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“Abroad and at Home”: Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*

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WHEN MARIA EDGEWORTH entitled the original sketch of *Belinda* “Abroad and at Home,” she demarcated an opposition between the public, or artificial, female self and the private, or genuine, one. The sketch revolves around Lady Delacour, a character distinguished by “the contrast between [her] apparent prosperity and real misery. . . . At home she is wretched; abroad she assumes the air of exuberant gaiety” (“Sketch” 480). Lady Delacour suffers from breast cancer, the consequence of a wound she received when dueling with another woman while they were cross-dressed. Reflecting her sexual ambiguity and her general resistance to domesticity, “the hideous spectacle” of the breast marks Lady Delacour’s “incurable” dissipation of “mind” before she dies (481). The events teach Belinda, Lady Delacour’s young friend and protégée, that “happiness at Home” is preferable to “happiness Abroad” (483).

In the novel that emerged from the sketch in 1801, Lady Delacour’s breast presents the same “hideous spectacle” (32), and her sexually ambiguous behavior is compounded by homoerotic insinuations. But instead of dying, she recovers after revealing that her indecorum is only an act; her “natural character” is that of a “domestic woman” (105). This cure allows Lady Delacour to reunite with her husband and child and then to settle the domestic futures of colonial characters never introduced in the sketch. By the novel’s end, Lady Delacour has helped expel Belinda’s Creole suitor and reward an English plantocrat, and the allusions to “home” and “abroad” broaden to suggest the complex ways in which late-eighteenth-century notions of sexual difference furthered English colonial interests by influencing the definitions of nation and race.

Typically recognized as the first Irish novelist, Edgeworth has in recent years become a visible subject of feminist and colonial studies.¹ But few

critics have noticed that although *Belinda*, Edgeworth's first "domestic" novel, takes place in England, it centrally concerns the problem of the West Indies. In the introduction to the recent Oxford University Press edition of the novel, Kathryn Kirkpatrick calls attention to the West Indian characters. Her approach is characteristic of emerging efforts to integrate late-eighteenth-century novelists into the discussion of women writers' relation to colonialism that sprang from essays by Laura Brown ("Romance") and Margaret Ferguson ("Juggling") on *Oroonoko*, Edward Said's analysis of *Mansfield Park*, and Gayatri Spivak's critique of *Jane Eyre*.²

A number of critics suggest that in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature femininity is portrayed as both similar to and different from colonial otherness in ways that destabilize the English woman's relation to empire. When Jenny Sharpe argues that *Jane Eyre*'s subjectivity "is constituted through a complex system of tropes . . . , which cannot be reduced to the simple binarism of colonizer and colonized" (29–30), she encapsulates a developing theoretical consensus about the role the English woman writer or character plays in shaping—as well as defining resistance to—colonialism.³ Presenting an obvious synchronization of "domestic with international authority" (Said 87), a sustained attention to sexual, national, and racial ambiguity, and a chaotic variety of characters and events that prohibits political fixity, *Belinda* can serve both to enrich the discussion of the vexed and contradictory relations between gender and colonialism and to help define the particularity of late-eighteenth-century concerns.

The novel breaks into two overlapping narratives that evoke the two parts of the title of the original sketch. In the first narrative (which occupies the initial two-thirds of the novel), Lady Delacour reveals her "natural" desire to supervise the home, recovers from her breast injury, and comes to represent an essentialist notion of biologically determined womanhood. If the domestic woman imagined in eighteenth-century conduct books has "depths in the self" beneath the material surface of her body, as Nancy Armstrong argues (76), *Belinda* suggests that such depths include what Judith Butler calls "an interior and organizing gender core" (136).

In the other narrative (which begins in the second third of the novel), the reformed Lady Delacour helps to distinguish home from abroad by rejecting Belinda's Creole suitor. The Creole blurs the boundaries of nation and race much as the breast injury blurs gender difference, but Lady Delacour reduces this confusion by positioning him on the other side of the line that defines England. Yet because she supports the plantocratic class in Jamaica, which profits from the commodification of English women and African slaves, Lady Delacour collapses some of the national and racial distinctions she otherwise promotes. In the end, the objectification of women she sanctions returns value to their material surface, undercutting her earlier idealization of an inherent femininity.

In addition to suggesting the complexity of defining the relation between national and sexual identity at the end of the eighteenth century, these tensions may point to Edgeworth's own ambivalence and to the ambiguity of her family's political alignments. In 1782, when Edgeworth was fourteen, her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, moved the family from England to Ireland so that he could preside over the family's Irish estate. In Parliament, Richard Edgeworth was considered a Protestant defender of Catholic interests, but as a landlord he was in enough danger during the peasant uprising in 1798 to flee with his family to a Protestant stronghold, where he was nearly lynched by a Protestant mob (M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 137–38).⁴ Two years later, offended by the bribery used to pass the Act of Union, joining the Irish and English Parliaments, Richard Edgeworth voted against the measure even though he supported it (181–83; M. Butler, Introduction 35). Just as it is difficult to fix Richard Edgeworth's political behavior, critics have debated his daughter's beliefs. While some emphasize the "Colonial Office mentality" Edgeworth developed in Ireland (Hurst 86–87), others, including her biographer, Marilyn Butler, argue that her conservative sympathies were balanced by "progressive, at times even radical," critiques of Anglo-Irish landowners (M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 125; see also M. Butler, Introduction, and Dunne).

Ireland's legislative absorption into the English Parliament followed in the wake of the American Revolution, the first great splintering of the empire. The formation of the United States produced

enormous anxiety about the fate of the Caribbean remainder of the “American empire,” anxiety that was compounded by the long war with France and by slave agitation that the French Revolution roused (especially in San Domingo). Jamaica, a crucial source of the sugar that fueled the British economy, had begun to decline in prosperity by the end of the eighteenth century in part because of business interruptions during the American Revolution, devastating hurricanes in the 1780s, and England’s raising of sugar import taxes to support the war against France (Patterson 27).⁵ In addition, both the plantocracy and the slave population in Jamaica were notoriously rebellious. The plantocrats supported the American Revolution, resented the British government’s demand that they help fund their own defense, and declared the sovereign right to determine their laws (Burns 511, 517–18, 538, 551–52, 558–59, 600), while the slaves instigated conspiracies, revolts, and near revolts at least ten times between 1776 and 1815 (Burns 511, 599; Burt 141; Patterson 271–73). With the abolition of slave trading in 1807 and the growth of competitive sugar markets in Brazil, the French West Indies, Cuba, and the East Indies (Patterson 28), the value of the “first” empire, in the West Indies, would decline as the importance of the “second” one, in the Far East, began to rise (Burt 3–169; Fieldhouse 55–83; Patterson 15–51).

Published during this period of apprehension about the West Indies, *Belinda* offers new perspectives on the nineteenth-century literary image of the domestic woman, whose moral influence over the natives in India disguises colonization as civilization (David, esp. 111–17; Poovey 194–97). Lady Delacour is interested not in “civilizing” the West Indians but in defining the boundaries that distinguish them from the English. Her preoccupation with such distinctions may reflect the concerns West Indian colonialism generated, as British settlement complicated efforts to separate English citizens from English settlers and their Creole descendants and as the West Indies became potential economic and political liabilities at the end of the eighteenth century.

The novel also shows how ideas about sexual normalcy underwrote constructions of national identity and imperial ambition. Lady Delacour, who receives a breast injury while engaging in ambiguous relations with another woman, turns to colonial

concerns only after her homoerotic inclinations are dampened. Although no universal term like *lesbian* existed in the early modern period, a number of scholars have argued that there was a cultural interest in and anxiety about female homoerotic desire (Greenfield, “Desire”; Johnson, esp. 47–69; Moore; Nussbaum 135–62) and that words such as *amazon*, *sapphist*, and *tommy* may have been used to describe female homosexuals (Castle 9–10; Trumbach 112–13). Studies of the connections among nation, sexuality, and race have paid some attention to male homoeroticism but little to female homoeroticism in eighteenth-century England.⁶ Though unable alone to fill such a gap, a careful analysis of *Belinda* suggests that female homoeroticism and miscegenation may have been seen as analogous dangers and that the need to demarcate the boundaries of gender difference on which heterosexuality depends was linked to a need to imagine national boundaries impervious to racial mixing.⁷

Home: Sexual Ambiguity and the Domestic Woman

Edgeworth’s *Belinda* has the same name as the mock heroine of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*,⁸ but it is the fashionable and superficial Lady Delacour who actually resembles the poem’s protagonist. Preoccupied with material appearances and dependent on an elaborate dressing ritual, Lady Delacour describes her investment in “the cosmetic powers” that Pope’s *Belinda* consumes (34; Pope 1.124). Like Pope’s heroine, Lady Delacour has avoided the kind of human intimacy that is supposed to accompany domestic duty. Pope’s *Belinda* may “die a maid” (5.28), and the “hideous spectacle” of Lady Delacour’s breast can be read as her punishment for neglecting her family. When Lady Delacour’s first child is born dead, her aristocratic in-laws blame her refusal to be confined during pregnancy. The second child dies from her inadequate nursing (42), and she sends the third to a wet nurse and then straight to boarding school. Lady Delacour hates her in-laws, who view her as a “monster” of a mother (102), and her husband, a gambler and an alcoholic, who tries to exercise his spousal right to rule her.

Disgusted with the domestic world, she subsequently decides to lead a sexually ambiguous life

“abroad” (out and about), rejecting her family for the aptly named Harriet Freke, a woman known for compulsive cross-dressing.⁹ As Lisa Moore contends, Harriet’s “male-parodic behavior” marks “the possibility of a female [homo]erotic agency” (505). Lady Delacour says that she turned to Harriet to fill the “‘aching void’ in my heart” and calls her a “bosom friend” (43), evoking that part of her own body she withholds from her husband and children.¹⁰ It is in keeping with the challenges Harriet poses to heterosexual domesticity that she persuades Lady Delacour to dress as a man and engage in the pistol duel that produces the breast injury.

Although Harriet becomes an enemy shortly after the novel begins, Lady Delacour, like Pope’s *Belinda*, continues to reserve her bosom for women only, forbidding her husband or any male doctor to see her undressed. Convinced that the breast is diseased with cancer, she first depends for care on her masculine and sadomasochistic servant Marriott (note the name’s assonance with Harriet), who “rules me with a rod of iron” (20).¹¹ Later, Lady Delacour admits *Belinda* to her boudoir to nurse the injured breast as well. When Lady Delacour calls herself an Amazon (34, 194), she thus may refer as much to her homoerotic inclinations as to the dueling that created her imagined need for a mastectomy.¹²

According to Judith Butler, the belief in sexual difference is based in part on an idea that gender is intrinsic—that sex exists as part of the “‘inner world’” of the “coherent subject,” marking “the internal fixity of the self” (134). Transvestism is threatening because it “subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and . . . mocks . . . the notion” that “true gender identity” is an “interior essence” (136–37; see also Epstein, “Either/Or” 100). Homosexuality similarly challenges the intractability of the binary distinctions on which heterosexuality depends.

I would like to consider Butler’s discussion of “the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core” (136) in tandem with Nancy Armstrong’s suggestion that the domestic woman popularized in eighteenth-century conduct books appears to have “depths far more valuable than her surface” (76). For Armstrong, the image of the domestic woman functions as a critique of the material self-display associated with the aristocracy and characterizes



The celebrated transvestite and female warrior Hannah Snell. From the Dutch translation (1750) of her biography *The Female Soldier*. Courtesy of the Amsterdam University Library.

the early modern creation of an interiorized self (in which Butler is interested). I would add that “by implying that the essence of the woman [lies] inside or underneath her surface, the invention of the depths in the self” (76) is an invention of internal gender difference as well.

In *Belinda*, Lady Delacour’s interior essence is inaccessible both because she is sexually ambiguous and because she is preoccupied with the material appearances against which the eighteenth-century domestic woman was defined. This preoccupation involves Lady Delacour in a ritualized self-objectification that masks her “natural character”

(105). Like Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*, Lady Delacour requires that her face be “completely repaired” every morning (*Belinda* 34; cf. Pope 1.141). Pope’s protagonist artfully “[n]ourish[es]” her lock (2.20) and teasingly withholds it from the man who would cut it, while Lady Delacour cosmetically hides the signs of her injury to prevent male surgeons from cutting off her breast.¹³

The novel blames Lady Delacour for her superficiality, but it also establishes the grounds for linking her obsession with appearances to women’s problematic role in an increasingly commercial society where cosmetics were aggressively advertised and widely consumed along with a host of other fashionable items to which the novel refers, including plants, pets, drugs, and razor blades (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 146–94, 316–27). When Lady Delacour recounts that her husband married her because “the heiress lozenge is a specific in some consumptions” (36), she suggests that she was reduced to one of “the welter of proprietary brand medicines” advertised at the time (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 185–86). After the marriage, Lord Delacour and his relatives presume the right to keep her “prisoner” during her pregnancy (42), as if she were simply a breeder of new heirs. It is in part because she resents this heterosexual objectification that Lady Delacour takes “a prodigious fancy to Mrs. Freke” (43). The injury that results is arguably caused as much by society’s commodification of women as by Lady Delacour’s sexual proclivities.

Once the novel plots the stages of Lady Delacour’s physical cure, the gender confusion that the injury had provoked is erased, and her essential female desire to serve her family is established. The cure constructs her as a domestic woman, whose internal femininity proves her fitness to serve the interior space of the home. Ironically, though, the means by which the cure occurs reinforces Lady Delacour’s status as a material object. Her motivation in initially resisting a mastectomy is to avoid being treated as a possession by the surgeons, who would perform it only with “the knowledge, privity, consent, &c. &c. &c. of her husband” (179). But, after insisting that Lord Delacour “has the strongest claim to be consulted,” Belinda persuades her patroness to welcome him to her dressing room and expose herself (179, 267). No sooner does he wit-

ness his wife’s injury than Lord Delacour’s love revives “in full force” (269). Once his authority is re-established, there is no longer cause to prevent the surgeons from operating. When they undress her, however, the doctors discover that Lady Delacour has no fatal disease after all, just a festering bruise, exacerbated by the drugs she takes (313–14). Thus when Lady Delacour finally allows her body to be circulated among men, the revelation that her breast is normal beneath the surface injury, that the organ is internally pure, rectifies the system of sexual difference the wound had challenged and proves that unfeminine behavior cannot change a woman’s essence.

The emergence of the “real state” of the breast beneath the wound establishes Lady Delacour’s ability to oversee household order (314). By the time Marriott announces that Lady Delacour is cured, the servant has been replaced in the dressing room by Belinda and has learned “never [to] be disrespectful [to her mistress] again” (161). Meanwhile, Lady Delacour acknowledges her long-standing affection for her daughter and husband and is prepared to uncover her “real character” in a world in which all have found their proper places (292).¹⁴ This includes Harriet Freke, who, on the night before Lady Delacour’s cure, is caught in a “man trap” (311) that mangles her leg so badly “she would never more be able to appear to advantage in man’s apparel.” In a symbolic substitution, Harriet’s leg is “cut” moments before readers learn that the breast will not have to be removed. Whereas the “bruised” leg can not heal (312), perhaps because Harriet Freke never had a biological right to wear pants, the breast “bruise” is reparable since the breast stands for woman’s natural difference (314). This would help explain why the breast remains whole while Harriet’s leg (as well as the hair that “locks” Pope’s Belinda out of heterosexual circulation) must be cut. But if Harriet has to be painfully maimed to become a woman, how essential can her femaleness be?

Abroad: Miscegenation and Colonial Boundaries

In the second narrative, the need to define and secure internal integrity reemerges on a national scale with the entrance of two West Indian characters who seek sexual control over English women. Mr. Vincent,

a Creole from Jamaica, comes to England to be educated and falls in love with Belinda, who is enamored of Clarence Hervey. Mr. Vincent's fate is intertwined with that of Mr. Hartley, a middle-class Englishman who made a fortune in Jamaica and, having narrowly survived a slave rebellion, has returned home to marry off the daughter he deserted. As Mr. Vincent's and Mr. Hartley's stories develop, the problems of homoeroticism and gender are gradually replaced by questions about heterosexuality, nation, and race. Does the Creole born abroad have as much right to Belinda as does her countryman, Clarence Hervey? And should Mr. Hartley, who abandoned his family in England to become a slave owner in Jamaica, be allowed to return to bequeath his daughter—tellingly named Virginia—to the man of his choice? Published soon after the Act of Union, during a period when England was both anxious about how to preserve the remains of the American empire and concerned about the empire's economic instability, *Belinda* raises questions about how the boundaries between England and the West Indian colonies should be drawn.¹⁵

Ultimately, Lady Delacour helps resolve these problems by ensuring that Belinda's and Virginia's marriages serve England's colonial interests in Jamaica but protect against the development of a Jamaican presence in England. By the novel's end, the distinction that she draws between Englishness and otherness justifies both the pursuit of colonial advantage and the maintenance of national difference. Ratified by gender boundaries that fix her own identity, Lady Delacour becomes the center around which the space of homeland can be defined. Having abandoned her life abroad in one sense, she now helps create a space abroad in another. She thus supports what she calls the "national economy" (39). If Lady Delacour does not assume the role of "civilizing" the natives associated with domestic women in nineteenth-century literature, she does reflect the eighteenth-century need for English mothers to "populate the empire" (Nussbaum 29).¹⁶ After reuniting with her daughter, Lady Delacour arranges for Belinda and Virginia to reproduce to imperial advantage.

At the same time, however, the threat of rebellion and confusion Lady Delacour once represented is displaced onto colonial problems—the danger of

slave revolts in Jamaica and the blurring of racial and national boundaries at home. The commodification of women, which provoked Lady Delacour's initial subversion, also remains a central concern in this portion of the novel, as English women are linked with African slaves.¹⁷ Although the trope of the English woman as slave capitalizes on an emotionally charged history while erasing the specific cruelty of slavery, the analogy simultaneously disrupts the national and racial distinctions on which justifications of slavery depend.

As a Creole from Jamaica with the name of another rebellious English colony,¹⁸ Mr. Vincent bears a double mark of subversiveness. His Creoleness disrupts distinctions of nationality and race much as Lady Delacour's breast injury and Harriet's transvestism confuse sexual difference. Indeed, Mr. Vincent might be said to replace Harriet Freke, for anxieties about his identity and power become central after she exits the text. The continual blurring of boundaries throughout the novel suggests that the divisions fundamental to the narrative (female/male, inside self/outside self, English/foreign, white/black, home/abroad) are fictions at risk of disintegration.

In the eighteenth century, the term *Creole* was ambiguous, referring to persons born in the colonies whose parents were of European or of African descent, including island-born slaves (Richardson 57). Even a Creole who was a wealthy landowner of pure European roots presented "a historically unique political" challenge to the process of imagining a national homeland, according to Benedict Anderson, for the Creoles "constituted simultaneously a colonial community and [a Europeanized] upper class" (58). Rich West Indian Creoles (like Mr. Vincent) who came to England and pushed "upward into the ranks of the landed gentry" were seen as threats to English social order (Sypher 504). Boundaries were erected, Anderson suggests, by "the convenient, vulgar deduction that creoles, born in a savage hemisphere, were by nature different from, . . . inferior to," and implicitly racially other than "the metropolitans" (60). Edward Long's influential *History of Jamaica* (1774) identifies Creoles as an alternative species, "descended from British ancestors" but "stamped with . . . characteristic deviations" (262), some of which, according to other authors, were the effect of their "contamination of

[i.e., by] the negroes" (qtd. in Sypher 515). Mr. Vincent's arriving for an English education guarantees nothing about his racial purity, for, as Long complains, "many Mulatto, Quateron, and other illegitimate children [are] sent over to England for education . . . where . . . they pass under the general name of West-Indians" (274). Accordingly, Mr. Percival asks Mr. Vincent if he plans to "turn savage," and Lady Delacour likens him to "Caliban" (234, 339).¹⁹

To complicate matters, Mr. Vincent has "a black servant," Juba, who has journeyed with him to England because "the poor fellow begged so earnestly to go with young massa" (219).²⁰ Perhaps named after the African prince in Joseph Addison's popular play *Cato*, Juba is a selfless, willing, and happy assistant, described by Lady Anne Percival as "the most grateful, affectionate creature I ever saw" (239).²¹ But according to Edward Long, Juba was also a popular African name for a woman (427), and it is in keeping with the troubles cross-gendering raises earlier in the novel that the servant is easily influenced by Harriet Freke. After she convinces him that he is haunted by an obeah woman, Juba, like Lady Delacour before, becomes ill and recovers only with Belinda's help (221–22).²² The reference to the religious practice of obeah, a widely feared source of slave resistance, is a reminder that slaves throughout the West Indies, and especially in Jamaica, are engaging in deadly rebellions, like the one alluded to in the novel.²³ Indeed, if Juba's eagerness to follow Mr. Vincent proves the reciprocal value of the master-slave relationship, the place Juba insists on going to, England, is one where in theory, if not in fact, he can be legally free.²⁴

Although Juba functions in part as a foil to make his master appear more European and civilized, the novel draws increasing attention to the kinship between Mr. Vincent and "negroes." Mr. Vincent acquired his fatal addiction to gambling in the West Indies when "day after day" he played "with eagerness, at games of chance, with his negroes" (422). Indeed, he identifies himself with African men when he reads Belinda *The Dying Negro* (347), the enormously popular antislavery poem written by Thomas Day, Richard Edgeworth's good friend. The poem describes how "a Black, who a few days before, ran away from his master . . . with intent to marry

. . . a white woman, being taken, and sent on board the Captain's ship, in the Thames; took an opportunity of shooting himself through the head" (Day). Mr. Vincent apparently sympathizes with the African speaker in the poem, who, like him, discovers the supposed superiority of European female beauty. Later Mr. Vincent too attempts to shoot himself in the head, when he realizes that his relationship with Belinda is doomed (431).²⁵

To the extent that Mr. Vincent is identified with the dying Negro, his desire to marry Belinda presents the threat of miscegenation, which repeats some of the problems raised by homoeroticism in the first portion of the novel.²⁶ Both are sexual dangers that confuse binary categories of difference, and both threaten maternity: homoeroticism because it is not reproductive and miscegenation because when it *is* reproductive the maternal body becomes the site of a racial and national blending that renders the differences between home and abroad indistinct. Long's complaint is representative of late-eighteenth-century concerns about the effect relations between black men and white women would have on the national population: "English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture . . . till the whole nation resembles the Portuguese and *Moriscos* in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. This is a venomous and dangerous ulcer, that threatens to disperse its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it" (Shyllon 104–05).²⁷ From this perspective, the threat of miscegenation in *Belinda* complements Lady Delacour's breast disease.

Tellingly, Belinda ultimately rejects Mr. Vincent when she discovers that he has been borrowing money from a Jew to support his enduring "negro" habit of gambling. Produced at a time when "to judge from their public complaints most [West Indians] were well on the way to bankruptcy" (Ward 45), the representation of Mr. Vincent's gaming may reflect fears about the Jamaican drain on the English economy.²⁸

For Lady Delacour, Mr. Vincent's money marks a national difference that makes him undesirable as a husband for Belinda. Lady Delacour tells the heroine that Clarence Hervey, the other suitor, "might do as well . . . considering, that an English member of parliament is, in the eyes of the world



Miscegenation on the border of William Hogarth's *The Four Times of Day: Noon* (1738). Note the black man and white woman on the left, the distressed and neglected children below them, and the gender confusion suggested by the signboards above (one features the chopped-off head of John the Baptist and the other the headless body of a woman). On the opposite border, two elderly women kiss. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

... a better connexion, than the son of a West India planter" (358). She reinforces the insinuations about Mr. Vincent's unfamiliar race when she reminds Belinda that it was a fight between the Jew and (the homonymic) Juba that revealed the Creole's gambling losses: "without that wrestling match of theirs, the truth might never have been dragged to light, and Mr. Vincent would have been this day your lord and master" (451). Drawing on an image of interior exposure reminiscent of the unmasking of her own feminine difference, she implies that Mr. Vincent is too much like Juba and the Jew to possess the heroine.²⁹ The domestic role she assumes in securing Belinda's sexual borders (and internal purity) represents a form of national and racial border patrol as well.

Lady Delacour's greater goal is to have Belinda marry Clarence Hervey, the "English member of parliament," even though he is pledged to Virginia, the abandoned daughter of the rich Jamaican planter Mr. Hartley. In orchestrating Clarence's release from Virginia, Lady Delacour supports an exchange of the women at home that furthers English colonial interests in Jamaica.

Just as the lost American colony Virginia had ranked with Jamaica as one of the most valuable properties of the American empire before the Revolution (Fieldhouse 58), in the novel a variety of English men seek possession of Mr. Hartley's daughter. The worst offender is Clarence, who changes the orphan's name to Virginia, after a character in J. H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, a novel set in Mauritius (then a French colony), and decides to follow Rousseau's *Emile* by educating her in seclusion to be his future wife. Evoking Saint-Pierre's comparisons between his heroine and a slave woman, Clarence treats Virginia as property.³⁰ Not only does he sport a lock of her hair (139) like the Baron in Pope's poem, but Virginia is also constantly worried that she does not feel sufficient gratitude toward him (382, 383, 386, 388, 389, 399, 400, 466). Gratitude may be expected of the ideal slave, but even Clarence knows that it is inappropriate for a potential wife, and he urges her "not [to] consider me . . . your master" (399).

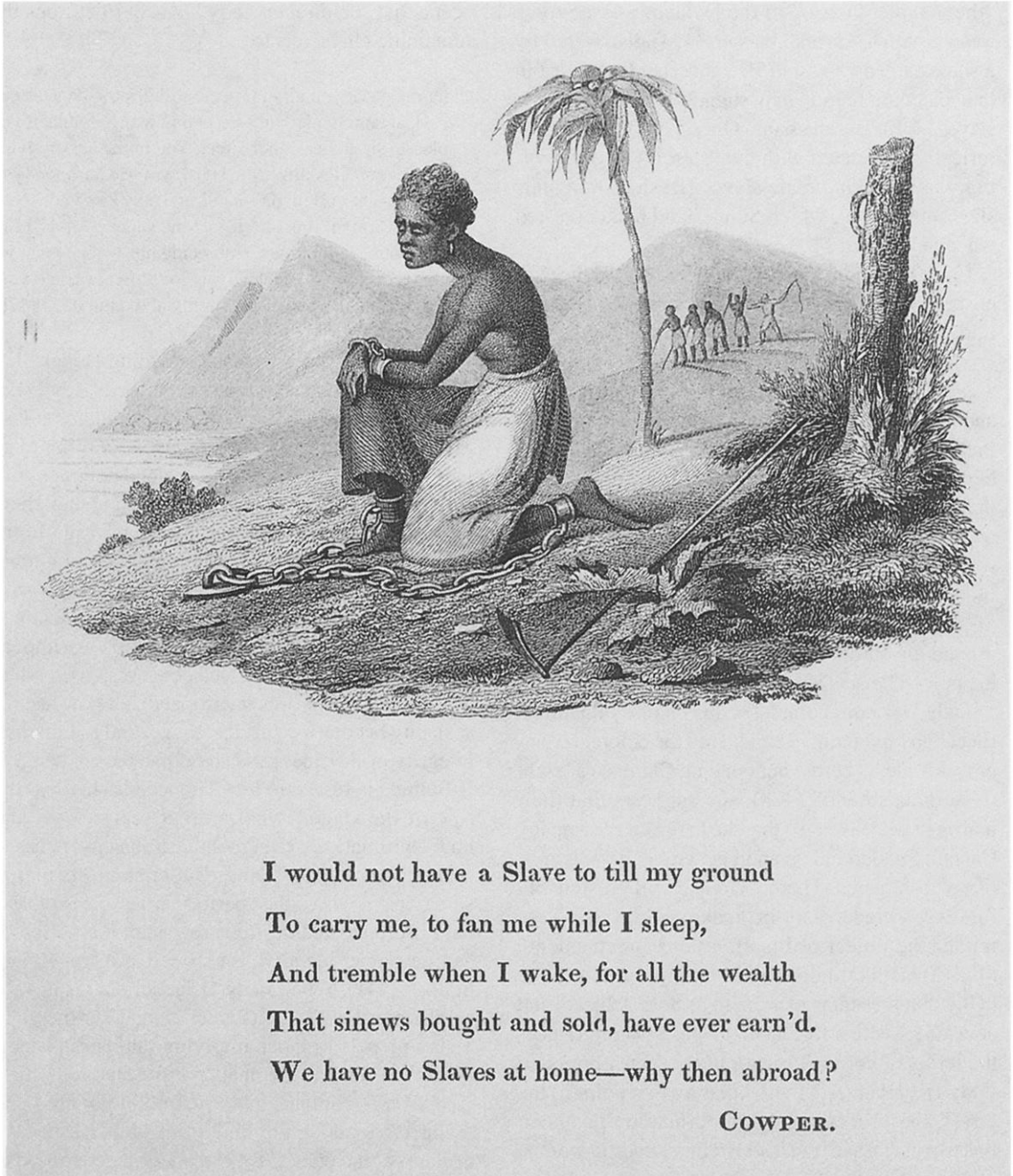
Eventually Clarence decides to dispose of the girl. On learning that her father has returned home from Jamaica to find the daughter he deserted, Clar-

ence searches for him, hoping that Virginia's wealth will attract a host of admirers. Positioning the girl to become an "heiress lozenge" like Lady Delacour earlier, Clarence now wants "the fashionable world in all its glory . . . [to] be before" Virginia (395), even though he had previously insisted on secluding her from material corruption. He inserts "proper advertisements in all the papers" (393) and then publicly exhibits her portrait, a process of commodification that succeeds in reuniting parent and child when a jeweler recognizes the likeness between the portrait and a miniature the father had given him to set. The details about advertising evoke a moment at the beginning of the novel when Clarence hears a gentleman describe Belinda as having been brought to market by her aunt and been "as well advertised, as Packwood's razor strops" (25). Alluding to the "strops" used to beat West Indian slaves, Packwood's famous advertisements sometimes featured black characters as promoters.³¹

When Clarence's campaign succeeds in locating Virginia's father, Mr. Hartley is so overwhelmed with "gratitude for the kindness, which Clarence had shown to her, he protested that he should look upon her as a monster, if she did not love him" (407). Mr. Hartley's investment in a system of exchange and entitlement based on gratitude may spring from his sentimentalization of his desert as slave owner, but the fact that he barely survived "a rebellion of the negroes on [his] plantation" indicates that his slaves hardly felt thankful toward him (476).³²

Nevertheless, Lady Delacour arranges for Mr. Hartley to exchange his daughter to greatest colonial advantage. Discovering that Virginia secretly loves Captain Sunderland, the man who rescued her father during the slave revolt, Lady Delacour brings the couple together. The union frees Clarence Hervey to marry Belinda and secures Mr. Vincent's permanent removal, Lady Delacour's overt goals. But, more ominously, it also ensures that Virginia will serve as "payment" of her "father's debt of gratitude" to Sunderland (476), as Lady Delacour cheerfully explains.

Lady Delacour first meets Captain Sunderland when he rescues Juba in a scene reminiscent of the one in which Harriet cuts her leg. Juba's head is "terribly cut" and his ankle sprained in a battle with a baronet and his dog (437), and Sunderland brings



I would not have a Slave to till my ground
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold, have ever earn'd.
We have no Slaves at home—why then abroad?

COWPER.

In this illustration from an antislavery publication (c. 1830), a West Indian slave epitomizes the difference between home and abroad. The inscription is adapted from William Cowper's *The Task* (1785). Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library.

“the disabled negro” to the Delacour home to be treated with a “quack” balsam (474) discovered by a slave named Quassi (75). Sunderland’s interest in the “bleeding negro” may suggest his sympathy for slaves (438). But the name Quassi or Quashee (historically associated with the “stereotype of the lying, lazy, thieving male slave” [Bush 53]) signals slave subversion, which Sunderland had contested when he rescued Mr. Hartley.³³

Lady Delacour manipulates the coincidences to ensure that, like the cut lock that forces Pope’s Belinda into the heterosexual economy, the “cut” Negro will remain available for circulation. For after ascertaining that Juba’s savior is also Virginia’s hero and bringing the two lovers together, she guarantees that Sunderland will inherit some of the Negroes he suppressed on behalf of Virginia’s father. The marriage affirms that the English male rights to own a virgin body and to possess a colonized land worked by slaves are parts of the same privilege. Indeed, if Virginia can be read as the sundered land of a former colony, Sunderland, who has already proved his ability to contain rebellion in a remaining colony, enacts a myth of reclamation.

Lady Delacour completes this picture of national success by inducting Belinda into the colonial economy. Moments before announcing Clarence’s “right to Belinda’s hand” (478), she suggests that their marriage be delayed so that the hero can accompany Captain Sunderland on another “cruise” (477), most likely to Jamaica. There Clarence will presumably follow his predecessor in “making a fortune . . . to render the object of his affections independent” (475). This likelihood raises multiple ironies, one being that the status of woman as both “object” and consumer (with a fortune to dispose of) reproduces the terms of commodification that once oppressed Lady Delacour. Another is that by this point in the novel, the process of commodification has been linked to the slave trade, which the domestic woman endorses but which her own exchange resembles. As this resemblance grows, the national and racial differences Lady Delacour constructs in condemning Mr. Vincent and supporting Captain Sunderland’s slave inheritance become meaningless.

Her vision of heterosexual stability in the final pages seems equally precarious. In a theatrical

scene that she directs, Lady Delacour petitions the remaining characters to

let me place you all in proper attitudes for stage effect. . . . Captain Sunderland—kneeling with Virginia, if you please, sir, at her father’s feet. You in the act of giving them your blessing, Mr. Hartley. . . . Clarence, you have a right to Belinda’s hand, and may kiss it too. Nay, miss Portman, it is the rule of the stage. . . . My Lord Delacour . . . should be embracing me, to show that we are reconciled. . . . Helena, my love, do not let go your father’s hand. There! quite pretty and natural! (478)

Arranging the three virgins (including Helena, her daughter) to greatest patriarchal effect, Lady Delacour appears to have become a good mother at last. She prepares the girls to reproduce according to an idea of national purity she has helped define in support of a “national economy” that devalues them (39). And yet the final line of the passage highlights the artificiality of the moment, which must be staged to seem “natural.” Concerned only with appearances, Lady Delacour mockingly proclaims, “What signifies being happy, unless we appear so?” (478). Earlier Lady Delacour was cured when her heterosexuality was interiorized, but now heterosexuality becomes a surface image, and the internal integrity of the final pose she directs is challenged. If Belinda is forced to let Clarence kiss her by “the rule of the stage,” what are her real desires and how legitimate are the colonialist maneuvers based on her compliance? Judith Butler suggests that in situations in which the “performative” basis of sexual difference and desire is revealed, the notion of “a true gender identity” is exposed as a “regulatory fiction” (141). When Lady Delacour claims to “finish the novel” (477), character and author merge in a play on performance implying that perhaps neither of them trusts the final “pretty” picture.

“Our *tale* contains a *moral*, and, no doubt, / You all have wit enough to find it out,” Lady Delacour declares at the end (478). If readers are supposed to conclude that “happiness at Home” is preferable to that “Abroad,” as Edgeworth suggests in the original sketch, the problems evoked by the need to establish and maintain this division may invite a question in return: “What signifies being happy” in either place?

Notes

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¹Atkinson and Atkinson; Gallagher 257–327; Kowaleski-Wallace; Mellor 40–46, 78–80; Moore; and Perry 231–32 offer feminist readings of Edgeworth's work. Colgan; Dunne; Flanagan 53–106; Hurst; Mc Cormack 97–168; and Sloan 6–7, 22–35, 73 relate it to colonialism. Butler, Introduction; Gallagher; Kowaleski-Wallace; and Mellor combine feminist theory and colonial analysis of Ireland.

²Nussbaum's *Torrid Zones* is an important recent example of these efforts. For other discussions of the importance of the West Indian characters in *Belinda*, see Moore; Perera.

³Brown ("Romance") and Margaret Ferguson ("Juggling") point out this tension in *Oroonoko*. Similar theoretical formulations can be found in Brown, *Ends*, esp. 29–35, 199–200; Chaudhuri and Strobel; David, esp. 5, 77–117; Donaldson 1–31; Grewal and Kaplan 17–28; Hall 207; and Nussbaum, esp. 1–7. For specific readings of the colonial complications in Austen, see Stewart; Moira Ferguson, "*Mansfield Park*."

⁴The peasant uprising, which began in May, was initially confined to Wexford, but in August a small group of French invaders incited the peasants in County Longford, where the Edgeworths lived. The invasion and rebellion were quickly suppressed, but Richard Edgeworth was subsequently accused of being a French spy (M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 137–38).

⁵England's war against France began in 1793 and continued with little intermission to 1815.

⁶For general discussions of the connections among nation, sexuality, and race, see Yuval-Davis and Anthias; Williams and Chrisman 17; Chrisman 193. For discussions of homosexuality, see Parker, Russo, Sommer, and Yaeger 6–7; Mosse. Nussbaum examines the colonial implications of female homoeroticism (135–62).

⁷The term *miscegenation* was not current in the eighteenth century, but the concept had been established. See Margaret Ferguson, "News" 166–67.

⁸Throughout, my reading of Pope's poem is influenced by Brown, *Pope*, esp. 13–14, and "Amazons" 126, and by Pollak 77–107.

⁹Atkinson and Atkinson point to the *OED* to argue that *freak* does not refer to monstrosity or abnormality until the mid-nineteenth century (100). The many references to monsters and deformity in *Belinda*, however, suggest that the text may be one of the first to allude to *freak* in the modern sense.

¹⁰Lady Delacour flirts with men, including the novel's hero, Clarence Hervey, but she is more emotionally involved with women. Clarence himself is described as "all things to all men—and to all women" (14), and in one scene he cross-dresses (75).

¹¹In addition to the genital connotations of *rod*, the term was commonly associated with sexual flagellation by the mid-eighteenth century (Gibson 16).

¹²Castle discusses the homoerotic implications of *amazon* (9). Lady Delacour describes herself as an Amazon after quoting *The Rape of the Lock* (34), in which the Queen of the Amazons urges Belinda to reject men. See Dugaw on the popularity of the female-warrior motif from the seventeenth to nineteenth century. The image of the warrior woman is also associated with colonialism; travel accounts recurrently describe the discovery of a race of Amazons (Brown, "Amazons" 130). Moving from a subversive role in the first narrative to a hegemonic one in the second, Lady Delacour exemplifies what Brown characterizes as the Amazon's capacity to figure both native resistance and imperialist ideology (131–32).

¹³Her drug abuse and theatrical attitudes similarly obscure the reality of her sufferings by masking her pain and depression. Eleven years after the first edition of *Belinda*, Frances Burney gave a horrifying account of the invasive male doctors who performed her mastectomy and of the pain she endured. See Epstein, *Pen* 53–83.

¹⁴Kowaleski-Wallace offers a good interpretation of the domestic significance of Lady Delacour's cure (110–11, 125–29).

¹⁵Hall describes England's mid-nineteenth-century tendency to root an English identity in assumptions about Jamaican difference (208, 209).

¹⁶See Perry 206–07 on motherhood.

¹⁷This connection between English women and slaves anticipates the one Moira Ferguson notes in *Mansfield Park* ("*Mansfield Park*"). I make a similar argument about *Mansfield Park* in "Fanny's Misreading" 318–19. For a general approach to the joint commodification of English women and slaves, see Brown, *Ends* 20–21.

¹⁸Acquired from the French in 1763 and declared a separate colony the year that America began its revolution, Saint Vincent was subject to bouts of unrest, the most serious of which occurred when the French inspired the Caribs to revolt in 1795 (Burns 505–06, 570–72; Ward 38, 91).

¹⁹Perera (31) and Kirkpatrick (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 495n; "Gentlemen" 334, 344–45) also discuss the problem of Mr. Vincent's race.

²⁰The depiction of Juba might be read in relation to that of Caesar, the slave hero featured in "The Grateful Negro" (1804), a story Edgeworth published shortly after *Belinda* that contrasts two Jamaican slave owners. The brutal Mr. Jefferies is distinguished from the good Mr. Edwards, who disapproves of slavery but believes "that the sudden emancipation of the negroes would . . . increase . . . their miseries." Mr. Edwards adopts a benevolent plan for his slaves' "amelioration" (195) consistent with the one Edgeworth's father applied to his Irish tenants (see M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 85–87, and Hurst 30–31 on Edgeworthstown). Caesar is so grateful to Mr. Edwards that he ultimately risks his life to save the planter from a slave revolt. "The Grateful Negro" was produced during a period when abolitionist legislation was defeated in England and there was a lull in antislavery activities (Blackburn 150; Moira Ferguson, *Subject* 249–50). Even William Wilberforce, the leading advocate of abolition in

Parliament, abandoned the annual abolition bill between 1799 and 1804 (Blackburn 150). The narrative criticizes both slavery and sudden abolition and suggests that benevolent paternalism reaps its own rewards.

²¹In *Cato*, Juba is an apologist for Roman imperialism and is rewarded with the love of Cato's daughter. In the original edition of *Belinda*, Juba marries a white woman (discussed below, in n26).

²²In "curing" Juba of his belief in obeah, Belinda could be said to help "civilize" the colonial other, the role typically associated with the nineteenth-century domestic woman.

²³For good discussions of obeah, see Bush 74–77 and Patterson 265. Obeah is associated with slave resistance in "The Grateful Negro."

²⁴The 1772 Mansfield Decision, which some believed outlawed the owning of slaves in England, was notoriously confusing and ineffective.

²⁵Perera (30–32) and Campbell discuss the importance of this poem.

²⁶Edgeworth was mindful of miscegenation. She allowed Juba to marry a white country girl in the first edition of *Belinda* (1801) but omitted this development when she revised the text for inclusion in Anna Barbauld's British Novelists Series (1810), explaining, "My father says that gentlemen have horrors upon this subject, and would draw conclusions very unfavourable to a female writer who appeared to recommend such unions" (M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 495). As Kirkpatrick points out (Introduction xxviii–xxxii), Edgeworth may have worried that Belinda's relationship with the Creole posed a similar challenge (and perhaps undermined Edgeworth's national status as a "British novelist"), for she also dampened the romance between Belinda and Mr. Vincent and deleted the proposal scene.

²⁷See also Shyllon 100. For discussions of the threat of miscegenation in *Belinda*, see Kirkpatrick, Introduction xxii–xxxii, xxxi–xxxii, and "'Gentlemen.'"

²⁸See also Long 265–66; Burns 551; and Stewart 92. Kirkpatrick discusses the relation between miscegenation and the management of colonial wealth in *Belinda* ("'Gentlemen.'" 345–47). Lord Delacour is also a gambler, but his behavior does not raise colonial concerns, and it is brought under control as Lady Delacour recovers.

²⁹In *Castle Rackrent*, Thady describes the Jewish bride as "little better than a blackamoor" (76; see also 77). Felsenstein documents the widespread eighteenth-century English representation of the Jew as "the ultimate paradigm of the eternal Other," "whose unsettling presence serves to define the bounds that separate the native Englishman from the alien" (247, 3).

³⁰In *Paul et Virginie*, the heroine's sympathy for a brutalized slave collapses their differences; thus Paul wants to fight the slave's master on Virginie's behalf (Saint-Pierre 36–55, 91). Thomas Day, the author of *The Dying Negro*, tried and failed to raise a country bride. Edgeworth had personal reasons to be critical of Day, who had told her father not to allow her to publish her work (M. Butler, *Edgeworth* 149). Others have noted Edgeworth's disapproval of Clarence (Kowaleski-Wallace 100; Mellor 43–44; Shaffer 61–62; Spencer 161–62).

³¹In one ad, for instance, slaves named "Common Strop" and "Superior Strop" debate the product's merits (McKendrick,

Brewer, and Plumb 157). The "rod of iron" with which Marriott controls Lady Delacour is relevant in this context. On Belinda's resistance to commodification, see MacFadyen (430).

³²In "The Grateful Negro," Jamaican slaves revolt when the master is brutal.

³³Patterson offers a detailed analysis of the Quashee stereotype (174–81). In Long's text, Juba is the female name for Monday, Quashee the male name for Sunday (427).

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