serve him, without giving any thought to what got them there in the first place: 'If your offer is genuine, I accept it, and there's an end… still I have some self-respect, and that I should lose utterly if I were to picture myself as escaping from this calamity at your expense, without, as it were, value received on your part' (110). In other words, self-respect requires him to draw a line at guilt. He first convinces himself that he is essentially blameless, then he moves on to constructing a reality in which he is fully swapping places and *passing his guilt* to Conway.

Pennicuick may not know the monetary value of the Shay-le, but he seems happy to put a price on his friend's life. Having successfully exploited (in effect, killed) Conway without serious financial cost to himself he returns to England. Once there, however, he must convince both himself and others that he has done and continues to do the right thing. This proves more difficult than he anticipated. The mental gymnastics Pennicuick ultimately performs in order to 'feel less like a villain' (219) are a very late sign that he may have a residual moral conscience. As soon as an opportunity presents itself to make his life easier back in Britain, he takes it, breaking his word to Conway. He convinces himself that the money he has promised Conway is 'really so much better' when it is in his possession: 'he could scarcely make over the 20,000l. to the widow and her daughter as a free gift, even if they would have accepted it' (158). With the money in-hand, he sees himself playing the Hero: 'the idea of playing the patron to Mrs. Conway was very pleasant to him' (155). Pennicuick explains to his son, 'Of course it would be better if everybody could leave their wives and children well provided for, unfortunately, only one person in a thousand can do so,' ending crassly, 'Conway, as we all know, was not one of those fortunate exceptions' (185).

He, by contrast, positions himself as a benign philanthropist, offering Nelly an annuity of £400, a 'handsome' offer of 'an income sufficient for any young lady', (224). A charitable reading would be that a guilty conscience leads him to offer aid to the family of his friend, presumed dead. His intention is, however, malicious: 'I, his friend, intend to take that burden upon me… Though, mind you, I acknowledge no claim,' (185); 'I intend to act for their benefit, of course, but I don't desire any thanks… I don't wish them to feel any sense of obligation, and still less do I wish them to express it' (187). Knowing that Mrs. Conway would refuse his offer, never having trusted him, 'he would have all the more to give to Nelly, which her mother could hardly dissuade her from accepting, and yet which would lay herself under the very obligation which she had resented' (155). Thus, he takes advantage of the opportunity to slight Mrs. Conway, whom he has never liked, while fashioning himself as a benefactor to her daughter. Mrs. Conway is not convinced.

> What could have induced a man so mean—except where his own pleasures of vices were concerned—to have made such a proposal? That it was no tenderness for the memory of his friend, she felt well assured. It must be some miserable attempt at compensation—at neutralization of the stings of conscience. The ghost of her husband seemed to stand beside her, whispering "Foul play, foul play". (204)

Mrs. Conway's Hamlet-like suspicion signals an intuitive moral clarity. She accuses Pennicuick to his face of being a 'murderer' (he is quick to substitute the blander 'Betrayer of Trust') understanding that 'there was no proof… nor ever would be' that her husband stole the Shay-le. 'The knowledge that another person beside himself had become possessed of this fact—though it was only by intuition' is 'intolerable to [Pennicuick]' (208). Even though she is unable to prove it, the very fact that Mrs. Conway intuits Pennicuick's crime is felt by Pennicuick to threaten his ability to ingratiate himself back into society. Immediately upon accusing Pennicuick of wrongdoing, Mrs. Conway falls over and dies from a 'fit of apoplexy' (201). Though Pennicuick does not actively kill her, he does not attempt to come to her aid by holding her head, which he understands might have prevented her death. Upon her death, he admits that though he 'wished her dead', he did not '[wish] to kill her', but all 'desire of self-preservation overpowered all other feelings' (208-09) to either intervene or feel anything other than relief at her passing. Mrs. Conway's death functions as an yet another irrevocable loss within the novel; despite this, it offers Pennicuick temporary reprieve as the only person who knew with certainty of his guilt—even without knowing its extent—is gone and no longer a threat.

The challenge the reader is faced with is not deciding the morality of Pennicuick's opportunism but rather keeping pace with the constant changes in his reasoning and the degree to which he can reconcile himself to the fact that his actions have serious consequences for the next generation. Now orphaned, Nelly is left to decide her own fate. Unknowingly participating in his father's scheme, Raymond, Pennicuick's son, berates Nelly for not wanting to accept his offer of marriage. Keeping Raymond in ignorance of his financial involvement, Pennicuick mentally bargains down Nelly's proposed annuity. What was meant to be handed over *in full* to the Conways upon Pennicuick's arrival is now proposed to be provided over the course of *fifty years*, all under the guise of generosity. It is then revised down again to a mere 400 per annum—and he is vexed to feel the prickings of conscience: 'Four hundred a year' is surely 'sufficient for any young lady', but it is 'not the income derivable from 20,000l., except at two per cent' (224). The gross immorality of Pennicuick's behaviour is again addressed via free indirect discourse: 'His specious excuses to himself, his reasons for his wrong, were all moonshine—or rather limelight, for there was nothing natural about them; the main fact was, that he could not bring himself to part with the money, since there was none to compel him, or reproach him for keeping it' (158-59). Revising 'moonshine' to 'limelight' in his own mind—with a flash of narcissistic charm that seems much more Pennicuick than Payn—the façade of innocence begins to crumble, leaving Pennicuick with a growing sense of dread.

> It had cost him a good deal—all his peace of mind, and half his powers of digestion —to establish the matter to his satisfaction, or partly to his satisfaction, and he was not going to be disturbed by casuistry. Only he did desire, now, much more even than before, to feel less like a villain. Although never liberal in his dealings, he had been a scrupulously honest man all his life, until this great temptation to do evil without risk had been too much for him. No amount, or scarcely any amount, of gain could have induced him to rob another man; for in this case he did not feel that he was doing this; he was only keeping money, which, though he had agreed to part with it, had never left his hands, and therefore somehow still seemed to be his own. And it was really so much better, taking the matter all round, that he should keep it. (219)

This style of narration exemplifies the novel's double-act of heavy-handedness and subtlety in depicting of the state of mind in which a man might commit a theft that seriously offends another culture, and then go to strenuous efforts to evade the consequences—framing another man, leaving him to suffer capital punishment, and robbing his family of the compensation due to them. Here, Payn's primary interest seems not to be straightforward criticism of Pennicuick's actions, though there is plenty of that; the emphasis rests on the psychology of a man who has so clearly done wrong and must live in the aftermath of

indefensible actions. To an extent the morality is drawn in black and white—discriminating when Pennicuick's behaviour is condemned or condoned—but other aspects of the narration seem rather more preoccupied with *why* Pennicuick is so chronically incapable of taking accountability for the obvious missteps he has made. A serious act of cultural violation is reduced, in Pennicuick's casuistic thinking (constantly self-revising in his own moral favour) to the effect of a casual whim—one whose fallout—for the perpetrator, for Conway, for, the Buddhist community—is not allowed to register, though the first two at least clearly press at the margins of his consciousness.

V: Cultural Consequences of Theft

Payn addressed the success of *By Proxy* in his second memoir: 'It is, I believe, my most popular novel; but though the local colouring has been pronounced accurate enough by residents in China, a great authority once informed me that though the populace would have torn the author of the sacrilege described to pieces, the mandarins would have taken no notice of it'.[355] If the entire premise concerning 'the mandarins' was inherently flawed, what then, becomes of the Payn's claim to realism? Eric Hayot's characterization of nineteenth-century Mandarins offers a possible answer; he asserts that 'by the mid-1800s widespread historical and philosophical attacks on Asia's historical immutability… made the mandarin a figure for stagnation in its broadest possible meanings: historical stasis… economic stasis… and the stasis of capital'.[356] If the Mandarins within *By Proxy* are a stand-in for political stagnation, as Hayot suggests, their absolute insistence that an archaic order must be followed can be read as exemplifying this refusal to tolerate or adopt new ideas of moral governance, so that they must necessarily appear underdeveloped or 'backward' to a British reader. To suggest that in reality, the Mandarins 'would have taken no notice', implies that the 'European imaginary' that casts Mandarins as violent, litigious, and somehow stagnate to progress is simply inaccurate. I maintain that Payn's admission here was largely inconsequential; his *assumption*, in the early 1860s or 70s, that the Chinese government would respond aggressively is all that matters.

The assumption of Chinese brutality or a thirst for vengeance provides an opportunity for melodramatic storytelling which then functions as a point of resistance, as Payn almost systematically frames the signs of barbarity with explicit recognition that the

---

[355] Payn, *Gleams of Memory*, 113.
[356] Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

Buddhist community has just cause for anger. Death by a thousand cuts might be a cruel sentencing, but it is never presented as anything other than a punishment that matches the crime of sacrilege. The presentation of the Chinese as both the arbiters of agonizing death-sentences *and* victims of an attempt at cultural expropriation drives the plot forward, regardless of whether or not real-life Mandarins who 'would have taken [...] notice'. With this in mind, the Chinese response to Pennicuick's theft within the novel becomes even more critical.

Pennicuick understands how to operate within a foreign culture to maximize his own benefit; he knows that bribery (usually) works wonders, and he is keenly aware of areas for potential exploitation. Conway, on the other hand, approaches Chinese culture with a scholarly curiosity that surpasses tolerance and involves mutual respect. Cultural awareness, or any kind of general knowledge about the population, is proven to be vulnerable to exploitation. Where Conway's understanding of the culture is regarded as inherently well-intentioned, Pennicuick's is self-serving. Exploiting Conway's more thorough understanding of Chinese culture and his ability to speak the language, Pennicuick is able to capitalize on his time spent in China. Pennicuick only cares about what might serve him and pays heed to nothing and no-one else. Knowledge of Chinese culture is treated by him as superfluous and what little familiarity he has with the country is achieved through proximity to others who are better informed.

The following scene occurs at the very outset of the novel, prior to Pennicuick's theft of the Shay-le.

> [At the] entrance gate sat a wooden lady about sixty feet high... Her august title was Mi-le-fu (The Guardian), but as an immense pot of incense, to which every visitor contributed a stick of two, dispersed odors all around her, an irreverent spirit might have termed her Millefleurs. That was the name Ralph Pennicuick gave her, directly he had seen and sniffed... She was very handsomely painted and gilded, and had a hole between her shoulder-blades through which she was supplied with artificial entrails. The Chinese, it is said, with reference to their indifference to human suffering, have no bowels; but that is not the case with their deities. The gods of the Buddhist Olympus are nothing without them, which are supposed to represent the living spirit; they generally consist of silver representations of the heart and other internal parts of the anatomy, with pearls and precious stones dropped in by the well-to-do pious; and during certain international troubles, the British officer, who has improved his mind by the study of native customs, has been known to reap the fruits of it... The first row you have with these crocks, you will come to her to practice anatomy, I reckon'. (15-17)

Pennicuick, whose view, we gradually realize, is channelled here, revels in semantic hair-splitting, after-the-fact justifications, and rationalizations; his reluctance and eventual refusal to acknowledge his own misdeeds is amply anticipated by this, the first scene in the novel. We hear not of '*some* British officers' or that '*we* will come to her to practice anatomy'. The definitive article, '*the*' well-informed British officer is in practice applicable only to Conway. British Officers are treated as a single unit—of which Pennicuick is crucially *not* a part of (he is not in the British Armed Forces). Moreover, while he refuses any direct complicity by suggesting 'you'—Conway—would be the one to commit the act of theft, he also suggests that culpability is somehow shared and therefore rationalized; it is not just that *he* would do it, *you* would do it as well. Regardless of any supposed legitimate provocation, Pennicuick's obstinate perception of supposed barbarity and savagery in China establishes a pervasive and self-generated incitement. It is not just that Pennicuick believes he has a reason to hate these people; he believes that reason constitutes a warranted and even urgent need to act.

According to Pennicuick's previously established logic regarding Mi-le-fu, any disagreement—a 'first row' (17)—is sufficient provocation for theft. However, the complete lack of incitement on the Chinese side and the evident undermotivation for Pennicuick's actions undermine his position. In practice, he completely contradicts the logic he puts forth; all he needed was a moment of opportunity. The superficiality of his reasoning is borne out by the not uncharismatic baseness of his description of Buddhist religious practices. Pennicuick explicitly points to various episodes in the past when British officers have 'reaped the fruits' of encountering local Buddhist practices with idols: emptying the idols (flippantly referred to as 'crocks') of the silver, pearls and precious stones donated by the pious. Some sense of the scale of his transgression is surely discernible in Pennicuick's crassly self-deluding declaration that the proper response to his arrest and potential death sentence would be for the British to start a war. The *Saturday Review* was particularly taken by Fu-chow's role in Pennicuick's arrest, noting that in turning Pennicuick over to Chinese officials, Fu-chow is afforded the 'opportunity' to 'reveng[e] himself' for the Englishman's sacrilege.[357] The 'opportunity' Fu-chow capitalizes on temporarily displaces Pennicuick's opportunism, making the Chinese man the villain. Pennicuick, importantly, is not the only person to minimize the crime and look to the British government to, at least, get the Englishman out of trouble. Milburn, Conway's junior compatriot, remarks on 'the treachery of the Chinese government' in carrying out the sentence of capital punishment on Conway before senior

---

[357] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 219.

officers could seek reprieve, and continues, 'I trust they will still be made to pay for it; but it is so difficult to punish the true transgressors in such cases. Moreover, supposing the facts to be as reported, it was not a casus belli' (246).

In the face of all desperate attempts to do so, neither Pennicuick nor the British government can refute what Milburn refers to as 'the facts' surrounding the unquestionable act of sacrilege. Despite the apparent local justice of Pennicuick's proposed death by *Lingchi*, a greater offense has been committed which remains wholly unresolved. The Shay-le has been returned, yet in the eyes of its adherents, it has clearly been affected by its theft, marred permanently in a way that makes restitution impossible. The damage is written on the faces of the Chinese onlookers left to contemplate a Shay-le that has lost something of its aura.

> What made their almond eyes so bright and wondering as they gazed upon their captive was the immensity of his crime. They could not understand what Buddha could have been about to have permitted so great an impiety as the abstraction of a portion of his own anatomy, without some signal and immediate revelation of his wrath. Here was the man alive and unscathed who had stolen the sacred Shay-le, and carried it round his neck as a girl her beads; and there was the precious relic itself, on an open plate upon the altar, twinkling in a subdued manner (by reason of the paper windows) as though the sacrilege that had disturbed its ten thousand years of venerable seclusion was rather a joke than otherwise. (70)

As the adherents of Buddhism bear witness to the consequences of the crime committed by Pennicuick, it is plainly understood that it is not just the relic that has been injured, but the Buddha himself and the faith of the pious. The 'subdued' appearance of the Shay-le comes not just from the paper windows, but from the perception that the Buddha has 'permitted' a frivolous English opportunist to commit so great a sacrilege. Equally, it is not only the Shay-le that shines less brightly but the eyes of the faithful. The paper window protections on the jewel emphasize the vulnerability of an object of high cultural value to foreign despoilation. Neither the gem nor the people for whom it has crucial cultural and religious significance can be kept safe, as Pennicuick has clearly proven. The paper windows are more funerary than protective now, and yet it sits back in its place after being displaced for less than twenty-four hours—a mere blip within it its ten-thousand-year history. Although this passage imparts a degree of cultural condescension, in that the Buddhist adherents cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of the event, there is fundamentally a shared understanding of morality and accountability; the British and Chinese seem to agree in condemning Pennicuick's theft, and understanding that the desecration of the gem (and with it the sanctuary) is fundamentally immoral.

Alive, unscathed, and unrepentant, Pennicuick's nonchalance mocks those who understand the gravity of his theft. For a brief time he has worn the Shay-le around his neck just as Rachel, 'innocent of all knowledge of the truth,' wears the Moonstone 'in the bosom of her dress' in Wilkie Collins's novel,[358] the crucial difference being Pennicuick's flippant disrespect in comparison to Rachel's pleasure in and ignorant acceptance of the 'wonderful'[359] Moonstone. Only hours before, Pennicuick has explicitly imagined the Shay-le as a 'concentration of Chinese sanctity, [the] crystalized essence of Buddha himself,' (68) yet he somehow fails to anticipate the magnitude of his actions and the repercussions of his theft in the moment. A single man capable of such destruction 'without some signal and immediate revelation of [the Buddha's] wrath', remains visibly undisturbed in his conscience—seeing his actions 'as though' they were nothing but a 'joke'. The narrative perspective here is, importantly, not Pennicuick's, but that of the temple goers. The notion of his theft being a 'joke' echoes Conway's puzzled ruminations, when he wonders whether it was 'just possible that Pennicuick designed to play some absurd trick upon the high-priest to recompense himself for having let the hermit slip so easily through his fingers' (25). Here, even Conway quickly regards Pennicuick as immature, chauvinistic, and entirely capable of such an offense. Regarding this sacrilegious act as being perpetuated as easily as one tells a joke does not characterize Pennicuick especially prone to joking, but rather reiterates the notion that Pennicuick is simply an opportunist.

The theft of the sacred jewel—and its unsatisfactory restoration—brings about the start of a crushing realization that despite all attempts by the Chinese to administer punishment, a jarring lack of restorative justice remains on their side of this drama. The Chinese proceed under the belief that Pennicuick is dead which establishes an additional sense of false closure. If the local Buddhist population cannot understand why Buddha allowed him to survive the initial act of theft, they have no idea (a few bribed guards aside) that he has subsequently escaped his death sentence. Even if Pennicuick, and not Conway, had been killed—flayed and tortured as retribution for his initial crime—the damage and destruction left in his wake in China are shown to be incommensurate with what is required in the way of reparative justice. By contrast, the offence against the temple is overshadowed for the British characters by the drama of Pennicuick's sentencing and later by Conway's assumed demise. From the moment the gem is returned, the novel shifts from being a story of opportunistic looting to a study of a failed cultural and moral logic of proxying. As noted already, the Shay-le is both the shining exception to the pattern of attempted proxying and

---

[358] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 70.
[359] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 64.

the anchoring symbol of its impossibility. Out of fear that his knowledge of it might raise suspicion should he describe it truthfully, Pennicuick lies to Conway when he describes the Shay-le as a 'bit of glass' (26) that he could barely make out in the darkness. In truth, when he sees it first, he cannot fathom what it is. He knows it is 'not opal' but remains baffled, wondering to himself: 'what the deuce is it?' (30). Negative definition here establishes an almost apophatic relationship to the object itself. Not understanding or appreciating its value as a deeply meaningful cultural and religious object leaves Pennicuick without the capacity to perceive what it is 'worth'. Back in England, the Shay-le is subject to a long-range jeweller's valuation where its value seems as arbitrary as the £20,000 price tag Pennicuick affixes to Conway's life. For Pennicuick, the Shay-le is essentially an unknown quantity.

Within the novel, proxies function not as one-to-one equivalents, nor as easily predictable or consistently effective solutions to a problem; instead, they exist along a spectrum encompassing imperfect transactions, replacements, and exchange. In a Chinese jail cell, a ring is proxied for the promise of quick and ideally painless execution. In this instance, the proxy acts as a bribe. Conway's jailer recalls, 'He gave it to me as they led him forth to death' and immediately makes it available for further proxying, indicating, 'I would never part with such a memento—unless for a very considerable consideration' (129). Much later, and at the other end of the moral scale, Mrs. Wardlaw, already a proxied parental figure for mother of the orphaned Nelly, offers financial assistance by way of purchasing the girl's collection of paintings. Not wanting to embarrass or insult Nelly's position, Mrs. Wardlaw employs the collection of paintings as a proxy for the help she so desperately wants to give Nelly. She explains to Nelly, 'these half-dozen little pictures of yours give me a greater pleasure than all the grand collection that we have got at home. And since this is so, why shouldn't John make me a present of the whole of them?' (200). In this case, the transaction is more reputable, but the underlying logic remains the non-equivalence of things supposedly exchangeable. This is not to argue that all payments or transactions are proxies for the thing or service received, but in the case of Mrs. Wardlaw's purchase of a handful of paintings, her payment acts in the same way as a proxy for aid, not just financial payment. The emotional value of the paintings affords Mrs. Wardlaw a justifiable motivation for purchasing them from Nelly, even if the non-equivalence between the (potentially mediocre) pictures and the high price point offered for them makes any logical sense. Finally, as Pennicuick reveals the supposed cost of his plight during his confession to his son, he tells Raymond, 'Twenty thousand pounds is not to be called nothing, lad. That is what you would have to pay for hearing my story' (331). Here, the story returns to Pennicuick's initial attempt at proxying a life for a life with an undelivered payment of £20,000. Regardless of the sum of money promised or received, the consequences of Pennicuick's theft cannot be subject to

proxying if justice is to be done. Neither death by a thousand cuts nor £20,000 are adequate proxies for the Shay-le. No proxy can repair the damage of sacrilege.

By Proxy is not exclusively concerned with exposing the arbitrariness of an opportunistic gem-theft but extends its reach to a much wider system of cultural value, seen to be acutely vulnerable to violation. In China, after Kushan (Twang-hi's majordomo) learns that Conway will take Pennicuick's place in his execution and commends him for willingly 'perform[ing] one of the noblest of human acts', by dying for another, Kushan declares with foreboding: 'Gold is emptiness, silver is emptiness, honorable sir; how after death can we retain them in our grasp? The thing remains, the man departs' (112). He draws attention to the precariousness with which any material object can be said to be 'owned'. It is not the object itself—the gem—that is the primary focus of the novel's interest, but what happens *in response to* its violation. The Shay-le is melodramatically and self-servingly referred to by Pennicuick—at last feeling deep visceral fear of what he has done—as the 'cause of the catastrophe' (272). He already knows, by this point, that it was not desire for the object itself, or any power inherent in it, but the 'great temptation to do evil without risk [that] had been too much for him' (219). The theft of the Shay-le entailed a fleeting moment of impulse, yet it provides the catalyst for a an increasingly desperate series of moral, economic, and political attempts to restore what cannot be restored or mend what cannot be put right. Morally, his attempt to proxy his own accountability affords Pennicuick a temporary disguise for his crime and deferral of accountability.

The enduring, although untenable, refusal of accountability generates perpetual conflict, the more vivid given the setting of the novel in Britain's extraterritorial Chinese port zones, where the political and legal and moral right to operate was already so tenuous. In a veritable tinderbox of potential conflict, any moment of discord could spark war. Opportunism is in this context not limited to explicitly exploitative actions like looting, but also encompasses a longer history of unequal trade, forced advantage, and cultural insensitivity. The Buddhist proverb that Payn chooses as an epigraph to novel encapsulates this desire for the moral certainty of ultimate justice: 'Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, not in the clefts of the mountains, is there a spot in the whole world where a man may be freed from an evil deed'. Payn depicts more than just the fallout of a single instance of opportunism, instead asking his readers to recognise, beneath the momentary error in judgement, a distinctively British sense of entitlement *not* in reality shared by the majority of the novel's British characters.

VI: Pennicuick's Fate

With so little to say regarding the motives for his crimes, and even less to say in his defence, what remains of Pennicuick's psychology is a glaring sense of arrogance—an expectation of impunity that is repeatedly evidenced. When he evades paying Conway's family, he keeps more than just the £20,000 from them; crucially he withholds the truth about Conway's supposed fate. Across the length of the novel, Payn works to show Pennicuick's sheer opportunism. There is, after a while, a degree of supererogatory repetition about his mode of reasoning with himself: 'Even as it was, he did not, as we have said, propose to himself to rob the widow and the orphan. He would not give them their due, but he would give them—well, a good deal—and all in the way of kindness and generosity' (155). Only a few pages later, narration repeats more explicitly: 'Such hypocrisy would have been almost as abominable as the contemplated robbery itself, and there would also be the loss of the money. That, of course, was the keystone of the whole edifice of fraud and crime that Pennicuick was building up' (158). Here, Payn does not introduce an unreliable narrator, nor does he compromise the previously established narrative level of detachment, but instead seems to intentionally block every attempted explanation, rationalization, or normalization for Pennicuick's actions by a combination of ironic inflection and direct critique.

What Pennicuick offers in lieu of motivation is a series of short-term strategies to deter recognition and punition. Financial gain is a motive that Pennicuick can point toward for the crime, but the guilt he represses speaks against him, implicitly registering, as we have seen, that he knows he is guilty of a crime. His determination to avoid looking at his own guilt, takes on a more explicitly political caste back in England. Once 'circumstances' have made it 'absolutely necessary that he should obtain [...] relief from [his] worries,' (264) he decides to run for Parliament. Milburn quotes Pennicuick asserting: 'I want an object in life... and though to sit for a borough is rather an expensive object, it is cheaper than some others, such as horse-racing, for example, and it also suits me better' (260). He spends thousands of pounds (297) to fix a parliamentary run that he embarks on strictly as a 'diversion' (264). Ironically, his financial expenditures swell during his campaign, approaching the £20,000 figure that he so strenuously attempted to withhold from Mrs. Conway and Nelly. Alone in a hotel room before a campaign event, he feels a swelling sense of dread.

> The two black feathers at the corners of the bed... looked more like funeral plumes than ever, and he was turning from them with a half sneer, half shudder (common enough with him now when he was alone), to put out the light, when something shining on the carpet attracted his attention. He stooped down and picked it up; then uttered a cry of fear so loud and wild that it must have rung through any house of modern construction... What he thought it was, was the Shay-le of Buddha that he had stolen from the temple, and which has been the

> cause of the catastrophe that had slain his friend and made a scoundrel of himself. What it really was, was a drop that had fallen from the great chandelier that hung from the centre of the room, and on which the light played as it lay on the carpet as though it had been the Kohinoor. (272-73)

Pennicuick clings to a view, increasingly hard to maintain, that it is not simply his own undermotivated actions that have ruined him but a sort of vague, enigmatic force at work in China that compelled him to theft and then to pay another man to die for him. The description of the ancient inn's thick walls and doors suppressing the sound of Pennicuick's screams and leaving him to confront his moral reckoning alone recalls the conditions of initial crime. Like the temple that housed the Shay-le, the hotel room is—or rather, seems—an ancient place of safety. Alien and untouched by any supposed progress of time, the hotel room with its shining glass-like chandelier drop transports Pennicuick back in his own mind to the Sanctum Santorum and the gem it contained. Cornered by the recollection of his former crime, his first reaction is to 'sneer' (272). Arrogantly defensive though he is, the experience cracks his veneer of unwavering impunity. The explicit reference to the Koh-i-noor is, of course, likely to put many readers in mind, also, of *The Moonstone*. In *By Proxy*, as in Collins's novel, the gems wreak havoc, haunting any who remain complicit in its sacrilege. Like Collins, Payn brings the real Koh-i-noor into imaginative view in order to show the Shay-le as quasi-supernatural in its power to deliver justice where justice is due. Stylistically, this scene marks a distinct change in tone and dominant genre—a turn toward gothic melodrama with its supernatural moral revenge in accordance with Payn's penchant for Dickensian flair.

Pennicuick is first depicted as bigoted, then impetuous, then indignant, and finally, absurd in his inability to take accountability for his actions. Fabricating half-baked explanations only to abandon them as soon as another presents itself, he is essentially fickle—unable to explain the theft even to himself. A psychoanalytic reading of his actions might suggest that he is capable only of displacement. At a hustings ahead of his bid for Parliament, where the question 'What has he done?' to justify election is repeatedly raised, he is suddenly confronted with a sign on the hoarding that reads: 'INQUIRE AT DHULANG, CHINA' (279). For Pennicuick this is uncanny proof that he cannot escape accountability, and that justice is under way.

> It was marvellous—nay, it was miraculous—that that deed done in a corner, thousands of miles from his native land, and from civilization itself, without a witness except certain savages all interested in keeping silence on the matter, should be making this stir on English soil. It was almost enough to make a man

> believe in an overruling Providence, or at all events in a Nemesis of some sort that awaited the transgressor. (289)

Having purchased his life with Conway's life, he knows that moral responsibility is not fungible. Enough fear remains in him to make it clear that heat last understands this. As the weight of his ill-doing hits home, the narrator speaks to the reader in the first person.

> I have known a man unjustly suspected of delirium tremens, who was in reality troubled by the consciousness of having murdered a child of tender years. Ralph Pennicuick was conscience-smitten. Wrongdoers sometimes are so; they are morally prostrated by the guilty knowledge within them; and yet they generally retain their intelligence—as some would call their reluctance to part with their stolen goods (323).

This two-pronged interruption by way of free indirect discourse and direct interjection from the implied narrator moves Pennicuick sharply away from the narrative in which he has attempted to centre himself as the victim, or not as the villain, at the very least. As the implied narrator compares the guilt of murdering of a child with the guilt of committing sacrilege and defrauding a dead man's honour and family, the scale of Pennicuick's transgression becomes emphatically clear. A remnant of his initial 'intelligence' of his actions remains. 'Reluctance to part with' it guarantees his own unravelling and his death, finally, not by a thousand cuts, but by the painful self-lacerations of remorse, or something approaching remorse.

Pennicuick's dedication to avoiding his own guilt until it becomes unbearable to him is bolstered by the notion that even guilt can serve a manipulative purpose. On his deathbed, 'nothing… was further from Ralph Pennicuick's mind that night than the idea of restitution' (323). Even as he at last confesses to his son Raymond, he maintains that 'it was a bargain', a fair trade, as it were: Conway 'took my guilt upon him, knowingly, and for a consideration' (333). It is Raymond—not Pennicuick—who feels the full seriousness of his father's wrong-doing and determines that 'restitution can at least be made' (335). Even in his last moments, Pennicuick's thoughts do not turn to the Conways, but remain singularly focused on the future of his son. Pennicuick tells his son that restitution *can* be made, 'but not to you. I cannot restore to you the happiness which my words have taken away,' and he concludes by asking how Raymond could possibly marry Nelly knowing that 'her father's death lies at my door, and that I robbed him afterwards?' (335). Any remorse implied by his wish to 'restore' 'happiness' is directed at the damage he has done to his son's happiness, not the Conways'. Pennicuick's final words prior to his death have nothing to do with Conway, but instead

divert attention to something that he hopes his son can accomplish for him; he delegates—or rather unburdens himself of the task of making restitution. His eye is on his own legacy, imagined in the third person: 'Men will say hard things of Ralph Pennicuick when he's grassed over—those that were most civil to him when he was above ground, the hardest, because they feared him—but do let them say "he drank."' (336). He dies, leaving Raymond to settle his affairs, prompting the recently revealed Conway (not dead after all—this is indeed melodrama in the end) to declare with justified coldness: 'it was his wont, it seems to do all things by proxy… even to the discharge of his just debts' (351).

The novel, then, becomes a study of how the tangled and forced rationalizations that prop up after-the-fact justifications for expropriation inevitably unravel to expose the shallowness of motivation. In its review of *By Proxy*, *The Spectator* reflected: 'It is not a cheerful comment on human nature that most people will tell one they know a Ralph Pennicuick, and some will even protest that they are convinced the author had "so-and-so" in his mind when he drew the portrait of this thoroughly odious individual, who yet—and there is the skill of the artist—is no monster'.[360] Seemingly addressing this specific comment, Payn explained in his first memoir, that *'By Proxy* was simply evolved from the idea of a man not performing a promise to his dead friend'.[361] He continues, 'When the villainy of the chief character was denounced as exaggerated and out of nature, on one occasion I remember my dear old friend, Sir Francis Doyle, observed, "That is rubbish; I know Pennycuick [*sic*] quite well." And so did I, though it was not the same person'.[362] Readers clearly saw something in Pennicuick that felt familiar if also shameful: 'Pennicuicks' existed throughout the empire, and readers knew him well. Pennicuick is neither a 'monster,' nor even a caricature of a type of person but a psychological portrait—a fictional manifestation—of the damage done by cultural theft committed without motive beyond the simple exploitation of opportunity.

---

[360] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 765.
[361] Payn, *Gleams of Memory*, 113.
[362] Payn, *Gleams of Memory,* 113.

Chapter Three: Spent Treasure: Robert Louis Stevenson and Expropriative Violence

Robert Louis Stevenson's oeuvre introduces treasures of all sorts—diamonds, jewellery, trunks of gold, pearls. For treasure to be treasure, in his fictions, it seems that it must be capable of being unmade—*spent*, in some capacity. Stevenson imagines treasure as existing in a precarious and intermediary state—potentially converted into money and spent, or wasted, lost, or stolen. In his most straightforward depictions, treasure is used as currency to buy simple pleasures like 'rum and a good fling'[363] and has the potential to be life-changing—to 'set up [a] gentleman in earnest' (67). In later depictions, treasure is treated more critically; its expropriation leads to loss and waste, and its consumption not only depletes its value, but harms those attempting to cash in. *New Arabian Nights* (1878) sees the stolen Raja's Diamond eventually thrown into the Seine; in *Treasure Island* (serialized 1881-82), few pirates survive an attempt to retrieve hoarded gold (they are left to spend it 'wisely or foolishly' (219)). The *Ebb-Tide* (1894) draws attention away from the objects themselves (pearls, in this case) to focus on the exploitation of human labour.

I consider how and why, as Stevenson travelled in the South Pacific between mid-1888 and the start of 1890, his view of gems, treasure, and pearls became more comparative and more sceptical—increasingly probing the distinction between the priceless object, the hoard, and the commodity. I argue that a spectrum emerges across Stevenson's many stories of portable wealth: a single diamond surrounded by an aura of intrigue and opportunity; hidden treasure, fetishized but morally suspect; hoarded pearls, lucrative objects of trade, only obtainable at the cost of racially exploitative labour. The distinction is not between the isolated gem—on the one hand—and hidden treasure and hoarded pearls on the other, but rather between the amassed, hoarded or otherwise stowed collection that amount to a deliberate distribution of attention across the wider category of gems, precious metals, and precious stones, giving much wider context to the allure of singular gems. Stevenson repeatedly introduces possibilities and opportunities for expropriation that ultimately fail or are not seen to manifest without severe complication. In a deliberate refusal to gratify the generic romanticisation of gem-theft and exploitation with *visible* profit, Stevenson incorporates visceral reminders of loss and depravity—the bones of dead pirates,[364] wreckage

---

[363] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island and The Ebb-Tide* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), 67.
[364] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 200-201. [*Treasure Island*, 1-220]

from pearling extraction,[365] burial grounds of dead labourers[366]—to illustrate larger circulations of value, labour, and unequal cultural exchange in which all gems reside.

I. 'The Raja's Diamond': 'a wonder that explained itself'

'The Raja's Diamond' was published in 1878 in a collection of short stories that Stevenson titled his *New Arabian Nights*. This collection launched Stevenson's literary career and marked the first instance where his experimentation with genre and narration garnered public attention. The collection brings together elements of detective, adventure, and romance fiction and injects a protagonist taken straight from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* with the inclusion of Prince Florizel of Bohemia. Stevenson never makes explicit his recycling of Shakespeare, nor does he claim any particular intention to translate, transpose, or indirectly replicate any of the stories from the original *One Thousand and One Nights*, though he repeatedly calls attention to his homage to the 'erudite'[367] 'Arabian author' (32). Instead, he states that he is simply 'following prudently in the footsteps of this Oriental' (75). In doing so, he creates a series of interlocked romances in which he is, ostensibly, only repeating stories well known to the 'inhabitants of Baghdad',[368] 'too entertaining… to be omitted'[369] from his reworking of the original. Stevenson places himself in a direct line of descent from the 'Original Author', structuring his narration as inherently referential to himself as a mediator of tales, and to the 'Arabian author' from whom he gained inspiration. In imagining *One Thousand and One Nights* as having a single 'Oriental' author, Stevenson replaces an oral tradition with a fictional one that sees both the Raja's Diamond and the Arabian author as real.[370]

The second of six stories included in *New Arabian Nights*, 'The Raja's Diamond', introduces an eponymous diamond that promises 'he who possessed it was set free for ever from the primal curse and might follow his own inclinations without concern or hurry,

---

[365] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Ebb-Tide', in *South Sea Tales*, ed. by Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 123-252, 201.
[366] Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide*, 204.
[367] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Suicide Club', in *New Arabian Nights* (Richmond, Alma Books Ltd., 2019), 50-75, 75. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[368] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Raja's Diamond', in *New Arabian Nights* (Richmond, Alma Books Ltd., 2019), 77-150, 143.
[369] Stevenson, 'The Suicide Club', 75.
[370] For more on the oral tradition of *One Thousand and One Nights*, see the entry 'The Thousand and One Nights', *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Thousand-and-One-Nights, accessed 15 April 2026.

without let or hindrance'.[371] This grand assurance against a 'primal curse' remains vague at best: 'the Raja's Diamond', we are told, 'was a wonder that explained itself' (103). The explanation that nevertheless follows, prompts more questions than it answers. Unlike Collins's Moonstone and Payn's Shay-le, which are explicitly described as objects not just of great cultural import but of religious adoration, the Raja's Diamond's status as either a religious relic or cultural artifact remains more ambiguous. It is described (much like the Moonstone) as 'accursed' (145), making all those who engage with it fall under an 'intoxicating' (109) spell, leading good men to ruin. Instead of cultural significance being ascribed to the gem by way of a social history, its import is described in terms of the effect it has on its possessor: 'a village child, if he found it, would run screaming for the nearest cottage; and a savage would prostrate himself in adoration before so imposing a fetish' (103).

The description of the gem as a 'fetish' establishes it as a romanticized treasure, its symbolic density transmitting an aura of romance and wonder. While I use Weiner's term (density) here, Mauss's understanding of the Māori concept *hau*—the spirit of the object—is equally appropriate, as it recognizes that the power is in part intrinsic to the object itself, and not just an accumulation from its dense social history. The examples of the village child and the savage encountering the Raja's Diamond can each be read in two ways. The first sees both the screaming child and the prostrated savage awed that their lives are changed by the possession of endless wealth. The second reading sees both the child and the savage terrified, sending the child running to safety and the savage attempting to assuage the power of the diamond. The gem mystifies, attracts, and overwhelms; when confronted with it, a person becomes 'transfigured', eyes shining with 'concupiscence' (95), rendering their 'intellect' entirely 'overpowered' (103). In essence, this is a concentrated encounter with the sublime, provoking 'terror and amazement' (94). Where, in Collins, the importance of the diamond is bound up with a long history of cultural use and abuse, here the social history of the diamond is largely ignored, its would-be owners recognizing it both as fungible wealth and an object with innate power.

The Raja's Diamond offers enormous wealth, and a life free from labour. A priceless stone, it liberates its possessor from the wage economy. Chronicling the many hands into which the diamond falls either by accident or by force illustrates the base greed that drives the relentless hunt for the Raja's Diamond, first stolen by General Vandeleur, a rogue British soldier, who betrays his position and his 'fellow soldiers' by abandoning them 'to be defeated

---

[371] Stevenson, 'The Raja's Diamond', 103. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

and massacred by thousands [of Indian soldiers]' (148), so that he might return (as in Collins's novel) with the gem in hand. Where the Moonstone sees Herncastle 'cursed' by the relentless Brahmins sent to retrieve the diamond, the diamond itself is ascribed little to no mystical power or agency. The Raja's Diamond, however, has a stupefying effect which Prince Florizel regards as a 'dangerous evil for the world' (145). His intention to be the 'last victim to its influence' (146) leads him to wonder 'what crimes and treacheries it incited', though he understands it to have 'faithfully served the powers of hell' (149). While the prince ascribes a clear power to the gem, Stevenson limits the destruction the diamond causes to the greed it provokes in men attempting to attain it.

Isolated from the other gems in General Vandeleur's hoard comprised of family heirlooms and other gems with unspecified histories, the Raja's Diamond constitutes a treasure with the most complicated kind of fungibility; its distinct size and appearance distinguish it from other, less awe-inspiring gems. The vivid illustration of the Raja's Diamond sets it apart from treasures depicted in Stevenson's later writings. Its exceptionalism is made clear on first description.

> In an instant [Rolles] had disinterred a dainty Morocco case, ornamented and clasped in gilt... Mr. Rolles opened the case, and drew a long breath of almost horrified astonishment; for there lay before him, in a cradle of green velvet, a diamond of prodigious magnitude of the finest water. It was the bigness of a duck's egg, beautifully shaped and without flaw; and, as the sun shone upon it, it gave forth a lustre like that of electricity, and seemed to burn in his hand with a thousand internal fires... the rays leapt forth again with renewed brilliancy, and seemed to pierce his very heart. (103-104)

The Raja's Diamond is the only individual gem described in detail; neither the coronet nor any other piece of the Vandeleur's hoard is so treated. The breathtaking, 'prodigious', singularity of the Raja's Diamond makes it—in fact—the only gem throughout his oeuvre to be described with such specificity. Like the Shay-le stowed away in its temple, the Raja's Diamond must be removed from general sight, encased in an almost Russian nesting doll-like set of protective layers. Those layers are, however, insubstantial: the bandbox is only hidden by Lady Vandeleur in 'the left-hand side of the oak wardrobe... underneath the pink slip... and Mechlin' (83). The femininity and delicacy of that pink slip leave the diamond obviously vulnerable to theft. It lacks even the institutional protections the Shay-le and the Moonstone originally possessed—on public display for religious adoration, but under the gaze of temple priests and faithful worshippers. The Raja's Diamond is privately concealed, but its coverings are no defence against a determined robber.

The ironic subtext of so much investment in the potential market value of the Raja's Diamond—priceless beyond comparison—is that its detachment from any 'rightful owner' (reinforced several times over through accidental losses and thefts) renders it difficult to protect officially and worthless on an open market that would recognize it by its notoriety. The Vandeleurs, it is clear, are not the rightful owners; the diamond's very name implies who is. Once part of the 'collections of an Indian prince', its provenance is a matter of suspicion: '[it had] been often whispered and repeatedly denied, [that] the Raja of Kashgar had presented [General Vandeleur] with the sixth known diamond of the world. The gift transformed General Vandeleur from a poor into a wealthy man, from an obscure and unpopular soldier into one of the lions of London society' (79). Whether it was the significance of the gift from the Raja that bestowed such favour, or simply the possession of such a valuable diamond that garnered the General such renown, the rumours do not specify, and the diamond's social history becomes less clear with every denial surrounding its circulation.

This 'origin story' emerges only at the tale's conclusion, when the only person seemingly immune to the charms of the diamond, recounts its history ('but a hundredth part of its story' (149)), to the police officer tasked with locating the diamond, and then throws it 'into the flowing river' where it will be beyond retrieval, its powers of corruption at an end.

> An officer [now General, Vandeleur], a man of courage and conduct… visited, in an unfortunate hour for his peace of mind, the collections of an Indian prince. Here he beheld a diamond so extraordinary for size and beauty that from that instant he had only one desire in life: honour, reputation, friendship, the love of country, he was ready to sacrifice all for this lump of sparkling crystal. For three years he served this semi-barbarian potentate… at a time of great danger to his native land, [Vandeleur] betrayed a body of his fellow soldiers, and suffered them to be defeated and massacred by thousands. In the end he had amassed a magnificent fortune, and brought home with him the coveted diamond. (148)

The prince's bathetic reference to the diamond as a 'lump of sparkling crystal', combined with the generalized judgment of his storytelling, prompts the question as to why he is not enchanted with the Raja's Diamond like everyone else. Unlike the previously poor General, the Prince is hardly in need of a jewel to grant him status, but his opinion of the diamond does not suggest that he sees it as a culturally significant object. His argument that the diamond should 'be reserved for the collection of a Prince or a treasury of a great nation' (109) does not necessarily skew either toward cultural appreciation or regard for the purchasing power of the wealth. The complex narrative of the jewel's removal from India is further complicated with the General's earlier reference to the Raja's Diamond as 'the Pride

of Kashgar' (100). Located in Western China—not India—Kashgar was part of the Qing Dynasty from 1759 until 1913 (with a brief rule by an Islamic monarchy between 1864 and 1877). Occupying a strategic position as a point of connection between China, Russia, and India it was emerging at this historical juncture as a key site in the 'Great Game' (the battle between the British and Russian empires for control in Central Asia). No indication is given of how the diamond made its way from China to India—whether by trade, gift, theft, or 'prize'. Where Collins's prologue to *The Moonstone* provided a deeply researched historical provenance, Stevenson remains at most gestural, romanticizing a region of the world that could readily have provided a similarly imaginative history of the gem as 'portable property' (to use Plotz's term) amid ongoing inter-imperial conflict.

Prior to the provenance of the gem-theft being revealed, the story has rested heavily on what was quickly becoming one of Stevenson's signature character archetypes: the once full of potential, now failing, effeminate man living beneath what is thought to be his appropriate station. Harry Hartley, private secretary to Lady Vandeleur is the first to unwittingly have possession of the Raja's Diamond. Lady Vandeleur's name is a not-so-subtle nod to her and her husband 'vandalizing' the diamond by treating it both as social and monetary currency rather than an object of cultural significance. Unaware that he is actively engaged in Lady Vandeleur's attempt to steal the Raja's Diamond from her husband, General Thomas Vandeleur, Harry sets off to deliver a bandbox to her brother, Charlie Pendragon, as per the Lady's request. Here starts a laughable number of incidents involving the bandbox. In quick succession, Harry encounters General Vandeleur, gets framed for the theft of the bandbox by Pendragon (out to save himself and his sister), only narrowly escapes the two men and spills the contents of the box in the meantime. Only in his frazzled attempt to sweep up the gems, does Harry discover what has been transporting. Harry meets Mr. Raeburn, an opportunist gardener whose garden Harry jumps into while running from the General and Pendragon. Mr. Raeburn takes advantage of Harry's precarious situation and naivete and steals about half of the gems from Harry (97), who then fumbles his grip on the box, tipping the remaining gems onto the street, allowing a random loiterer to pilfer from him (98).

From here, the story shifts its focus to the Reverend Simon Rolles, the next to have the Raja's Diamond in his possession. Having briefly witnessed Harry and Raeburn in his garden, Simon grows suspicious of what the men were huddling over and examines the area after they leave. He finds, half-buried from the scuffle, one stone left behind by the two men: the Raja's Diamond (103). The latter half of the story chronicles Simon Rolles's attempts at disposing of the diamond while still attempting to profit from it. In his quest, he meets Jack Vandeleur: an 'Adventurer' and 'former Dictator of Paraguay' (107), and the envious brother of the General. A 'Diamond Hunter' (111), Jack is described as the 'best judge of precious

stones' (107). Under the guise of helping his brother, Jack demands that Simon and he act as a team so that they both may profit from the theft. Amongst these intertwined stories, Stevenson weaves in a troubled love story between Jack's daughter and Francis, a young man who sees Francis's father as a villain—all under the sweeping influence of Prince Florizel of Bohemia, who more often than not operates in disguise so that he may infiltrate the inner circles of high society London.

In every instance at which the Raja's Diamond changes hands or gains another aspiring owner, the diamond is valued for its singularity while the rest of the dwindling hoard is largely forgotten or ignored. In the face of an impending arrest for theft, the story ends with Prince Florizel throwing the Raja's Diamond into the Seine, proclaiming, 'enough, I say, of blood, enough of disgrace, enough of broken lives and friendships; all things come to an end, the evil like the good… as for this diamond, God forgive me if I do wrong, but its empire ends tonight' (149). Instead of ending the story with this Balzacian act of defiance, Stevenson breaks the facade of the 'Original Author' whose story he is relaying by explaining that the prince 'may go, along with the Arabian author, topsy-turvy into space' and continues, 'if the reader insists on more specific information, I am happy to [oblige]' (149). With that, he strips himself and his stories of the elaborate artifice of the 'Arabian author' and explains that Prince Florizel, in his later life, settled down to become 'the handsomest tobacconist in London' (149-50), a shop—Stevenson notes—he frequents.

An examination of Stevenson's treatment of the gem in relation to a larger collection of treasure in 'The Raja's Diamond' exposes the significance of the story's present-day conclusion, and its removal of the initial 'Arabian' framing. The Raja's Diamond is one of many gems and pieces of jewellery kept in Lady Vandeleur's bandbox. When Harry first drops the bandbox it '[bursts open] from end to end; thence a great treasure of diamonds… poured forth… There was a magnificent coronet [and] rings and brooches, eardrops and bracelets, and even unset brilliants rolling here and there among the rosebushes like drops of morning dew' (94). The Raja's Diamond is neither seen nor mentioned, and yet the remaining contents of the box are still defined as 'a great treasure'. Only later is the Raja's Diamond discovered; this time it is isolated from the additional contents of the bandbox, and its unique significance becomes apparent. Upon learning that his wife has effectively stolen and subsequently lost the bandbox of gems, General Vandeleur bemoans the loss: 'You might have robbed me of my mother's coronet and ring; and Nature might have still prevailed that I could have forgiven you at last. But, madam, you have taken the Eye of Light, as the Orientals poetically termed it—the Pride of Kashgar! You have taken from me the Raja's Diamond' (100). Where the family heirlooms would normally be ascribed the greater emotional density, the General focuses exclusively on the loss of the uniquely valuable gem;

the rest of the collection becomes unimportant—collateral damage beside the loss of this single stone.

The basis for so strong a distinction between the single gem and the larger collection of jewels is presented differently by the General's brother, Jack. When he learns of the stolen bandbox, he sets out to retrieve not just the Raja's Diamond, but the entire collection. Beginning his hunt, he explains to Prince Florizel (not yet in possession of the diamond): '[A diamond] has beauty and worth; it alone can properly reward the ardours of the chase… I know every stone of price in my brother's collection as a shepherd knows his sheep; and I wish I may die if I do not recover them every one!' (110). Though he becomes fixated on the Raja's Diamond as the one gem that continues to evade him, Jack, unlike his brother, does not immediately distinguish between the single gem and the larger hoard. While it is implied that he has tracked down some of the other lost gems, Stevenson does not narrate their retrieval alongside Jack's quest for the Raja's Diamond. This complicates Stevenson's depiction of treasure, begging the question: if the hoard is not wholly retrieved, is it still the same treasure or treasure at all? Furthermore, how, and when does a single gem become treasure in its own right? Stevenson does not answer these questions, but instead leaves the fate of the Vandeleurs and the rest of their hoard unremarked upon after noting their failed attempts to unearth the diamond from the bottom of the Seine with a team of divers (149). In this way, the narrative's treatment of treasure ends quite simply: a particular stone (not unlike the Moonstone or the Shay-le) with a unique status—in keeping with a prior tradition of romanticizing exceptional and exotic—is highly contested, intensely sought after, then lost for good.

The influence of *One Thousand and One Nights* here becomes a question of genre, and not just, as Barry Menikoff asserts, a question of structure (the 'simple narrative device [linking the stories] all in a chain' that—he notes—Stevenson eventually subverts by 'insisting upon its artificiality').[372] Menikoff does not acknowledge the already popular method of employing a frame narrator whose perspective imposes coherence on otherwise dispersive stories—something that, for example, Dickens did often before Stevenson—nor does he say much about Stevenson's treatment of the romance mode, only considering it in relation to the story's thinness of characterization. Menikoff argues, 'the Prince and the Arabian author are not to be confused with real people. They are runes, Stevenson's own hieroglyphics for illuminating truth, and they can be dispensed with as easily as the story'.[373]

---

[372] Barry Menikoff, 'New Arabian Nights: Stevenson's Experiment in Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1990), 339-62, 343.
[373] Menikoff, 356-57.

If *New Arabian Nights* is meant—as Menikoff contends—to be read in this way, then the question of romance is simplified to the point of parable. This simplification is reiterated by Menikoff's understanding of Stevenson's narration as paying vague homage to the 'arbitrariness of life'[374] that he claims was a thematic preoccupation of *One Thousand and One Nights*. If there are 'limits' to romance as a vehicle for experimentation as Menikoff claims, then Stevenson was far from constrained by them. He uses its received character types like Shakespeare's Prince Florizel and its stock dramas (a stolen diamond, a malign force, a forbidden love, a righteous yet benevolent ruler) not just as a means to energize a pastiche, but to modernize—transforming the prince into a detective, Jack the barbaric adventurer into the jingoistic tyrant on the hunt for a stolen diamond, and shifting the field of action from 'Arabia' to London as the centre of the British Empire.

Stevenson is, at best, gestural in his handling of empire at this stage, despite the ending that sees Prince Florizel set up shop as a London tobacconist. Harry, for example, is neither arrested no charged with any wrongdoing at the conclusion of the story: '*But to the unfortunate secretary the whole affair was the beginning of a new and manlier life'* (100). He inherits money from an aunt and gets married before going to the colonies—setting *'sail for Bendigo or Trincomalee… content, and with the best of prospects*' (101). Established as a personal secretary to Lady Vandeleur, Harry's vague characterization seemingly gives him no distinct ties to any specific time-period. Neither his infantilization nor his emasculation by the Vandeleur's is seen as relating to the expectations of an Englishman living in Victorian London. Instead, Stevenson characterizes him as being capable of existing in the Middle Ages as easily he does in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the deeply romantic yet convenient notion of a surprise inheritance paired with a whirlwind romance has a certain kind of timelessness. Stevenson only actively contradicts this timelessness when he introduces the imperial/ colonial timeliness of Harry's settling in either '*Bendigo or Trincomalee',* as if the two are interchangeable at a time of British global expansionism that saw countlessly looted treasures. Adapting the narrative freedoms of the romance mode, Stevenson tells a story about the circulation of gems between empires without locking into the politics to the degree that Collins did within *The Moonstone*.

This deliberate contradiction between timelessness and era-specific detail continues as Jack Vandeleur is introduced. Rolles is asked, 'Have you never heard of [Jack's] duel with the Duc de Val d'Orge? Of his exploits and atrocities when he was Dictator of Paraguay? Of his dexterity in recovering Sir Samuel Levi's jewellery? Nor of his services in the Indian

---

[374] Menikoff, 357.

Mutiny—services by which the government profited, but which the government dared not recognize?' (107). Again, high imperialism is brought to the fore with mention of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, yet Jack's colonial exploits read like those of an ancient tyrant from Stevenson's 'Arabian' inspiration. The elements of the narrative taking place in Paris evoke an even stronger sense of a bygone Romance: locked away like a fairytale Princess, Jack's daughter waits for an opportunity to remove the Raja's Diamond from her father's grasp. Hastened by his would-be lover, the young Francis is sent away unaware—like Harry before him—that he is carrying the diamond and is told, 'Whatever happens, do not return to this house… You are in a greater danger than you fancy. Promise me you will not so much as look at my keepsake until you are in a place of safety' (135). Whisked away by an innocent damsel in distress, the diamond loses its Victorian political trappings and becomes, for a brief period, a token of her blind faith in her knight in shining armour—the young Francis. Confronted with the realization that he was stowing a diamond, and now in the presence of Prince Florizel, Francis argues fervently that the diamond is not 'stolen property' (139). Like Collins's Rachel, unknowingly wearing an ill-gotten gem around her neck, Francis is pardonably naive—and duly hands the gem over to the prince.

The end of 'The Raja's Diamond' explicitly re-figures the prince as a Victorian detective, telling a (legitimate) police officer: 'We are both combatants against crime; only mine is the more lucrative and yours the more dangerous rank… I had rather… be a detective of character and parts than a weak and ignoble sovereign' (147). Paired with the prince's eventual chosen career as a tobacconist, the conclusion is decidedly mundane, ridding the story of romance. Gone are the conniving Vandeleurs, the tyrannical dictator turned diamond-hunter, the pastor led astray, the young lovers, and even the ruling prince, who now simply owns a tobacco shop after a 'revolution hurled him from the throne' (149); all that remains is London as a modern city, with modern amenities on Rupert Street. Hurled into Seine, the diamond is lost to everyone who has possessed it—and effectively lost to history itself.

II. 'Treasure not yet lifted': Hoarded Gold in *Treasure Island*

Unlike 'The Raja's Diamond', *Treasure Island* begins by telling us the *end* of the story, with the young Jim Hawkins's explanation that he has been instructed to 'write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island… keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and

that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted'.[375] In this way (much like *The Moonstone*), Stevenson denies narrative closure and perpetuates the cycle for further expropriation. Where 'The Raja's Diamond' focused on the eponymous gem, *Treasure Island* is not concerned with any singular gem, but with the hoard. This distinction, together with his inclusion of pirates whose livelihood depends on looting, moves Stevenson closer to his final (and much more political) treatment of a wholly commodified source of treasure in *The Ebb-Tide*. After detailing the 'crimes and riches' (207) perpetrated and obtained during his first piratical excursion, Jim concludes his tale as he began, calling attention to the treasure that remains undiscovered: 'The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know, where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to the accursed island' (220). This final acknowledgment effectively allows the so-called 'Treasure' island to remain at least minimally stocked (i.e. not entirely depleted) and perpetuates the notion of the ongoing hunt. More than this, it complicates the otherwise straightforward depiction of treasure within this story. The primary motivation of the quest is discovering the 'bulk' of buried treasure left by Captain Flint—'the bloodthirstiest buccaneer that sailed' (36). Hawkins's comment about the 'bar silver and the arms' refers to a secondary treasure located separately from the gold, but still specified on Flint's map. These undisturbed silver and arms, paired with the desperately sought after bars and coins of gold, create an altogether new treatment of treasure by Stevenson.

In *Treasure Island*, the lure of individual transformative wealth is transformed into a collective vision: 'You have your hands on thousands, you fools', Pew quarrels: 'You'd be as rich as kings if you could find it… I'm to be a poor, crawling beggar, sponging for rum, when I might be rolling in a coach' (30). The allure of treasure ripe for picking spurs endless fantasies as each pirate imagines a life of wealth—a life no-one in fact attains (for long). When the remaining crew of the *Hispaniola* find their way to where they believe the treasure to be buried, they dig frantically, 'Their eyes burn[ing] in their heads', 'their feet gr[owing] speedier and lighter; their whole soul… bound up in that fortune, that whole lifetime of extravagance and pleasure, that lay waiting there for them' (207). They see themselves as working to become 'gentlemen of fortune' (67) and conceive of piracy as a means to garnering their fortune 'in earnest' (67). These are not men who have unknowingly transported bandboxes filled with gems, stumbled upon spilled diamonds, nor acted in a

---

[375] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 3. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

state of rash opportunism; these are men who have undertaken the 'ticklish work' (55) that is treasure hunting.

When the treasure is located—'great heaps of coin and quadrilaterals built of bars of gold' (214)—Stevenson's young narrator is struck not by the value but by the *cost* of the treasure that lies before him instead of the *value*.

> That was Flint's treasure that we had come so far to seek, and that had cost already the lives of seventeen men from the Hispaniola. How many it had cost in the amassing, what blood and sorrow, what good ships scuttled on the deep, what brave men walking the plank blindfold, what shot of cannon, what shame and lies and cruelty, perhaps no man alive could tell. Yet there were still three upon that island… who had each taken his share in these crimes, as each had hoped in vain to share in the reward. (214)

Like the Moonstone, this is treasure tainted by a history of violence, and it taints those who claim ownership of it. By not including himself in his own arithmetic, he pardons himself from the very violence that has granted him part of the pie. In his discussion of what he coins the 'Imperial Play Ethic', Bradley Deane notes that Stevenson's novel—and pirate adventure novels more broadly—cast the 'protagonists and their adversaries as two teams competing for the same prize. Their game accommodates horror and brutality, and its score is kept by counting the lives of the remaining players'.[376] Even the winners, as Jim observes, feel themselves to be losers.

Treasure is susceptible to further division in the way a single gem is not. In *Treasure Island* the hoard, once discovered, is broken up and distributed in a wholly illegitimate version of the Prize distribution formalized by the East India Company and the British Armed Forces. Describing his method of loot-accounting en route to Treasure Island, Silver explains to Jim: 'I puts it all away, some here, some there, and none too much anywhere, by reason of suspicion' (67). The division of treasure, the stashing of money, and even Flint's initial burying of his loot all deplete the hoard. The Raja's Diamond might have been stolen and passed through various hands, but it is never cut nor otherwise diminished before being thrown into the Seine. The hoard, by contrast, becomes fractionalized time and time again. The Raja's Diamond–thought of as singular despite its presence among other gems—possesses exceptional value (we are encouraged to think of it as intrinsic value) in excess of

---

[376] Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 699.

its market value, by contrast with the hoard whose value is simply cumulative. Moreover, however muddied and seemingly insignificant its provenance is to its possessors, the Raja's Diamond retains something of its original aura as a cultural artifact whose perception and valuation set it distinctly apart from the rest of the Vandeleur's' collection. The treasure of *Treasure Island*, conversely, remains cultureless despite various forms of stamping.

In lieu of the bandbox of gems and assorted jewellery introduced in 'The Raja's Diamond', *Treasure Island* introduces a pirate's treasure chest filled with gold bars and a 'diversity of coinage' seemingly representing 'every variety of money in the world' (215). No gems, no chalices, no jewel-laden crowns, or strings of pearls. The romance conventions governing 'The Raja's Diamond' do not extend to *Treasure Island*; instead, this adventure tale begins by looking toward a description of treasure that carries less of an aura of special significance. The intrigue surrounding it is entirely a reflection of avarice. While the bars of gold are not specified as bearing any markings that might divulge their origin, the minted gold that Jim is instructed to pack into 'bread bags' (215) bears explicit provenances.

> English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Georges, and Louises, doubloons and double guineas and moidores and sequins, the pictures of all the kings of Europe for the last hundred years, strange Oriental pieces stamped with what looked like wisps of string or bits of spider's web, round pieces and square pieces, and pieces bored through the middle, as if to wear them round your neck. (215)

The description of the hoarded coins is markedly less romantic than the association of the Raja's Diamond with the marvellous, the awe-inspiring, and the spiritually corrupt. The splendour described here comes from not the density of any single coin, but from the amassed pile, representing the world's economy in a single hoard. Of diverse ages and origins, the coins are shovelled together into bags and loaded aboard the pirate's vessel. Jim offers a telling simile: 'I am sure they were like autumn leaves, so that my back ached with stooping and my fingers with sorting them out' (215). Like fallen leaves the coins are, by implication, light but in quantity fatiguing. More interesting is their studied specificity ('strange Oriental pieces stamped with … wisps of string or bits of spider's web, round pieces and square pieces, … pieces bored through' (215)) and the clear statement of their sum value. Where the Raja's Diamond was held to be priceless and never given an explicit valuation, the market value of the hoard of gold is appraised at about £700,000 (a figure reiterated four times: (205), (207), (208) (209)). Moreover, as the Raja's Diamond would have to be denatured to be used as currency—the hoarded gold is *already* currency. At most individual coins would need to be converted into modern local coinage.

In keeping with the historical curiosity-value of the coins, *Treasure Island* itself is given a historical cast. Set in the mid-eighteenth century, the novel clearly gains inspiration from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) while also drawing on much more recent British and American tales of 'buccaneering' in the Caribbean and beyond.[377] As *New Arabian Nights* takes its cue from *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Treasure Island* shifts in tenor to allow Stevenson to situate himself within the international and trans-Atlantic market for stories that draw on multiple sources of inspiration—not just Defoe in this case—but also Melville, Poe, and Scott. As such, a distinctly Stevensonian approach to gems as portable wealth reappears, this time incorporating elements of romance, adventure, historical realism, and coming-of-age narrative. The larger measure of historical realism in *Treasure Island* (than compared to *New Arabian Nights*, for example)—paired again with a romancing of treasure—produces a novel kind of tension between imagining the hoard as a vague conglomeration of plundered coins and highly-specified denominations of currencies that are ready for conversion and reincorporation into the open market.

Heralded as a foundational adventure story that influenced the likes of Haggard, Henty, Kipling, and Conrad in Britain's high imperial age, *Treasure Island* is largely responsible for the late nineteenth-century popularization of the idea of undiscovered treasure as an invitation to the men and (especially) boys of Victorian England to go out into the world and find their share. Nevertheless, Linda Dryden rightly observes that this is not a 'gung-ho adventure story, but rather a complex narrative of loyalty and betrayal, with a charismatic villain who escapes retribution'. When its successful superficial emulation 'propelled Haggard into a career as a popular writer of imperial romance' he was, ironically, giving traction to 'the very genre against which Stevenson was writing in his imperial tales'.[378] There is no simple binary opposition here between adventure and complex narrative, imperial romance and scathing critique of imperialism. Written just three years after 'The Raja's Diamond', *Treasure Island* shows that both things can be true. To argue that *Treasure Island* is not a romantic adventure story would be to ignore its largest audience and the impact it had on later imperial fictions. Where 'The Raja's Diamond' keeps close to romance only to throw it over at the end, *Treasure Island* more nimbly keeps both in

---

[377] A few examples of pirating narratives include Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822), James Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827), Ezra Baldwin Strong's historical compilation *The History of the Lives and Bloody Exploits of the Most Noted Pirates* (1836), Frederick Marryat's *The Pirate* (1836), and Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Gold Bug' (1843).

[378] Linda Dryden, 'Literary Affinities and the Postcolonial in Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Michael Gardiner, et al., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 86-97, 90.

play. The tension between romance and historical realism becomes acute as the discovery of the treasure map that would lead the pirates to the treasure also includes a log with 'a table for reducing French, English, and Spanish moneys to a common value' (37). This pairing shifts the scene from a moment of anticipatory thrill (setting forth to follow the treasure map) expected within an adventure tale, and moves toward a measured, thought-out plan complete with a financial accounting of the loot. Stevenson's dexterity in moving between and blending genres ultimately suggests that where the pirates hoard treasure, Stevenson hoards popular genres.

III. In the South Seas: Blackbirding and Pearling in the Pacific

By the later 1880s Stevenson was seriously ill with tuberculosis and unable much to enjoy the still-uproarious acclaim that *Treasure Island* (1881-82) and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) earned him. Prioritizing his health, he secured a commission from the American publisher Samuel S. McClure to travel to the South Seas and write a series of travel articles. In preparation for his departure in 1888 Stevenson studied A. G. Findlay's *Directory for the Navigation of the South Pacific Ocean*; [379] explicitly referenced in the last of the series of stories written in parallel with the travel articles, the novella entitled *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio, and a Quartette*.[380] The most critical of Stevenson's fictions, *The Ebb-Tide* concerns itself with the economic basis of pearling. Blackbirded labour here takes the narrative place of the fetishized gem as the pearls themselves are never once seen by the would-be pirates attempting to steal them.

Blackbirding, in a now near-obsolete sense, was the coerced—if not entirely forced—recruitment and transportation of labour that became so widespread across the Pacific that it led to a global re-evaluation of the presence of slavery in the nineteenth century. Stevenson's interest in blackbirding is crucial to the case this thesis makes for the cultural significance of Victorian popular fictions of expropriation. As I read it, *The Ebb-Tide* engages with not just the ethics of exploited labour, but the ways in which forced labour contributed to British dispossession of other cultures. I explore how Stevenson's romanticizing of empire evolves (and becomes less romantic) by tracking the development of his depictions of the relative value of treasured objects and human lives. 'The Raja's Diamond' and *The Ebb-Tide* bookend Stevenson's career with stories about a supposedly priceless object wreaking havoc upon its

---

[379] Ann C. Colley, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 3.
[380] For Stevenson's reference to Findlay's *Directory* see *The-Ebb Tide*, 184.

owner—taking much more than it promised to give. *The Ebb-Tide* is by far the more seriously informed and thoughtful work.

Stevenson's journey to the South Pacific could not have been further from the young Jim Hawkins's Caribbean treasure hunt imagined only seven years before he himself set sail. While 'The Raja's Diamond' and *Treasure Island* glance at Stevenson's developing sense that gem-theft (or treasure-theft more broadly) can operate narratively to depict how treasure might be lost or spent, his move to the South Pacific brought a new level of realism, and with it an attention to the harsh realities of labour and resource exploitation that lay behind the extraction of jewels. For two years Stevenson travelled throughout Hawaii, the Gilbert Islands, Tahiti, and Samoa, where he would move permanently in 1890. In *In the South Seas* (1896), he writes that throughout every 'isle and hamlet', he saw 'missionaries, traders, and broken white folk living on the bounty of natives'.[381] While the seemingly ever-present white populations that he came across would inspire much of his fiction writing, he felt increasingly compelled to write a different kind of book. In a letter to his friend and editor Sidney Colvin, he details the plans for an anthropological magnum opus to be titled *The South Seas*.

> If I can execute what is designed, there are few better books now extant on this globe, bar the epics, and the big tragedies, and histories, and the choice lyric poetics and a novel or so—none… nobody has had such stuff: such wild stories, such beautiful scenes, such singular intimates, such manners and traditions, so incredible a mixture of the beautiful and horrible, the savage and civilized…[382]

Understanding the broadening of Stevenson's authorial focus—from popular fiction writing to travel writing and, increasingly, anthropology—is crucial to understanding how a new appreciation of the expropriative origins of gems and treasure developed.

'My book is now practically modelled', he tells Colvin in December 1889. 'I propose to call the book *The South Seas*: it is rather a large title, but not many people have seen more of them than I, perhaps no one—certainly no one capable of using the material'.[383] Stevenson's plans were lofty. He intended to cover 'that wide field of ocean, called loosely the

---

[381] Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, ed. with intro. by Neil Rennie (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 10.
[382] Letter from Stevenson to Sidney Colvin dated December 2nd, 1889, included in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Sidney Colvin, v. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 164.
[383] Stevenson to Colvin: December 2nd, 1889, 164.

South Seas, [which] extends from tropic to tropic'.[384] In it he would detail the 'Polynesian diversity'[385] that he encountered and explored. He admitted to Colvin that he understood the ambitiousness of the project: 'Even as so sketched it makes sixty chapters'.[386] As he worked to compile his research for *The South Seas*, he continued to publish both fiction and additional travel writing. This garnered a largely negative response; in a letter Henry James penned to Stevenson in 1891 (three years before *The-Ebb Tide* was published) he expressed disappointment in Stevenson's travel writing from the Pacific. James bemoans a loss of 'the visible in [your essays]—I mean as regards people, things, objects, faces, bodies, costumes, features, gestures, manners, the introductory, the personal painter-touch'.[387]

Among the earliest fruits of Stevenson's travels in the Pacific is an account of Penrhyn, an atoll in the Cook Islands, where he visited in 1890, hoping to witness a pearling operation run by native divers. The captain of his ship declined him access, citing dangerous conditions[388]—but even from the boat Stevenson saw enough to excite his curiosity about the conditions of labour on the island. The essay 'Penrhyn: A Pearling Island' (first published in New York in *The Sun*) begins with a few facts about the pearling industry. In Penrhyn, a good diver could make 'one, two, or even three pounds a day'.[389] Presumably this is *not* blackbirded labour: a salary is being earned, but the risks of the profession and the morally contaminating atmosphere of the place are underlined. Stevenson warns of the 'incompetent and idle' impulses nurtured by living in 'largesse'—impulses that can devastate entire families, should the diver irresponsibly spend his pearling wages.[390] He writes with fascination of seeing the debris from pearling operations cluttering beaches: 'boxes and bales and broken shell'[391]—'wealth [that] came from the sea'. [392] What concerns him most is the ravaging of the island by leprosy, and here he includes in stark form the level of detail that James accused him of withholding: faces, bodies, costumes, features, gestures, and manners of the sick—the lepers. He explains, 'by the midst of 1890 at least the Island was dotted with lepers, and the Janet Nicoll [one of the ships Stevenson journeyed on] had not long gone before the islanders awoke to an apprehension of their peril'.[393] Shortly after his visit,

---

[384] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, 107.
[385] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, 128.
[386] Stevenson to Colvin: December 2nd, 1889, 164.
[387] Henry James quoted in Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, xxi.
[388] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The South Seas: Life Under the Equator: Letters from a Leisurely Traveller, xiv: A Pearl Island: Penrhyn', *The Sun* [New York], 24 May 1891.
[389] Stevenson, 'Penrhyn'.
[390] Stevenson, 'Penrhyn'.
[391] Stevenson, 'Penrhyn'.
[392] Stevenson, 'Penrhyn'.
[393] Stevenson, 'Penrhyn'.

Penrhyn was divided into zones, with an isolated islet used as a leper colony so that no direct interaction could be had with the uninfected. Stevenson bore witness, in short, to the ways in which an exploitative pearling industry was directly implicated, also, in the spread of infectious disease.

Not all Stevenson's writing in this period was so frankly political. In 1890 he also published a work of poetry, *Ballads,* in which he attempted to establish positive continuities between his own culture of origin and those he was now witnessing, transforming Tahitian and Samoan legends into narrative verse set alongside Scottish lore. Fellow author Edmund Gosse was disparaging: 'The fact seems to be that it is very nice to live in Samoa, but not healthy to write there. Within a three-mile radius of Charing Cross is the literary atmosphere'.[394] He was not alone in his criticism of Stevenson's change of focus and style. Reviewing *Ballads* London's *Daily News* responded with backhanded praise. The review focused on Stevenson's excellence as a writer of prose but effectively dismissed his verse, writing, 'the gift of narrative verse is extremely rare, and the legends of the South Seas are not very inspiring'.[395] It finishes: 'He was born a Scot, he has become a Polynesian, and probably he would not be displeased at the title of a literary beachcomber.'[396]

Roslyn Jolly gives a very positive remit to the epithet 'literary beachcomber', suggesting that it credits Stevenson writings with '[carrying] a story between spaces, languages and cultures – [wherein] purity of source is less important than richness of mediation'.[397] While Jolly's teasing out of the word is clearly affirmatory, I am sceptical that Stevenson would agree, insofar as the term calls to mind the very type of needy accumulation he explores in 'The Raja's Diamond', *Treasure Island,* and (most critically) in *The Ebb-Tide*. Among his plans for *The South Seas* was a section entirely devoted to 'The Beachcomber'.[398] *The Ebb-Tide* itself describes three failed, miserable, and (we soon realize) morally loathsome white male beachcombers in Tahiti. Being 'on the beach', he writes in *In the South Seas*, is 'a South Sea expression for which there is no exact equivalent,'[399] though, especially when attributed to a non-Islander, it is far from a compliment. To be a 'literary beachcomber' is to be called an outsider—a scavenger of histories and pilferer of cultures—an authorial appropriator. He rebukes the *Daily News's* dismissal of *Ballads* as falling on 'ears

---

394 Roslyn Jolly, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9 (2013), 5-25, 11.
395 'Mr. Stevenson's Ballads', *Daily News* [London], 27 December 1890, 5.
396 *Daily News*, 5
397 Jolly, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives', 10-11.
398 Stevenson to Colvin: December 2nd, 1889, 164.
399 Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, 50.

inarticulate',[400] and though he does not address being regarded as a beachcomber, he continued with his plans for *The South Seas*. Stevenson did not live to complete the major work of travel-anthropology he had contemplated, though enough of it was written to form the content of several shorter travel articles published while he was alive. In 1894, Stevenson died at the age of forty-four. In 1896, *In the South Seas* was published posthumously, and included much but far from all of the content Stevenson hoped would make up his magnum opus. Other elements such as the knowledge he had accrued from his travels through the Pacific found their way into his final novella: *The Ebb-Tide*, published in the same year.

The Ebb-Tide follows three destitute white men living in Papeete: Herrick, an Oxford-educated but failed businessman, Huish, a violent Cockney swindler, and Davis, a disgraced American ship captain. Determined to end their deplorable efforts at surviving 'on the beach'[401]—at the mercy of whatever the tide might sweep in, or, more troubling for these men, at the mercy of the islanders—Davis devises a plan that would not only get the three off the island but would make them rich. When a cargo schooner en route to Sydney makes an emergency stop in Papeete after the majority of its crew have died of smallpox, he sees an opportunity: "I'm going to own that schooner. It's nothing new; it's done every year in the Pacific. Stephens stole a schooner the other day, didn't he? Hayes and Pease stole vessels all the time" (148). It is a passing sentence, but compacted into it is a great deal of essential information about the context in which Stevenson's story of South Sea pearling needs to be understood.

William 'Bully' Hayes and Benjamin Pease were two notorious American-born blackbirders who committed many more crimes than simply stealing vessels. Blackbirding provided the economic basis for the production of several key commodities traded from the Pacific back to Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand: sugar from Fiji[402] and Hawaii,[403] nickel from New Caledonia, coconut from Samoa, maize, coffee, and bananas from the New Hebrides (Vanuatu),[404] *beche de mer* (sea cucumber) and cedarwood from

---

[400] *Daily News*, 5
[401] Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide*, 124. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[402] Deryck Scarr, 'Recruits and Recruiters: A Portrait of the Pacific Islands Labour Trade', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 2 (1967), 5-24, 8.
[403] J.A. Bennet, 'Immigration, "Blackbirding", Labour Recruiting? The Hawaiian Experience 1877-1887', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 3-27, 3, 17.
[404] Scarr, 5.

New Guinea,[405] sandalwood,[406] shark's fin, tortoiseshell,[407] and whales from the coastal waters of Australia,[408] and, most important for the purposes of this study, pearls throughout Pacific. For scale, in *The White Pacific* Gerald Horne estimates that between 61,000 and 100,000 Pacific islanders were blackbirded in the latter half of the nineteenth century to the sugar industry in Queensland alone.[409] Benjamin Pease was thought to be 'the first man to import island labour into Fiji'[410] in the 1860s. In 1870, he went into business with Bully Hayes, a partnership that lasted only until Pease's death later that year, who went on to blackbird in Fiji. Hayes was said to have 'kidnapped a number of natives from one of the unfrequented islands of the South Pacific' only to sell them in Fiji as cargo.[411] There, blackbirded labour was in such high demand that its importation was a market in and of itself known as 'black ivory'.[412] Although Hayes was American, he often captained British vessels, under British jurisdiction. Multiple charges against Hayes were made by the British government, and blackbirding was only one of a myriad of crimes he was prosecuted for. Although Hayes and Pease evaded conviction, there are accounts of other blackbirders successfully jailed or disbarred from the labour trade.[413] Unfortunately, as with Hayes and Pease, defendants often got off on technicalities or had their charges lessened.[414]

The entire illegal enterprise of blackbirding was characterized by manipulation and violence, the worst of which is argued to have taken place in Samoa and New Caledonia, though atrocities were widespread throughout the Pacific.[415] Chronicling the global histories of blackbirding sufficiently to understand its representation in *The Ebb-Tide* presents a number of challenges. First, there are several colonial spheres at play in the region depicted by the novella: British, American, Dutch, French, and German extractive industries in the Pacific all required labour recruitment. Each of them operated under separate laws that changed independently of one another, sometimes inhibiting one another, sometimes enabling. The colonial powers traded globally, meaning that blackbirding was in no way

---

[405] Peter Corris, '"Blackbirding" in New Guinea Waters, 1883-84: An Episode in the Queensland Labour Trade', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 3 (1968), 85-105, 86-87.
[406] Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific*, 14.
[407] Scarr, 5.
[408] Horne, 19.
[409] Horne, 2.
[410] Horne, 60.
[411] Horne, 52.
[412] Kees van Dijk, *Pacific Strife: The Great Powers and Their Political and Economic Rivalries in Asia and the Western Pacific, 1870-1914* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 52.
[413] Corris explains: 'a number of captains of the recruiting ships [being] disbarred from the labour trade and the captain, recruiting agent, and four members of the crew of the Hopeful spent six years in gaol'. See Corris, 102.
[414] Bennet, 8.
[415] Scarr, 20.

confined to the South Seas, which are themselves vast and highly diverse. Despite relative distance, these islands may as well have been separate planets altogether.

Blackbirding—as it was conceived of in the nineteenth century—was not a new form of obtaining labour. Slave raiding was a commonplace occurrence globally, for centuries before abolition. The global adoption of abolition between the 1840s and the 1870s in many ways bolstered blackbirding. As slave-labour was no longer available, blackbirded labour as a source of labour recruitment was turned to as its replacement. In 1879, the Dutch Consul General for Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania concluded that 'with the French in New Caledonia, the British in Fiji and the Germans having obtained for the first time a firm footing in Polynesia… a miniature Europe was taking shape in the Pacific'.[416] Imagining the direct and indirect colonization of the Pacific not just as a 'miniature Europe', but as a kind of chess game played by multiple European players will allow the political complexity of blackbirding to become clearer.

As a form of revitalized slave-trade, blackbirding attracted a second-wave abolitionist movement beginning in the 1840s but only really acquiring general force well into the second half of the century. In 1868, Queensland's Polynesian Labour Act called for 'the prevention of abuses and for securing to the labourers proper treatment and protection'.[417] Four years later, British Parliament passed The Pacific Islanders Protection Act of 1872, ostensibly to penalize kidnapping, though its specifics seemingly suggest how to do it within the narrow confines of the law—that is, with the appropriate licenses and parties involved. Blackbirding became visible to a larger British public when, in 1871, one of Britain's best-known missionaries, John Coleridge Patteson, was killed by Pacific islanders fearing that he was a blackbirder.[418] The incident was mentioned by Queen Victoria in her opening of Parliament the following year.

> The slave-trade, and practices scarcely to be distinguished from slave-trading, still pursued in more than one quarter of the world, continue to attract the attention of my Government. In the South Sea Islands the name of the British Empire is even now dishonoured by the connexion of some of my subjects with these nefarious

---

[416] van Dijk, 43.
[417] 'Queensland: A Bill to Regulate and Control the Introduction and Treatment of Polynesian Laborers', Queensland State Archives, https://www.flickr.com/photos/queenslandstatearchives/28343698161, accessed 16 April 2026.
[418] Patteson's biography, *Life of John Coleridge Patteson, missionary bishop of the Melanesian Islands* (1874), was written by his cousin, the respected novelist Charlotte Yonge.

> practices; and in one of them the murder of an exemplary Prelate has cast fresh light upon some of their baleful consequences.[419]

Such 'baleful consequences' of blackbirding were hardly limited to the death of the occasional innocent British missionary: illegal recruitment including breaches of contract and brazen kidnapping continued well past Victoria's denouncement of these 'nefarious practices' in Parliament. Only in 1875 did recruiters become 'subject to a colonial administration… to ensure that [recruited] islanders came willingly'.[420] The same year, the Pacific Islanders Protection Act was amended: 'It shall be lawful for Her Majesty to exercise power and jurisdiction over her subjects within any islands and places in the Pacific Ocean'.[421] Explicitly warning against illegal recruiting, the Act effectively granted the British Empire a staggering degree of power over the Pacific, asserting the right of the Crown to prosecute illegal activity *off* British soil.

Despite protections for recruits and regulations on labour sourcing beginning in earnest 1868, some of the most atrocious blackbirding incidents happened in the 1880s. Blackbirding strategies involved the recruitment of young boys without parental consent,[422] groups of men only being told the terms of their contract after they were already on board the recruitment ships,[423] and men being plied with alcohol and put onto ships to be 'carried off before they recovered'.[424] While these examples of blackbirding are largely manipulative rather than violent, they only demonstrate the least egregious side of the blackbirding spectrum. Direct force was often used to obtain islanders as labour, sometimes rationalized, as in the case of men blackbirded in New Caledonia in 1882, by claims that the men were given to ships as gifts from tribal chiefs, claiming, '"you often buy a man from his chief, or family, and he knows nothing about it"'.[425] From 1875, such cases explicitly constituted kidnapping. In Hawaii, blackbirders were known to kidnap by 'stealth at night to avoid the wrath of their fellows' and would also accept 'captives forced to go [to the blackbirders]' by other islanders hoping to profit from 'trade goods as a reward'.[426] Such 'rewards' were a common means to garnering favour and became so egregious that the Queensland

---

[419] Roslyn Jolly, 'Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson's Pacific Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 35, (2007), 157-73, 159.
[420] Scarr, 6.
[421] 'Pacific Islanders Protection Acts 1875', https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/38-39/51/enacted, accessed 15 April 2026.
[422] Scarr, 15.
[423] Bennet, 7-8.
[424] Scarr, 21.
[425] Scarr, 21.
[426] Bennet, 8-9.

government eventually outlawed recruiters giving 'persuasive presents to the connexions of prospective recruits'.[427] Grotesquely creative methods were developed and used to lure the sometimes unsuspecting, otherwise already suspicious islanders. These involved blackbirders disguising their ships 'to look like missionary ships [where they] dressed the officers up as clerics so as to mislead those they were about to kidnap'.[428] One Australian blackbirder was said to have instructed his men to 'reverse their collars [and] carry black books under their arms and go ashore disguised as missionaries'.[429] Ironically, most missionaries—especially those in Hawaii[430]—were entirely opposed to blackbirding and were known to warn islanders of the potential danger of recruiters.[431] These histories haunt Stevenson's pacific fictions.

Roslyn Jolly's examination of piracy and slavery in Stevenson's oeuvre is of paramount importance to my discussion of treasure and labour in *The Ebb-Tide*. Jolly underscores that the Pacific Islanders Protection Act amendment of 1875 'became the basis of all British legal relations with the uncolonized Pacific for the rest of the nineteenth century'.[432] She explains that especially from 1875, the British government created an 'unofficial empire', all the while 'maintaining the official line against imperial expansion in the Pacific'.[433] By the time of *The Ebb-Tide's* publication in 1894, Queen Victoria's informal empire across the South Seas had in practice been made stronger by her bid to protect exploited labourers some twenty years prior: Britain's influence in the area now entailed increased trade, more deeply rooted missionary endeavours, and full-scale colonization of islands including Fiji, which now operating exclusively under British control.[434] Queen

---

[427] Corris, 87-88.
[428] Colley, 6.
[429] Horne, 43.
[430] Bennet, 16.
[431] Although exceedingly rare, it requires noting that Hayes is believed to have colluded with profiteering missionaries to coerce islanders onto his ship; the same missionaries were accused of providing Hayes with young girls that he likely went on to sexually assault, see Horne, 54.
[432] Jolly, 'Piracy, Slavery', 160.
[433] Jolly, 'Piracy, Slavery', 160. Despite this new British foothold, Dutch recruitment was suspended in the 1880s, see Martinez and Vickers, 37. Queensland remained pressured by 'Presbyterian missionaries of the New Hebrides, the Aborigines Protection Society, and the Colonial Office' for stricter regulations—eventually leading to legislation that prohibited additional 'licences to recruit Pacific Islanders for service in Queensland' after 1890, see Corris, 103. The Queensland government was required to repatriate labourers from New Guinea and compensate them for their grievances, see Corris, 102.
[434] Fiji officially fell under British rule in 1874 and lasted until 1970. See Martinez and Vickers for more on the increase of trading endeavours in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Victoria was, moreover, known for habitually wearing a specific commodity, the new supply of which relied nearly exclusively on blackbirded labour: pearls.[435]

When Herrick, Huish, and Davis, Stevenson's central 'trio' of criminals attempt a looting of a pearl-diving operation on a small Pacific atoll, they present a radical down-classing of the kind of buccaneering spirit of enterprise that Stevenson had earlier romanticized. On New Island, a small atoll 'disbelieved' to even exist 'by South Sea traders' (185) a sadistic missionary-trader runs a crew of blackbirded pearl divers. The only one of Stevenson's treasure stories to explicitly consider the extractive basis of the jewel industry, *The Ebb-Tide* is a devastating portrait of blackbirded labour permitted to continue under multiple colonial powers. The result is a confronting, literary de-romanticizing of the gem, showing us pearls as they had not been seen before in fiction.

In the nineteenth century, the acquisition of mother-of-pearl was the pearling industry's primary objective, with pearls for jewellery only making up one third of the industry's annual income.[436] 1870 alone saw Britain importing approximately 1,500 tons of mother-of-pearl, most of which was 're-exported to France and Austria to be made into buttons'.[437] Aside from buttons, pearl shell was also used to adorn furniture,[438] and was an ingredient in some Chinese pharmacopeia.[439] Despite mother-of-pearl being the 'key resource'[440] of the Victorian pearling industry, pearls were extremely prized. The vast majority of modern pearls on the market today are cultured;[441] but until the mid-twentieth century rise of Japanese cultured pearls,[442] the pearling industry relied exclusively on diving for the rare and highly valued *natural* pearls. Most molluscs secrete nacre (mother-of-pearl),

---

[435] I do not intend to suggest that all of Queen Victoria's pearls came from blackbirded labour, or that they all came from the Pacific; instead, I consider the possibility that a portion of her collection could have come from blackbirded labour. See Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 96-97 for more on Queen Victoria and pearls.
[436] Ronald Moore, 'The Management of the Western Australian Pearling Industry, 1860 to the 1930s', *The Australian Association for Maritime History*, 16 (1994), 121-138, 121.
[437] Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 30.
[438] Martinez and Vickers, 30.
[439] James Francis Warren, 'Tea, Pearls, and Pearl Shell: Cross-Cultural Trade, Slave Raiding, and the Transformation of Material Worlds—The Sulu Zone, China, and the West, 1349–1898' in *Pearls, People, and Power: Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds*, ed. by Pedro Machado, et al. (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2020), 60-85, 68.
[440] Moore, 121.
[441] 'What is the difference between natural and cultured pearls', *Gemological Institute of America*, https://www.gia.edu/gia-faq-about-gemstones-difference-natural-cultured-pearl, accessed 16 April 2026.
[442] Moore, 121.

but few produce pearls.[443] One estimate suggests one in five molluscs may contain a natural pearl,[444] while another emphasizes extreme variance: 'some oysters could contain a dozen pearls, some more, some just one, and hundreds none at all'.[445] In the late nineteenth century, pearls were either harvested in shallow isles or required divers to descend to the ocean floor with 'the aid of a heavy stone weight' while one of their feet remained tethered to a rope aboard their vessel.[446] Pearling was dangerous work; burst eardrums were almost guaranteed,[447] sight impairment was standard,[448] and thiamine deficiencies[449] and hypothermia[450] were commonly reported and sometimes deadly—not to mention the introduction of diseases like smallpox or influenza by white mariners to indigenous communities with no immunity.[451]

The increasing demand for pearls and pearl shell, paired with the extreme risk that divers incurred, meant that slave labour and blackbirding ran rampant in the pearling industry. Global indigenous practices of pearl diving are documented as early as 6,000 BC.,[452] and the slave trade saw this as early as the sixteenth century, when pearling as an international enterprise had been established in Venezuela by exploiting West African slaves as divers. [453] Pearling industries later arrived along the coasts of Mexico, Malaysia, Tahiti, [454] and Indonesia, where, in 1835, the Dutch East Indies permitted 'seafarers to be taken over-seas'.[455] In Northern Australia in the 1860s and 1870s,[456] the burgeoning industry again 'relied heavily on imported indentured indigenous labor'[457] until 1871 when the blackbirding legislation mentioned above impeded the acquisition of indentured labour.[458]

---

[443] Warren, 69.
[444] Hopper, 85. This is specific to the Persian Gulf.
[445] Warren, 69.
[446] Hopper, 84.
[447] Kevin Dawson, 'Enslaved Swimmers and Divers in the Atlantic World', *The Journal of American History*, 92 (2006), 1327-55, 1346.
[448] Warren, 80.
[449] Martinez and Vickers, 30.
[450] Dawson, 1349.
[451] Moore, 130.
[452] Robert Carter, 'The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orien*t, 48 (2005), 139-209, 139.
[453] Dawson, 1339.
[454] Hopper, 82.
[455] Martinez and Vickers, 34.
[456] Martinez and Vickers, 30.
[457] Martinez and Vickers, 21, 31, 36.
[458] The advent of the modern diving suit further complicated labour recruitment. Early renderings of diving helmets were seen as early as 1839, however, a 'full-dress system supplied with air by an on-deck, hand-operated compressor' was commercialized in the 1870s. See Steve Mullins, *Octopus Crowd: Maritime History and the Business of Australian Pearling in Its Schooner Age* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: 2019), 5. Alongside these diving suits came the partial replacement of '"naked" skin-diving,' in favour of adopting suits which allowed fleets of pearling luggers to explore deeper waters and

Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers's *The Pearl Frontier* follows the development of blackbirding and legitimate labour recruitment in Northern Australia's booming pearling industry beginning in the 1860s. Martinez and Vickers argue that the commodification of labour whereby enslaved divers worked 'alongside free divers,'[459] who were also exploited, if not enslaved, ultimately rendered these labourers 'objects in the production process'.[460] Imagining exploited labour as commodified objectification is not a new concept;[461] but, in *Pearls, People, and Power*, Pedro Machado extends the analogy in ways that shed light on the ethics of labour in a global pearl market. Because pearls require harvesting in coastal regions, he notes, they prompt 'questions about maritime jurisdiction … expos[ing] the anxieties of European colonial states struggling to solidify porous maritime boundaries'.[462] I extend Machado's theory of maritime boundaries by reading pearls in *The Ebb-Tide* as existing in the sort of liminal space where illegal labour practices could be exploited alongside legitimate imperial trade, establishing pearls as peculiarly politically charged objects.

IV. *The Ebb-Tide*

Originally titled 'The Pearl Fisher',[463] *The Ebb-Tide* begins with a scathing remonstrance directed at colonial exploitation of the Pacific: 'Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate' (123). Vegetating 'on the beach', Stevenson explains, is 'a South Sea expression for which there is no exact equivalent,'[464] but roughly translates to beachcombing. While Rod Edmond and Oliver Buckton imagine beachcombers as existing outside of a kind of civilized periphery,[465] I question the degree of agency or intentionality in ending up 'on the beach' and consider how these degrees manifest in relation to blackbirding and the subsequent extraction of pearls. First, a brief summary of

---

eventually develop 'floating stations' in the middle of the sea that could be 'fully decked with the pump housed in a hold' by the 1880s. These novel moveable stations resulted in a 'seemingly inexhaustible' supply of pearling beds. See Martinez and Vickers, 30, Moore, 129-130, and Mullins's *Octopus Crowd*, 7.

[459] Hopper, 81.

[460] Martinez and Vickers, 7.

[461] For an extensive overview of the Marxist concept of commodified labour, see Peter Hudis, 'Marx's Concept of Socialism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx*, ed. by M. Vidal, T. Smith, T. Rotta, and P. Prew (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018), 757-772.

[462] Pedro Machado, 'Indian Ocean Pearling Worlds', in *Pearls, People, and Power: Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds*, ed. by Pedro Machado, et al. (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2020), 15-37, 22.

[463] Oliver S. Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson: Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Athens: Ohio, 2007), 165.

[464] Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, 50.

[465] See chapter 3 in Edmond's *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* and Buckton, 30.

Stevenson's final novella is necessary to situate the roles of beachcomber and blackbirder in the narrative, both of whom subsist on appropriation alone. Herrick comes to Papeete because he knows 'the climate to be soft, bread cheap, and manners easy' and believes that there are 'fortunes to be made in pearl and copra; doubtless others not more gifted than himself had climbed in the island world to be queen's consorts and king's ministers' (126). Burdened by a crushing sense of failure manifesting in suicidal ideation, his 'moral bankruptcy', as the implied narrator describes him, results in a pitiful attempt at '[striking] his flag' (126) in the Pacific where he can acquiesce to a failed life. Here, he meets Davis and Huish, equally without moral purpose or a basic willingness to earn their own way in the world.

Edmond and Buckton describe beachcombing as a decisive flight toward freedom—one that offers the opportunity to acquire materials, albeit objects 'imbued… with the violent energies of empire'.[466] Herrick, Davis, and Huish are despondent, hungry, and conceive of themselves as being completely at the mercy of the Tahitians, for whom they end up dancing for food (135). All three have ended up in Papeete by accident. Davis crashed his ship, the *Sea Ranger*, in a drunken stupor and was left behind on the island in 'disgrace' (127); Huish, who had 'no redeeming grace' was 'discharged' by his employer (127)—finding his way to Papeete as a last resort. Herrick is seemingly swept in by the tides of his own indecision and his inability to do anything other than live a life of 'pleasant failure' (126). Stevenson characterizes these men as distinctly unlike the ordinary beachcomber content with life on the beach; these men wanted more and have planned to get it one way or another, but have run out of steam. It is only by accident that they come upon a treasure trove of pearls.

After four months in Papeete, Herrick follows Davis in his plan to commandeer and illegally re-sell a cargo-load of champagne aboard the *Farallone*. The schooner's crew consists of several islanders: 'Dungaree, Uncle Ned [Taveeta], Sally Day… and [the] Cook' (156), and though they are not likely to have been blackbirded by the *Farallone's* previous captains, at least one—Taveeta—is explicitly described as not Tahitian but Hawaiian (164), suggesting the rest of the crew may also be contracted labour from further afield ('some far western island' (155)). When the *Farallone* is forced to make an emergency stop, Davis, Huish and Herrick serendipitously discover an island not yet verified as existing. Huish reads from a directory: 'New Island… Commander Matthews H.M.S Scorpion, states that an island exists in lat. 12° 0' S. long. 133° 16' W. This must be the same, if such an island exists'

---

[466] Buckton, 30.

(185).[467] On New Island, the *Farallone* crew meet Attwater, a Cambridge-educated missionary-trader who has laid claim to the Island and blackbirded labour to create a thriving micro-industry of 'pearl and shell' (197) that he has exploited for ten years.

The first glimpse we are given of the pearling operation itself is confined to the traces of visible destruction left behind, drawing on Stevenson's own long-range witnessing of Penrhyn. Herrick sees several storehouses from a distance when he firsts reaches New Island: 'pearl-shell [was] piled in the far end… [there] were cables, windlasses and blocks… cabin windows and ladders; rusty tanks, a companion hutch; a binnacle with its brass mountings and its compass idly point, in the confusion and dusk of that shed, to a forgotten pole; roles, anchors, harpoons…' (201) the list goes on. Near the storehouses, a makeshift graveyard, signalling a decimating outbreak of smallpox. The story sees two of its main characters walking through the graveyard for blackbirded labourers, with one grave in particular pointed out: 'That fellow was from Penrhyn; like all the Penrhyn islanders he was ill to manage, heady, jealous, violent' (205). On Stevenson's fictional New Island, this islander did not dive of his own accord, nor did he have the opportunity to live comfortably as Stevenson described the divers of Penrhyn.

Shortly after meeting the *Faralloners*, Attwater explains the pearling operation—unabashedly intimating that it is based on intimidation and abuse of his labourers: 'One way or another, one got it knocked into their heads that they *must* work, and they did… until the Lord took them' (216). Attwater explains that he has a business partner—Dr Symonds—whose 'part' of the operation is to 'collect them' while his own role is strictly 'educational' (215). When asked where his workforce comes from, Attwater continues: 'in our case, as we could name no destination, we had to go far and wide and do the best we could. We have gone as far west as the Kingsmills and as far south as Rapa-iti [*sic*]' (215). Here, Attwater in effect admits that he and Symonds 'collect' blackbirded labourers from a zone that includes French Polynesia, the Gilbert Islands, Samoa, the northern Cook Islands, and dozens of other micro-islands. Crucially, Symonds is never seen in the novel; he is only spoken of by Attwater.

Attwater has given his men names such as Obsequiousness and Sullens (217)—patronizing nicknames that mock the missionary practice of baptizing islanders with the names of virtue. He views them as 'noxious creature[s]' (218), insubordinate and

---

[467] The *Farallone* was meant to travel straight east from Tahiti to Peru, however, the coordinates provided suggest they were much nearer to coasts of Central Mexico. Given accounts of Stevenson's use of Findlay's *Navigation*, this suggests he aimed to show how egregiously off-target the ship was from its intended location.

performative. Though Attwater jokes that his labourers are 'brown innocents' (206) whom he must convert, he more often sees them as a sometimes unruly—but ultimately subservient—workforce: Obsequiousness was 'obedient to the last' when he 'recommended his soul to God' before Attwater shot him (218). While Attwater does not explicitly mention the number of deaths that he has been responsible for in his long career on New Island—including those that followed a 'mutiny' (described with satiric belittlement as an '[incident] of missionary life' (211))—he does specify that nearly his whole workforce has recently succumbed to smallpox: 'Twenty-nine deaths and thirty-one cases, out of thirty-three souls upon the islands' (194). Only he and three blackbirded labourers remained, until the *Farallone* arrived.

Stevenson's depiction of the pearls that are the object of so much human suffering in *The Ebb-Tide* is consistent with his earlier depictions of treasure in *New Arabian Nights* and *Treasure Island* to the extent that Attwater's hoard has never been entirely safe and now draws unwanted attention of those who now learn of its existence. Even pirates can be pirated. After learning of the (apparent) pearling operation, Davis exalts: 'a pearling island the government don't know about? That sounds like real estate… Suppose it's just an island; I guess we could fill up with fish, and cocoanuts, and native stuff' (185). Unlike the gems and gold of *New Arabian Nights* and *Treasure Island,* Attwater's pearls are never seen by either the would-be thieves or the reader. Davis assumes this is because they are 'too valuable to trust out of [Attwater's] hands'. If he has accumulated a substantial collection they will 'want a lot of handling and matching; and the man who sells his pearls as they come in, one here, one there, instead of hanging back and holding up—well, that man's a fool look and it's not Attwater' (197-98).

Dressed in 'white drill' and holding a 'Winchester rifle' (192), Attwater epitomizes the 'imperial inva[der]' whom Linda Dryden describes exploiting 'Polynesian native pearl fishers'.[468] It is through Attwater's manipulation of the roles of Missionary and Trader that his devastating success in the Pacific is made possible. He duly confirms Davis's theory by telling Herrick that he does, in fact, have a safe of ten years' worth of pearls, yet the beachcombers still do not see them. Like the treasure of *Treasure Island*, the pearls are an object of maddening desire, offer a possible 'escape' for the beachcombers, 'riches in the future' (233) that would save the three from 'starvation and shame' and open the way to a 'glorified existence' (239-340)—a new life paid for exclusively by looted pearls. Unlike the

---

[468] Dryden, 92.

earlier treasure, they have no visible presence in a narrative that seems, rather, to go to some pains to prevent granting them its descriptive-imaginative investment.

Not unlike the *Farallone's* cargo of champagne—technically visible in bottles but not directly verified (the majority of the bottles are filled with water)—the pearls are said to exist in their safe yet are never seen. Instead, we see the machinations of colonialists-gone-rogue. Attwater, Dryden argues, is 'fair game'[469] to Davis and Huish. Just as Attwater considers his blackbirded labourers expendable in his pursuit of wealth, Davis is willing to consider Attwater collateral damage in the process of stealing his treasure. Davis says to Herrick, 'We've got no use for that fellow… if you get him and his pearls aboard, I'll spare him. If you don't, there's going to be a funeral' (198). Crucially, Davis's consideration of Attwater completely overlooks those who made the chest of pearls a reality: the labourers whom Attwater has exploited in his pearling operation. Tackling this aspect of *The Ebb-Tide*, Buckton suggests that unlike the short stories in Stevenson's *Island Nights' Entertainments*, and for all its interest in 'interracial encounters' and the 'exploitation of native labor by European colonizers', the novella entirely marginalizes Polynesian characters.[470] In fact *The Ebb-Tide* goes out of its way to highlight the perniciousness of a form of labour that is rendered invisible to the rest of the world.

Herrick's developing 'trust' and 'close relation' (167), with the islanders working aboard the *Farallone* ultimately demonstrates a 'cutting reproof' (168) to his fellow white crew members: Davis and Huish. Moreover, Herrick's relationship with the islanders on the *Farallone* serves as a complete antithesis to the relationship between Attwater and the islanders of New Island. There, little information is given about the islanders' lives, and Attwater's connection to them is a far cry from Herrick's camaraderie with his crew. It is instead essentially that between slaves and their owner. The change in Herrick comes about as a direct result of the privileged access Attwater allows him to the diving technology on which the pearling operation is dependent. Dismissive of Davis and Huish as 'two vulgar wolves' (205), Attwater treats Herrick as an equal in social standing—recognizing him immediately as a fellow 'University man' (193). A private conference with Herrick, on which Attwater insists, sees the two men walking along New Island's lagoon. Like Stevenson in Penrhyn, Herrick comments on the visible detritus around the lagoon, noting an 'accumulation of pearl-shell piled in the far end' (201) alongside the wreckage from at least two ships (201). Although Attwater initially regards the wreckage as 'junk' (201), he later

---

[469] Dryden, 92.
[470] Buckton, 250.

adds, ‘since my tenancy, we have had two wrecks, both derelict. The rest is conjecture’ (214). The description of the ships as ‘derelict’ upon their arrival on New Island is vague at best, though this suspicious detail terminates any conversation about potential survivors. Without additional explanation, the wreckage has the potential to signify failed attempts at usurping Attwater’s ‘tenancy’ and further emphasizes the destruction of the island.

The sight of this disordered wreckage is countered by a very ‘neatly ordered’ display of ‘ten complete [diving] outfits’ that includes ‘pumps and pipes, and the leaded boots, and the huge snouted helmets shining in rows along the wall’ (202). Hanging on the wall, the suits are lifeless technology that, when worn, will come to symbolize the uncanny dehumanization of kidnapped islanders—literally, rendered invisible by their labour. Attwater comments that the diving suits ‘paid beyond belief’, creating what looked to be uncannily serviceable ‘marine monsters [who] kept appearing and reappearing in the midst of the lagoon’ (202). Attwater regards the suits’ ability to keep the wearer dry as an example of ‘God’s grace’ (202), reinforcing the perverted notion that his mission is a form of evangelical profiteering. Signifying the potential for future profit from a currently stalled operation, the unworn diving suits are a visual emblem of the cost of an extractive industry that remains, for most of the world, out of sight and out of mind.

Attwater’s tour concludes with an offer to let Herrick at last see the very thing the beachcombers are after and that has yet to be verified: a safe holding ‘ten years’ accumulation’ (210) of pearls. Herrick declines, claiming, ‘I do not care for pearls. I am very indifferent to all these—’. Then he pauses. Attwater finishes Herrick’s sentence for him, chiming in with a dismissive reference to the pearls as ‘gewgaws’ (210). What follows, however, is an unsettling quasi-Biblical paean to his accrued store of riches upon earth.

> And yet I believe you ought to cast an eye on my collection, which is really unique, and which—oh! It is the case with all of us and everything about us!—hangs by a hair. Today it groweth up and flourisheth; tomorrow it is cut down and cast into the oven. Today it is here and together in this safe; tomorrow—to-night!—it may be scattered. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. (210)

Attwater’s insistence that Herrick ‘cast an eye’ on the pearls is both a dare and a threat; he implores Herrick to look so that Attwater may confirm his own suspicions that he is about to be robbed, and pressures Herrick into playing a part in his threatening game. Attwater’s ominous reflection that his collection, like all things and all men, ‘flourisheth’ only to risk being suddenly ‘cut down’ functions both as an admission of his awareness that these are ill-gotten goods and his sense that they are vulnerable to the likes of Davis and Huish. It also

gives a glimpse of a terrifying perversion of Muscular Christianity that sees moral manliness paired with brute force, physical discipline and murderous control.[471] Attwater becomes both a kind of minister to Herrick, looming over him and demanding his soul, only to back away somewhat, declaring himself a 'fatalist' before offering Herrick a glass of sherry and moving on with the evening. The performance as a whole leaves Herrick with the newfound realization that Attwater will be no 'helpless victim' at the hands of Huish of Davis but is instead an all-knowing 'angel of the Lord's wrath' (211), well-aware of the plans against him. Terrified, Herrick warns Davis, 'He knows all, he sees through all; we only make him laugh with our pretences—he looks at us and laughs like God!' (222). And yet Herrick also lies: 'He showed me his pearls' (222), he tells Davis. In fact, Herrick has seen no pearls, only the diving suits that enabled their collection, and the outside of the safe in which they are said to be held.

The fetishized gems and hoarded gold in 'The Rajah's Diamond' and *Treasure Island* are replaced in *The Ebb-Tide* by the political power and the technology required to extract these materials with the use of forced indigenous labour, rendering that labour not only alienated and commodified, but ultimately inhuman. Replaced narratively by the trappings that enable and symbolize their forced labour, the islanders are rendered monster-like and machine-like. Tellingly the suits are seen once more: worn as armour by Attwater's few remaining labourers when he calls upon them to protect him against Davis and Huish. Attwater and Herrick, both armed with rifles, are accompanied by two islanders. The sun 'glistens upon two metallic objects, locomotory like men, and occupying in the economy of these creatures the places of heads—only the heads were faceless' (244). We are not told which three survivors inhabit these uncanny modern approximations at medieval combat gear; the men are reduced to 'locomotory' vehicles, driven forward by Attwater, like 'faceless' machines deployed in a war on land over treasure that they have been forced to extract from the ocean. Now, they are not walking toward the lagoon to dive, but toward Huish, who holds vitriol and prepares to throw it in their eyes—the sheer viciousness of the enterprise horribly apparent.

Ultimately, the threat dissipates, Huish is killed, leaving the islanders to lie down in the sand, presumably exhausted by heat. The last we see of the two groups of islanders—those from the *Farallone* and those left on New Island—they are working together at Attwater's command two weeks after Huish's death. Now, 'trade ran very boisterous in all parts of the island' (250), and 'Attwater, stripped to his trousers and lending a strong hand of

---

[471] See Deane's *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 88 for more on Muscular Christianity.

help, was directing and encouraging five Kanakas; from his lively voice, and their more lively efforts, it was to be gathered that some sudden and joyful emergency had set them in this bustle; and the Union Jack floated once more on its staff' (250). Given the impending return of the *Trinity Hall*, Attwater's pearling atoll is effectively transformed at this point from a hidden extraction operation to a full-blown 'trade' acknowledged by London. Symond's arrival signals the start of the sale of the blackbirded pearls. While the novella's final scene focuses on Davis's newfound Christian faith, there is a striking detail. In the midst of a description of 'five kanakas' helping Attwater and Herrick, we are told that the *Farallone's* crew has been 'disposed of' (252). Until this point in the novella, the narrative perspective toward the islanders has been entirely impersonal—as if the men are interchangeable—essentially one mass of labour. The specification of 'five kanakas' warrants attention. By implication, two of the *Farallone's* crew have been killed or otherwise 'disposed of', since Attwater previously stated that he had three islanders living with him on the island, and the *Farallone* had four, making a total of seven labourers.[472] Like Attwater's pearls, these men escape the novel's line of vision.

The actual pearling operations performed by the blackbirded labourers are never seen. The only instance of labour explicitly described is by a white character at the start of the novella. Davis—down on his luck—whistles and dances for a group of islanders in the hope of receiving some of their food: 'Even as a poor brown Pyrenean bear dances in the streets of English towns under his master's baton; even so, but with how much more of spirit and precision, the captain footed it in time to his own whistling' (135). This scene presents Davis as (compared to a performing bear) *and yet* his own master (whistling his own tune)—compelling himself to perform in front of those that would otherwise be vulnerable to the likes of Attwater and Symonds. The 'kanakas smiled on the performance,' and offered him payment in food, remarking: 'All right. Me got… you tome here' (135). The exchange epitomizes a form of language-barrier-crossing colonialism that Buckton describes as a 'state of mutual unintelligibility resolvable only in a shared language, or "beach de mar."'[473] Ironically, the name of the shared broken language is the same as one of the most coveted commodities in the south seas: *bêche de mer*, or sea cucumber. Thrilled by the fruits of his labour, Davis rejoices, 'Here's your health, old man; you're a credit to the South Pacific'

---

[472] If the female islander was left inside, that still leaves one male islander left unaccounted for. This, paired with Herrick's remark, suggests that at least one, if not two islanders were killed. Stevenson specifies the number of surviving labourers, but not their identities, thus further isolating the human cost of treasure.
[473] Buckton, 222.

(135). This initial portrayal of both labour and cross-cultural exchange—crucially—puts the native Tahitians, however briefly in power, inverting and troubling what will come next.

Later on New Island, Attwater's recollection of an unnamed and now deceased labourer mirrors Davis's initial dance for the Tahitian sailors; Attwater points to a grave and remarks, 'Here was a fellow, now, that used to frisk like a dog; if you had called him, he came like an arrow from a bow; if you had not, and he came unbidden, you should have seen the deprecating eye and the little intricate dancing step' (204-205). Davis's fleeting performance of 'labour' controls his humiliation with comedy. Davis, Huish, and Herrick are only briefly the mercy of the islander's generosity; their safety is hardly threatened. This imbalance renders Davis's act ultimately freeing—allowing him to blunder his way into a free meal—while his counterpart, the forced labourer buried beneath Attwater's feet, has died of smallpox. In this way, Stevenson strips the end of *The Ebb-Tide* of romance. Neither Attwater nor Symonds face any real repercussions. Their pearls are not thrown (back) into the sea like the Raja's Diamond. There is no call to action to set sail on another adventure as in *Treasure Island* to retrieve treasure 'not yet lifted'.[474] The novella ends with Herrick berating Davis for becoming a Christian convert—'Attwater's spoiled darling and pet penitent' (252). The pearls are not spoken of again after Huish's failed plan to steal them from Attwater. The last words go to the former captain of the *Farallone*, who seems now beyond all thought of escaping and going home. Davis urgers Herrick to turn to God: '"Why not be one of us?... why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in yon beautiful land? That's just the one thing wanted; just say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" And He'll fold you in His arms. You see, I know! I've been a sinner myself!"' (252).

V. In Conclusion: 'Horrible and grotesque'?

As a work of literature, *The Ebb-Tide* divided its initial audience. *The Saturday Review* perceptively considered its final scene which sees Davis, the *Farallone's* captain, converted to Christianity, Huish dead, and Herrick despondent as marred by 'something inoperative, something of sterility'.[475] Several reviews understood *The Ebb-Tide*, as, in effect, *Treasure Island* gone more seriously awry. *The Saturday Review* found *The Ebb-Tide* to be 'decidedly inferior' to Stevenson's previous work, explaining that 'It is in what concerns the "story" that *The Ebb-Tide* differs most from the romances that are solely Stevensonian'.[476] Another

---

[474] Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 3.
[475] [Review for] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 22 September 1894, 330.
[476] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 330.

reviewer complained that Stevenson's characters 'have not the air of inevitableness… and tend towards no tremendous culmination'.[477] On one thing most reviewers agreed: *The Ebb-Tide* was not like Stevenson's earlier works. Reviews fixated on character archetypes and violence throughout the novella, looking to identify lingering elements of adventure and romance. The *Saturday Review* was willing to see Attwater as another, and more disconcerting, Long John Silver: 'This person, mystic, fatalist, evangelist, is a most striking and original conception. He magnetizes the weak and vacillating Herrick'.[478] *The Spectator* agreed: 'He is possessed of a splendid courage, veiled under a somewhat languid exterior, and a power of dominating other men in spite of themselves'.[479] Transfixed by Attwater, the reviewers gave no consideration at all to Stevenson's representation of blackbirded labourers. In general, the islanders are forgotten, the reviews being preoccupied rather by the 'horrible and grotesque'[480] violence aimed at *Attwater* for the violence he has perpetrated.

The reviewers were justified in sensing that *The Ebb-Tide* was a very different kind of fiction to anything they had seen from this writer previously. The 'Stevensonian' brand of 'romance' that they were harkening back to had given fresh life to old content: the pursuit of a jewel of inestimable power, or the treasure heard of maddening value. By contrast, *The Ebb-Tide* refuses the reader even a glance at the pearls hidden in Attwater's safe. Instead, it tracks those pearls to source in a brutal and not quite banished extractive industry that makes the trade in jewels complicit with the murderous exploitation of Pacific islanders' labour. Approaching New Island for the first time, Herrick is struck by the ghostly quiet of the lagoon which nevertheless bears obvious traces of activity: 'The place had the indescribable but unmistakable appearance of being in commission yet there breathed from it a sense of desertion that was almost poignant, no human figure was to be observed going to and fro about the houses, and there was no sound of human industry or enjoyment' (190). This uncanny absence disorients the would-be pirates, starting a process by which their greed is challenged and their (and our) fantasies are interrogated.

---

[477] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 330.
[478] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 330.
[479] *The Spectator* seemingly regards Huish—the would-be pirate—as the most villainous person in the story, not Attwater (or Symonds) who enslaved and murdered (either directly or indirectly via smallpox) an island of blackbirded natives. See the review for 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Spectator*, 6 October 1894, 443.
[480] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 330.

Chapter Four: Gem-Theft in Detective Fiction at the Fin de Siècle

From the 1880s, detective stories were a staple of periodicals. Among the most reliably popular plotlines were those involving the pursuit of stolen gems. Stock narratives and character types were, by now, well established. Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, clearly garnered inspiration for *The Sign of Four* (1890) from Wilkie Collins, as much as to the 'Arabian Author' of *One Thousand and One Nights*.[481] Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories are marked by two key features that are of interest to this study. First, the prevalence of gem-narratives across a series that spans forty years indicates a recurrent desire to experiment with plotlines that had proven popular.[482] Secondly, these gem-theft narratives repeatedly involve male characters looking to defend the young (largely innocent) female characters who, like Rachel Verinder, have become the unwitting recipients of the stolen gem and exposed to the dangerous cultural-political consequences of possessing it of it. These female characters' main narrative function is to engage with—and (as I will argue) in some measure stand in for—the stolen gems. At the end of the century, women authors including Catherine Louisa Pirkis, L.T. Meade, and Beatrice Heron-Maxwell iterated upon Conan Doyle's detective stories and repositioned the stolen gem for a popular fiction market that simultaneously rewarded and disparaged the repetition of a, by now, thoroughly clichéd narrative premise. The purpose of this chapter is not to argue that inspiration constituted simple profiteering, but rather to consider how Arthur Conan Doyle's influence of Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell came to inspire a new literary archetype: the Lady Detective whose task it is to track down the stolen gem.[483]

Writing in the decade and more after Arthur Conan Doyle first introduced Sherlock Holmes and John Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell were hardly the first to take inspiration from the hugely popular series that would see Sherlock Holmes die, in 'The Final Problem' (1893), only to return ten years later. In the ten years during which Holmes was seemingly dead to the world, a swath of new detective series

---

[481] Stevenson, *New Arabian Nights*, 32.
[482] Sherlock Holmes first appears in *A Study in Scarlett* (1887) and the final canonical instalment of Conan Doyle's series is 'The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place' (1927). The first Sherlock Holmes gem-narrative that I examine is the novella *The Sign of Four* (1890) and the final instalment of the series that I refer to is the short story 'The Mazarin Stone' (1921).
[483] Male authored lady detectives also came to prominence at the fin de siècle. Grant Allen, for example, had two female detective protagonists. These serialized stories featured women investigating crimes in an unofficial capacity. These were later compiled as *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) and *Hilda Wade* (1900). Later, Richard Marsh's series about the lady detective Judith Lee was published in *The Strand* from 1911.

emerged capitalizing on the established success of Conan Doyle's narrative formula. Duos akin to Holmes and Watson were relentlessly iterated upon, and heists, medical mysteries, and other confounding whodunnits riddled the pages of popular magazines including *The Strand*, *The Harmsworth*, and *The Ludgate Monthly*, all of which published the women's detective stories discussed in this chapter. The flow of detective stories did not cease or even lessen with Sherlock's return in 1903,[484] but instead were bolstered by it, firmly establishing a cultural phenomenon that would far outlive the Victorian literary period and indeed remains with us now. It is a core claim of this chapter that these recycled plotlines were themselves commercial objects, and that while they were inherently derivative, they represent a significant development in the gender politics of imperial gem-theft in late nineteenth-century British literature.

I have argued thus far that gems fictions of the mid- to late-nineteenth century evidence a Victorian cultural preoccupation with imperial expropriative violence and its aftermath. In its fascination with the gendered and intergenerational transfer of looted gems, and the failed attempt to wash them clean of the stain of violence abroad, Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890) belongs squarely in that tradition, not least in emulating earlier fictions' concern with the role of the woman, back in England, when the consequences of expropriation or attempted expropriation of a gem abroad 'come home'. In the detective plots of Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell, by comparison, the gender politics of failed 'gem laundering' (as we might think of it) are much more clearly to the fore. Unlike earlier works that find their starting point in the original cultural theft, narrating the act of expropriation itself, the bulk of the short stories this chapter considers take place back in Britain, far from the instigating crime. These stories largely describe not looting but the theft of gems circulating in a market economy, with their murky provenance in the past. Gems serve formulaic plotlines, typically providing a relatively simple obstacle to a marriage plot whereby the market value of the gem either permits a couple to be together or prevents their union, along differential lines of class status or financial power. The political focus here has moved from colonial power imbalance to gender power imbalance.

The popularization of the character of the Lady Detective as constructed by women at the fin de siècle garnered extensive critical attention in the 1980s and 90s. Feminist studies largely treated the Lady Detective as a particular instance of the New Woman, 'facilitat[ing] mainstream Victorian feminism by depicting strong female heroines and by establishing a

---

[484] Sherlock Holmes returns in 'The Adventure of the Empty House' (1903).

separate subculture for girls'.[485] A different strand of critical writing about the Lady Detective emerged in the late 2000s, recognizing aspects to these characters that render them more than just a new kind of role model. As Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell grapple with fast-changing social norms that 'signified real shifts in the relative freedom and occupational choice available to many young women near the end of the century'[486] they depict their lady detectives as succeeding outside of the domestic sphere in their role within a (more or less) formalized workplace while also showing them struggling against impediments that prevent them fully exercising their newfound agency. The dangers of going undercover, the challenges of asserting authority and achieving respect within a male-dominated sphere, and the physical and emotional risks involved of fighting crime are all heightened manifestations of the real-world demands that a New Woman would have to face.

Therie Hendrey-Seabrook has argued in a 2007 essay, 'Reclassifying the Female Detective of the Fin de Siècle', that Pirkis's *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: A Lady Detective* capitalized on the 'phenomenal success of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes [by] reworking [a] masculine paradigm'.[487] Similarly, Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's 2008 study of the 'New Woman Criminal' in fin de siècle detective fiction argues that these women writers (Meade, in particular) went beyond adapting and repeating the generic conventions established by Conan Doyle. Miller maintains that both Conan Doyle and Meade were interested in depicting 'women's suddenly expanded visibility in the public sphere, via consumerism and first-wave feminism'; and makes a case for the importance of Meade's work as it tackles 'pertinent feminist questions about gender, body, image, and visibility'.[488] As Miller presents her, Meade 'marr[ies] feminist and imperialist ideologies: women still play a key role in the construction of nationhood, but the role is independent and commercial rather than domestic'.[489] More recently, Joseph Kestner's *Sherlock's Sisters* (2017), draws attention to the narratological effects of autodiegetic versus homodiegetic narration in Lady Detective stories that, ultimately, are seen to offer only 'fantas[ies] of female empowerment' for characters and authors alike.[490] Identifying 'the male gaze'[491] as

---

[485] Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 71. Here, Miller is referring to earlier works by Lisa Tickner (1988), Mavis Reimer (1994), and Sally Mitchell (1995).
[486] Miller, *Framed*, 7-8.
[487] Therie Hendrey-Seabrook, 'Reclassifying the Female Detective of the Fin de Siècle: Loveday Brooke, Vocation, and Vocality', *Clues*, 26 (2007), 75-88, 75.
[488] Miller, *Framed*, 71.
[489] Miller, *Framed*, 96.
[490] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (Abingdon, Routledge: 2016), 13.
[491] Kestner, 7, 17.

the Lady Detective's greatest threat, Kestner's reading oversimplifies what are often quite nuanced gender dynamics in this literature. Adrienne E. Gavin is more convincing, arguing that Heron-Maxwell's *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl-Broker* is 'inherently a novel of protest about male violence towards women and about systems of secrecy that, explicitly or implicitly, collude in profiting from that violence'.[492]

I extend Hendrey-Seabrook and Miller's readings of the Lady Detective by tracking how the incorporation of gem-theft in these stories disrupts the 'role model' function of these professional women. Much repeated in the pages of periodical fiction, the trope of the stolen gem as bearer of gender conflict brings the politics of imperial gem-theft into the commercial and now female-inclusive spheres of the British home and the British workplace. Like Gavin, I see the perpetual threat of violence against the Lady Detective as distinguishing these stories from Sherlock Holmes and other male detective stories, and as fundamental to understanding gem-theft in these narratives. Where gem-theft in previous chapters was presented as an act of cultural expropriation that does damage to the gem's aura or density, in these stories, theft is less of a cultural assault, and more of a disruption to 'normal' market circulation. Any resolution of theft by way of return (the lady detectives solving these mysteries and restoring the stolen gems), finds meaning not within a larger discussion of 'original' cultural ownership or value, but as the reestablishment of unquestioned and unchecked possession of an object of great financial value in which the gem and the woman are complexly and intimately aligned.

It is not insignificant that these women authors were, by the later 1880s, writing within a well-established and hugely popular vein of fiction. Both the detective genre and the periodical format lent themselves to seemingly endless (and profitable) variations on proven formulae. While I do not disagree with Kestner that this fiction was 'transgressive by varying degrees',[493] not every story can– or should—be read as harbouring a feminist subtext. Female detectives in late Victorian fiction are repeatedly tasked with the restoration of stolen gems, and in their investigations, typically encounter secondary female characters who are employed (in effect) to launder the gems. Hyungi Park calls attention to the notion of women 'launder[ing] colonial goods'[494] and I adapt her phrasing to argue that as launderers of imperial violence now largely lost to scrutiny, the women in these stories are

---

[492] Adrienne E. Gavin, '"A good deal of risk… and a chance of danger": Detection, Adventure, and Violence in Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's The Adventures of a Lady Pearl-Broker', in *British Women's Writing from Bronte to Bloomsbury*, vol. 3: 1880s and 1890s, ed. by A. E. Gavin and C. W. de la L. Oulton (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 231-252, 150-51.
[493] Kestner, 21.
[494] Park, 153.

tasked primarily not with restoring the gem or gems to the rightful owner but with moving the object(s) on—washing gems of any remaining taint of original cultural violence and enabling their circulation. In essence their role is to the simplify the meaning of the gem in the text. Whether these characters are conscious of their potential culpability as accessories to a past theft, their narrative function typically resembles that of the gems themselves: they are things of beauty and of value in the eyes of men, passed between men (fathers, husbands, brothers) as need and desire require.

I. Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* and Other Sherlock Gem Stories

The second of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novels, *The Sign of Four* is as exemplary a Victorian novel about looted gems as *The Moonstone* (which preceded it by about twenty years). Published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in February 1890, *The Sign of Four* tells a story about an explicitly contested and desperately sought-after hoard of gems taken from the Agra Fort in Uttar Pradesh during the First War of Independence in 1857. Jonathan Small, a British overseer at an indigo plantation who fled to Agra when the war broke out, and was a key player in the subsequent looting of hidden treasure, describes the Agra Fort retrospectively as a British stronghold at 'the heart'[495] of a sea of violence. Elsewhere, at 'every point on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage' (99).

In Small's overtly racist retelling, the start of India's First War of Independence is framed as brutally savage—a 'perfect hell' (98) instigated by the 'black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs' (99). In a garrisoned space meant to keep out violence from the *outside*, an act of violence is committed within the walls—violently extracting a treasure trove brought to Agra to 'lie until the land is at peace' (103). The Agra Treasure is said to contain gems amounting to about 'half a million pounds' (110).

> One hundred and forty-three diamonds of the first water, including … "the Great Mogul," [which] is said to be the second largest stone in existence… ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one hundred and seventy rubies… forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates, and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cat's eyes, turquoises, and other stones… [as well as] nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in a gold chaplet (107).

---

[495] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, intro. by Peter Ackroyd and notes by Ed Glinert (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 99. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The specificity of the listing—each gemstone accounted for by type, quality, and setting (or lack thereof)—does not simply provide a thorough breakdown of the sheer magnitude of the hoard; it puts in context how little Mary Morstan is mysteriously sent each year. From the chaplet within the hoard, Mary, the daughter of a late British military captain previously stationed in India, receives annually a single pearl taken out of its setting and sent to her by anonymous 'trustees,' (31) later revealed to be Thaddeus and Bartholomew Sholto, sons of Major Sholto—who served alongside Mary's father before breaking the oath which bound them to share the looted treasure. This curiously piecemeal form of restitution made by a younger generation of men initially unaware of the origins of their wealth puts Mary in the position of being an unwitting launderer of a small portion of the treasure she stood to inherit, as Major Sholto's final days are spent acknowledging to his sons that 'half at least [should] be hers', and has only been kept from her by his 'cursed greed' (28)—a moral failing he hopes his sons will rectify.

Apprised of the prospect of Mary receiving 'half a million in treasure', her employer exclaims '"It is a romance!"' (71), calling to mind a kind of Stevensonian romancing of treasure that Conan Doyle surely understood to be both profitable and enough of a literary commonplace to reward imaginative reworking. By contrast, Mary herself shows 'no sign of elation at the prospect', giving instead a stoic 'toss of her proud head' (71). Her relationship to the treasure is consistently ambivalent. Her initial motivation for approaching Holmes and Watson is the desire to uncover the mystery surrounding her father's disappearance or death. Moreover, she does not to attempt to cash in on her inheritance by selling the pearls she has received or indeed by pursuing any form of 'justice' (16, 19) that might be financially lucrative. She is both selfless and abstemious in the face of a life-changing amount of money.

Despite Mary's initial introduction as independent and assertive—she actively seeks the assistance of Holmes and Watson—she is ultimately backgrounded by the plot and, at the point where the chest thought to contain the treasure is retrieved, physically reduced to a state of enervation, her posture in a chair 'sp[eaking] of an absorbing melancholy' (92). Only at the sound of Watson's impending approach does a 'bright flush of surprise and of pleasure [colour] her pale cheeks' (92). By asking what 'news' Watson has brought her, she repositions herself *away* from the action of the treasure-hunt and *back* into a domestic sphere. When the treasure is revealed to be missing, Watson can declare with relief that the 'impassable barrier' (50)—the 'golden barrier' (93-94)—which separated them has now been removed. Watson's admission: '…these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you' (94), rhetorically underlines the perceived need for Mary's separation from the treasure she was meant to receive; only by 'losing' the treasure might she profit

from Watson's betrothal. In losing the treasure, any question of her obtaining 'justice' (16, 19) or receiving 'compensation' (19) becomes irrelevant, especially as her interest in the potential 'inheritance' is muted at best. Though Mary may have lost her share of the Agra Treasure, Watson explains that he has 'gained' (94) his, thereby framing their marriage as the primary form of narrative resolution desired in *The Sign of Four* (not dissimilar to the marriage plot that concludes *The Moonstone*).

While Watson and Mary's marriage resituates the narrative within a domestic framework, a secondary resolution is achieved by way of ensuring all foreign threats are abated and all British accomplices justly punished. Any questions concerning the rightful ownership of the treasure (or the possibility of repatriation of the jewels to India) are quelled by the loss of the treasure in the Thames, the deaths of those guilty of its misappropriation (excepting Captain Morstan, whose death is framed sympathetically), and the imprisonment of the original four co-conspirators. Major Sholto's death from shock, Bartholomew's death by poisoned dart, and the Andamanese servant Tonga's death by gunshot are all seen as deserved. The Major's death by 'fear and guilt' (90) is almost identical to that of Pennicuick in *By Proxy*, repeating a popular generic trope (the dramatic death-by-conscience). These deaths drive the plot forward; they also move the attention of the narrative further away from the original crime. Of Bartholomew's death Watson notes only that he has 'heard little good of him and could feel no intense antipathy to his murderers (65)'. Likewise, Tonga's killing is justified not just on the grounds that he killed once before, but because he is about to kill again. As the two shots by Watson and Holmes 'r[i]ng out together' (87), the implication of shared responsibility and even a kind of absolution (either man can point to the other as responsible for the fatal shot) is largely irrelevant, as both can claim self-defence. With Tonga dead, the perceived foreign threat that has infiltrated the domestic sphere in England is removed and Scotland Yard takes over, handling the aftermath of Small's arrest.

Conan Doyle's characterization of Small up until this point—duped by Major Sholto while serving his sentence in the Andaman Islands and made inadvertently culpable by Tonga's independent decision to kill Bartholomew Sholto—verges on the sympathetic. Any meaningful claim to the treasure that Small may have boasted of becomes untenable as soon as he admits to being driven by revenge: 'I lived only for vengeance… Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto' (113). He is undermined, also, by his association with—and assumed authority over—Tonga, who kills Bartholomew Sholto. Small admits that his thirst for revenge has outweighed his desire for his share of the treasure: Whether Small will carry out the rest of his sentence in the Andaman Islands or at Dartmoor as he predicts (90) it is not made clear, but his arrest is

certain as he exits under the command of Athelney Jones of the Scotland Yard (90). As for Mohammed Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar, their sentencing to 'penal servitude for life' (107-108) in the Andaman Islands for the slaying of Ahmet (the false merchant) provides—by contrast to Small's initial sentencing to death—is presented as a just punishment. With this spectrum of villains squared away, and Thaddeus Sholto seemingly content with his exoneration of his brother's murder (not regretting the now lost treasure), the denouement resituates Mary's role within the text. She is not present for the dramatic boat chase down the Thames and does not hear Small's full confession. Her confinement to the domestic sphere while these events occur not only keeps her clear of the history of the treasure she has unwittingly become attached to, but to a significant degree loosens her association with it, though it has been treated up to this point as her rightful inheritance. Once married to Watson she loses any tangible connection to it.

Hyungji Park compares Mary in *The Sign of Four* with Rachel in *The Moonstone*, describing both as 'unknowing, naive female supplicant[s]',[496] who are 'passively granted the treasure and just as passively dispossessed of it'.[497] Though Park does not linger on the concept of laundering or its aftermath, she does note that both novels end with the women's 'suitors… participat[ing] in the scramble for the treasure and/or its ultimate disposal'.[498] I maintain that Mary's position as a launderer involves an important transition from participant to innocent bystander. If Mary's role as a launderer of ill-gotten treasure requires her to function as the quiet conduit transforming illicit goods (the looted treasure) to a legitimate inheritance, then the loss of the Agra Treasure leaves her with nothing to wash—no function in the plot beyond being the romantic heroine. Crucially, Park also draws attention to the 'substitution of a marriage plot ending for the usual detective plot resolution of the property's restoration'.[499] That she 'whisper[s]' her acceptance to Watson's offer of marriage completes the logic of legitimation; she stands in for treasure that must be washed of all traces of its illicit origins of a racialized capitalism and violent expropriation. Giving up her stake in any profit from it, she can marry an upstanding and devoted man in what is, effectively, an act of moral-sentimental substitution: the virtuous woman for the tainted jewels. Her last utterance in the novel—and in the whole series—is a repetition of Watson's words back to him as her acceptance to his proposal: 'Then I say "Thank God" too' (94). Prayer-like, the repetition of Watson's words by Mary serves as both the *start* of their union

---

[496] Park, 134.
[497] Park, 136-37.
[498] Park, 137.
[499] Park, 136.

and the *end* of her meaningful characterization within the series. With marriage as her 'reward', Mary fades away into obscurity and then an unspecified death a few years later.[500]

The Sign of Four was not Conan Doyle's only engagement with the narrative conventions attached to imperial gem-theft. The sheer size and splendour of the Agra Treasure and its centrality to the detective plot makes *The Sign of Four* the most gem-centric of the Sherlock Holmes stories (it is also the only full-length *novel* Conan Doyle would dedicate to the genre). There are, however, an additional four short stories with gem-related plotlines amid the long-running series of Sherlock stories. These plots are confined to the more concentrated narrative structure of a single instalment story. Fast-paced and short, the format lent itself to a straightforward formula whereby the mystery is introduced, the key players are identified (with some scrutinized while others are placed in a more sympathetic position), evidence is pursued, in most cases a chase ensues, all culminating in Sherlock's grand reveal of an explanation that only he could discover.

The seventh in a twelve-month series of instalments in *The Strand Magazine*, 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle' (1892) is one of two gem-centred stories compiled into *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (published two years after *The Sign of Four)*. The most comedic of Conan Doyle's gem-stories, 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle' chronicles the movements of a comical 'treasure-trove'[501]: a Christmas goose that contains a valuable gem. The carbuncle, a 'scintillating blue stone' (188) belonging to the Countess of Morcar, is stolen from her hotel room and later forced past the 'gullet and down into [the] crop' (200) of a live goose to hide it. The goose with the carbuncle in its crop runs back into its flock, becoming indistinguishable from the rest, and is slaughtered ahead of Christmas. Published in the January 1892 issue of *The Strand*, this was, plainly, Conan Doyle experimenting with the 'Christmas story' genre popularized by Dickens—parodying its moral sentimentalism and giving a glimpse of the working-class lives supplying the Christmas industry. A crucial passage sees Holmes and Watson interviewing the proprietor of a goose stall at Covent Garden market, tracing the supply chain until it leads him to the back garden of a house on the Brixton Road, where geese are literally fattened for the market. Ultimately, Sherlock

---

[500] Mary is only mentioned offhandedly throughout the series after *The Sign of Four*. She is briefly mentioned in 'The Five Orange Pips' (1891), 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891), 'The Final Problem' (1893), 'The Stockbroker's Clerk' (1893), and is implied to have died by the events of 'The Adventure of the Norwood Builder' (1903), when Watson returns to living with Holmes at Baker Street. It is important to note that Sherlock Holmes stories often move back and forth in time and the events of each story do not coincide to the year they were published; for example, 'The Adventure of the Empty House' was published in 1904 but is set in 1894.

[501] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle', in *Sherlock Holmes Selected Stories,* ed. with notes by Barry McCrea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 184-202, 189. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

reveals that he has both come into possession of the sought-after stone *and* tracked down the culprit who placed it in the goose in the first place. This exonerates an innocent man who has been framed for the theft of the carbuncle and neatly resolves the theft by returning the gemstone to the Countess of Morcar, giving a whole other meaning to the metaphors of going on a wild goose chase and seeking the goose that laid a golden egg.

While the carbuncle is never explicitly described as imperial loot, Conan Doyle ensures it generates a familiar kind of intrigue by its uniqueness and its value: 'It's more than a precious stone. It's *the* precious stone' (189), Sherlock explains to his associate, adding that a handsome reward for its return is advertised daily in *The Times* (189), thus advertising its fame to a wider audience. That the initial suspect is a plumber alleged to have 'forced' the bureau open and 'abstracted the jewel-case' from 'the dressing-room of the Countess of Morcar' (189) perpetuates the long-established trope of gem-theft as sexual violence, only rectified (in this instance) by the exoneration of the plumber and the return of the gem revealed to be stolen by a now remorseful man compelled to commit the theft after the Countess' maid informed him of how it might be done (199). The gender-dynamics shift here between the potential for violent sexual harm committed by men to a distinctly feminine threat of betrayal and conspiracy, which later women writers would often repeat and vary.

Conan Doyle devises a similar gem-theft plotline two years later, involving another strategically hidden gem belonging to travelling royalty in 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons', first published in *The Strand* in 1904 (and later compiled in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905)). 'The most famous pearl now existing in the world', 'the famous black pearl of the Borgias',[502] (instead of the Christmas goose) is taken from the hotel room of the Prince of Colonna (recalling the hotel room of the Countess of Morcar) and hidden in one of six plaster busts of Napoleon. The culprit—an Italian immigrant named Beppo—has concealed the 'enormously valuable prize' in a still-drying bust, understanding that the pearl 'would otherwise be found on him when he was searched' (303). As with the carbuncle stowed in the goose, Beppo 'could not tell which [bust] contained his treasure' (303)—a situation which requires him to scour London breaking busts of Napoleon, effecting a spree of apparently anti-Napoleonic violence which Holmes recognizes has nothing at all to do with the French revolutionary. 'Like a plum in a pudding,' (302) the pearl is found stuck in the now dried plaster 'remains' (302) of the shattered bust. The image of Napoleon 'himself' concealing a stolen artifact that is only revealed by striking 'a sharp blow on the top of the

---

[502] Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons', in *Sherlock Holmes Selected Stories*, 286-304, 302. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

head' can be read as an ironic reference to the infamous looting conducted by his armies, confiscating countless pieces of art across Europe.

Much like the blue carbuncle, the Black Pearl of the Borgias acquires its fame only as a result of its theft, with Sherlock revealing the distinguished provenance of the gem on its recovery. The added imperial significance does not, in this case, come from any backstory attached to the pearl, but by way of presenting the antagonist Beppo as a 'well-known ne'er-do-well among the Italian colony' (301). Asked to explain how Beppo came into possession of the pearl, Holmes speculates, 'He may have stolen it from Pietro, he may have been Pietro's confederate, he may have been the go-between of Pietro and his sister. It is of no consequence to us which is the correct solution' (303). Engaged in 'evil courses' that are repeatedly described as violent (first arrested for 'stabbing a fellow country-man' (301) and ultimately arrested for 'some crime of violence' (303)), Beppo is rendered indistinguishable from the larger foreign criminal enterprise he comes to stand for: the Italian mafia. Despite framing the mafia as a dangerous, the story ends with the threat they pose as well contained by Sherlock and the Scotland Yard, who have succeeded in recovering and returning the famed pearl to the Prince of Colonna.

Four months after the publication of 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle' *The Strand* published another of Conan Doyle's gem stories—the penultimate instalment delivered as part of his year-long contract. 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet' (1892) chronicles the partial dismantling of a 'national possession'[503]—a coronet used as collateral by one of the 'highest, noblest, most exalted names in England,' (26) who, nevertheless, remains unnamed. Fearful of the 'horrible scandal' (27) caused by any 'imprudence' (28) that might arise if the coronet were to come to danger in the bank where it is deposited, the banker responsible for the loan and its collateral, Alexander Holder (morally directive naming of this order is common currency in the Holmes stories), vows to transport the case 'backward and forward' (28) each day from the bank vault to a locked bureau in his own home at night so as to never leave it wholly unattended or otherwise wholly 'out of [his] reach' (28). The Beryl Coronet, named after the thirty-six beryls (a category of gemstone including emerald, morganite, and aquamarine) adorning the crown, is damaged, with three beryls stripped from their settings. Finding his own son, Arthur, in the compromising position of holding the damaged coronet near the presumed time of its attempted theft, Holder presumes his guilt, calling in Holmes to confirm his suspicions and track down the

---

[503] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet', in *The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb and Other Cases* (London: Penguin English Library, 2014), 23-51, 27. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

missing stones. The ensuing investigation reveals that Holder's niece, Mary, has fallen under influence of 'one of the most dangerous men in England—a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience,' (45) and been used as a 'tool' (45) to steal what was meant to be the entirety of the coronet.

Elizabeth Carolyn Miller identifies in Mary's 'associati[on]… with precious jewels' a 'conventional literary trope' established by *The Moonstone*, noting that Conan Doyle 'articulates the breakdown of a gendered code wherein the visibility and invisibility of daughters can be managed like precious jewels'.[504] More salient, for the purposes of this reading, is the reappearance of *The Sign of Four*'s interest in the failure or weakness of that effort at moral management. Where *The Sign of Four's* Mary functions as a passive launderer to her near-inheritance, Mary in 'The Beryl Coronet' is forced into a much more active laundering role. She is not only compelled actively to participate in the theft of the stones, but her marriage, unlike that between Mary and Watson, is neither joyous nor reparative of her crime. Inverting the romance ending this story sees Mary righteously punished and frames her vulnerability to exploitation as a significant cause for moral concern.

Her vulnerability and that of the precious stones are symbolically linked. When Arthur stumbles upon the scheme and attempts to stop it, the coronet is damaged, and Arthur is left with the choice of either protecting Mary (with whom he is in love) by accepting blame or exonerating himself by naming her as the accomplice to the crime. Holmes discovers that Arthur took 'the more chivalrous view' and deduces that Mary, a plainly undeserving recipient of such generosity, 'is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment' (51). The ending frames the marriage plot as *not* a resolution to the theft (the damaged coronet is repaired by purchasing the illegally sold beryls from a fence), but a form of moral punishment removed from any legal framework (more karmic, in other words, than judicial). Any misery or mistreatment Mary faces within her marriage (itself framed as illicit, if not illegal) substitutes—adequately, it would seem—for legal justice.

The final gem-related Holmes story is included in the last of Conan Doyle's Holmes collections, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927). The 31-year gap itself suggests a desire, on his part, to find new terrain and, perhaps, a point at which innovation with the

---

[504] Miller, *Framed*, 59.

detective form failed him.[505] 'The Mazarin Stone' (originally published in 1921) shares much of its plot formulation with 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet' in that it pertains to a gem ostensibly owned by the British Crown. Once more, Conan Doyle returns to a thematic conjunction of gem-theft and victimized royalty. Noteworthy here as is the explicit allusion to the real-life Mazarin Diamonds. The 'hundred-thousand-pound burglary' investigated by Holmes involves a 'missing Crown Jewel' identified as the 'yellow Mazarin stone'.[506] The real-life collection known as the Mazarin Diamonds was amassed partially as a result of the British Crown (Charles I) defaulting on a loan, resulting in the diamonds being passed in lieu of gold to Cardinal Mazarin, an Italian prelate who served as Chief Minister to both the French Kings Louis VIII and XIV in the mid-seventeenth century. The bulk of the original collection was left to the French crown on Mazarin's death but a portion was sold by him to Oliver Cromwell. By 1792, the remaining collection—now owned by the French Crown—was stolen alongside other famous gems including the Hope Diamond and the Regent Diamond during an infamous robbery at the Garde Meuble. Most, but not all the gems stolen would eventually be found and returned.[507]

Neither the real history of these gems nor a fictitious alternative is explicitly attached to the single stone at the centre of Conan Doyle's story. Instead, his chief interest seems to be in the aura of extreme importance attached to a stone whose provenance is not recounted (presumed, perhaps, to be widely enough known). The hushed tones in which it is spoken of, and the sense of urgency attached to its retrieval, imply royal involvement. Moreover, although the missing 'King of Diamonds' is not specified as belonging to the *British* Crown Jewels, the involvement of the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, and an uncongenial member of the House of Lords heavily implies that it does. The characterization of the diamond thief—Count Negretto Sylvius—begins and ends with his conspicuously Italian name, which can be read as another nod to the real Mazarin diamonds (Mazarin was Italian

---

[505] While 'The Mazarin Stone' (1921) was published outside of my specified period of interest, it is worthwhile to discuss as it demonstrates the pervasiveness of gem-narratives throughout Conan Doyle's detective oeuvre. There are 31 years between *The Sign of Four* (1890) and 'The Mazarin Stone' (1921).

[506] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Mazarin Stone', in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. with notes by W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-22, 8. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

[507] See Balfour, 60, 61, 140 and Edwin M. Streeter's *Precious Stones and Gems: Their History, Sources and Characteristics*, fifth edition (London: George Bell & Sons, 1892), 21-22.

by birth)[508] and a return to the notion of an Italian threat to the British social order (fictional territory closely associated with Wilkie Collins, among others).

Using a Tussaud-like wax facsimile of himself, Holmes lures and captures Count Sylvius before he can transport the gem to Amsterdam where he intends to 'cut it into four pieces' (17) (just as Godfrey Ablewhite planned to do in *The Moonstone*).[509] Holmes delivers the stone back to the Lord involved in the case, who presumably returns it to the Royal Collection. As with Beppo, Count Negretto Sylvius's characterization is shallow at best. He is 'half-Italian' (8) with 'menacing eyes' (12) and the potential to be the 'devil incarnate' (8) should he be crossed, though there is no indication (other than his name) that he is anything other than an imperial adventurer, with an 'excellent sporting record' in 'big game' (8) shooting in Africa (12). Distinctly *un*-British by name, he is nevertheless sufficiently familiar with British imperial territories for the disassociation to seem incomplete.

The gendered aspects of these plots are strongly marked in three of the five Conan Doyle stories considered here: *The Sign of Four* (1890), 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle' (1892), and 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet' (1892). Each of the associations of the woman with a gem or gems becomes the occasion for significant destabilization of ownership in ways that endanger the woman's security and happiness: in *The Sign of Four*, Mary Morstan finds herself made first the passive recipient of priceless pearls and then the victim of their theft. The Countess of Morcar has her hotel room ransacked (her personal safety threatened) in the 'The Blue Carbuncle'; in 'The Beryl Coronet' Mary is coerced into stealing the Beryl Coronet, and lives to pay the price in an unhappy liaison with the man responsible.

Conan Doyle's repeated return to certain formulaic plot conventions evidence both a keen sense of the market for these fictions and, for a while, a striking degree of innovation with them—though 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' (1904) and 'The Mazarin Stone' (1927) both indicate that the effort of renewal was a strain. Arguably as, or even more, important than his ability repeatedly to ring the changes on existing gender dynamics is his sense of the stolen gem as highly marketable narrative material. The press coverage given to gem-theft within these fictions acts as a subtle way of recognizing and exploiting public interest: the lost Borgia pearl, for example, is quickly taken up by the newspapers, causing a 'sensation' (303); its theft is brought, literally, home to a member of the Central Press

---

[508] Mazarin was Italian by birth, moving only to France as an adult. Also of note, Mazarin was deeply connected with the noble Colonna family. The fictional Prince of Colonna is the owner of the stolen Borgia pearl in 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons'.
[509] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 73.

Syndicate who owns one of the Napoleon busts, and, when it is destroyed, is left wishing he could cover his own story in print.[510] In 'The Mazarin Stone', the two gems that go missing are *not* mentioned in newspaper reports only because strenuous efforts are made to keep so politically sensitive a theft secret. In the case of the Beryl Coronet, too, discretion is required of Holmes and Watson by the banker responsible for the coronet and the Lord presumably tasked with hunting down the stolen coronet. Publicity surrounding the carbuncle and the Mazarin stone focuses *exclusively* on the foreign owners who require British aid.

While the restoration of these gems by Holmes does not happen 'on-stage', as it were, the British-detective-as-saviour trope is solidified despite both thefts happening on British soil. In the case of the stolen gems from the British Royal Collection, requisite discretion implies both profound embarrassment within the establishment at not having been better fortified against a theft, and a frantic attempt to avoid the 'public disgrace'[511] of the loss of a 'national possession' (27). Holmes's restoration of the gems in both cases is made to seem an act of patriotic significance, protecting the British crown and the aristocracy from ridicule should the thefts, and the failure of guardianship, be made public. The dominant stance is, surely, a satiric sense of institutional ineptitude. Using one of the 'precious public possessions of the empire' as collateral begs the question of how and by whom an object belonging to the 'nation' might be used or spent, even if only as an assurance of a loan to be repaid. Taken out of the Royal Collection with the aim of illicitly raising credit only to have a trusted institution fail to protect it, the Mazarin stone demonstrates the precariousness with which gems are held by the Crown—and, by extension—the nation. Moreover, that a theft has occurred within the purview of a bank implies institutional failings that go beyond the crown estate to infect the wider public life.

Underpinning each gem-theft described in these Sherlock stories is a notion of gem threat as a symbolically laden form of violence—the imperial implications of the theft of the Moonstone still relevant, but increasingly backgrounded in favour of more contemporary political concerns: the rights of women with respect to property (including their property in themselves under the marriage laws); the penetration of British culture and society by wars on the European continent (first France, then Italy); the condition of the institutions at the centre of British political and commercial life. The changing historical background between *The Sign of Four* and the *Strand* stories is evident; where the novella grapples with the intergenerational consequences of imperial looting in India, the aftermath of what was done

---

[510] Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons', 290.
[511] Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet', 24.

by British soldiers in Uttar Pradesh playing out in the life of a young woman in London, the short stories seem relatively uninterested in the back stories of provenance—and yet the sense of moral contamination remains strong. 'Every good stone', Holmes tells us in 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle', should be thought of as the 'devil's pet baits… [that] may stand for a bloody deed'.[512]

The story that gets the reader closest to an articulated gem history is 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle', which specifies that its eponymous gem was found in Southern China, leaving the reader to meditate (or not) on the potential relevance of Britian's imperial presence in Hong Kong and its control of certain port zones. It is in this geopolitically tenuous space that the stone accumulates its 'sinister history' despite being only two decades old (191). Nothing else of the stone's history or significance is mentioned. Where Annette Weiner asks us to consider the gem as accruing additional density, Conan Doyle seems to go out of his way, increasingly, to lighten the load of history, playing with the concept of a priceless heirloom simply having 'adventures' of its own which can be easily withheld without consequence. Crucially, each of the stolen gems from Conan Doyle's short stories is found and returned—unlike the lost Agra treasure. Holmes himself is left pondering: '"Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the gallows and the prison?"' (191). It is a question any reader of Conan Doyle gem narratives may be left with—and one that proved fruitful to the women writers who sought to emulate his market success.

II. Catherine Louisa Pirkis and *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective*

Conan Doyle's popularity weathered the decade-long period between 1893 and 1903 in which Holmes was ostensibly dead and gone. In Sherlock's absence, however, many other writers for the expanding market in monthly magazines sought to fill the gap. *The Harmsworth Magazine* (1898-1915)—later known as *The London Magazine*—published popular fiction across genres as well as general human-interest stories throughout a nearly twenty-year tenure that saw it—briefly—competing with *The Strand* and *The Pall Mall Magazine*. Issues from the first half of 1899 characterize a particular appetite of the *Harmsworth's* readership for gem stories. Two articles published back to back within the March 1899 issue illustrate this point: a jingoistic adventure story by Gilbert Floyd concerning a cursed diamond,[513] and a fashion column by Emily Neville Jackson, detailing

---

[512] Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle', 191.
[513] Gilbert Floyd, 'The Great Green Diamond', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 108-112. Described by one modern historian of the book as a 'hack writer' who made frequent use of stock characters like the

modern high society trends in priceless jewellery.[514] Following Floyd and Neville Jackson's articles in the March issue came the first instalment of L.T. Meade's *The Florence Cusack Mysteries* only four months later, in the July issue of the same year. This series follows a lady detective repeatedly required to investigate stolen jewellery. Florence Cusack was not the first Lady Detective to be found throughout late-Victorian popular fiction, however. Cusack was developed as part of a rapidly evolving literary tradition of women authors breaking into the market of detective fiction and publishing stories about male and female detectives alike.

In the hands of Meade, Catherine Louisa Pirkis, and Beatrice Heron-Maxwell, detective stories about stolen gems are brought into combination with another specific later Victorian literary sub-genre: New Woman fiction. In presenting their protagonists as varying models of the New Woman, these writers capitalized on a lucrative space within popular fiction—propelling the New Woman protagonist forward as a feminist icon amidst a sea of male-dominated adventure stories written by men—while implicitly capitalizing also on their own potential identification as New Women by virtue of their pursuing professional careers in literary journalism. Where and how Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell introduced *female* detectives within their work provides the second half of this chapter with the opportunity to understand the gendered inflection of gem-theft as a recurrent plotline.

Catherine Louisa Pirkis's first made her name with about a dozen novels written in the 1870s and 1880s. Her most successful work, however, was a series of stories published in the early 1890s following Loveday Brooke, a female detective. Although less prolific than Meade, for example, Pirkis had gained particular prominence in the burgeoning animal welfare community prior to the success of her stories about her Lady Detective. Six instalments of Pirkis's series were published first in *The Ludgate Monthly*, then reprinted with a seventh story as the book *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (1894). Three instalments, 'The Black Bag Left on a Doorstep', 'Drawn Daggers', and 'Missing!',

---

'bold' 'bushranger, soldier, and stockbroker,' Floyd's short stories appeared in boys' magazines including *The Boy's Friend* and *The Boy's Realm*. Never as successful as the titans of *Boys' Own* adventure storytelling Ryder Haggard or George Alfred Henty, Floyd nevertheless continued to find publishers for his 'popular usage' of imperial narratives well into the twentieth century. See Sue Thomas, 'Vance Palmer in London, 1906-1907', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 10 (1986), 25-30, 27.

[514] Nevill Jackson, Mrs. F., 'Jewel-Wearers and How They Wear Their Jewels', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine,* vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 113-117. Emily Nevill Jackson's journalism specialized primarily in the history of domestic objects—most notably lace, furniture, and the histories of silhouettes. In the *Harmsworth*, she adds jewellery to her list of 'domestic' and especially feminine accoutrements, further exemplifying the contemporary interest in these storied objects. See Meaghan Clarke, 'The Art Press at the Fin de Siècle: Women, Collecting, and Connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, 35 (2015), 15-30.

narrates Brooke's investigations leading directly to the discovery of stolen jewellery in ways that complicate marriage plots and provide a catalyst for the lady detective's new and thrilling adventures.

Pirkis's characterization of Brooke establishes a kind of prototype that Meade and Heron-Maxwell would later build on in with their lady detective fictions. This prototype involves the evident competency of each female detective being—to varying degrees—doubted, requiring their ability to be defended, often by their male counterpart. Unlike her male counterparts she is highly intuitive and perceptive—singularly capable of crime solving and deserving of her good reputation.[515] Despite this, she is under constant physical threat—her work requiring that she leaves the comfort and safety of home for potentially dangerous work alongside police that often puts her in direct contact with criminals. Against all odds, the Lady Detective not only survives but solves the case and ensures that justice is done. In each series, the cases tackled by the Lady Detective include at least one gem-theft, and while there are staple resolutions involving successful marriage plots—a trope long-established within the genre and throughout popular fiction of the time—these women authors also iterate upon gem-plots in ways that are often specific to the evolving politics of the New Woman.

The first instalment of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, 'The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step', introduces Ebenezer Dyer, 'chief of the well-known detective agency in Lynch Court, Fleet Street'.[516] Dyer procures Loveday Brooke's assistance as an independent contractor of sorts, and briefs her on a case involving Lady Cathrow, who 'has lost 30,000 worth of jewellery' (1) from her home in (the fictional) village of Huxwell. Giving Brooke her 'sailing orders' (8) to locate the 'booty' (30) and determine the culprit(s), Dyer explains that the police have instructed him to 'send down for this purpose one of the shrewdest and most clear-headed of [his] female detectives' (6). While Dyer's estimation of Brooke clearly holds some weight within the police force, her competence is repeatedly brought into question by

---

[515] Loveday Brooke is described by her boss, Ebenezer Dyer: 'she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly, and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius'. See *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, 6. Florence Cusack, similarly, is described by Doctor Lonsdale as a 'marvelous woman'; he continues, 'I knew if there was one person in the world who would suggest a solution, that person was my old friend Miss Cusack'. See 'Mrs. Reid's Terror', 126, 124-125. Finally, as he hires Mollie Delamere as a pearl-broker, Mr. Leighton explains, 'we find that ladies have an instinct for appraising the value of jewels. We in the trade of course learn how to distinguish between good and bad, but ladies seem to become experts without any training at all. They can almost detect a flaw with their eyes shut.' (3-4). Mollie's effectiveness in keeping the pearls safe and selling the pearls proves Leighton's theory to be correct.
[516] Catherine Louisa Pirkis, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1894), 1. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

male police officers as she works undercover to solve a case of gem-theft. This assumption perpetuates a gender stereotype according to which the maids of the home would be more likely to 'gossip' with Brooke, implying that they have not been fully cooperating with the male police officers or with Dyer.[517] Working undercover in this instance would indeed require Brooke to forfeit the degree of authority she has as a detective, depriving herself—however temporarily—of the status and agency she has worked to cultivate. By choosing *not* to go undercover, she controls her reception within the house, doing her detective work without depending on girlish gossip. The patronizing view of her male colleagues is accordingly ironized. After a mere five minutes examining the scene where the theft occurred and a brief conversation with the other household staff, Brooke solves the case, leading the police directly to the location of part of the stolen jewellery and providing evidence sufficient to convict the three thieves involved (36-37). Although the victim of the theft is pleased by Brooke's work and Dyer praises her for what Brooke refers to as 'mere ABC work,' (45) she remains underestimated and underappreciated throughout the series, with newspaper reports failing to acknowledge her pivotal role in solving a string of country-house robberies (140-43).

Pirkis's later gem stories tend to favour endings culminating in a successful marriage plot. Pirkis 'solves' the plotlines by having stolen gems make marriages possible. Two instalments of *The Adventures of Loveday Brooke* end in this way. In 'Drawn Daggers' Brooke is called in to investigate the loss of a pearl necklace worth 'over nine hundred pounds' (195). The necklace has been handed down to the young Miss Monroe by her mother but is discovered missing after Miss Monroe's journey from Peking to London. In London, Mr. and Mrs. Hawke—family friends of Miss Monroe's parents—have taken her in to ensure that she remains 'out of the way of a troublesome and undesirable suitor' in Peking (189). Once more, the expansion of empire provides a key backstory to gem-related trouble in England. Pirkis prioritizes the interest of the marriage plot over explicit commentary on empire. The influence of empire at home makes itself felt primarily in detailed descriptions of the anxiety arising from having so valuable a stone in one's possession (and not in a bank). This uneasiness again gives rise to an explicit troping of the gem-as-female-virginity trope, in a way that was increasingly becoming distinctive of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century female-authored gem-theft narratives.

---

[517] Kestner argues that in part, female friendships allow for detective work by 'spur[ring] professional engagement', 153.

Brooke discovers both the fate of the necklace and the fate of the lovers who are supposedly torn apart in China. After interviewing Miss Monroe and observing her movements, she realises that this is not Miss Monroe at all. The real Miss Monroe has married and run off with her lover, Mr. Danvers of Peking. The young woman posing as Miss Monroe is actually Mary O'Grady, a young woman who was approached by (the real) Miss Monroe while aboard the ship from Peking to London. Once more, the inclusion of a distinctly Irish name introduces questions of imperialism closer to home, only to refocus on the marriage plot. Miss O'Grady is offered one hundred pounds to swap places for a brief period of time while Miss Monroe and Mr. Danvers hastily arranged a marriage. Brooke interrogates Miss O'Grady, who reveals that the pearl necklace never left Peking. It was given by Miss Monroe to Mr. Danvers, who pawned it to diamond merchants in Hong Kong for money to enable him to follow Miss Monroe to England and fund their contested marriage (229-230). The new Mr. and Mrs. Danvers are assumed to have run off to Plymouth, unlikely to return to Peking. The success of the marriage plot thereby necessitates the use of the pearl necklace as a fungible object in a global market.

Similarly, in 'Missing!', the final instalment of the series, a young woman disappears, last seen wearing especially valuable jewellery including 'a plain gold brooch, leather strap bracelet holding small watch, and on the third finger of [her] left hand a marquise ring, consisting of one large diamond, surrounded with twelve rubies' (275). When she is found, she is without the marquise ring—'and in its stead she wears a plain gold wedding-ring' (305). She has secretly run away to marry her true love, bribing her maid with a pair of earrings (325). In both instances, the missing gems (the pearl necklace and the marquise ring) are to all intents and purposes lost—translated into cash to enable a young woman to marry whom she pleases, against her family's wishes.

Noting the frequency of this mode of Victorian plotting, John Plotz argues that we have paid too little attention to hard pragmatism as an aspect of romance in the period 'For jewelry to be laden with affect is suitably Victorian; but it is equally true to the times for such jewelry to offer quick access to the world of fungibility, where esteem can be translated readily into property'.[518] 'Family' heirlooms—in these stories—are sold in the process of contested marriage plots, begging the question of who really owns an heirloom, what it means to hold it in trust, and what obligations if any, the current generation owes to generations past. Supposedly 'inalienable' gems go on the market and are irrecoverably lost;

---

[518] Plotz, *Portable Property*, 32.

the endings of these stories frame the loss of the gems as a kind of collateral damage in the service of a more important romance plot.

III. L.T. Meade's Detective Oeuvre

Pirkis's characterization of Brooke as a Lady Detective operating in a fairly hostile environment, and her treatment of gem-theft in ways that seem deliberately to background considerations of empire in favour of a focus on gender relations, can be seen to clearly influence later works by Meade and Heron-Maxwell. Remembered as one of the most prolific New Woman writers, L.T. Meade wrote hundreds of novels, short stories, and editorials for girl's magazines such as *Every Girl's Magazine* and *Atalanta*. Collaborating with medical doctors Edgar Beaumont and Eustace Robert Barton (writing respectively under the pseudonyms Clifford Halifax and Robert Eustace), Meade authored several medical mysteries including *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* (1893-1895) and *Stories of the Sanctuary Club* (1899). These came as a precursor to her detective fiction that would come to include an unofficial lady detective in the *Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries* (1899-1901), involving an unofficial lady detective and *The Sorceress of the Strand* (1902-1903), with a (male) duo clearly indebted to Holmes and Watson. While her medical mysteries do not involve the *character* of the detective, they are centred on mysteries that compel detective *work* to be completed and for that reason treated here, as, in effect, her first forays into detective fiction.

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor, coauthored with Clifford Halifax, is comprised of a dozen medical mysteries, the final instalment of the first series being the most pertinent to this study.[519] In 'The Ponsonby Diamonds', Dr Halifax is called to attend to a case involving a young woman in failing health. Lady Violet Dalrymple, recently engaged to Captain Ponsonby, is diagnosed with 'neurasthenia', which Halifax explains is a result of her becoming 'over-culture[d and having] little to do'.[520] Halifax's recommendation for Violet's care is based upon the notion that women are social creatures and that a lack of social stimulus can trigger a distinctly feminine vulnerability to psychosomatic distress. He recommends that the family hire Beryl to provide medical care and to entertain Violet as a friendly companion. Despite early signs that the social prescription is working, and despite

---

[519] The fictional doctor within these stories is called Halifax, like the pseudonym Beaumont chose for himself.

[520] L.T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, M.D., 'The Ponsonby Diamonds', in *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1894), 339-370, 342. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

the quick rapport between the two women, Violet soon slips back into bedridden ennui. In an effort to cheer her up, Captain Ponsonby presents her with a diamond necklace explaining, '"those diamonds are heirlooms in the family, and are of great value. They will be yours when we are married"' (351-52). The diamonds have a deeply physiological impact, causing her to sit 'upright', her eyes to become 'bright', her cheeks 'rosy' (351), and her general disposition to deeply improve. So acute is the disturbance that the gems must be sent away so that Violet may rest, but in their absence, she falls into an even worse condition. It is at this point that the diamonds are discovered missing (354). Violet's health goes into steep decline. In a moment of lucidity, she proclaims, '"Tell my father and mother that I do not love Captain Ponsonby, and will never marry him. From the first he never attracted me, and now there is no inducement—not even the diamonds!"' (363). She falls into a languishing daze and declares that she had once 'forgotten' where she put them but now 'remember[s]' (368) that they should be in their original safeguarded location, and Dr Halifax agrees to check the safe once more. 'There lay an old-fashioned Morocco case' and when opened, reveals the 'Ponsonby jewels in all their magnificence' (368) as if they had never gone missing at all.

The intensified psychological burden on the woman who is made the recipient of gems is made evident in Violet's diagnosis insofar as the suddenness of the gem's return is paired with an immediate resolution of her health crisis. Halifax's official diagnosis is both medical and goes well beyond the medical. Halifax explains Lady Violet had experienced 'sudden and acute kleptomania' following 'the depression caused by her uncongenial engagement to Captain Ponsonby'. He puts it plainly: 'She had stolen the diamonds and then forgotten all about her theft' (369). As before, the diamonds have a restorative effect on her health: 'The finding of the diamonds was the turning-point in Lady Violet's illness. She slept for many hours with the sparkling gems round her neck, and when she awoke it was to consciousness and recovery' (370). The engagement to Captain Ponsonby is called off and his diamonds are returned—this time, however, their loss does *not* impact Violet's health. Instead—Halifax explains—her 'strange story' ends on a 'strange' note: 'Lady Violet has never, from the moment of her awakening to now, alluded to the Ponsonby diamonds. It is my belief that she has forgotten all about them, and, as far as I can tell, I do not think she will ever be visited by another attack of kleptomania' (370).

Meade's use of fiction to critique a kind of upper middle-class malaise would soften across her detective oeuvre. Published nearer the start of her detective-centred work, 'The Ponsonby Diamonds', includes a great many not-too subtle injections of symbolism and irony surrounding the gem-theft plot, including the name of the Violet's nurse, Beryl. The dramatic interplay between Violet's failing health and the fate of the still missing diamonds works to increase narrative tension and move the plot forward as Beryl is accused by Captain

Ponsonby of stealing the diamonds; this also perpetuates the common literary trope that servants are the most likely culprits of theft, given their access to the home. Following the disappearance of the gems, Violet's condition quickly deteriorates further; her confused lament in Beryl's presence positions the gems as having a kind of healing power associated with their social or historical density.

> "I thought, at least, I should have the diamonds," she said, with a queer sort of desolate echo in her voice, "and I love diamonds: they seem to comfort me in the strangest way. I feel akin to them. When they sparkle and leap and glitter, they appear to me to be alive; they tell me secrets of the strange things they have witnessed, in the course of their long existence. Think, if the Ponsonby diamonds could speak, what stories they could tell of the queer, queer things they have seen and heard" (355).

This longing to hear the diamonds' history from their own mouths (as it were) finds a parallel in her difficulty in speaking to Beryl and her insistence that the diamonds tell her their 'secrets of the strange things they have witnessed'. The assumption is that diamonds must have a provenance and a history worth hearing. Where, in Conan Doyle's stories, and most obviously in *The Sign of Four*, the function of the woman was to dissociate the gem from its past, cleansing or laundering them of their association with violence and exploitation, here the intensity of identification suggests a different set of narrative priorities: a concern primarily with the oppressed condition of the woman. Violet's yearning not just to recover but to *know* the diamonds is made to seem much more than a desire for physical possession; she needs them for the self-knowledge on which her *health* depends.

The corollary of this shift in focus toward an unspeakable condition of female oppression is that the story has little if any of Conan Doyle's investment in the romance of marriage. Where the loss of the Agra Treasure allows Watson and Mary to wed without significant financial inequality, effectively liberating them from a socio-economic impediment to their union, Violet's psychosomatic response to the loss of the diamonds—crucially not stolen (the false accusation against Beryl is essentially forgotten as soon as the diamonds are found)—reads as a kind of unconscious grappling with her unwillingness to marry Ponsonby. The premise of the narrative is, indeed, that the diamonds are no more nor less than a proxy for the woman's self-possession: Halifax's diagnosis of Violet's 'nervous disorder' as seemingly caused by her 'uncongenial' (369) engagement happens as quickly as the diamond necklace is restored. Following Violet's decision to call off the marriage, there is no mention of her family (or Ponsonby) criticizing her decision or attempting to persuade or force her to marry. Instead, the matter-of-fact resolution sees the diamonds simply 'returned

to Captain Ponsonby the following day' (370) and Violet free of the unwanted proposal and any threat of further psychosomatic distress. Halifax's closing reassurance: 'I do not think she will ever be visited by another attack of kleptomania' (370) is neither dismissive nor patronizing: he frames her acute stress as a rational response to an unhappy and unsatisfactory relationship. He is—essentially—on her side, allowing Violet's psychosomatic distress to be read as deserving care and treatment, not a dismissive judgement at a point in time whereby women were afforded more agency in choosing their spouse. By writing Violet's conclusion to *not* marry, Meade upends the trope established in *The Sign of Four* that sees marriage plots as a satisfactory conclusion to a gem-theft narrative. She would, however, come back to the marriage plot and its relation to gem-theft later in her work.

Four years after publishing *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* with Halifax, Meade partnered with Robert Eustace for another series of medical mysteries called *Stories of the Sanctuary Club*. Across six instalments published in *The Strand,* this series follows a doctor named Paul Cato and his work at the newly established Sanctuary Club, a 'great institution'[521] designed to—for an annual fee—house and attend to patients suffering from illnesses that would otherwise require them to be sent away from England for alternate climates or to health resorts too far for the weak to travel to. The third instalment of the series, 'The Diana Sapphire', focuses on a man named Sherwin who, while battling late-stage tuberculosis, is on the verge of a scientific breakthrough involving the production of artificial gems. Cato and his colleague Kort meet Sherwin in his 'lapidary's workshop',[522] where he reveals that he is in possession of 'a treasure of great value' (267), the Diana Sapphire, 'well known to all gem collectors… This glass globe with the wonderful gem inside is so old that even the historical records which go back seven centuries are at a loss to know its origin' (268)—much like the Moonstone's eight century-long history recounted in the novel's preface. Sherwin traces what little is known of the provenance of the Diana Sapphire for Cato and Kort, explaining that his 'great-great-grandfather [was] a British Consul at Cadiz, in Spain' and married a 'Moorish woman of great beauty' (269). He continues, 'The Moors [came] from Arabia', and his wife's uncle came into possession of the stone and passed it down to her on the 'sole condition that she and her descendants would always keep the sapphire unbroken' (269). Believing 'the sapphire inside that glass globe was made artificially', he remains convinced that the sapphire's 'crystalline structure' is the key to his

---

[521] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: Introduction', *The Strand Magazine*, vol. 18, 2-17, 3. [July 1899]
[522] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: The Diana Sapphire', *The Strand Magazine,* vol. 18, 264-277, 266. [September 1899] Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

life's work of creating lab-grown gems. However, the structure of the Diana Sapphire 'is in such an extremely unstable condition that it depends for its existence on the surrounding pressure and support of the glass in which it was embedded' (268-69). Breaking it from its crystalline shrine might either kill him or result in the disappearance of the inner. At the Sanctuary Club, the presence of the Diana Sapphire is made known to Banpfylde, a secretly penniless but well-known gem seller receiving treatment at the club. Bankrupt and desperate, Banpfylde attempts to steal the crystal and 'liberate' (276) the gem from its belly. Doing so results in his death as the crystal explodes, leaving the others wondering whether the sapphire, too, exploded amongst the debris of the glass encasing.[523] Cato finishes: 'the terrific explosion had done its deadly work—the Diana sapphire had avenged itself' (276). Chetwynd agrees: 'the Diana Sapphire has proved the truth of its own legend. It has vanished from our sight' (277).

The lore attached to the Diana Sapphire not only imbues the narrative with the threat of impending danger (here attributed to an ancient and exotic curse) but lines up a novel form of resolution. While not discounting the lore of the stone, Meade's conclusion rests on a strenuously innovative scientific explanation. Before the destruction of the sapphire, Sherwin reads a detailed account of the gem's lore; 'Masudy [al-Masudi], the well-known Arabic writer and traveller, first makes mention of [the history of the Diana Sapphire]' (268).

> I came not from mines, my master created me from earth. Feast your eyes upon my rays. Here I lie safe in my bed of crystal. Seek not to possess yourself of me, for though I am priceless beyond all gems, he who holds me shall never see me again. However poor you are, you will be poorer if you try to hold me. Coveted by a thousand kinds, no gold can buy me. Try to discover the secret of my birth, to look upon me unveiled, and I shall vanish from your sight (268).

Masudy's personification of the gem functions different from the Ponsonby Diamond's ascribed communicative potential to tell its secrets to Violet. Here, the gem's lore (written by an already orientalised figure) is threateningly cautionary, recalling Murthwaite's warnings of the power of the Moonstone.[524] Sherwin admits to Cato and Kort, 'To tell the truth, I am

---

[523] The crystal is revealed to be a Prince Rupert's Drop, as discovered by Chetwynd, Cato's friend and business partner. Chetwynd explains the science behind a Prince Rupert's Drop: 'when glass is dropped into water and suddenly cooled a crust is formed while the internal mass is still liquid. This tends to contract on cooling, but is prevented by the molecular forces which attach it to the crust. In this state, unless it is struck, or its tail broken off, it will last as such for centuries, and look like an ordinary bit of glass; but when struck and broken it flies into powder with an explosion' (273).
[524] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 72, 73, 287.

afraid of that legend. It is not a meaningless jargon of words' (268-69). His fear of the legend is surpassed by his ambition, however; 'I want to perfect my discovery, I want to handle riches, I want to be known to futurity as the man who rediscovered the crystallization of sesquioxide of aluminium, and I want to revenge myself on my enemy' (269).[525]

As in 'The Ponsonby Diamonds', the relationship between health (or at least physical safety) and secure possession of priceless gems suggests a deep interdependence, and a shared vulnerability. Violet required the restoration and return of the diamonds to heal her mysterious illness, the diamonds symbolizing her need for release from the 'uncongenial' relationship with her former fiancé. Sherwin's scientific (and deeply personal) breakthrough is tethered to his own willingness to jeopardize his safety. While no female-centred threat of violence or laundering occurs in this story, Sherwin's dying breath muttering the name 'Isobel' (276) links the (destruction) of the Diana Sapphire with what is later in the series revealed to be a love triangle in which Sherwin and Kort were rivals for her love. Though Isobel does not appear in 'The Diana Sapphire', her relationship with the two rivalrous men serves as another tie between gems and women and spurs the violence that ensues.

Cliffhanger endings to the series parts require the reader to return if they want answers to the narrative's carefully staggered questions: who Isobel is, how the love triangle begins and ends, where the gem has disappeared to. More than Meade's other series discussed in this chapter, *Stories of the Sanctuary Club* experiments with delayed disclosures that relate to tangential plot points, inviting readers to link stories across different instalments. At the end of 'The Diana Sapphire', Cato considers whether Banpfylde might have had an accomplice who stole the sapphire after his death and fears it might be Kort. It is only revealed later in *The Sanctuary Club* series that Kort is indeed traitorous,[526] and that the Diana Sapphire has never been found. Conan Doyle, of course, engaged with similar narrative strategies including sequential cliffhangers or resolutions occurring across

---

[525] In 'The Diana Sapphire', Sherwin insinuates to Cato that Kort knows more than he is letting on, especially about a woman named Isobel whom he claims is Kort's (secret) wife. Sherwin tells Cato to ask Kort about Isobel once he (Sherwin) passes from his illness (273). In the following instalment, 'East of North', it is revealed that Kort and Isobel are indeed married. It is not until the sixth and final instalment of the series, 'The Secret of the Prison House' that is it revealed that Sherwin was once Isobel's suitor, and Isobel left Sherwin for Kort. Isobel reveals that Sherwin discovered that Kort was a murderer and attempted to save her from him, making him Kort's target. Kort is later brought to trial for his crimes, and it is heavily implied that he receives the death penalty. Isobel is thus saved from her devastating marriage by the death of her traitorous husband.

[526] In 'The Secret of the Prison House', it is revealed that Kort has kept Isobel trapped and slowly poisoned her to ensure she would not speak out against him. In the end, Isobel reveals that her husband has killed (or caused the death of) several people, including Banpfylde in 'The Diana Sapphire'. See 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: The Secret of the Prison House', *Strand Magazine* vol. 18, 665-678, 675-678. [December 1899]

instalments; Meade's noticeable shift in *Stories of the Sanctuary Club* toward more elaborate integration with earlier narratives demonstrates an attempt to emulate his example. Moreover, she is also plainly keen to imitate his (and Collins's) appetite for resolving mysteries with medical, scientific, or otherwise technical explanations. Meade's close description of the physics of the Prince Rupert's Drop amounts to an ingenious variation on the now ubiquitous gem-theft plot. The effect is less to lampoon the conventional use of an ancient Eastern legend warning of the dangers of the gem, than a determined effort to renew its appeal.

Continuing to collaborate with Eustace, Meade's next series *The Florence Cusack Mysteries* was published in the *Harmsworth* in 1899 and 1901. Narrated by a (male) medical doctor named Lonsdale, the series follows him and his patient-turned-partner Miss Florence Cusack as they endeavour to solve criminal cases in both an official and an unofficial capacity. Stolen gems are a recurring way of instigating plot for Meade, and are particularly concentrated in the *Florence Cusack* series. Throughout the series, gems are stolen and either returned, lost, or sold in ways that offer crucial insights into the late-century politics of gem ownership amid rapidly changing gender relations. As in the Loveday Brooke stories, Cusack's detective work exposes her repeatedly to gender bias, as although she is 'highly respected by every detective in Scotland Yard',[527] her dedication to following a strict moral code of sorts garners a degree of patronizing consternation.

The gendering of the gem's vulnerability to theft and positioning the woman as gem, is at once regulated and complicated by Meade's handling of romance plotting. In the final instalment of the *Cusack Mysteries*, a young man named Tempest goes pearling off the coast of Queensland, finds a marvellous pink pearl, shows it to his crewmates and is almost immediately attacked by a shark. The explicit reference to pearling in a region notorious for blackbirded labour—discussed in the previous chapter—garners no traction here other than as it provides a backstory for possession of an illustrious gem and creates a catalyst for a marriage plot previously hindered by a lack of financial equality between Tempest and his would-be fiancé. Here we see Meade levelling the playing field between women and men, casting the hero as no less vulnerable than the heroine to physical harm, when in possession of the gem. After the shark attack Tempest is 'carried ashore with the great pink pearl safe in

---

[527] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'Mr. Bovey's Unexpected Will', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 259-268, 259. [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*]

[his] pocket'.[528] He understands the precarity of his 'prostrate condition'; his 'anxiety' at securing the pearl proves justified, when he believes 'his treasure' (398) to have been stolen from him in the middle of surgery necessitated by a shark attack, which left his surgeon dead. Tempest is too weak to fight and left 'raging' with 'impotent fury' (398) at his loss before it is revealed by way of a repeat administration of chloroform to recover his memory (400). Only then is he able to recall his surgeon explaining that Tempest himself would be the most secure vault for the jewel; the surgeon stitched it into Tempest's wound during the surgery to protect it from theft (402). Despite understanding that, back in England, he will only receive a twenty percent commission on selling the pearl, potentially worth thirty-thousand pounds,[529] Tempest estimates that the gain will be enough to enable him to marry his boss's daughter, Ella (admitting to Cusack that he has 'long loved devotedly' (398) but would be required to have made something of himself financially in order to earn her father's respect and her hand in marriage). During his operation after the attack, he dreams of Ella 'decked with pink pearls' (398). When the pearl is restored after Lonsdale removes it from Tempest's scar, the marriage plot is quickly enacted: 'the pink pearl was its own harbinger of peace, of success, of fortune' (402). In this story, the typical threat to female bodies is inverted, with a male body literally twice cut open to conceal and then retrieve a gem. The sheer outlandishness of Meade's reworking of the gem narrative does something to destabilize the gendering of a well-established generic convention before grounding the story back in convention with its resolving marriage plot.

Meade's collaboration with Eustace continued through the first decade of the twentieth century, resulting in the last of her series considered here, *The Sorceress of the Strand,* probably the best known of her detective fictions. The series was published in monthly instalments in *The Strand* between October 1902 and March 1903 only six months after the final instalment of Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in the same magazine (April 1902). Conan Doyle's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* then began serialization at the end of 1903, the two writers in effect passing the baton between them. With *The Hound of the Baskervilles* explicitly set *before* Holmes's assumed death at Reichenbach Falls and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* revealing his survival, it is not entirely unsurprising that *The Strand* would seek to (re)introduce a charismatic duo with Meade's series fitting the bill. Her characters Dixon Druce—working for 'Werner's Agency,

---

[528] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'The Great Pink Pearl', *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 5: 1900-1901, 395-401, 398. [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*] Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[529] Meade and Eustace, 'The Great Pink Pearl', 398.

the Solvency Inquiry Agency of all British trade'—[530] and a police surgeon named Vandeleur (131) are repeatedly pitted against the duplicitous and dangerous 'Sorceress of the Strand'—Madame Sara.

A beautician employed by the who's-who of London, Madame Sara engages in three separate schemes involving the attempted theft of gems. Exactly half the series' instalments are dedicated to this familiar plotline.[531] Described as 'look[ing] about five-and-twenty… by birth … a mixture of Indian and Italian' (120), Sara is attended to by a succession of what Miller refers to as 'subservient colonial men, reinforcing the stories' association of Western female independence and Western imperial hegemony'.[532] Meade's shift from one-off appearances of antagonists to a series dedicated to a singular female antagonist allows her to play with the dramatic potential of melding the New Woman and the threateningly exotic female villain. Miller explains, 'the back room of [Madame Sara's] shop confirms that she is poised, like the New Woman, to infiltrate not only science and commerce, but also the professions'.[533] I extend Miller's argument to suggest that, in making Madame Sara the object of a female detective's investigation, Meade gives a new slant to Conan Doyle's association of gem-theft with the exposure of British legal and domestic vulnerability. In 'The Blood Red Cross', 'The Bloodstone', and 'The Teeth of the Wolf', Meade introduces three gems: a 'large carbuncle of the deepest red cut and prepared [in] the shape of a cross' used to blackmail a young woman into forfeiting a pearl necklace worth 'a King's ransom';[534] a gem named the Bloodstone which is the 'most treasured possession of the Persian Court for untold centuries,'[535] never taken out of Persia; and the diamond Orion—'the most marvellous diamond that Africa has produced of late years'.[536] In each of these gem-theft stories, young

---

[530] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'Madame Sara', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 117-141, 118. [Part of the series *The Sorceress of the Strand*] Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[531] Madama Sara's characterization is inspired by the real-life scandal of London's Madame Rachel, a beautician and con artist tried and convicted of fraud in the late 1860s and early 70s. Madame Rachel was Jewish, and Meade's incorporation of Madame Sara's tantalizing exoticism exchanges the harsh antisemitic critique that Rachel faced during her trial for a kind of dangerous yet enthralling orientalism. See chapter two of Miller's *Framed* for more on Madame Rachel.
[532] Miller, *Framed*, 94.
[533] Miller, *Framed*, 99.
[534] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'The Blood-Red Cross', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 142-164, 163. [Part of the series *The Sorceress of the Strand*]
[535] L.T. Meade, and Robert Eustace, 'The Bloodstone', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 207-231, 216-17. [Part of the series *The Sorceress of the Strand*]
[536] L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace, 'The Teeth of the Wolf', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 231-249, 240. [Part of the series *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

women are drawn under Madame Sara's influential spell by her promises of beautification and exploited as gem-launderers.

In 'The Blood-Red Cross', Miss Ripley, a young and soon to be married woman is promised a family heirloom by her fiancé: a necklace with 'eighty pearls, smooth, symmetrical, pear-shaped, of a translucent white colour'.[537] The necklace is 'booty [from] the Battle of Agincourt' (142), its centuries-long ownership by the Rowland family has, and continues to be, explicitly contested by distant relatives of the Duke of Genoa. These descendants have unsuccessfully attempted to regain the necklace by means of extreme violence against the Rowland family across centuries. When they are sent off to the jewellers in advance of Miss Ripley's upcoming wedding, a new attempt is made. However, Madame Sara has decided to get to the pearls first by manipulating Miss Ripley into wearing the pearls before her wedding day. Madame Sara exploits an insecurity of Miss Ripley's, promising to remove a skin blemish that has left her embarrassed to wear anything across her chest. Agreeing to the procedure (unbeknownst to her fiancé), Miss Ripley places herself at the mercy of Madame Sara, who sees an opportunity for blackmail.

Having (somehow) determined that Miss Ripley's is concealing a dark family secret—that her father murdered her mother—Madame Sara brands her, using a chemical concoction of nitrate of silver with the words: 'I AM THE DAUGHTER OF PAOLO GIOLETTI, WHO WAS EXECUTED FOR THE MURDER OF MY MOTHER' (157). If exposed to electric light, the 'fiendish words' will appear on her 'white throat [and remain] indelible' (159). Madame Sara explains this to Miss Ripley when she wakes from the surgery, telling her that the effect will be neutralized if she wears a red carbuncle cross in such a way as to cast a light across her chest and prevent the chemical reaction. She will, however, only provide the cross if Miss Ripley hands the pearls on the night of a ball at which they will both be in attendance (158). Druce and Vandeleur become aware of the attempted blackmail and secretly administer an antidote to Miss Ripley's chest using 'cyanide of potassium' (159). Miss Ripley, crucially, still believes she is at risk of exposing the shameful declaration on her chest; Druce and Vandeleur essentially use her as bait to ensure that Madame Sara remains ignorant that she is under suspicion. The men only reveal that they have 'saved' (163) Miss Ripley with the antidote when—in a fit of desperate shame—she is about to reveal everything to her fiancé. By this time, Madame Sara has fled, presumably having grown suspicious that plans are being made against her.

---

[537] Meade and Eustace, 'The Blood-Red Cross', 142. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Once again, Meade does not dwell on the complexities of the original looting of the gems, generations beforehand. The fifteenth-century battle indeed seems an oddly remote historical reference point for a narrative much more obviously concerned with how a Victorian woman's marriage might be compromised by her father's murder of her mother. Miss Ripley's difficulties are resolved by her wearing the contested gems at the end of the story, happy ahead of her upcoming wedding and without a thought as to the generations of contestation over them. Ultimately, Meade portrays Miss Ripley as an entirely sympathetic character, given her exploitation by Madame Sara. Moreover, Miss Ripley's complete lack of involvement in acquiring the contested gems (obtained hundreds of years beforehand by her husband's distant relatives) means that she can, Meade implies, wear the gems without inheriting an imperial stain.

Like 'The Blood-Red Cross', 'The Bloodstone' and 'The Teeth of the Wolf' run the risk of losing the reader in the intricacies and remorseless pacing of their plotting. Incorporating blackmail, financial fraud, kidnapping, the threat of violence, double-crossed agents, threatened love-matches, explicitly othered antagonists, and even performing wolves, Meade's final two gem-narratives again depict the laundering gems through the exploitation of vulnerable young women. In 'The Bloodstone', a young woman named Violet is blackmailed by Madame Sara into stealing a priceless Persian gem brought to England by 'one of the Shah's favourite courtiers and most trusted emissaries' to be cut for resetting.[538] Falsified letters from Violet's brother Hubert convince Violet that he is in a desperate financial situation in Australia, requiring substantial and ongoing instalments of money. Violet is quickly bankrupted by the effort to help him and hides her situation from her husband out of shame. Madame Sara threatens to expose Violet if she does not obtain the Bloodstone and pass it on to her. Violet does so to protect her and her brother's reputation, and Madame Sara makes off with the stone. Violet disappears, presumably desperate to conceal her incolvement in such a crime, before Druce and Vandeleur discover the moral motivation behind for her actions. Here, the motive for the theft of the Bloodstone is neither cultural domination nor personal greed: the cultural significance of the gem is rendered largely irrelevant, affecting only the courtier tasked with its safekeeping who declares his life will be 'forfeit' (223) when the loss of the diamond is discovered in Persia. Despite Violet's innocence and the exploitation that she faces at the hands of Madame Sara, she—like the courtier—must flee for safety as the story's conclusion withholds official exoneration.

---

[538] Meade and Eustace, 'The Bloodstone', 216.

The last instalment of the series sees Madame Sara attempting to acquire one more gem: the Orion diamond. In 'The Teeth of a Wolf', a myriad of blackmailing attempts complicates a marriage plot and eventually leads to the demise of the 'Sorceress', who has until this point evaded capture by Druce and Vandeleur. Madame Sara's (apparent) friend and associate Mrs. Bensasan works as a wolf-tamer and has a daughter named Laura. Laura is in love with the son of a diamond merchant named Gerald Hilliers. Gerald's father, Hilliers Sr., has just purchased the Orion Diamond. Mrs. Bensasan is being blackmailed by Rigby—a man who wants to marry Laura—'A horrible, misshapen little man… half Jew, half Greek… His face is as repulsive as his body is misshapen'.[539] Rigby knows that Mrs. Bensasan has poisoned her late husband and uses this information to demand that she provide Laura as his wife. While Mrs. Bensasan does not want Laura to marry Rigby, she does not confess to her crime and instead works with Madame Sara to try to protect Laura by staging a kidnapping and secreting Laura in a dungeon. Madame Sara, however, also knows Mrs. Bensasan's secret and *also* wants the Orion Diamond. Madame Sara first tells Gerald that she will work to convince Mrs. Bensasan to allow their marriage if he convinces his father to sell (or perhaps even freely give) the Orion to her; Hilliers Sr. refuses. Madame Sara ultimately convinces Hilliers Sr. to give her the diamond in exchange for a 'secret by which he can in a measure recover his lost youth' (245) and in doing so she outs Mrs. Bensasan to Hilliers Sr., causing Mrs. Bensasan to double-cross Madame Sara. Mrs. Bensasan does not intervene when a wolf she is training mauls Sara, and in the mêlée, Madame Sara shoots Mrs. Bensasan through the lung. In her final moments, Mrs. Bensasan explains to Druce and Vandeleur that 'avarice got the better of [Sara]. For the sake of a stone, a bauble, she gave me up, and I could not brook that… Revenge became the strongest motive in my life' (249), calling to mind Jonathan Small's admission: 'I lived only for vengeance'[540] in *The Sign of Four*.

Her final act is to reveal the location of the dungeon where her daughter is being held captive, noting with little love that 'She is uninjured. She inherits my money. When I die Rigby will be powerless. You can give her to the other man' (248). Once released, Laura, '…flew to [Gerald]. He took her in his arms. He loved her and she loved him. There was no longer any bar to their happiness and future union' (249). This moment of reconciliation ends the series—with no gem in sight, as in *The Sign of Four*. The Orion is presumed lost, having been stashed away by Madame Sara before her death. Like Mary, 'reward[ed]'[541] in

---

[539] Meade and Eustace, 'The Teeth of the Wolf', 232. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[540] Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 113.
[541] Park, 147.

her marriage to Watson, Laura's finds happiness (but not fortune) in a love-match. Here, the primary target of Madame Sara's exploitation is not the young heroine but her mother who in turn uses her daughter as a pawn to save her own reputation, casually 'giv[ing] her' (248) away when impending death signals an end to her ambitions. Once again, Conan Doyle's plotting of intergenerational male culpability is rethought as a story of mother-daughter blocked inheritance.

The young women described in Meade's stories, unlike Pirkis's, are repeatedly saved only by way of (male) assistance from Druce and Vandeleur. In these stories, each woman is young and either betrothed or recently married, and at risk from the malign self-interest of the generation above. Violet, in 'The Bloodstone', with 'the freshness and charm of a true English girl',[542] is to be married to a man a 'great deal older' (209). In 'The Blood-Red Cross', Rowland refers to his fiancée as his 'Dear little girl'[543] and she is only described otherwise when she is in a fit of desperation: 'She was no child to be humoured; she was a woman, and despair was driving her wild' (162). Lastly, Laura in 'The Teeth of the Wolf' is a pawn in her mother's hands. These women are first infantilized by their parents and partners and subsequently manipulated as launderers of those malign mentors' ill-gotten goods. Meade's illustration of how young women are held back or deprived of independence often occurs alongside stories of gem-theft, and as such, there is a residual glamour of romance plotting overlaid on what are otherwise simple stories about the vulnerability of women to forms of domestic exploitation. In 'The Blood Red Cross', the exploitation comes in the form of an apparent shamefulness surrounding Miss Ripley's family history prior to her adoption (the murder of her mother by her Italian father), in 'The Bloodstone', Violet's blackmailing with several ties to Empire (her husband's work for the 'foreign office' (209), the 'rupee coupon bonds' (212) she uses to finance her brother's debts, and crucially, the gem itself—'the Shah's favourite talisman' (216)), and finally in 'The Teeth of the Wolf', the threat of physical (and an implied sexual) threat of violence by a 'misshapen' 'half Jew, half Greek' (232) dwarf in all occur with a British domestic sphere. Bad fathers, bad husbands, bad brothers are, in the end, more significant than any remote threats from abroad. Meade's gem narratives depict young women as vulnerable to threats within the domestic sphere *and* capable of overcoming such threats by trading the 'priceless' gem for what matters more to them: love, freedom, and security.

---

[542] Meade and Eustace, 'The Bloodstone', 208.
[543] Meade and Eustace, 'The Blood-Red Cross', 153.

IV. Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's Gem Narratives

Two pieces of fiction written by Beatrice Heron-Maxwell published in 1899 are of particular interest to this study. A pastiche of *The Moonstone*, 'His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond' treads a fine line between homage, inspiration, and full-fledged literary looting with Esther taking the place of Collins's Rachel. Heron-Maxwell's ending takes a strikingly firmer stance against imperial looting than any of the stories by Meade. The novel *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker* (1899), serialized in the *Harmsworth*, similiarly adheres to a familiar formula—its episodic adventures following Mollie Delamere, a young woman as she begins a career as a pearl broker in London. But in both instances, Heron-Maxwell gives a fresh twist to established detective tropes and challenges some of the assumptions of the genre—particularly around the typically requisite exposure or punishment of perpetrators.

Although the occupations a pearl broker and a (lady) detective are clearly different, their roles within the text are strikingly similar, and my reading of Delamere sees her functioning in essentially the same way as a female detective. The same gendered power imbalances and workplace hazards are in operation, and though Delamere is not actively investigating any ongoing criminal cases, she engages in undercover detective work to ensure her identity as a broker is not known to any would-be thieves. As a broker she has to keep pearls on her person and in her home. Here, the combined role of launderer and broker marks a clear shift in the New Woman detective story. No longer passive or coerced, as female launderers were in earlier texts, Delamere's role grants her the agency to move gems of her own accord, with her boss not only providing her with the pearls but explicitly bestowing her with the capacity to act independently. Not only does Delamere narratively redefine previous characterizations of women laundering gems, she also represents a young woman gaining financial independence by that means.

In 'His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond', Heron-Maxwell gives us a retired Colonel named Faling who, like Collins's Herncastle, boasts a 'long record of Indian service, and a singularly unfortunate experience of Orientals' and who now introduces a cursed diamond into the life of the story's romantic heroine.[544] While Herncastle clearly gifts the Moonstone to Rachel thinking that it will free him of its curse and pass it to her, Faling brings his gem with goodwill to a young woman named Esther, 'who in her fearless childhood had conquered his austerity' (552). At a gathering in a country house

---

[544] Beatrice Heron-Maxwell, 'His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 1, 1898-9 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 549-557, 552. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

where Faling, Esther, and a mysterious Rajah are all in attendance, Faling bestows the special 'keepsake from India' (551) on Esther. He reminisces at having calling Esther his 'little Sunbeam' in her youth and continues: 'I managed to find a ray of the sun straying about in India, and to imprison it in that box' (552).

Just as Rachel opens the Moonstone in front of Franklin (who goes on to become her future husband) unaware of the chaos that would ensue, Esther opens the box revealing the yellow diamond in front of her suitor, Sir Richard Blake: 'Nestling inside was a huge yellow stone, so brilliant in its coruscations that it seemed indeed like a chip from the sun itself, as large as a pigeon's egg' (552). Clearly emulating Collins's account of the Moonstone placed in the eye of a temple deity, Faling informs Ester that the yellow diamond—'[once] formed the apex of a crown adorning the brow of a god in one of the hill-temples. They were looted in the Mutiny, and this particular shrine completely demolished' (552). He makes light of the history attached to the yellow diamond and the warning he received when he pocketed it: 'The last man, the one who traced the stone to within a few inches of its whereabouts, disappeared mysteriously. I was told the priests got at him. They are terrible fanatics, these beggars, you know, full of superstition' (552). Faling's proclamation mimics Franklin's awareness of the dangers of the Moonstone and later Murthwaite's warning, in the clearest instance yet of inspiration just skirting plagiarism; Franklin understands that the Brahmins, 'certain chosen servants of an old Hindoo superstition [are known for] devoting themselves, through all difficulties and dangers, to watching the opportunity of recovering their sacred gem';[545] likewise, Murthwaite warns: 'Those men will wait their opportunity with the patience of cats, and will use it with the ferocity of tigers. How you have escaped them I can't imagine'.[546] Despite her hesitation that the gem may be a 'dangerous plaything', Esther accepts it: 'it is like a living thing. I love it already, I am not a bit afraid of it' (552). A well-read reader will see Rachel accepting the Moonstone and 'put[ting] the Indian diamond in the Indian cabinet, for the purpose of permitting two beautiful native productions to admire each other'.[547]

Heron-Maxwell's most significant divergence from Collins comes by way of the visiting Rajah's peculiar effect on Esther. Upon her first introduction to him 'the sensation strongest in Miss Fairfax's mind is that of fear—undefined, intangible, but yet so marked as to cause her a real physical shudder of horror… She felt nervous, as she often did in his presence' (550). She is told by the Rajah that she must not leave the following day, and she

---

[545] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 39.
[546] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 72.
[547] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 76.

must not tell anyone he compelled her to remain. 'Bent over her impulsively, and pressing both her wrists with his fingers', he poses a physical threat and soon obtains 'mastery' (550) over her. Esther is, at last, emboldened to defy him when he asks whether she is interested in India: 'A wave of sudden rebellion swept through her; she felt strong to defy the strange influence this man's lightest glance or speech seemed to exercise over her' (551-52). Her resistance is short-lived, however, as he soon approaches her again demanding that she give him the yellow diamond so that he might replace it with a replica. She says nothing of this encounter to her family or suitor: an 'intangible ban of silence' (554) consumed her and rendered her unable to explain what has happened to Faling when he asked to see the diamond again.

As Faling inspects the (false) diamond in the study, the Rajah enters and kills him with a poisoned dart (556) then disappears without a trace, leaving only a letter behind for Esther. The Rajah's letter finishes the story.

> 'My quest is accomplished… When great things are at stake, such trifles count for nothing. I care nought for the condemnation of men; but to you, because you are the one and only woman in the word who has had power to quicken my pulse and to stir my thoughts from the contemplation of the Eternal, I write these words of explanation. For the desecration and the sin it was essential that a life should be sacrificed. Had the task belonged to other hands than mine, yours might have been the life chosen; I am glad, therefore, that it was in my power to save you and I go back to my solitude with only one regret—that I shall never look upon your face again; and with only one consolation—that you are going to be happy for many years with the man whom you love. Do not grieve for the loss of one who richly deserved his fate, and who should have known better than to involve you in it. Farewell!" (557)

The Rajah's letter in effect gives voice to the cultural commitments of the silent Brahmins in *The Moonstone*. Where Collins's Brahmin's are last witnessed by the (concealed) Murthwaite in Somnath walking 'in three separate directions, [setting] forth as pilgrims to the shrines of India',[548] Heron-Maxwell provides the Rajah with not only the opportunity to explain himself, but the ability to humanize himself as a man with a mission to complete and yet a strong attraction to Esther. His admission of unwanted love, in breach of his mission to restore the gem to its own culture, is a one-sided fixation that leaves Esther aware that she has been at risk of both the loss of the diamond and danger to her person, at the hands of the Rajah or any other envoy who would come in his stead. The trope of English women facing the 'looming threat of sexual violence' at the hands of 'native' men had become much more

---

[548] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 465.

'readily apparent' in fiction following 1857, Cornelia Wachter explains.[549] With Heron-Maxwell's story, this threat is framed as more dangerous than the apparent curse of the Yellow Diamond.

Narrated in the third person, Esther's responses to the Rajah are presented as almost entirely physically and emotionally confounding to her. When he comes to swap the yellow diamond, 'her heart beat[s] fast and [she breathes] unevenly' (553) suggesting the *potential* for reciprocated affection. Her emotional response to his 'raising her fingers gently to his lips' (554) as he takes the box, however, establishes that it is fear, not attraction she feels. A 'trembling horror' creeps into her before he takes his leave. With Esther's fear of the Rajah established, his 'mastery' over her and her inability to voice her discomfort suggests a very real sexual threat, especially after his written declaration of love. Both the revelation that the Rajah acted to save Esther's life and his decision to return to 'solitude' frame his departure as the reverse of what might have been. Either she would have died at the hand of another, or—if the Rajah chose not to leave, or leave *her*—he could have acted on impulse, already described as physical when he admits to a 'quicken[ed]' pulse.

With the Rajah gone, presumably to return the diamond to its shrine (as the Moonstone is returned to Somnath), Esther is free to marry Richard without the moral burden on her of laundering an illicit gem. Following Collins in bringing her plot to a close with a successful marriage, Heron-Maxwell incorporates a more explicit critique of colonial violence. Despite Faling distancing himself from his theft, explaining that he simply traced the 'hiding place' of the diamond to a village and 'unearthed' it (552), Heron-Maxwell only *initially* allows him to frame the acquisition of the diamond as if it were the object of a non-violent treasure-hunt. Her ending treats his death unsympathetically. Unlike Herncastle, whose death happens off-stage, Faling's killing by the Rajah's poisoned dart is direct retribution for the crime of imperial theft. Moreover, the Rajah's explicit condemnation of Faling for 'involv[ing]' Esther in the 'desecration' and 'sin' of his theft calls specific attention to her role as an unwilling launderer of the object of an imperial crime.

The Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker is the more original work. It begins with a description of the task to be undertaken by Mollie Delamere, should she accept a position with Leighton's pearl brokers. Her appointment to work alongside 'Mr. Leighton, the prince

---

[549] Cornelia Wachter, '"Intimacies of complicity and critique": Race, Gender and Sexuality in Victoria Cross's Imperial Fiction', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 124-139, 129.

of pearl merchants'[550] comes with an attractive salary and commission for the pearls she brokers. The prerequisites for the job of 'middleman' 'between pearl merchants and their clients' (3-4) are simple: 'I want a lady, a young lady, who is good-looking, smart, and free of encumbrances, who has a nice manner, and a sweet voice, is accustomed to society and yet knows how to hold her own, and who, besides all these, has plenty of pluck' (1).

Delamere, much like Brooke, is reliant upon her employer, who provides her with a collection of pearls she is to transport and broker. Leighton is immediately impressed by this New Woman's capabilities, and ready to concede that her gender equips her with certain talents suited for her new position. He explains that he and other pearl buyers 'find that ladies have an instinct for appraising the value of jewels. We in the trade of course learn how to distinguish between good and bad, but ladies seem to become experts without any training at all. They can almost detect a flaw with their eyes shut' (3-4). There is, of course, a hint of satire in this praise, whether Leighton intends any deprecation: women, by implication, are naturally drawn to jewels by a love of adornment and wealth and may have a keener eye for a depreciating flaw. Delamere proves Leighton right, being fastidiously adept at appraising pearls and successful in brokering them. At first under explicit instructions as to the most suitable clients, but increasingly working independently, she begins to cultivate her own network of potential buyers and other interested parties. Like Brooke and Cusack, she has a knack—what Leighton refers to as a 'veritable intuition' (50)—that sets her apart from her male counterparts. Unfortunately, this ability also puts her at risk. Leighton perceives Delamere as 'too confident' and 'too reckless' at times, warning her that despite her talents, he fears that 'sooner or later' 'something bad will happen' (109). Delamere faces by far the most direct physical threat experienced by the three Lady Detectives studied here. She is explicitly and repeatedly warned by Leighton: 'there is a good deal of risk… a chance of danger which you must venture by yourself' (2-3). He also makes explicit that should her identity as a broker be discovered, she will be targeted: 'remember that you must always be looking out for an attack. If it once gets known—and London thieves learn these things in the most marvellous way—that a woman is in possession of jewellery to any extent, she is marked at once, and sooner or later they have a try for it' (5). He reiterates the warning: 'put yourself in a pearl-broker's place—imagine yourself carrying about a small fortune with you, and think how you would act in the event of anything untoward happening to you' (6). Leighton gives her ample encouragement to step away at any point, insisting that he would

---

[550] Beatrice Heron-Maxwell, *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker* (London: The New Century Press Ltd., 1899), 1. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

'never forgive' (24) himself if anything were to happen to her; Delamere nevertheless agrees and indeed persists even after multiple brushes with danger.

Gavin is not wrong that the Heron-Maxwell's story 'contains an insidious counter-narrative in which male violence against women trumps female professional success'.[551] This theory is ultimately reinforced by both Delamere's growing concerns over her personal safety, and her eventual decision to leave the career. The danger Delamere faces is framed as almost a necessary evil if she is to obtain financial security. She initially explains that her willingness to take on the job simply in terms of needing money: 'it is worth some risk to have an assured income… Money is so easy to lose, Mr. Leighton; so hard to gain' (5-6). The gravity of the danger she is exposed to does not become truly apparent until her first brush with death, when she thinks to herself: 'I might pay the penalty of my life for the saking [*sic*] of saving the pearls' (16). In her time as a pearl broker she is: chloroformed (17), drugged with a sweet by a group of men attempting to take her to 'Kabalpur' [*sic*] as their hostage (29), forced to jump out of a window to avoid attack (40), nearly sentenced to death by a secret society called the Association of Gentlemen Burglars (53-54), nearly attacked on a train by a thief who mistakes another woman for Delamere (attacking *her* instead) (105), nearly stabbed to death with a jewel-encrusted stiletto by a crazed client (141), and nearly attacked by a man attempting to rob the safe filled with pearls in her home (86). After each brush with danger, Delamere explains why she cannot always disclose the danger she has been in to Leighton or inform the police of the attack or communicate the identity of the criminals she has identified. After the first instance of someone attempting to rob her, she proclaims that she has 'plenty of courage still,' and that 'it would take more than one alarm' to cause her to 'give up' her newfound 'profession' now that she has 'seriously adopted it' (22). The same confidence Leighton initially praises her for soon starts to look like recklessness, as he feared, and not only does she encounter more instances of almost fatal attacks, but she begins to withhold all information of the threats against her. By depicting a series of increasingly precarious near-misses, Heron-Maxwell imparts a strain of conservatism to her novel, laying down a notional line between the exercise of newfound freedom and putting oneself in danger.

Like Meade, Heron-Maxwell incorporates elements of Eastern threat to her gem-theft plots. Abdullah—the Indian man who kidnaps Delamere at the command of Muhammad—is described as 'a man with a strange, wild face, and matted black hair [with] dark skin, and a

---

[551] Gavin, 233.

Hindoo cast of feature' (7-8). Muhammad 'def[ies] even [the] London police' (33) and goes on to tell Delamere why she has been chosen as their would-be hostage.

> 'some years ago… a young and beautiful English woman … was captured while insensible by some of my countrymen [in Kabulpur], and was carried to the Rajah's palace. She has remained there as his wife ever since… The Rajah is very much attached to her, and since she pines for her own country and her own people, to which he cannot permit her ever to return, he has thought that it might add to her happiness if she had a companion of her own race.' (35-37)

The kidnapping and implied sexual threat against the 'young and beautiful English woman' in Muhammad's story is a return to the trope of the victimization of the innocent woman made popular by the Mutiny Novel. That Delamere faces a similar threat while presumed safe in England, nearly half a century after the events of 1857, suggests a continuous literary interest in this type of gendered threat of violence and a sense of what has changed, politically, in the relationship between Britain and India. British invasion of the Indian continent has been replaced by Indian invasion of England, British exploitation of Indian women by a reverse threat that an Indian man might take a young British woman away from her (presumed) safe domestic sphere. Delamere's captors insist that if she were to escape and make her capture known, she would 'seriously [damage her] chances' in her new profession, leading her, when she meets with Leighton after a brief period of rest, to disclose only that her 'Oriental interview had been unsuccessful, and that the price offered for the jewels was inadequate' (41). Here, however, Delamere's reluctance to disclose her near-fatal experiences is more explicitly positioned as reckless, even if exhilarating.

Her vulnerability is consistent with a wider sense of the vulnerability of English homes to theft and violence of a kind strongly coded as sexual. Making herself security for the transport of pearls from her shop to clients, Delamere understands the danger of securing her pearls about her person, and explains she has modified her clothing to do so.

> I had contrived pockets in various unexpected places in my dress, those I was especially pleased with being some small oblong ones in the lower part of my sleeves, on the inner side of the wrists under the cuffs. It would be impossible for me to lose anything out of them, and quite impossible for anyone to cut out the pockets while I had my senses about me (9-10).

When the pearls are not on her person, she explains they are hidden away inside a trunk which is 'always covered with a rug; and screwed [right] through… to the floor' (10). The lock

to her safe is also kept on her person; she 'enclosed the key in a brooch, the back of which opened with a secret spring… It fastened with a safety pin, and a small chain attached to it' (10), which allows her to always wear it around her neck. Her diligence requires that she count them all each night to 'make sure of their safety' (14). There is one pearl—a brilliant pink pearl 'so perfect as to be almost priceless' that she takes additional care to protect, and would never leave behind in her safe, choosing instead to take it everywhere with her 'in a safe and secret pocket' of her dress (144-45). The connotations of threatened chastity are none too subtle.

One pink pearl acts as its 'own harbinger of peace' as Delamere's final act of brokerage uncovers a mystery of stolen jewellery, leading to multiple successful marriage plots. From the moment she first receives the special pink pearl, Delamere consciously sets it aside, 'reserving' it for what she refers to as a 'special mission' (22). Having turned down unsatisfactory offers from buyers and sellers, Delamere takes the pink pearl with her on what is meant to be a period of respite from her profession. Holidaying at the estate of a newly engaged couple, Delamere makes quick work of solving the theft of an engagement ring from her friend, identifying the culprit as part of the Association of Gentlemen Burglars. She does so while keeping her occupation secret from the Association as well as from her friends who do not know of her role as a pearl broker. Having recovered the engagement ring, and in that sense secured the first marriage plot, Delamere is pleasantly surprised to meet Mr. Anderson, the Australian millionaire with a taste for rare gems whom she had hoped to encounter one day in a professional capacity. Anderson's nationality once more reintroduces an imperial context to the narrative, tying Delamere's pearl-brokering operation back to the activity of commercial pearl extraction on the other side of the globe. Having made his acquaintance, Delamere almost immediately discovers that Anderson's close friend and personal secretary has been secretly defrauding him *and* stealing pearls from another guest staying at the estate—Adela Fenton, who hopes to marry Harry Duncan. A whirlwind investigation-turned-romance leads to two final marriage plots.

> Adela Fenton has her pearls back again, and is engaged, with her father's consent, to Harry Duncan, who is Mr. Anderson's new private secretary at a salary of 850 a year. And the pink pearl has again changed hands, for it belongs now to me, and was given to me, as one of my wedding presents on the happy day when I became Mrs. Anderson, and gave up the profession of pearl-broking once and for all (164).

At the point where we leave her, Heron-Maxwell's independent, self-assured, protagonist is securely (back) in the domestic sphere.

The marital conclusion to *The Adventure of the Lady Pearl Broker*, like the happy marriages that close off Pirkis and Meade's lady detective stories, fit a pattern established by their nearest inspiration, Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*—to a degree that seems surprising, given their investment until that point in rethinking the gendered basis of his gem plots. In her reading of Delamere's marriage, Gavin argues that 'for female characters in many 1890s texts, marriage is problematic, undesired, and a place of violence of its own, but [here], there is a culminating sense of it being a welcome stage of life and a state of happiness and safety'.[552] Unlike the potentially harmful or toxic marriage plots that are the staple fare of Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-Maxwell's own earlier detection narratives, this final marriage plot signals a 'movement into a state of comparative safety',[553] as Gavin notes, which I argue might be taken a step further. This culmination in a marriage plot may surpass that of physical or even financial security and can instead depicts a successful *completion* of Delamere's successful work in which she provided *herself* with financial security and developed means to ensure physical safety. However, a more cynical reading of Delamere's marriage would be warranted—her role as broker taken, finally, to heart as she brokers herself into a profitable marriage.

V. From Launderer to Broker: In Conclusion

The morally bland or more fully compromised marriages through which Conan Doyle brought resolution to his gem plots are either entirely absent from the female detective stories examined here or rectified by the explicit assertion of happiness in marriage, prompting the question of whether the genre was consciously altered by these New Woman writers in order to broker a new relation to domesticity. Whether thoroughly, or—as is sometimes the case—superficially, these authors treat the theft of gems as a vehicle for rethinking the politics of gem-theft, backgrounding the imperial violence that had preoccupied the previous generation of writers and foregrounding the politics of gender.

Whether we read these stories' relation to earlier narratives of imperial gem-theft as homage, mere repetition and variation, or literary looting depends upon how we view the legitimacy of that reorientation toward gender, in a context where gem theft had emerged as a thoroughly clichéd popular plot device for middle and lowbrow fiction. The transformation of the romance of the stone by making it matter for criminal detection was clearly grasped by Conan Doyle, and grasped again with different priorities by Pirkis, Meade, and Heron-

---

[552] Gavin, 248.
[553] Gavin, 249.

Maxwell. Where some of the stories produced by each of these writers as they worked, at speed, to satisfy a periodical market for popular fiction do little more than reproduce now familiar conventions of gem-theft plotting with only the most gestural acknowledgement of the cultural and political seriousness that characterized earlier efforts by Collins, Payn, and Stevenson; others, however, are distinctively innovative. Where a cursory reading of Loveday Brooke, for example, might regard her as a straight copy of Sherlock with little payoff in either plot innovation or character development, I have shown that Pirkis's repeated depictions of young women using gems as a means to buy themselves the ability to marry freely expands upon a trope that often saw women at the mercy of men who initiate marriage plots that serve their interests. Meade's Florence Cusack, similarly, can be read as another female-Sherlock, but her nervous sensibilities are deeply gendered, the stolen gem coming to stand for a highly valued, clearly imperilled self-possession. Meade limits the potential radicalism of female detective fiction most starkly in *The Sorceress of the Strand* where the New Woman and the foreign villain Madame Sara start to look oddly alike, troubling the safety and happiness of other young women. Heron-Maxwell's pearl broker is more provocatively conservative, ending with an abrupt marriage in which Delamere voluntarily forfeits her vocation. Upon first reading this may seem to confirm the woman/gem association and close down any political disturbance it implies, but the characterization of the female pearl broker leaves another interpretation open. Refusing to accept that women can be only passive launderers, conniving thieves, or doomed brides unable to prevent their own exploitation, Heron Maxwell's Mollie Delamere demonstrates the capacity of an intelligent woman to assert her own agency through the romance of the gem. Actively brokering the gems themselves, she brokers, too, her own symbolic relationship with it, on something more like her own terms.

Conclusion: 'Plunder is chaos; prize is organized'[554]

It has been the argument of this dissertation that Victorian popular fiction exhibits a deeply self-reflexive attachment to stories of exotic gems and gem-theft. The texts I engage with in this study depict gems taken from their cultures of origin to Britain (or taken with that intention). In the case of Robert Louis Stevenson's later 'South Seas' stories, the starting point in the seeking out of provenance narratives is earlier, going to the source in the extraction of the gem through forced labour. The majority of the narratives discussed in this study are far less jingoistic than might be expected. They take a critical distance on imperial fantasies of military, economic, and cultural dominance. Their depictions of gem-theft allow readers to identify, as John Plotz makes clear, 'the inherent instability… of the opposition between fungible and relic object'.[555] As we have repeatedly seen, gems of cultural importance in their country of origin exist, once alienated from it, in a precarious and intermediate space that where their historical and cultural density—to borrow Annette Weiner's term—come into conflict with their potential for market value. 'Imperialism was always more than guns and goods', James Hevia reminds us' 'it was also a cultural process involving resistance to and accommodation of forces or entities attempting to achieve hegemonic control over specific geographic spaces'.[556] Looted gems become representative of a larger political and discursive phenomenon that saw violence and the expropriation of cultural artefacts as a means to establish greater control over colonized spaces and colonial peoples. It is a key insight of these fictions that responsibility for the act of cultural violation does not stop with the individual thief, but contaminates everyone who comes in contact with the gem thereafter, until or unless restitution is made.

Historically, demands for the repatriation of plundered objects have rarely been met; most often these artefacts have been kept away from their cultural homeland, confined to museums established by the same colonial powers that first looted them. However, within the last few years (2023-2026) headline reports of repatriated objects have become staple fare, attracting strong media interest. *The Guardian* reported on Sotheby's cancellation of a planned 2025 sale of a collection of gems believed to be Buddhist relics following a public outcry on the grounds that a sale would violate cultural heritage laws. They have since repatriated the gems to the Indian government as part of a sale involving a 'private-public

---

554 Tania James, *Loot* (London, Vintage: Penguin Random House Group, 2025) [Originally published 2023], 120.
555 Plotz, *Portable Property*, 15.
556 Hevia, *English Lessons*, 3.

partnership'.[557] In 2023 the Scottish National Museum repatriated a totem pole to Canada;[558] in 2023, the Manchester Museum repatriated nearly two hundred cultural artefacts to indigenous Australians;[559] and the list goes on, despite the legal constraints sometimes prohibiting repatriation from national museums.[560] Despite these recent repatriations, public opinion on the issue remains split.

Where museums, auction houses, and private collections often invoke their duty of preservation, stewardship, and tradition as the basis for refusal to return objects, contemporary literature continues to grapple with the cultural aftermath of imperial expropriation of gems, engaging—like their Victorian predecessors—with questions of ethical and unethical possession. Among the most interesting examples of this ongoing reckoning is Tania James's 2023 novel *Loot*. A modern retelling of a historical event that has emerged as something of a touchstone for this thesis: the 1799 Siege of Seringapatam—synonymous with the looting of gems and other items of high cultural value by the British in India. The thematic focus is apparent from the novel's title. Set against the backdrop of a pre-siege Seringapatam, James's plot—much like Collins's *The Moonstone*—reflects painstaking historical research. The novel follows a young Muslim toymaker named Abbas as he works under a French clockmaker to design Tipu's Tiger, the life-sized mechanical artefact depicting a tiger mauling a European solider. James fictionalizes the story behind the creation of this automaton, formerly displayed in the East India House after the British overthrew Seringapatam and today displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

---

[557] David Batty, '"A joyous day": India celebrates return of ancient gems linked to the Buddha', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2025.
[558] Mark Brown, 'Manchester Museum hands back 174 objects to Indigenous Australian islanders', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2023.
[559] Mark Brown, 'London museums lag behind regional peers in returning disputed objects', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2023.
[560] Brown notes, 'The British Museum Act 1963 specifically forbids the museum from disposing of its holdings. The National Heritage Act of 1983 prevents trustees of institutions, including the V&A, Science Museum and others, from deaccessioning objects unless they are duplicates or beyond repair. Regional museums, whether they are run by local authorities, universities or are regimental museums or private, don't have the same issue. See 'London museums lag behind regional peers in returning disputed objects', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2023.



Figure 4. 'Tippoo's Tiger', painted wooden semi-automaton consisting of a tiger mauling a prostrate figure, ca. 1790, Mysore. With permission from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Although the primary looted object within James's novel is not a gem, gems take on special valence in her rendering of the horrors of the Siege of Seringapatam. Amid the chaos of the British attack against Mysore, they are 'tuck[ed] into pockets, sleeves, armpits' of soldiers despite orders to 'prevent [them] from escaping with the spoils' (119)—orders General Harris (a 'walking haemorrhoid') endeavours to enforce (101). James's description of the siege intentionally defies temporal logic: it seems to happen both instantaneously and with unendurable slowness. Within seven minutes of 'plant[ing] a flag in the southern rampart' the fort is taken, 'and so [the British] believe, is everything in it' (115). Where jewels initially taken by looting soldiers appear unattached to any specific person or place, one key scene attaches them to vulnerable women. These women are not launderers—tasked with washing away an illicit provenance; rather they represent a shocking extension of the 'native' bounty to be claimed by the British.

> Of the women, some scream and some don't. Some proffer jewels in exchange for immunity. One for whom it's too late to proffer anything, staggers around a corner, clutching the torn drawstring of her skirt. Know that she will survive the night and many more to come. What will sustain her is the story that will form in her mind, in which she is not the spoils of war but a fallen soldier. (114-115)

James's interruption of her description to reassure her reader that this unnamed woman survives the assault and the siege is not a narratological device she repeats often or depends upon to establish an unwarranted optimism in noting the survivors of the siege.

Where James incorporates an especially Victorian trope of aligning gem-theft with gendered violence, she does not allow gems to function here as a prevention of or resolution to the violence at hand. Unlike the young women described in Chapter 4, depicted 'using' jewellery to protect themselves, James's woman has no gem to offer in exchange for her body

or virtue. A gem cannot *stand in* for threatened chastity here, as it did in *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker*. Instead, James requires that her reader confront a violence that is not so explicitly reckoned with in Victorian popular fiction. By pairing scenes of gem-theft, destruction, and rape with an explicit interjection of sustained resilience, James plays on a well-worn trope of the Victorian Mutiny Novel that would see *English* women threatened with sexual violence at the hands of barbaric mutineers. James inverts this trope to illustrate the horrors of sexual violence committed against colonized women and does so in a way that grants this character a degree of autonomy and resistance. She is not a victim; she is not a trophy taken in war or collateral damage in the face of imperial expansion. She—like the other men and women around her—has been propelled into defensive action by no choice of her own.

Elsewhere in the novel, gems are given less explicit attention, but each mention of a gem comes to take on a negative connotation. Abbas digs 'dirt out of the jewel holes with a pointy stick' (74) as he learns how to repair the intricate mechanisms within clocks. Gems are presented as dirty and 'fuss[y]'—the real beauty coming from the mechanics of the timepiece. Rubies affixed to the turbans of Tipu's sons are described as 'swollen', after the return of the men to Mysore from England where they were held as political hostages for two years. The swelling calls attention to the unhealthy, perhaps infectious sense of the sons' hardships once they re-enter their homeland as well as Tipu's fear that they are forever changed by their time spent away from India. Even and especially here, James does not ascribe any particular power or prestige to gems; there are no histories attached to specific gems nor any suggestion that they are valued for anything more than their financial worth when the soldiers target them for pillaging.

Where Victorian popular fiction repeatedly incorporated gems into stories in ways that ascribe mystique and identify concentrated forms of cultural value in the stones, the primary form of loot in *Loot* is the hand-carved wooden automaton designed and created to signify political resistance. Within the fictionalized history of the novel, Tipu's commissioning of the automaton corresponds to the return of his two sons from their time spent under the care of General Cornwallis, in accordance with the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam. James represents the catalyst for the creation of this overtly political piece of art as the desperation of a father attempting to apologize to his sons, who he fears have felt abandoned by him, and reposition them (and the Sultanate) in power over the British. Depicting a tiger looming over a supine British soldier and biting his neck (the novel is clear that this is a British soldier, though the Victoria and Albert Museum curators are less sure), the object is neither ancient like the Moonstone or the Shay-le, nor imbued with specific religious significance. But—like many of the gems discussed in this study—it is robbed of its

significance as soon as it passes into British hands, turned from a proud display of Indian resistance to a symbol of British power. James describes the processing of loot by the Company's Prize Committee: 'On the parade grounds in front of Tipu's personal palace, General Harris sets up a prize committee. Plunder is chaos; prize is organized' (120). James's treatment of the looting of Tipu's Tiger demonstrates how an artistic figure depicting British defeat can become a symbol of conquest through a two-stage process: first the looting itself, then the legal conversion of plunder into prize.

The Victorian literary tradition of depicting forms of ethical unease in relation to the possession of illicit cultural artefacts is entirely done away with in *Loot*. It its stead, James depicts only hubris. When the Prize Committee looks to reward a Colonel Horace Selwyn for his 'loyal service in the Anglo-Mysore Wars', his request for 'the Musical Tiger' (over the suggested gift of 'either a filigreed casket, studded with semiprecious gems, or two palanquin pole ends, gilt silver, cast and chased into the shape of tiger heads' (121)), the narrative underscores the material self-interest attached to the handling of loot. Selwyn's lack of interest in the objects covered with gems is in line with other representations of gems within the novel whereby they do not enjoy any special status but simply underline the despoilation of the conquered. Selwyn takes the tiger in preference to the gems not through any appreciation of its craftsmanship or even of its potential resale value, but because he thinks the tiger will amuse his wife: 'The longer Selwyn looks at the Musical Tiger, the giddier he feels. His wife has a penchant for crusader tales, Moors and knights, blood and tragedy. For once, he feels one step ahead of her' (122). He turns the tiger—a once powerful political statement about colonial resistance and a deeply personal appeal to his sons to return to a state of confident nationalism—into a sideshow act as the tiger's tail is turned to produce its famous growl, a toy to delight Britain and Europe.

Unlike so many of the Victorian fictions this study has examined that end with a looted object thoroughly cleansed of signs of its cultural origins or disposed of, *Loot* does not reimagine a future for Tipu's Tiger in which it is repatriated to India. When Colonel Selywn's widowed wife is approached by Abbas and Jehanne, the daughter of the French clockmaker, to negotiate a potential repatriation of Tipu's Tiger, she responds, 'The automaton is one thing to you, and another thing to me' (250), and ultimately refuses further discussion, drawing the negotiation to a close with a final pronouncement: 'What matters is the question of who will care for the object, who will protect it from the war and tear of time? A Frenchwoman of little means, or me? I have taken the utmost care to ensure the Musical Tiger's long-term preservation' (251). James (through Lady Selwyn) articulates a

contemporary justification for the refusal to repatriate objects.[561] Withholding the satisfying endings that would entail reparation to the dispossessed or meaningful consequences for the perpetrators of imperial violence, and investing a modern (eighteenth century) technological instrument with a direct critique of colonialism, James offers a distinctly post-colonial re-iteration of the Victorian gem-theft narrative that meets the mood of contemporary Britain.

The Guardian reviewer regarded *Loot* as a 'vivid and witty reimagining of an episode of history that continues to shape the present, and the ways we think about art, identity and ownership'.[562] *Columbia Magazine*, similarly, read *Loot* as a contribution to a broader cultural conversation concerning the consequences of imperialism, finding the novel 'infused with a twenty-first-century acuity, particularly in relation to such themes as the evils of colonialism, the dilemma of whether to return plundered cultural treasures, the irrationality of class systems and racial and religious animus'.[563] *The Times*, by contrast acknowledged that 'destruction and pillage prevail' in the novel, ending on a rhetorical note of approval: 'Abbas's hands are a treasure that cannot be taken'.[564] Where these reviews call attention to the obvious historical allusions and the novel's willingness to challenge notions of imperial violence and expropriation, I am more interested in how James's depiction of the aftermath of looting has emerged from a Victorian literary tradition that anticipated the still ongoing conversation about the ethics of illicit (dis)possession.

Reading earlier forms of popular fiction that described gem-theft across colonized spaces and spheres of imperial interest including India, China, and the Pacific, this thesis has considered the ways in which British fiction engaged in cultural self-reflection on the country's current ways of dealing with illicitly obtained gems. From a political-historical standpoint, the absorption of the East India Company's armies into the British Armed Forces in 1857 (and later the dissolution of the Company in 1874) required a reformulation of the handling of loot as well as a clear redefining of military roles that governed imperial expansion. As the interests of the Company were absorbed into the larger Crown-ruled military that saw colonialism not just as a commercial enterprise, but as an ideological imperative, loot became more than the trophies of conquest. As the British Empire expanded throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, loot became symbolic of imperial

---

[561] Ironically, Lady Selwyn then almost immediately causes a fire by falling asleep while smoking but saves the automaton with her last moments of strength by dragging it out of harm's way before she collapses and dies of smoke inhalation (260).
[562] Stephanie Merritt, '*Loot* by Tania James review - imperialism through the eye of a tiger', *The Guardian*, 21 Jan. 2024.
[563] Lorraine Glennon, 'Review: Loot', *Columbia Magazine*, Fall 2023.
[564] Norma Clarke, 'Spoils of War: How Tipu Sultan of Mysore became a British folk hero', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 Jan. 2024. [Review of James's *Loot*]

prowess and an insatiable appetite for continued domination; it also became indicative of the more casual abuse of power and opportunity. The handling of loot in Victorian fiction marks a turning point in the cultural conversation regarding the growth of an empire and the practices of cultural expropriation that accompanied it.

This thesis has illustrated how Victorian popular fiction came to articulate and react to imperial gem-theft at a point in time when a cultural conversation about the ethics of possession was only just beginning. At a time when there was, as yet, no formalized or articulated legal or social process defining repatriation—and ad hoc reparations most often involved financial compensation rather than any acknowledgement of any cultural destruction—Victorian fiction documented, participated in, and sometimes anticipated the cultural conversations we are still having about the 'handling' of loot. Most often ending with a standard literary resolution whereby the marriage plot stands in for any moral reparation for wrongs done to another culture, while the gem itself is dealt with off-stage (the Moonstone taken back, the Raja's Diamond thrown into the Seine), these fictions create a kind of fantasy that suggests that ridding oneself of a imperial loot absolves the would-be owner from any damning complicity and protects them from any ongoing responsibility. And yet the threat from the dispossessed culture is clear, dramatized by the actions of the Brahmins in *The Moonstone*, the Mandarins in *By Proxy*, the murderous Rajah in 'His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond' to name just a few.

These fictions exemplify the often-contradictory nature of the looted gem in the Victorian period, whereby it could be both revered for its symbolic status as an imperial trophy and feared as a token of coming retribution. The cause of great moral disquiet, the gem is typically both the motivating object of the plot and the thing that requires, finally, removal from the storyline. This removal has been shown to sometimes occur overtly, as with the Moonstone restoration to its idol after it is taken (back) from England. More often, and increasingly, across the historical span covered here, restoration occurs less straightforwardly; in *By Proxy*, Pennicuick is caught but the return of the Shay-le to its temple is marred by its theft—its lustre now 'subdued'; in Stevenson's fiction, treasure is spent; in *The Sign of Four*, Mary Morstan's 'loss' of the treasure comes as a relief to all. Parsing the moral responses provoked by gem-theft in these fictions has required identifying specific ethical dilemmas and endeavouring to understand the myriad ways in which cultural dispossession prompted critical reflection, much earlier than is commonly recognized, about the case for reparation and repatriation.

Bibliography

[Anon.] [Obituary for] 'James Payn', *The Spectator*, 2 April 1898, 474.

[Anon.] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Examiner*, 4 May 1878, 562-63.

[Anon.] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Saturday Review*, 17 August 1878, 219-20.

[Anon.] [Review for] 'By Proxy', *The Spectator*, 15 June 1878, 764-65.

[Anon.] [Review for] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Saturday Review*, 22 September 1894, 330.

[Anon.] [Review for] 'The Ebb-Tide', *The Spectator*, 6 October 1894, 443.

[Anon.] 'About the Collection', Royal Collection Trust, https://www.rct.uk/collection/about-the-collection, accessed 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Benares', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by T.S. Traill, 8th edn, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853-60), 644. [Vol. 4 was published in 1854]

[Anon.] 'Crown of the Emperor Bahadur Shah II: Second Quarter 19th Century', Royal Collection Trust, https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/67236/crown-of-the-emperor-bahadur-shah-ii, accessed 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Ghizni', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by T.S. Traill, 8th edn, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853-60), 603. [Vol. 10 was published in 1856]

[Anon.] 'Grand Vestibule: The British Monarchy and the World', Royal Collection Trust, https://www.rct.uk/collection/stories/grand-vestibule-the-british-monarchy-and-the-world/history-of-the-room, accessed 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague II); July 29, 1899', https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague02.asp, accessed on 14 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907', https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp, accessed on 14 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Mr. Payn's New Novel', *The Spectator*, 13 November 1880, 1449-50.

[Anon.] 'Mr. Stevenson's Ballads', *Daily News* [London], 27 December 1890, 5.

[Anon.] 'Pacific Islanders Protection Acts 1875', https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/38-39/51/enacted, accessed 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Queensland: A Bill to Regulate and Control the Introduction and Treatment of Polynesian Laborers', Queensland State Archives, https://www.flickr.com/photos/queenslandstatearchives/28343698161, accessed 16 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'Sikh Wars', *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sikh-Wars, accessed on 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'The Samoan Reporter', National Library of New Zealand, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/samoan-reporter, accessed 8 March 2024.

[Anon.] 'The Story of the Tower of London', Historic Royal Palaces, https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/the-story-of-the-tower-of-london/, accessed 14 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'The Thousand and One Nights', *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Thousand-and-One-Nights, accessed 15 April 2026.

[Anon.] 'What is the difference between natural and cultured pearls', Gemological Institute of America, https://www.gia.edu/gia-faq-about-gemstones-difference-natural-cultured-pearl, accessed 16 April 2026.

Ablow, Rachel, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

Anooshahr, Ali, 'The Elephant and the Sovereign: India circa 1000 CE', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28 (2018), 615-44.

Anooshahr, Ali, 'The Ghaznavid Empire of India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 58 (2021), 441-76.

Anooshahr, Ali, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Ansari, Sarah, 'The Sind Blue Books of 1843 and 1844: The Political "Laundering" of Historical Evidence', *The English Historical Review*, 120 (2005), 35-65.

Appadurai, Arjun, 'The Thing Itself', *Public Culture*, 18 (2006), 15-22.

Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Arnold, Jean, *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

Attard, Bernard, 'Informal Empire: The Origin and Significance of a Key Term', *Modern Intellectual History*, 20 (2023), 1219-1250.

Baker, William, *Wilkie Collins's Library: A Reconstruction* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).

Bal, Mieke, 'The Discourse of the Museum', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Bruce W. Ferguson, Reese Greenberg, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 145-157.

Balfour, Ian, *Famous Diamonds* (London: Collins, 1987).

Barme, Geremie R., 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness, a Life in Ruins', *East Asian History*, 11 (1996), 111-58.

Barringer, Tim, and Tom Flynn, 'Introduction', to *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum,* edited by Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-8.

Batty, David, '"A joyous day": India celebrates return of ancient gems linked to the Buddha', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2025.

Beach, John Warren, 'The Sources of Stevenson's Bottle Imp', *Modern Language Notes*, 25 (1910), 12-18.

Bell, Lizz, 'Museums, Ethics and Human Remains in England: Recent Developments and Implications for the Future', in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 29-34.

Bender, Jill C., *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina, 2016).

Bennet, J.A., 'Immigration, "Blackbirding", Labour Recruiting? The Hawaiian Experience 1877-1887' *The Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 3-27.

Bloch, Ernst, 'A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel', translated by Roswitha Mueller and Stephen Thaman, *Discourse*, vol. 2 (1980), 32-52.

Blumberg, Ilana, 'Collins's Moonstone: The Victorian Novel as Sacrifice, Theft, Gift, and Debt', *Studies in the Novel*, 37 (2005), 162-86.

Boehmer, Elleke, *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Briefel, Aviva, 'Tautological Crimes: Why Women Can't Steal Jewels', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 37 (2003), 135-157.

Brown, Bill, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), 1-22.

Brown, Judith, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Brown, Mark, 'London museums lag behind regional peers in returning disputed objects', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2023.

Brown, Mark, 'Manchester Museum hands back 174 objects to Indigenous Australian islanders', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2023.

Brown, Michael, 'Cold Steel, Weak Flesh: Mechanism, Masculinity and the Anxieties of Late Victorian Empire', *Cultural and Social History*, 14 (2017), 155-181.

Buckton, Oliver S., *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson: Travel, Narrative, and the Colonial Body* (Athens: Ohio, 2007).

Bulfin, Ailise, 'Guy Boothby and the "Yellow Peril": Representations of Chinese Immigrants in British Imperial Spaces in the Late-Nineteenth Century', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies,* 20.1 (2015), 24-40.

Burns Coleman, Elizabeth, 'Repatriation and the Concept of Inalienable Possession', in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 82-95.

Chakravarty, Gautam, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Chang, Elizabeth Hope, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2010).

Clarke, Meaghan, 'The Art Press at the Fin de Siècle: Women, Collecting, and Connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, 35 (2015), 15-30.

Clarke, Norma, 'Spoils of War: How Tipu Sultan of Mysore became a British folk hero', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 January 2024. [Review of James's *Loot*]

Cohen, Monica F., *Pirating Fictions: Ownership and Creativity in Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture* (Charlottsville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

Colley, Ann C., *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Colonial Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

Collins, Wilkie, 'A Sermon for Sepoys', *Household Words*, 17 (1858), 244-247.

Collins, Wilkie, *The Moonstone*, ed. with intro. and notes by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Combs, Mary Beth, 'Cui Bono? The 1870 British Married Women's Property Act, Bargaining Power, and the Distribution of Resources within Marriage', *Feminist Economics*, 12 (2006), 51-83.

Combs, Mary Beth, 'Wives and household wealth: the impact of the 1870 British Married Women's Property Act on wealth-holding and share of household resources', *Continuity and Change*, 19 (2004), 141-163.

Conan Doyle, Arthur, 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet', in *The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb and Other Cases* (London: Penguin English Library, 2014), 23-51.

Conan Doyle, Arthur, 'The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle', in *Sherlock Holmes Selected Stories*, ed. with notes by Barry McCrea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 184-202.

Conan Doyle, Arthur, 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons', in *Sherlock Holmes Selected Stories*, ed. with notes by Barry McCrea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286-304.

Conan Doyle, Arthur, 'The Mazarin Stone', in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. with notes by W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-22.

Conan Doyle, Arthur, *The Sign of Four*, intro. by Peter Ackroyd, notes by Ed Glinert (London: Penguin Classics, 2001).

Cong, Wanshu, and Frederic Megret, '"International Shanghai" (1863-1931): Imperialism and Private Authority in the Global City', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 34 (2021), 915-933.

Cooper, G. S. Randolf, 'Culture, Combat, and Colonialism in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century India', *The International History Reviews*, 27 (2005), 534-49.

Corbett, Mary Jean, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

Corris, Peter, '"Blackbirding" in New Guinea Waters, 1883-84: An Episode in the Queensland Labour Trade', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 3 (1968), 85-105.

Dalrymple, William, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (New York City, Vintage Books, 2008).

Dalrymple, William and Anita Anand, *Koh-i-Noor: The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

Daly, Nicholas, 'Colonialism and Popular Literature at the Fin de Siècle', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939,* ed. by Richard Begam and Michael Moses (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 19-40.

Daly, Nicholas, 'Melodrama', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46 (2018), 766-769.

Daly, Nicholas, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Daly, Nicholas, 'Popular Fiction and Culture', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 305-324.

Daly, Suzanne, *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

Dasgupta, Ushashi, *Charles Dickens and the Properties of Fiction: The Lodger World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020).

Davidoff, Leonore, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011).

Davies, Stephen, 'Terminal Dilemma: Hong Kong's Waterfront, 1841-1891', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies,* 20.1 (2015), 5-23.

Davis, Richard H., *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Dawson, Janis, 'Introduction', to *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories* (Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview Editions, 2016), 13-40.

Dawson, Kevin, 'Enslaved Swimmers and Divers in the Atlantic World', *The Journal of American History*, 92 (2006), 1327-1355.

Day, A. Grove, 'Introduction: Robert Louis Stevenson and Hawaii', in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels in Hawaii,* also known as *The Eight Islands*, ed. with intro. by A. Grove Day (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973), xi-xlii.

De Capitani, Lucio, 'A Born-Translated Fairy Tale: Transcultural Reader and Anti-Exoticism in Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Bottle Imp"', *Altre Modernita*, 19 (2018), 197-211.

Deane, Bradley, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Dickens, Charles, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012).

Dickens, Charles, and Wilkie Collins, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1858).

Dixon, Robert, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender, and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Dryden, Linda, 'Literary Affinities and the Postcolonial in Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Michael Gardiner, et al., (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 86-97.

Duncan, Ian, 'The Moonstone, The Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 55 (1994), 297-319.

Dye, Thomas S., 'Gift Exchange and Interpretations of Captain Cook in the Traditional Kingdoms of the Hawaiian Islands', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 46 (2011), 275-292.

Edmond, Rod, 'The Pacific / Tahiti: "Queen of the South Sea Isles"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing,* ed. by P. Hulme, and T. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139-155.

Edmond, Rod, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Edmond, Rod, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Ehland, Christopher and Jana Gohrisch, 'Introduction: Cross-colonial Encounters and Expressions of Power in Middlebrow Literature and Culture, 1890 1940 and the Present', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 1-21.

Elliot, H. M., *The History of India: As Told by its Own Historians, The Muhammadan Period* (London: Trubner and Co., 1869).

Finn, Margot C., 'Material Turns in British History: I. Loot', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 28 (2018), 5-32.

Finn, Margot C., 'Material Turns in British History: II. Corruption: Imperial Power, Princely Politics and Gifts Gone Rogue', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (2019), 1-25.

Fiske, Shanyn, 'Orientalism Reconsidered: China and the Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Victorian Studies', *Literature Compass*, 8 (2011), 214-226.

Fitzpatrick, Peter, 'Really Rather Like Slavery: Law and Labour in the Colonial Economy in Papua New Guinea', *Contemporary Crises*, 4 (1980), 77-95.

Flower, Margaret, *Victorian Jewellery* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1967).

Floyd, Gilbert, 'The Great Green Diamond', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 108-112.

Forman, Ross G., *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Free, Melissa, '"Dirty Linen": Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48 (2006), 340-71.

Freedgood, Elaine, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Frow, John, 'A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), 270-85.

Frow, John, *The Practice of Value: Essays on Literature in Cultural Studies* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2013).

Gallagher, John, and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review,* 6 (1953), 1-15.

Gavin, Adrienne E., '"A good deal of risk… and a chance of danger": Detection, Adventure, and Violence in Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's The Adventures of a Lady Pearl-Broker', in *British Women's Writing from Bronte to Bloomsbury*, vol. 3: 1880s and 1890s, ed. by A. E. Gavin and C. W. de la L. Oulton (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 231-252.

Glennon, Lorraine, 'Review: Loot', *Columbia Magazine*, Fall 2023.

Goodlad, Lauren M. E, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Gregorian, Raffi, 'Unfit for Service: British Law and Looting in India in the Mid-nineteenth Century', *South Asia*, 13 (1990) 63-84.

Griffin, Ben, 'Class, Gender, and Liberalism in Parliament, 1868-1882: The Case of the Married Women's Property Acts', *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 59-87.

Griffiths, Charles John, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi*, ed. by Henry John Yonge (London: John Murray, 1910).

Harrison, Henrietta, 'Chinese and British Diplomatic Gifts in the Macartney Embassy of 1793', *English Historical Review*, 560 (2018), 65-97.

Hartwell, Nicole M., 'Framing Colonial War Loot: The "Captured" Spolia Opima of Kunwar Singh', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 34 (2022), 287-301.

Hayot, Eric, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Headrick, Daniel R., *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Hendrey-Seabrook, Therie, 'Reclassifying the Female Detective of the Fin de Siècle: Loveday Brooke, Vocation, and Vocality', *Clues*, 26 (2007), 75-88.

Heron-Maxwell, Beatrice, 'His Highness the Rajah: The Quest of the Yellow Diamond', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine,* vol. 1, 1898-99 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 549-557.

Heron-Maxwell, Beatrice, *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl Broker* (London: The New Century Press Ltd., 1899).

Hevia, James L., 'Remembering the Century of Humiliation The Yuanming Gardens and Dagu Forts Museums', in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. by Sheila Miyoshi Jager (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 192-208.

Hevia, James, 'Plunder, Markets, and Museums the Biographies of Chinese Imperial Objects in Europe and North America', in *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, ed. by Jan Mrazek and Morgan Pitelka (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 129-141.

Hevia, James, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Hicks, Dan, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

Hoffenberg, Peter H., 'Introduction' to *Oceania and the Victorian Imagination: Where All Things Are Possible*, edited by Richard D. Fulton, (Abingdon, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 1-8.

Holterhoff, Kate, 'Picturing Africa: Illustration in the Allen Quartermain Adventure Fictions of H. Rider Haggard', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 44-71.

Hook, Theodore Edward, *The Life of General, the Right Honourable Sir David Baird*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1832).

Hopper, Matthew S., *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Horne, Gerald, *The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

Howald, Christine, 'The Power of Provenance: Marking and Pricing of Chinese Looted Art on the European Market (1860-1862)', in *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets*, ed. by Benedicte Savoy, Charlotte Guichard, and Christine Howald (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 241-265.

Huangfu Day, Jenny, 'From Fire-Wheel Boats to Cities on the Sea: Changing Perceptions of the Steamships in the Late Qing, 1830s-1900s', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 20.1 (2015), 50-63.

Hudis, Peter, 'Marx's Concept of Socialism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx*, ed. by M. Vidal, T. Smith, T. Rotta, and P. Prew (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018), 757-772.

Johnston, Anna, '"Greater Britain": Late Imperial Travel Writing and the Settler Colonies', in *Oceania and the Victorian Imagination: Where All Things Are Possible*, ed. by Richard D. Fulton (Abingdon, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 31-43.

Jolly, Roslyn, 'Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson's Pacific Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35, (2007), 157-73.

Jolly, Roslyn, 'South Sea Gothic: Pierre Loti and Robert Louis Stevenson', *English Literature in Transition,* 1880-1920, 47 (2004), 28-49.

Jolly, Roslyn, 'Stevenson's Pacific Transnarratives', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 9 (2013) 5-25.

Kaye, John William, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, vol. 3, New Ed, Revised and Corrected (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1857).

Keown, Michelle, 'Isle of Voices: Scotland in the Indigenous Pacific Literary Imaginary', *Special Issue of International Journal of Scottish Literature*, guest ed. by Dougal McNeill and Philip Steer, 9 (2013), 51-67.

Kerr, Douglas, *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

Kerr, Douglas, 'Kipling in China: Empires of Noise', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies* 20.1 (2015), 41-49.

Kestner, Joseph A., *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (Abingdon, Routledge: 2016)

King, Charles William, *The Natural History of Precious Stones and Gems* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865).

Kingsbury, Benjamin, *The Dark Island: Leprosy in New Zealand and the Quail Island Colony* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2019).

Kinsey, Danielle C., 'Koh-i-Noor: Empire, Diamonds, and the Performance of British Material Culture', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009) 391-419.

Kinsey, Danielle C., 'S. M. Tagore's Maṇimālā and the meanings of diamonds in late Victorian Britain and India', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 43 (2021), 479-501.

Kinsey, Danielle, 'Diamonds and Emotions in the Minerals Gallery: Civilizing Emodities in the Age of Liberal Empire', *Museum & Society*, 22 (2024), 75-89.

Komter, Aafke E., *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Kucich, John, *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class* (Princeton, New Jersey: 2009).

Kuehn, Julia, 'The Victorians and China: Travels with Ships, Ideologies and Literature', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 20.1 (2015), 1-4.

Kuper, Adam, 'The Marriage of Cousins in Victorian England', in *Cousin Marriages: Between Tradition, Genetic Risk and Cultural Change,* ed. by Alison Shaw and Aviad E. Raz (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 218-28.

Kuper, Adam, *Incest and Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

Lansdown, Richard, *Strangers in the South Seas: The Idea of the Pacific in Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

Largeaud-Ortega, Sylie, 'A Scotsman's Pacific: Shifting Identities in R.L. Stevenson's Postcolonial Fiction', *Special Issue of International Journal of Scottish Literature*, guest ed. by Dougal McNeill and Philip Steer, 9 (2013), 85-98.

Largeaud-Ortega, Sylvie, 'Who's Who in "The Isle of Voices"? How Victorian Robert Louis Stevenson Viewed Pacific Islanders' Perceptions of Victorians and of Themselves', in *Oceania and the Victorian Imagination: Where All Things Are Possible,* ed. by Richard D. Fulton (Abingdon, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 93-105.

Latai, Latu, 'Changing Covenants in Samoa? From Brothers and Sisters to Husbands and Wives?', *Oceania*, 85 (2015), 92-104.

Leonard, Zak, 'Law of Nations Theory and the Native Sovereignty Debates in Colonial India', *Law and History Review*, 38 (2020), 373-407.

Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. by James Bell and John von Sturmer, ed. by Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

Lidchi, Henrietta and Stuart Allan, 'Dividing the Spoils', in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 1-16.

Lidchi, Henrietta and Nicole M. Hartwell, 'Colonial Collection in British Military Museums: Of Objects, Materiality, and Sentiment', in *Museums, Societies, and the Creation of Value*, ed. by Howard Morphy and Robyn McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2021), 63-80.

Lidchi, Henrietta, 'Material reckonings with military histories', in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 269-283.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 'The Gates of Somnauth', *London: House of Commons*, March 1843.

Machado, Pedro, 'Introduction: Indian Ocean Pearling Worlds', in *Pearls, People, and Power: Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds*, ed. by Pedro Machado, et al. (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2020), 15-37.

Mackenzie, John M., 'Collecting and the Trophy', in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 60-81.

Malagaris, George, 'Firishta's Sultan Mahmud: On Beauty and Gold', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies,* 56 (2018), 21-33.

Malecka, Anna, 'Koh-i-Noor Diamond and Babur's Stone: Issue of Identity', *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 58 (2020), 84-92.

Manfredi, Carla, '"Sore Love": R. L. Stevenson and Leprosy on Penrhyn Island', *Journal of New Zealand & Pacific Studies*, 5 (2017), 27-43.

Markovits, Stefanie, 'Form Things: Looking at Genre through Victorian Diamonds', *Victorian Studies*, 52 (2010), 591-619.

Martinez, Julia, and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015)

Mason, Phillip, 'Introduction' to *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix-xvii.

Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift*, Expanded Edition, trans. by Jane I. Guyer (Chicago, Illinois: HAU Books, 2016).

Maxwell, Anne, 'Building Friendships: "Civility" and "Savagery" in R.L Stevenson's The Beach of Falesa and The Ebb-Tide', *Special Issue of International Journal of Scottish Literature*, guest ed. by Dougal McNeill and Philip Steer, 9 (2013), 38-50.

McLaughlin, Kevin, 'The Financial Imp: Ethics and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 29 (1996), 165-183.

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Mrs. Reid's Terror', *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 6: 1901, 121-128. [March 1901] [The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries]

Meade, L.T. and Clifford Halifax, M.D., 'The Ponsonby Diamonds', in *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1894), 339-370.

Meade, L.T. and Clifford Halifax, M.D., 'The Seventh Step', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, ed. by Janis Dawson (Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview Editions, 2016), 47-70. [Part of *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Mr. Bovey's Unexpected Will', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 259-268. [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: Introduction', *The Strand Magazine*, vol. 18, 2-17. [July 1899]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Arrest of Captain Vandeleur: How Miss Cusack Discovered His Trick', in The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 545-554. [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'A Terrible Railway Ride: The Story of the Man with the False Nose', *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 4, February 1900-July 1900, 559-567. [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Madame Sara', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 117-141. [Part of *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: East of North', *Strand Magazine*, vol. 18, 437-448. [October 1899]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: The Diana Sapphire', *Strand Magazine*, vol. 18, 264-277. [September 1899]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'Stories of the Sanctuary Club: The Secret of the Prison House', *Strand Magazine*, vol. 18, 665-678. [December 1899]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Blood-Red Cross', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 142-164. [From *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Bloodstone', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 207-231. [From *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Face of the Abbott', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 164-186. [From *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Great Pink Pearl', *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 5: 1900-1901, 395-401. [June 1901] [Part of *The Miss Florence Cusack Mysteries*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Outside Ledge: A Cablegram Mystery', *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 5: 1900-1901, 201-207. [October 1900]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Talk of the Town', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 186-207. [From *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Meade, L.T. and Robert Eustace, 'The Teeth of the Wolf', in *The Sorceress of the Strand and Other Stories*, edited by Janis Dawson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 231-249. [From *The Sorceress of the Strand*]

Menikoff, Barry, 'New Arabian Nights: Stevenson's Experiment in Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1990), 339-362.

Merritt, Stephanie, 'Loot by Tania James review - imperialism through the eye of a tiger', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2024.

Mill, John Stuart, MP, quoted in 'Married Women's Property Bill, vol. 192: Debated on 10 June 1868, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1868-06-10/debates/644b6d95-a513-40ee-9577-b7a1fa041b67/MarriedWomenSPropertyBill, accessed 15 April 2026.

Miller, Andrew H., *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity, Culture, and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn, 'Trouble with She-Dicks: Private Eyes and Public Women in The Adventures of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33 (2005), 47-65.

Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn, *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Moore, Ronald, 'The Management of the Western Australian Pearling Industry, 1860 to the 1930s', *The Australian Association for Maritime History*, 16 (1994), 121-138.

Moretti, Franco, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, revised ed, trans. by Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller (London: Verso, 1988).

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo, *Crime and Empire: The Colony in the Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo, 'Victorian Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 641-661.

Mukhopadhyay, Priyasha, 'On Not Reading The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22, (2017), 40-56.

Mullins, Steve, 'Torres Strait in the Moluccas: The Transformation of Pearling in the Residency of Ambon, Netherlands Indies, 1890s-1942', in *Pearls, People, and Power:*

Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds, ed. by Pedro Machado, et al. (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2020), 272-299.

Mullins, Steve, *Octopus Crowd: Maritime History and the Business of Australian Pearling in Its Schooner Age* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: 2019).

Munich, Adrienne, *Empire of Diamonds: Victorian Gems in Imperial Settings* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020).

Nayder, Lillian, 'Collins and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139-52.

Nevill Jackson, Mrs. F., 'Jewel-Wearers and How They Wear Their Jewels', in *The Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 2: February-July, 1899 (London: Harmsworth Bros. Limited, 1899), 113-117.

Nunokawa, Jeff, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Osteen, Mark, 'Gift or Commodity?', in *The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002), 229-47.

Osteen, Mark, 'Introduction: Questions of the Gift', in *The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-41.

Osterhammel, Jürgen, 'Britian and China, 1842-1914', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, ed. by Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146-169.

Owens, Alastair, 'Property, gender and the life course: inheritance and family welfare provision in early nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 26 (2001), 299-317.

Park, Hyungji, 'Empire, Women, and Epistemology in the Victorian Detective Plot', *Korean Modern Anglo-American Literature Society*, vol. 15.1 (2008), 133-56.

Payn, James, *By Proxy*, A New Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1892).

Payn, James, *Gleams of Memory with Some Recollections* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, 1894).

Payn, James, *Some Literary Recollections* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1884).

Payn, James, *Some Private Views* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881).

Peake, R.B., [Stage Play] *The Bottle Imp: A Melo-Dramatic Romance*, produced at the Theatre Royal, English Opera House, July 1823.

Peers, Douglas M., *India Under Colonial Rule: 1700-1885* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

Perry, Ruth, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Petzold, Jochen, 'A Girl's Own Empire? Imperialism and the Girl's Own Paper, 1880 to 1903', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 22-43.

Phillips, Clare, *Jewels and Jewellery* (London: Thames and Hudson, V&A, 2019).

Pierce, Joseph M., and Manu Samriti Chander, 'Cousin Theory: Brown Kinship and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel', *Victorian Studies*, 62 (2020), 474-485.

Pirkis, Catherine Louisa, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1894).

Plotz, John, 'Materiality in Theory: What to Make of Victorian Things', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture,* ed. Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 522-38.

Plotz, John, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Plotz, John. 'Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory', *Criticism*, 47, (2005), 109-18.

Price, Leah, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Puri, Tara, 'Indian Objects, English Body: Utopian Yearnings in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22 (2017), 1-23.

Rappoport, Jill, 'Greed, Generosity, and other Problems with Unmarried Women's Property', *Victorian Studies,* 58 (2016), 636-60.

Richardson, Brian W., *Longitude and Empire: How Captain Cook's Voyages Changed the World* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

Robbins, B., 'Commodity Histories', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 120 (2005), 454-63.

Roy, Ashish, 'The Fabulous Imperialist Semiotic of Wilkie Collin's The Moonstone', *New Literary History*, 24 (1993), 657-81.

Sattin, Anthony, 'Afterword' to *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 175-183.

Sattin, Anthony, 'Editor's Note' to *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xviii-xxiii.

Scarr, Deryck, 'Recruits and Recruiters: A Portrait of the Pacific Islands Labour Trade', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 2 (1967), 5-24.

Schaffer, Talia, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

Shi, Flair Donglai, 'The yellow peril discourse in anglophone and sinophone literatures and cultures, 1895 to the present: mutations, reactions, and reinventions', DPhil dissertation for the University of Oxford, 2021.

Siebenhüner, Kim, 'Precious things in motion: Luxury and the circulation of jewels in Mughal India', in *Luxury in Global Perspective: Objects and Practices, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 27-54.

Simpson, Moira, 'The Plundered Past: Britain's Challenge for the Future', in *The Dead and their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice*, ed. by Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, and Paul Turnbull (London: Routledge, 2002), 199-217.

Singh, Bhai Nahar and Kirpal Singh, *History of the Koh-i-Noor, Darya-i-Noor and Taimur's Ruby* (New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1985).

Slade, Carole, 'The Value of Diamonds in English Literature', in *The Nature of Diamonds*, ed. by George E. Harlow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 171-178.

Smith, Victoria Ford, *Between Generations: Collaborative Authorship in the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019).

Spiers, Edward M., 'Spoils of War: Custom and Practice', in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire,* ed. by Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 19-38.

Spurr, David, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

Steer, Philip, *Settler Colonialism in Victorian Literature: Economics and Political Identity in the Networks of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *In the South Seas*, ed. with intro. by Neil Rennie (London, Penguin: 1998)

Stevenson, Robert Louis, 'The Bottle Imp', in *South Sea Tales*, ed. by Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 72-102.

Stevenson, Robert Louis, 'The Ebb-Tide', in *South Sea Tales*, ed. by Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 123-252.

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Sidney Colvin, v. III 1887-1891 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923).

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *New Arabian Nights* (Richmond, Alma Books Ltd., 2019).

Stevenson, Robert Louis, 'The South Seas: Life Under the Equator: Letters from a Leisurely Traveller, xiv: A Pearl Island: Penrhyn', *The Sun* [New York], 24 May 1891.

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Travels in Hawaii*, also known as *The Eight Islands*, ed. with intro. by A. Grove Day (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973).

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Treasure Island and The Ebb-Tide* (London: Penguin Group, 2012).

Streeter, Edwin M., *Precious Stones and Gems: Their History, Sources and Characteristics*, fifth edition (London: George Bell & Sons, 1892).

Sutherland, John, 'Introduction', to *The Moonstone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii-xxix.

Thapar, Romila, *Somanatha, the Many Voices of a History* (New Delhi: Penguin, Viking, 2004).

Thomas, Martin and Andrew Thompson, 'Empire and Globalisation: From "High Imperialism" to Decolonisation', *The International History Review*, 36 (2014), 142-170.

Thomas, Nicholas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991)

Thomas, Sue, 'Vance Palmer in London, 1906-1907', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 10 (1986), 25-30.

Tosh, John, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999).

Tratner, Michael, *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2001).

Truschke, Audrey, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017).

Turnbull, Paul, 'Introduction', to *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. by Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1-11.

Tytler, Harriet, *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858*, ed. with afterword by Anthony Sattin and intro. by Philip Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Van Broekhoven, Laura, 'On Decolonizing the Museum in Practice', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 32 (2019), 1-8.

van Dijk, Kees, *Pacific Strife: The Great Powers and Their Political and Economic Rivalries in Asia and the Western Pacific, 1870-1914* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

Virani, Shafique N., *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Wachter, Cornelia, '"Intimacies of complicity and critique": Race, Gender and Sexuality in Victoria Cross's Imperial Fiction', in *Imperial Middlebrow*, ed. by Christopher Ehland and Jana Gohrisch (Leiden, Brill, 2020), 124-139.

Wakefield, Jack, 'Nationalise the Royal Collection!', *The Spectator*, 4 June 2022.

Warren, James Francis, 'Tea, Pearls, and Pearl Shell: Cross-Cultural Trade, Slave Raiding, and the Transformation of Material Worlds—The Sulu Zone, China, and the West, 1349-1898', in *Pearls, People, and Power: Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds*, ed. by Pedro Machado, et al. (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2020), 60-85.

Weiner, Annette B., *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1992).

Weiner, Annette B., 'Inalienable Wealth', *American Ethnologist*, 12 (1985), 210-27.

Weiner, Annette, 'Cultural Difference and the Density of Objects', *Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 21 (1994), 391-403.

Wheeler, James, *The History of India from the Earliest Ages* (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1867).

Wolseley, Garnet, General Viscount, *The soldier's pocket-book for field service*, 5th Edition (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886).

Wynne, Deborah, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010).