New Conceptions of Time and the Making of a Political-Economic Public in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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NEW CONCEPTIONS OF TIME AND THE MAKING OF A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PUBLIC IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

a dissertation

by

AMY WITHERBEE

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This project argues that the British “financial revolution” ushered in a new way of conceptualizing time based in mathematic innovations of the seventeenth-century. As it was employed in financial instruments and government policies, mathematics’ spatialized representation of time conflicted with older, more intuitive experience of time associated with consciousness and duration. Borrowing from the work of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I examine how the interaction between these two temporalities reshaped conceptions of value, the public, and the body in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The first two chapters of my study explore texts ranging from pamphlets that advocated for the establishment of banks to the periodical essays of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* that advocated for political economic conceptions of time and value at the turn of the century. These texts reveal the subtle tensions and strange paradoxes created by the clash of disparate temporalities and open the door to new readings of fictional narratives like those of Daniel Defoe and Aphra Behn. My second two chapters focus on selected works by these two authors to explore how longer first-person narrative forms modeled both the possibilities and dangers of emerging political economic structures. My study concludes with two chapters that follow the development of the oriental tale in Britain. Making use of a seventeenth-century tradition that explores the tensions between representation and meaning in oriental fables, *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* follows in the wake of John Paul Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* and reshapes the oriental tale genre to reflect the new concerns of a global marketplace in which deferral has become essential to the production of value. I conclude these chapters with readings of Johnson’s *Rasselas*, Hawkesworth’s *Almoran and Hamet*, and Frances Sheridan’s *Nourjahad*, three tales that foreshadow late-eighteenth-century efforts to manage the public and its temporal paradoxes through an attention to the body.
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Introduction

Joseph Addison’s January 5, 1710 issue of The Tatler presents the remarkable image of a woman’s petticoat so large that when lifted and fully unfurled, it balloons like a dome above the wondering eyes of onlookers:

I then ordered the Vest which stood before us to be drawn up by a Pully to the Top of my great Hall, and afterwards to spread open by the Engine it was placed upon, in such a Manner, that it formed a very splendid and ample Canopy over our Heads, and covered the whole Court of Judicature with a kind of Silken Rotunda, in its Form not unlike the Cupolo of St. Paul’s.¹

Addison means to draw humor from his narrator’s comparison of the undergarment with the lofty structures of church and state, and certainly, we are justified in reading this essay as an eighteenth-century satire on the female gender and its fashions. We are also meant, however, to think about the century’s increasingly important questions of economy and scale. As it happens, Addison’s self-appointed judge learns that the relatively minor matter of a fashionable petticoat plays a significant part in the economic foundation of the Empire. The rope that holds together the skirt nourishes an entire rope-making industry at home; the whalebone that stiffens its fabric feeds a British whaling interest as far away as Greenland. The advocate for the petticoat cites

political economist Sir William Petty and declares that such an oversized item of fashion could multiply the profits of the woolen trade such that its effects “could not fail to sink the Power of France in a few Years” (II.193).\(^2\) As ridiculous as Addison’s narrator deems the petticoat to be (he declares the garment forfeit at the end of the trial), the hoop skirt’s expanse reminded the reader that every trivial act of purchase or trade potentially multiplied to become part of the enormous structures of an Empire.

The emerging field of political economics challenged Addison’s contemporaries to reconcile the individual bodies of consumers and tax payers with the mathematically derived scale of state finance.\(^3\) Addison’s essay highlighted the significance of great masses and great distance to this statistical view, but with the exception of a note that the hoop-skirt wearer spends three days outside the doorway trying to squeeze through, this particular essay hid the importance of time to political economic thought. Britain’s eighteenth-century financial and political expansion was made possible only by the introduction of a new articulation of what time was and what it could do. Reimagined as a field of play from which data could be gathered and value extracted, time was qualitatively different from the experiential time of human consciousness and from early Christian articulations of mortal time and eternity. This is not to say, however, that mathematical articulations of time replaced or even subordinated alternative time concepts. In the eighteenth century as in the twenty-first, many distinct understandings of time shaped the world. For readers in Addison’s century the new conception of time came with enormous financial and political stakes and needed to be integrated with existing beliefs and

\(^2\) Addison, 193.

experiences. This study seeks to better define the qualitatively different version of time that suffused British finances and popular culture during the long eighteenth century and to trace its repercussions in narrative structures and literary genres of the period.

Over the past two decades, a significant field of critical work has emerged to focus on the dramatic cultural shifts that accompanied Britain’s financial revolution. James Thompson argues that the recoinage debates of the period brought into relief changing notions of value as Britons sought to articulate the relationship between financial value and coins or credit notes. Using a Marxist lens, Thompson shows how concerns about the difference between treasure and capitalist wealth reemerged in the novel form, particularly in depictions of the female character as treasure. Deidre Shauna Lynch’s *The Economy of Character* asks how changing marketplace conditions provided the impetus for a redefinition of character over the course of the century as literary character lost much of its visual sign function to be replaced by an emphasis on psychological depth. Catherine Ingrassia and Sandra Sherman turn attention to the role of the author in this marketplace dynamic, exploring the way in which literary fiction works in an often disturbing parallel with the fictional quality of financial credit.

Looking more specifically at the state’s move toward public credit (based in long-term state debt), Peter Brantlinger finds that the psychological demands of living in an expansive, credit-based marketplace create the impetus for a new form of subjectivity, one whose value and

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interiority develops with the help of aesthetic discourse.\textsuperscript{8} Robert Mitchell also explores the effects of Britain’s state financing schemes, finding that the disruptions and anxieties brought about by the nation’s investment in debt helped to shape a discourse of sympathy.\textsuperscript{9} Mitchell argues for the importance of temporality both in Romantic constructions of sympathy and in financial discourse. Combining social-systems theory and the work of Gilles Deleuze, Mitchell’s study explains how poets employed notions of past, present, future and cyclical or linear time in an effort to re-shape the cultural assumptions bequeathed to their generations by the century’s early financing policies.

By naming time as a crucial element in Britain’s creation of both finance and the systems it spurs, Mitchell’s study approaches another field of thought that has emphasized the importance of time concepts during the early-modern and eighteenth-century periods. Benedict Anderson’s \textit{Imagined Communities} locates the birth of a “horizontal” modern time and the simultaneous demise of Christian “messianic time” in a period somewhere between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{10} Johannes Fabian reaches back further to an elite scholastic tradition of memory techniques to explain why anthropology spatialized time into zones of social and economic development during the era of colonial exploration.\textsuperscript{11} Looking specifically at time concepts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Stuart Sherman argues that innovations in time-keeping at the end of the seventeenth century initiated a new relationship between time and


individual experience. Sherman’s study reveals the period’s use of time as a method for organizing thought and experience and shows how diurnal forms made use of two distinct ways of using temporality in narrative structures. Sherman finally demonstrates that new ways of measuring and marking time led to new ways of representing the experience of subjectivity in time.

The development of Sherman’s analysis from new technologies and narrative structures to representations of subjectivity provides an important tool for our ongoing efforts to understand the development of the novel. But it also reminds us that our efforts to comprehend time tend to lead us back to the experience of the individual mind. Tangled somewhere between the historically specific world of cultural constructions and basic cognitive functions, notions of time challenge our methodologies. Thinking about time requires us to think about our most intuitive mental and biological experiences, demands that we claim at least a starting point for defining human consciousness. In this study, I borrow from a philosophical tradition that prioritizes the time experience of human consciousness and defines that time as continuous, durational and fundamental to the way in which human beings organize stimuli. An important inspiration for Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of time, Henri Bergson posited that the distinction between this continuous, durational time and the time intervals of science accounts for both Zeno’s paradoxes of motion and for the paradoxes created by Einstein’s theory of relativity. Bergson sought to reveal the fictions behind science’s claim to represent time without representing duration. In


doing so, Bergson wished to define more accurately the relationship between the human consciousness and its sensory world.

Borrowing from Bergson’s premises, this study addresses the historical moment in which mathematical and older time frameworks came together to produce a new marketplace system in Britain. Mathematical time arrived with promises of immense wealth and infinite productivity, but also with the possibility of dramatic failure. And though recognizing the role of time concepts provides new insights into this period, I do not intend for this study to be simply a history of ideas. Civic leaders, businessmen and authors employed a range of discursive strategies to convince their populaces that the future gifted by mathematics could be relied upon and manipulated to the benefit of a growing empire. In many cases the strategies they employed knowingly or unconsciously occluded failures in the new framework for time, opening up dangerous gaps between individual experience and socially shared constructions. By revisiting the role of time in eighteenth-century Britain’s financial revolution, I hope to unearth some of these discursive strategies, to provide a new framework for understanding the eighteenth-century debate about time and value, and to reveal the inherent conflicts in the mathematically-derived market system that we still inhabit.

The six chapters that follow begin with a survey of some of the mathematic and financial innovations that made possible the dramatic changes to Britain’s government and marketplaces during the last decades of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth. Beginning with a comparative look at the time theories developed by Locke, Leibniz and Newton, I describe how those theories were distilled and simplified for use in financial instruments. From among the many financing schemes proposed or tried during the period, the idea of national banks eventually emerged as the dominant scheme for providing cash to the
crown and supplementing the Empire’s shortage of coin. The second part of this chapter looks closely at some of the printed banking proposals that led to both successful and unsuccessful financial experiments during this period. Responding to the contentious debates about whether exchangeable money could be created absent the usual forms of specie, these pamphlets both reflected and helped to shape the way value would be conceived in modern political economics.

The second chapter explores how the concepts of time and value embedded in banking proposals emerged within the periodical essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Authors like Stuart Sherman and Erin Mackie have demonstrated the importance of Addison’s and Steele’s projects to shaping British readers’ experience of the marketplace. I build on this work and on existing theories of the modern public’s emergence to argue that the public is, itself, a symptom of the mathematical time concepts of the period. Though identified as a driving force behind the nation’s wealth, the bodies that buy, sell, and trade in Britain’s marketplaces cannot be represented within mathematical frameworks because, among other reasons, those frameworks provide no equivalent for the conscious present. Addison and Steele’s periodicals made use of their genre’s timely regularity to help bridge the divide between a mathematical public and the embodied reader. To this point my work follows closely alongside Stuart Sherman’s readings of The Tatler and The Spectator and Benedict Anderson’s reading of periodical genres, but I go beyond previous studies on the periodical’s relationship to the public in arguing that Steele and Addison used the figure of the Spectator and his observations around London to capture the sign nature of the public. Seen through the mathematical time that structures the marketplace, the public cannot be represented, but it can be approached through an older linking of sign and material world that Michel Foucault describes as a an episteme of

14 Stuart Sherman, Telling Time; Erin Mackie, Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
resemblances.\textsuperscript{15} Within this framework, the Spectator turns London’s human bodies into metonymic signs of the public even as his commentary becomes a sign to be commented on by others. As Foucault notes, the episteme of resemblance recognizes both the words and the materiality of the world as a part of a living web of meaning, prompting an infinite cycle of commentary and material sign.

Not all of the writers concerned with the period’s emerging time concepts were convinced of their value. In the third chapter I shift away from the periodical essays to examine the role of the longer, first-person narratives that were increasingly popular among readers. Published in 1688, at the end of the author’s career, Aphra Behn’s \textit{Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave} garnered renewed interest among twenty-first-century critics for its depiction of slavery in a failing British colony and its troubling narrator. My analysis places Behn’s story in context with the bureaucracies that managed both colonization and the slave trade. The long distances between Britain and its colonies and, just as significantly, the long time frames involved in both local governance and trade gave birth to a bureaucratic print culture. In Behn’s colonial world, slaves and governors alike were represented in and by legal documents that take on a power of their own within administrative systems. Behn’s narrative highlights the fact that these administrative systems use print to mimic the patterns of mathematical time, rather than the cognitive and biological duration of the human body, and illustrates the dangers of a world in which text begins to absorb the bodies it claims to represent.

Chapter Four provides a counterpoint to Behn’s concerns with a reading of two of Daniel Defoe’s first-person narratives. I argue that \textit{Robinson Crusoe} can be read as a follow-up to Defoe’s political economic arguments in the financially disastrous years of 1719 and 1720,

\textsuperscript{15} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things: An archeology of the human sciences} (New York: Routledge, 2001).
When read for the play of competing time concepts in the story’s narrative and thematic structures, *Robinson Crusoe* proves to be part of Defoe’s evolving effort to promote his readers’ faith in the long-term projections of the market, and a caution that they must differentiate these time frames from the daily repetitions and incremental developments that fill human time. In 1720, this effort failed dramatically with the collapse of the South Sea Bubble and Law’s Mississippi Company in France. Nevertheless, the awkward harnessing of embodied time and mathematical time continued (and continues) to dominate marketplaces. To understand Defoe’s response to the financial disasters, I examine Defoe’s *Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress*. Published after the collapse of the markets in 1724, *Roxana* shows the shifts in Defoe’s thinking about the British financial state. This later novel gives voice to some of the same fears that were evident earlier in Behn’s text as the body becomes a central rhetorical site for the battle to reconcile mathematically-derived time with the narrow limits of embodied time.

The final two chapters of the dissertation shift attention away from the loosely defined traditions of periodical essays and first-person narratives to a genre that reached its apex during the eighteenth century. Oriental tales proliferated with the growth in print culture during the seventeenth century. The genre was immensely popular through most of the eighteenth century and, in fact, most of the authors discussed in the previous chapters incorporated oriental tales into their other narrative work. Beginning with the oriental *romans à clef* that circulated among Western European courts, I argue for a new understanding of how and why the oriental tale developed as it did. Suggesting an alternative to existing versions of the genre’s history, this discussion finds the tales’ narrative tradition to be inextricably linked to the momentous shifts in political and economic power during the period. Chapter Five thus begins with my discussion of *The Sultana of Barbary*, an early *romans à clef* that served as a thinly-veiled critique of Charles
II’s court. Reading The Sultana’s elaborate plot twists for their indebtedness to the English fable tradition, I argue that early oriental tales used their Eastern settings to negotiate the increasingly permeable boundaries of political power.\(^\text{16}\) Moving from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, I argue that by the time Marana’s widely read Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy is published, the literary market is already adjusting older tropes to the conceptual demands of the new marketplace. The fifth chapter concludes with a discussion of the English translation of Antoine Galland’s Mille et une Nuits, re-titled Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. Arabian Nights’ had an incalculable impact on the English literary tradition and continues to do so, but during the first two decades of the eighteenth century, it participated in the same discussions of time and value that are evident in the works of Addison, Steele, Behn, and Defoe. Arabian Nights’ models capitalism’s deliberate blurring of the boundaries between the material world of bodies and the immaterial realm of language. Using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s discussion of desire and capitalism, I explore Arabian Nights’ deployment of bodies and desire mimic the ceaseless production of a political-economic system embedded in time.\(^\text{17}\)

In the sixth and final chapter of this study I move beyond the early decades of the eighteenth century to examine how oriental tales transformed as Britain’s initial period of financial innovation came to a close at mid-century. Looking at Samuel Johnson’s Rasselas and John Hawkesworth’s Almoran and Hamet, this chapter argues that the larger shift from political-economic discourse to moral philosophy effectively occluded the role of mathematical time in shaping the British populace.\(^\text{18}\)

Questions how the public functioned within a new marketplace

system transformed into questions about human nature, but a human nature devoid of cultural or historical specificity. As a result, the starting perspective of these works also shifted, such that what was once a blurred boundary between materiality and sign broke apart into a binary of presence and illusion. This new binary required a place holder to denote presence and reality. Authors turned once again the human body, but these later texts identified a different body, an insistently physiological body that inhabited the space carved out beneath the body’s visual character.

The study concludes, then, with a reading of Sheridan’s 1767 tale, *Nourjahad*. In her use of the oriental tale Sheridan gives her own shape to a tradition that by that point had spanned more than a century. As she re-works Johnson’s and Hawkesworth’s themes of illusion, Sheridan leaves us with a troubling, unresolved split between two times. And in looking forward to Romanticism, *Nourjahad* offers a starting point for new questions about the spots of time, mythic cycles, and fantastic oriental spaces that would shape the next generation of British literature.
Chapter One
Finance and the Introduction of Mathematical Time

In 1710, a joyfully optimistic Isaac Bickerstaff calculated that his chances of winning the state lottery of the day were “but an Hundred and Fifty Thousand to One against my being worth a Thousands Pounds per Annum for thirty two Years.”¹ Naturally, Richard Steele’s fictional narrator decides to purchase a ticket; moreover, to advertise in the next issue of *The Tatler* for anyone willing to bet against his success. Seduced by visions of fortune and wealth, Bickerstaff reflects a public exuberance for gambling that still resonates. The essay itself reflects a convergence of mathematics, state financing and human imagination that changed the basic structures of the state, its marketplaces and its public. This chapter looks at the actual mathematics behind Bickerstaff’s dubious calculations and argues that seventeenth-century mathematic innovations not only popularized probability theories, but introduced a new articulation of time to Britain’s marketplaces.

During the seventeenth century, British scientists and mathematicians participated in a remarkable period of development in mathematics. Unbounded by later notions of specialization, those engaged in mathematical studies borrowed from a densely woven network of science,

mechanics, classical traditions and theology. The need to improve navigational tools and practices inspired Edward Wright and John Napier to revise old representations of longitude and latitude relations and the first logarithmic tables and prompted a century-long effort to solve the longitude problem. Though designed to correct problems in global navigation, this early work opened the door to innovations in trigonometry and the subsequent development of calculus by Fermat, Newton and Leibniz. Within the larger field of geometry, René Descartes and Pierre de Fermat independently established new methods for representing spatial relations through algebraic equations. And Galileo’s work permitted spatial relations to be understood in motion as he, John Wallis, Newton and many others revolutionized our understanding of dynamics. The results of this work could be applied in astronomy, but also in engineering and machines. In 1657, for instance, Dutch astronomer Christiaan Huygens fine-tuned mathematical representations of motion to create the first functional pendulum clock.2

Much of the theoretical basis for this work came from a set of paradoxes developed by the ancient Greeks. The first of these paradoxes asked how a single point on a line relates to the line. Presumably, one could differentiate an infinite number of points on any given line. The line must be infinitely divisible into such points, which results in the conclusion that an individual point can have no magnitude. But a series of points without magnitude could not create a line of any magnitude, resulting in a theoretical negation of the line itself. The problem permitted Greek mathematicians to articulate a fundamental challenge to the ways in which we conceive of space, but the paradox that inspired eighteenth-century thinkers shifted attention to the concepts of time.

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and motion. Known as Zeno’s paradox, this problem posited that like the hypothetical line, time and motion across distance are infinitely divisible. And yet these too seemed to be made up of something akin to magnitude that could not be conceived of without finite parts. Seventeenth-century mathematicians found that they could use Zeno’s paradox to avoid the challenge posed to calculation by the concept of infinity. In this mathematical sleight of hand, infinitely small and therefore insignificant numbers could be used as limits in the calculation of a series and then disposed of at the end. This early trick paved the way for calculus, with its foundation in the inverse relation between integration and differentiation, and we find the thinking behind it fully articulated in the definitions of time, motion and fluxion to be found in Newton’s *Principia* and in the work of Leibniz on the Continent.³

While Newton and Leibniz were exploring the very basis of measurement, others were building on the work of Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat in probability theory.⁴ Inspired largely by popular games of chance, probability theory provided a mathematical perspective on the idea of the event. Binding a series of events together by mathematical similarity, rather than by cause and effect, probability theories made use of space or time or both to gather the large number of event repetitions necessary to make such patterns emerge. With its identification of large patterns, this work would serve as a cornerstone for modern statistics and the social sciences.

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We do not need to understand the specific calculations by which seventeenth-century mathematics progressed to appreciate the conceptual directions that it took. How motion, time, change and space were reduced to representation in number relations is not so important as the idea that such things are both possible and productive of great innovations in everything from navigation to machines. But late seventeenth-century Britons had another problem on their hands. Spurred on by Continental successes in the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, British thinkers adapted their mathematic tools to the period’s vigorous debates about national financial policies.5

The 1710 state lottery described in Steele’s essay was one of a series of schemes designed to raise immediate cash for the state during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century period that P.G.M. Dickson dubbed the “financial revolution” in England.6 Later studies, including work by Joyce Oldham Appleby and Larry Neal, and Robert Markley, revise Dickson’s insulated approach to England’s financial history, demonstrating the extent to which Britain and other European states owed their modern financial concepts to international markets.7


A significant part of the story of the Britain’s financial crisis during the seventeenth century begins in those marketplaces and in the colonial Atlantic, where traders and governments were stretched to address a growing shortage of coin. Merchants argued that coin clipping and shortages strained their efforts to expand trade in both domestic and foreign markets. In the meantime, the British Crown suffered from a coin shortage of a different sort. Civil conflict and Continental wars meant that the state was chronically in need of funds despite the Empire’s steadily growing shipping, textile, and agricultural industries. In fact, the East India trade exacerbated the domestic coin shortage with its outflow of bullion.

The monarchy’s indebtedness was a source of great concern for its subjects. As Dickson explains, prior to the ascension of William and Mary, state debt was necessarily associated with both financial and political weakness:

For most of this period its reputation had been unsavoury. To start with, the very idea of lending money was suspect. As late as the seventeenth century borrowing tended to be regarded as an index of necessity, and lenders as those who took advantage of necessity. This was the line of thought behind the prohibition of usury until the sixteenth century, and the subsequent establishment of maximum rates of interest for loans between private persons.\(^8\)

In prior centuries, the discourses surrounding usury had tainted the general perception of lending transactions; lending was not only un-Christian, it was closely associated with the power dynamics of necessity. While credit had developed its own positive associations with character

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and trust, borrowing still implied a very short-term solution to a present need so that, even absent religious concerns, borrowing carried the taint of a transaction in which power was disproportionately weighted toward one party. These factors help explain the vitriolic discourse surrounding lenders throughout the early modern period and the persistence of usury laws.

Crown debt provoked concerns about the “money men” whose loans supplied that need. As a matter of necessity, the Crown was exempt from the usury statutes that were in effect from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The monarch negotiated interest rates with the lenders at hand and usually from a position of weakness created by financial urgency. This generally meant that the select group of lenders who dealt with the crown could demand high interest rates that the Crown almost inevitably had difficulty carrying. As unpaid interest was added to principal, a long line of English monarchs found itself with what Dickson calls “a growing snowball of debt.” While the English public regularly bemoaned the power of the lenders or the profligacy of the Crown, the heart of the state’s chronic financial troubles lay in structures unsuited to the funding of a modern nation-state. Simply put, the state had no financial instrument or structure to make use of the long-term future.

In this sense the Crown was no different from private merchants, nobles, or gentlemen in the period:

Many a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century nobleman, paying 10% on his debts, and paying off old debts with new ones until the accumulated principal swallowed up his estate, would have recognized his case as that of the government in miniature.

Merchants, too, though usually more prudent both in the scale of their needs and in
keeping accounts than kings and nobles, also borrowed and repaid on an essentially short-term basis.  

Economic historians attribute the short-term nature of lending during these centuries to a number of factors. A volatile political context, a shortage of funds for long-term loans, and the need for liquid capital to keep pace with the largely short-term nature of most commercial ventures all conspired to make long-term loans largely impractical. There were, however, precedents for long-term debt systems. With coin shortages and funding shortages becoming increasingly intractable, the British state made use of these precedents with legislation and policies that were no less effective for being controversial.

The most pressing concern of late seventeenth-century financial debates was how to finance payments on the existing state debt while finding the most expedient way to raise new funds as they became necessary. Just behind that concern was the ongoing anxiety about bullion. Currencies in England, Scotland and Ireland were all dependent on gold and silver that were in short supply. The recoinage debate that later became famous in Jonathan Swift’s *Drapier’s Letters* was already focused on a dual need to restore the kingdom’s clipped, alloyed and otherwise diminished coins to a standard material value and to find more currency with which to expand commerce domestically and abroad. To some small extent this second problem had already been solved. Faced with a shortage of precious metals, England’s traders and financiers were conducting lucrative businesses primarily with private letters of credit, supported by goldsmiths and scriveners who served as proto-bankers and by foreign banks like those of Amsterdam and Venice. Neal describes how banks in Antwerp and later, Amsterdam, used serial

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9 Dickson, 40.
endorsements to create bank notes that moved efficiently amongst the two parties to a transaction and their banks in different cities or countries. The system provided security, convenience and speed, eliminating the need for coin and complementing the information networks that were tightening the ties among international markets. Moreover, Dutch banking systems were complemented by a joint-venture capital model that relied on long-term investments. While most European commercial ventures remained short-term until the eighteenth century, the East India trade witnessed early efforts to rely on long-term investors. According to Neal, the Dutch East India company depended on long-term investment by 1612, followed by the English company by 1659. Beyond the practices of these corporations, Britons who traveled in Eastern marketplaces encountered systems of credit and capital investments that had been established for centuries. A third and no less pressing component of the financial debates was the possibility of balancing the various interests of Britain’s social and economic classes through long-term political economics. After a century of civil and Continental wars, the orderly, interlocking mathematical patterns of finance seemed a likely model for rebalancing power within the state. The tables and logarithms disseminated from seventeenth-century mathematics seemed to offer a means for harnessing the long-term future to Britain’s present use.

Probability theory suggested that events unrelated in simple cause-and-effect frameworks could be related in mathematical formulas. Ambitious in work as in life, William Petty offered theories of political economy while mathematically (if often erroneously) deriving previously unavailable figures for population, growth and decline in state revenues, and more. One could

12 Neal, 118.
14 William Petty’s role in the development of political economics has been treated in a number of studies. See William Letwin, The Origins of Scientific Economics, 114-46; and Mary Poovey, A History of the Modern Fact, 92-143.
not accurately predict the life span of a particular annuitant using a figure for the average life span of a British citizen, but one might predict the average life span of a large group of annuitants over time. Life tables, which would form the basis for both life insurance and for systematic state annuity plans, first appeared in John Graunt’s 1662 *Natural and Political Observations*. But countless other mathematical treatises, including Johan de Witt’s *The Worth of Life Annuities compared to Redemption Bonds* (*Waardije van Lyf-renten naer Proportie van Los-renten*) and Richard Witt’s *Arithmetical Questions*, offered up precise mathematical solutions to the question of how to structure financial schemes.

Borrowing from the numerous tracts that offered tables, estimates and logarithms, financial thinkers and businessmen brought mathematic thought to the Empire’s burgeoning urban centers. Not only merchants and investors, but also those who mingled with them in coffee shops and in private homes could grasp the basic premises behind insurance policies and long-term joint-stock investing. The popularity of games of chance made the existence of probability theories a matter of common knowledge. Nor could the many indebted land owners, merchants and consumers of Britain’s cities have remained unaware of the growing use of compound interest. The proponents of the new state financing schemes, whether they advocated annuities, lotteries or banks, all depended upon a revenue to be exacted from and in the future. Foundational to the early development of Britain’s credit-based economy, the new mathematics quietly disseminated apparently basic but highly significant changes in the way British cultures understood the future that they were manipulating.

Even within private transactions the shift to longer lending terms brought about intuitive adjustments to how lenders considered their loans. Most famous for establishing one of the first

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fire insurance companies after the Great Fire of London in 1666, Nicholas Barbon was also a financial theorist, a builder, and a landlord of dubious distinction. Barbon participated actively in the effort to found a national bank. He established a land bank in 1695 in partnership with John Asgill and later obtained legislative authority for its merger with John Briscoe’s land bank. Though the land banks ultimately failed, the approach to credit promoted by Barbon and his colleagues provides insight into a manner of thinking about credit that succeeded in changing the British financial system. Describing the distinctions between short and long-term lending transactions, Barbon wrote in 1690:

There are Two Sorts of Credit; the one, is Grounded upon the Ability of the Buyer; the other, upon the Honesty: The first is called a Good Man, which implys an Able Man; he generally buys upon short Time; to pay in a Month, which is accounted as ready Mony, and the Price is made accordingly. The other is accounted an Honest Man; He may be poor; he Generally buys for three and Six Months or longer, so as to pay the Merchant by the Return of his own Goods; and therefore, the Seller relys more upon the Honesty of the Buyer, than his Ability: Most of the Retail Traders buy upon this Sort of Credit, and are usually Trusted for more than double they are worth.

Barbon’s distinction between the two sorts of credit reveals the challenge involved in shifting to an economy in which long-term debt becomes a norm. As lenders consider longer durations, they are increasingly unable to account for all of the possible events that might effect the repayment of loans. The lender dismisses the usual variables from the calculations and relies instead on a


17 Nicholas Barbon, Nicholas Barbon on a Discourse of Trade (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1934), 19.
pattern of experience, in this case “the Honesty of the Buyer.” The wealth of eighteenth-century materials that deal with questions of credibility and character testify to the difficulties of gauging honesty. But as the scale of state finances steadily grew, the length of time necessary to manage the flow of money extended well beyond the span of any single debtor, king, merchant or otherwise. In response Britons turned to mathematics and its distinctive representation of time.

As in the intuitive calculation of the “Honest man” described by Barbon above, the mathematics of late seventeenth-century financing substituted predictions of broad patterns of behavior over time (like the general honesty of the debtor) for the more difficult predictions of specific events and decisions. To accomplish this, mathematics needed a representation of time that eliminated variables, leaving room for the mathematician to superimpose just the data he would rely upon. Newton’s *Principia* illustrates an early step toward rethinking temporality: “Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration.” Newton’s premise is that the myriad of ways in which we measure, perceive or understand time as associated with change are merely symptomatic of our own cognitive limitations (“the common people conceive those quantities under no other notions but from the relation they bear to sensible objects”). In contrast to our intuitive understanding, real or absolute time has no relation to change:

All motions may be accelerated and retarded, but the flowing of absolute time is not liable to any change. The duration or perseverance of the existence of things remains the

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20 Newton, 13.
same, whether the motions are swift or slow, or none at all: and therefore this duration ought to be distinguished from what are only sensible measures thereof.\textsuperscript{21}

Devoid of all “sensible measures,” time becomes the blank sheet on which mathematics may begin its work of representing a world reduced to its most essential numbers. Newton is not the only thinker articulating an alternative version of time during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but his description helps us to mark the difference between an eighteenth-century theoretical time and an understanding of time that prevailed in the centuries before.

Citing Arthur Lovejoy’s discussion of the “temporalization of the great chain of being,” Lewis White Beck writes, “At the beginning of the century . . . the chain was suspended from a static eternity, and every link in it was characterized by its vertical distance from God.”\textsuperscript{22} Prior centuries had maintained a belief in what later thinkers would call “messianic” time, a framework in which the eternal lives alongside and within the present. Contrasted with the no-time of the eternal, mortal time was just that: a symptom of our own limited understandings. Neither the secular future nor the past held great significance in this context. While Lovejoy surmised that the transition from “vertical” to “horizontal” time occurred only slowly over the course of the eighteenth century, late seventeenth-century science and mathematics indicate that the transition already was well on its way. Thus Beck describes how not only Newton, but also Locke, Kant and Leibniz restructured conceptions of time to help produce our modern understanding of time as a horizontal structure, akin to space, that stretches out to accommodate the realm of the eternal to which time was previously contrasted. The mechanics of these

\textsuperscript{21} Newton, 15.
conceptions of time differed in material ways, of course, and for our purposes it makes sense to focus on the two early British thinkers, Locke and Newton.\textsuperscript{23}

As Beck points out, Locke’s infinite duration has a different ontology than Newton’s absolute time. In Locke’s thinking any conception that we have of time is abstracted from the sense of duration that arises through the experience of consciousness; the individual reflects on “a train of ideas which constantly succeed one another in his understanding,” thus producing the idea of succession that forms the basis for an idea of the individual’s duration.\textsuperscript{24} From an understanding of his own duration, the individual can imagine other coeval durations and then those that exist before and beyond the time of his own thoughts. Locke’s abstractions take him all the way to a final concept of time that is at least reminiscent of Newton’s absolute time: universal, infinitely divisible, and unchanging. As Berkeley argued, Locke’s move from the conscious experience of succession to such an abstracted concept requires some dubious logical leaps, but Locke’s insistence on this final construction of a universal, infinite flowing time demonstrates the importance of this conception by the close of the seventeenth century.

Beck’s discussion necessarily omits much of the complexity of the relationship between time and the sacred in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century thought. Robert Markley and others have demonstrated how Newton’s science worked within, rather than outside of or against, a theological framework. In particular, Newton’s commitment to the precepts of voluntarism and his participation in the millenarian thought of the period meant that his time

\textsuperscript{23} Leibniz critiques both Newton and Locke, arguing for a more explicitly theological grounding that posits time as an order through which human beings perceive the ideal state of non-compossible possibilities. But as Beck argues, Leibniz’s framework nevertheless leaves us with a mortal time that expands horizontally and is significantly more than illusion: “Time is a moving image of eternity, in which what is ontologically necessary appears to be phenomenally contingent.” Beck, “World Enough,” 124.

theory was always conditioned by the possibility of divine action or revelation. The role of the divine continued to shape the way people understood temporality and the ways in which philosophers theorized time, but as mathematics moved from theory to the daily praxis of probability calculations and compound-interest tables, scientific time lost its rich nuances and became merely a blank slate on which to superimpose numerical patterns. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century probability theories, mortgage tables, annuities and economic projections begin by assuming this skeletal version of absolute time.

In praxis mathematics eliminated the sense of continuity and motion found in Newton’s theory and superimposed its units of division (whether seconds, years, or even centuries as in some early annuity tables) upon the fixed representational space that remained. Regardless of the mathematician’s unit of division, the resulting calculation needed only a single variable to account for time. This dynamic works precisely because the process by which mathematics accounts for time through measured intervals has the effect of collapsing time into space, a move that corresponded with seventeenth-century efforts to bridge the divide between space and complex numbers. But this representation of time has no way to account for the human sense of duration and its continuity, a failure that distinguishes mathematical time from earlier spatial metaphors for time.

Human beings associated time and space long before the advent of modern mathematics. Even the possibility of an eternity “outside” of mortal time invokes spatial metaphors. But time’s most important association was primarily with change. This is the association that gives structure

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26 I follow Beck in using “absolute” to mean “independent of the things and events which occupy them.” Beck, “World Enough,” 125.
to what Stuart Sherman calls occasional time, time that arises not out of its place in a system of
measurement, but out of its relation to culturally significant events or practices.\textsuperscript{27} In this
construction, we draw our understanding of time from the distinctions between experienced
events such that we experience duration as the persistence of change in our world.\textsuperscript{28} This
conceptual integration of time and change gives rise to familiar metaphors of motion, invoking
space as that element in which motion becomes detectable. Thus, the metaphors hidden in
references to time passing, flying, creeping or flowing capture the way in which intuitive
associations between time and change emerge figuratively as a sense that time moves through
space.\textsuperscript{29} During the seventeenth century, European thinkers revolutionized mathematics by
finding new ways to represent change as a relation between events. But in the process,
Newtonian thought had disassociated time from change and redefined it as a flow that could be
divided infinitely. Mathematics imposed its own structure on that flow, stilling its motions and
capturing change in the static relations of evenly spaced instants.

In a response to Einstein’s theory of relativity, Henri Bergson points to the distinction
between this mathematical time and our durational experience of time as an explanation for
apparent paradoxes embedded in our theories of time.\textsuperscript{30} As Bergson notes, the power of
mathematics to represent and manipulate data over long time intervals obscures the fact that
mathematics does not in fact represent the continuity of time that fills those intervals:

If we now observe that science works exclusively with measurements, we become aware
that, with respect to time, science counts instants, takes note of simultaneities, but

\textsuperscript{27} See Sherman’s discussion of early English bell ringing and Donne’s \textit{Meditations}, 36-48.
\textsuperscript{28} Vyvyan Evans, \textit{The Structure of Time: Language, meaning and temporal cognition} (Amsterdam: John
Benjamins, 2004), includes a discussion of the relationship of time to event experience from a cognitive perspective,
13-32.
\textsuperscript{29} See Evans, \textit{The Structure of Time}.
\textsuperscript{30} Henri Bergson, \textit{Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe}, ed. Robin Durie
(Manchester, Eng.: Clinamen, 1999).
remains without a grip on what happens in the intervals. [Science] may indefinitely increase the number of extremities, indefinitely narrow the intervals; but always the interval escapes it, shows [time] only in its extremities. If every motion in the universe was to accelerate in proportion, including the one that serves as the measure of time . . . the change would exist only for that consciousness able to compare the flow of things with that of inner life. In the view of science nothing would have changed.\textsuperscript{31}

Bergson’s illustration reveals the importance of motion to human experiences of time and the contrasting lack of motion in mathematical temporality. In its closed system of simultaneities, mathematics has no need for motion. But in the intuitive temporality of human consciousness, motion is a necessary byproduct of the need to represent change, whether that change is within or without the human mind.

As distinct frameworks, these two understandings of time need not conflict, but at the crux of Bergson’s thesis is the idea that the human mind chronically entangles the mathematical innovations through which we advance scientific knowledge with the intuitive concepts through which we experience our world. This tendency was already visible in John Locke’s explanation of time. Positioning his discussion of time immediately before the section on “numbers,” Locke understands duration as “another sort of distance, or length.”\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, Locke feels bound to concede that this form of length arises, “not from the permanent parts of space, but from the fleeting and perpetually perishing parts of succession.” Nevertheless, Locke’s insistence, throughout the section, on defining time through a metaphor of the static measurement of length diverges from previous conceptions of time as dynamic and associated with space through motion and change. Duration in Locke’s theory thus becomes pure length as

\textsuperscript{31} Bergson, 40-1.
\textsuperscript{32} Locke, 104.
“ideas” become a unit of measurement; “the distance between any parts of that succession, or between the appearance of any two ideas in our minds.”

Locke’s conflation of spatial and temporal measurements suggests the difficulty of keeping time concepts distinct in our minds. Bergson describes the eventual result:

The measurement of a thing is sometimes the revealer of its nature, and precisely at this point mathematical expression turns out to have a magical property: created by us or risen at our bidding, it does more than we asked of it; for we cannot convert into space the time already elapsed without treating all of time the same way. The act by which we usher the past and present into space spreads out the future there without consulting us.

The excess dimension through which mathematics demarcates time thus becomes an expansive past and future that are physically “present” with us now, though tantalizingly inaccessible. From the eighteenth century onward, that ever-present past haunts its creators with the possibility of doors and windows that open onto that other time. In the later part of the century, the psychological temptations of such a time-space will manifest themselves in powerful uses of history and nostalgia. But in the fixing of time, something else happens as well. Though mathematics has no conceptual need to associate time with motion, the human mind cannot dispense with that most fundamental understanding of time’s “passage.” When mathematics fixes the motion of time into measured intervals of space, time no longer flies; we do. Modern mathematics thus reconfigures the future as a temporal expanse to be glimpsed and manipulated in numbers. The human mind transforms that expanse into an imaginative landscape that lies spread out before us, waiting for a human subject that is now in motion within a whole new dimension. Late seventeenth-century leaders and businessmen believed that their new means for

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33 Locke, 105.
34 Bergson, 43.
financing the empire would allow the public and its government to march toward that future together.

Prompted by the urgent finances of the Crown, Britain put mathematical time to work with a series of annuities, lotteries and tontine annuities designed to raise short-term funds for the state. Civic leaders had adopted all three financing tools from the Continent, and in the case of annuities and lotteries in particular, these tools already had found some success in private use within Britain. Early on, the state sought to tempt its citizens with annuities and tontine loan schemes. The tontine loan was a game of chance in which the government and participants bet on the lifespan of the participant. Under the scheme, participants received ten percent interest on their loans until 1700 and seven percent thereafter. To entice its participants, the state paid this interest on the loan as a whole, directing a pro rata share of each interest payment to a participant only during his lifespan or for the life of a person he had nominated at the outset of the contract (his nominee). As a result, the state essentially won if the nominee died early, but a young participant might live to see a windfall on his original investment. The scheme raised only £377,600, and only £108,100 remained after many participants took an option to switch their claims to annuities. Whether because the terms of the tontine appeared too complicated to potential lenders, as Dickson suggests, or because those inclined to place their money with the state were more interested in security than windfall, the state’s early appeal to the public’s sense of chance was relatively unsuccessful.

Fortunately for the cash-strapped Crown, the annuity schemes fared better. Annuity sales licensed under parliamentary acts of 1693 and 1694 raised a combined total of £891,900. Annuity schemes came with a larger price tag for the government, however. In order to convince seventeenth-century Britons to lend their money to the Crown, the state had to offer annuitants
an interest rate of fourteen percent, well above the legal interest rate of six percent for private transactions. Moreover, to initiate any of these schemes, Parliament first needed to pass legislation designating a future source of funds with which to pay the winners or buyers of the schemes. A 1708 Act of Parliament paid for the 1710 lottery with an ongoing tax on “Coals, Culm and Cynders” and new duties on “Houses, having Twenty Windows or more.”

Parliament guaranteed the 1693 and 1694 annuity schemes with an added and highly controversial excise tax on beer, vinegar, and certain imported liquors to cover the potential ninety-nine year term of the annuities.

The British state soon found that lotteries were generally more successful for raising money without running too far afoul of public opinion. Privately-run lotteries had become popular throughout Britain and the Continent, and though an Elizabethan state-lottery attempt had met with mixed success, the seventeenth-century populace was ready for a state version of the scheme. In March of 1694, Parliament authorized the first state lottery for the amount of £1 million. Tickets cost £10 each, with winners receiving sixteen-year annuities at varying amounts. The 1694 lottery tickets sold quickly and set the stage for state lotteries that would be put on sporadically through most of the next century. From the point-of-view of the state, lotteries worked very much like a sale of annuities. Based on revenue the Crown expected to receive in the future, the state could commit to making regular payments to its annuitants or lottery winners. By opening the offer to the general public, the Crown could increase its pool of “lenders” and avoid many of the political dangers of borrowing from a select group of

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35 An Act for Continuing part of the Duties upon Coals, Culm, and Cynders, and Granting New Duties upon Houses, having Twenty Windows or more, to Raise the sum of Fifteen hundred thousand Pounds, by way of a Lottery, for the Service of the Year One thousand seven hundred and ten, 8 Anne.
36 The annuity payments in this scheme ended upon the death of the annuitant, such that the state was gambling upon the early deaths of its debtors to compensate for the interest that it had promised to pay.
moneymen. Putting aside for a moment the concerns expressed by many contemporaries that state lotteries might encourage private gambling, the lotteries proved to be an invaluable tool in late seventeenth-century efforts to raise cash without further straining the public’s relationship to the Crown.

But neither state lotteries nor annuity schemes worked unless a significant part of the British populace shared the state’s view of its financial (and political) future. With the recasting of state debt as public credit, the financial interests of the government and a large number of its citizens become intimately aligned. J.G.A. Pocock notes the way in which a shared financial stake in the future changes the relationship of a people to its government.\(^{38}\) Pocock’s uncritical approach to this financially-backed nationalism is troubling, but scholars acknowledge the role of state debt policies to the forging of the British Empire and its marketplace culture. Peter De Bolla links the public’s perception of its unprecedented state debt to the discourse on the sublime, arguing that the individual emerges as the site of the “real” to counteract the disorienting boundlessness of state finance.\(^{39}\) Patrick Brantlinger also makes use of psychoanalytic theory, but combines this with a strong Marxist perspective to show that the national debt creates a fetishization of paper currency that underwrites the idea of nation and the subject’s ties to that nation.\(^{40}\) Brantlinger argues convincingly for the importance of colonial and class exploitation in sustaining the fiction of the British empire and its currency. Robert Mitchell addresses the effects of early state borrowing on later generations of Britons, arguing that the discourse of sympathy emerges to compensate for the systemic tensions inherent in that financial


\(^{39}\) Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*.

\(^{40}\) Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*.
discourse. Only Mitchell goes beyond the relatively simple idea of the shared future to examine the importance of temporality in the period. Focusing on Romantic poets of the latter part of the century, Mitchell reads in Wordsworth and Shelley an effort to escape the self-perpetuating temporal structures of state debt.

While Mitchell is less invested in the means by which eighteenth-century Britain contracted for its long-term debts, both De Bolla and Brantlinger construct their discussions around the Bank of England. After its establishment in 1694, the Bank served as the central player in all of the state’s schemes; its operations centralized the state’s financing operations, and its credit notes dominated English currency valuations. In the next chapter, I address the conceptual changes that surrounded the Bank’s founding and its operation in the first decades of the eighteenth century. But with their explicit ties to a gambling tradition, the lotteries offer something that the Bank’s operations cannot: a window onto the role of chance in the financial construction of the state.

Lotteries, writes Dickson, “tapped the general rage for gambling” and provided “a perennial way of escape into wealth and leisure – if only in the imagination.” Undoubtedly there is a solid element of truth to Dickson’s analysis of the public’s psychology, but we cannot imagine that most ticket buyers would have admitted to such short-sightedness. Many if not most lottery buyers believed in the real possibility of winning. This is not to say that ticket holders envisioned the same sort of carefully measured future on which annuity purchasers were betting, but it does mean that the lottery-playing public had its own relationship with the future.

41 Robert Mitchell, *Sympathy and the State.*
42 Dickson, 54.
43 A number of scholars have looked at the cultural significance behind lotteries, gambling and other games of chance during the eighteenth century. In *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance,* Thomas Kavanagh argues that the statistical thinking that emerged in seventeenth-century France gave birth to the idea of a universal standard through which all individuals could be defined, such that “probability theory offered the paradise of a purely present
Richard Steele’s satirical critique of that relationship gives us a glimpse of the conceptual twists that shaped it. *The Tatler* essay on the 1710 lottery begins with Bickerstaff’s account of the crowd forming near the Bank in a rush to purchase tickets for the latest lottery. After a passage reflecting on the creativity of a state that has turned a form of wartime taxation into a public diversion, Bickerstaff gets caught in the excitement of the crowd. At this point, surrounded by a jostling London crowd ready to gamble their money, Bickerstaff decides to purchase a ticket for himself. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, Steele reveals his narrator to be considerably less adept with probability calculations than those who designed the lottery. And in fact, Bickerstaff’s faith in his mathematics finds reinforcement in “the twinkling of a certain star in my astronomical observations.” With a gambler’s confidence, Bickerstaff begins preparing for his future as a wealthy man:

> I am arming myself against her [Fortune’s] favours with all my philosophy; and that I may not lose myself in such a redundance of unnecessary and superfluous wealth, I have determined to settle an annual pension out of it upon a family of Palatines, and by that means give these unhappy strangers a taste of British property.

Besides these fortunate Palatines, Bickerstaff tells us that he will provide for a particular servant-maid’s retirement to her home in Wales with an annuity. Our narrator’s beneficence is supported by the sympathetic bonds that he feels for the members of the milling crowd around him. His attention lights particularly on a young country wench who is “whirling her mop, with her petticoats tucked up very agreeably” and whose dance-like motions he imagines to be a

rationality freeing us from the burdens of history, family, and class” (24). Games of chance countered this conception by revealing the limits of human rationality and control.

44 Beginning with the 1710 lottery, ticket subscriptions were drawn at the Bank; drawings were held in the Guildhall. See Cornelius Walford, “Lotteries: The Part They Have Played in State Finance,” *Journal of the Institute of Bankers* 6.2 (February 1885): 71-94,80.

45 Steele, 230.

46 Steele, 231.
premonition of future success. Consequently, Bickerstaff is careful to greet her as he would someone of her future standing. He further advises “all masters and mistresses to carry it with great moderation and condescension towards their servants till next Michaelmas, lest the superiority at that time should be inverted.” Under Steele’s pen, Bickerstaff revels in the sense that he and his fellow lottery players have been gifted with a glimpse into the future and all its outlandish possibilities.

But of course, Bickerstaff represents the flawed reasoning and wild optimism that Steele is critiquing. Bickerstaff’s mathematics mimic the conceptual process that went into the state’s planning of the lottery. To his mind, the success ration he has produced for himself provides the same sort of calculated survey out over the future that lottery advocates used to create tax-income and debt-payment predictions decades in advance. Steele’s narrator even partakes in the political concerns of his financial predecessors. As Bickerstaff’s references to Greek statesmen suggest, lottery advocates claimed that such schemes would alleviate political concerns as well as financial strains. Judging from this essay alone, we cannot say that Steele disapproved of the lotteries themselves, but he does mean for his readers to see the potentially disastrous results of the lottery on the ticket-buying public. Bickerstaff’s mop-whirling companion probably cannot afford to be spending her wages on lottery tickets, but Steele is probably more concerned with Bickerstaff’s willingness to invert class differences and gamble his neighbors’ employment status on the twinkling of a star and a premonition. The problem here is that Bickerstaff has mistaken his own wishes and desires for a calculated version of the future.

47 Steele, 231.
48 Steele, 231-2.
49 A secondary market that sold proportionate shares in lottery tickets quickly developed around the state lotteries, making it possible for lower-wage earners to participate.
The mathematical future given in probability theories and financial projections works only in large numbers if it works at all. And this is certainly a problem as Bickerstaff attempts to predict a specific future for himself and the few people nearest him in the crowd. But Steele’s essay also picks up on a conflation of two versions of time. Bergson’s analysis shows that mathematical time is not time at all, but a variable represented as space. The formulation works precisely because the consciousness that surveys the mathematical future lies outside of it, much as a prospector might survey a landscape from a position well above it. Bergson also tells us, though, that the human mind cannot help but introduce its experiences of consciousness and duration into that time-space the moment it is re-imagined as lived time.

Bickerstaff’s wild optimism for a mathematical future that he believes he can lay claim to personally demonstrates how easily the mind slips from mathematical survey to time experience. This small cognitive slip opens the door to the skeletal spaces of a mathematical future, imbues it with a sense of motion, and brings the future to life with the rich temporality of human consciousness. But given the static intervals of mathematics, this conflation of times assigns its sense of motion to the human consciousness rather than to time itself. Bickerstaff does not watch time flow past like a river; he rushes headlong down a road into the future with the whirling energetic crowd around him. Steele’s fictional character shows us the consequences of this temporal confusion in Bickerstaff’s naïve belief that he foresees, experiences, and might even create the imminent future of the nation. So compelling is this sensation that imaginative projections emerge as foresight, glimpses of what is to come. It is no coincidence that Bickerstaff raises the money for his lottery ticket by selling two globes and a telescope. The future created by mathematical thinking becomes an expansive space to be explored, discovered and created by a human consciousness in motion.
With his amicable but foolish narrator, Steele wants his audience to see the illusions that such thinking creates. Bickerstaff has, in a temporal sense, gotten ahead of himself. His financial future is only an illusion of the present moment, albeit keenly felt. More disturbing still, his political future is also illusory. Bickerstaff has found a moment of social cohesion amongst the crowd as he shares with them both the physical space in front of the Bank and giddy hopefulness toward future prospects. But the fact that Steele has written this essay from his own apartment rather than from the public spaces of the periodical indicates that the patriotic sense of community involved in a lottery is more illusory than not. Every member of the crowd has his or her eyes on the future, but each of these futures differs from the rest. Concerns about how such state-sanctioned gambling affected the minds of the public steadily grew over the course of the eighteenth century, resulting finally in the end of the state lotteries (at least for a time). The conflation of times that made these lotteries popular, like the state’s debt, persisted long afterward.

Annuity sales and lotteries played an important role in the making of Britain’s eighteenth century, but it was banking that emerged at the center of the Empire’s financial system. Well before England and Scotland founded their first national banks, governments in the Continent’s shipping centers were establishing banking systems designed to meet the demands of far-flung trade networks. The earliest banking in Britain was a relatively simple operation; a goldsmith or pawn broker could hold coin or goods in safekeeping and issue credit notes that would be paid at the demand of the bearer. These practices helped compensate for the Empire’s shortage of coins, and avoided the dangers and inconveniences of transporting gold and silver. Inspired by the more centralized efficiency of Dutch, German and Italian banks, financiers began promoting the establishment of a banking system within Britain. Their proposals outlined several different
models for banking and resulted in the establishment of a number of institutions before Parliament finally issued a charter for the Bank of England. Most of those early ventures failed relatively soon after their establishment, but the mathematical concepts on which they depended found their way into the basic banking model we still use in the twenty-first century. In the next chapter, I look back at early banking proposals and argue that their constructions of time and finance give us a new perspective on the public that Addison and Steele so assiduously worked to shape.
An anonymous drawing in the British Museum shows the interior of a coffee house sometime during the latter part of the seventeenth century or the first half of the eighteenth. The middle of picture shows an attentive waiter who stands facing out toward the viewer. With one foot positioned slightly forward, he holds a coffee pot aloft in his right hand and skillfully pours its contents in a long arching stream into a white china cup held in his left hand. The waiter’s image effectively splits the image into two balanced halves. To the waiter’s right, the drawing depicts the business workings of a coffee shop. A woman in a white shift manages the tea and tobacco from a canopied stand while another servant of the shop retrieves clay pipes for its clients. The floor is clean and bare in front of them, and behind them a roaring fire heats a row of pots in preparation for service. On the opposite side of the page, well dressed men sit in clusters at the tables, holding coffee cups and engaged in lively conversation over newspapers. Messages dot the back wall, and a man stands, his candle held high to illuminate an English landscape scene behind him.

Whatever the intentions of the original artist, the drawing reflects an old but persistent story about the nature of the public during the eighteenth century. This was the public of the
British Enlightenment, a well-heeled middle class consisting primarily of men whose coffee shops and tobacco pipes reflected their new leisure time as effectively as their newspapers reflected the power of print media to reshape everything from politics and science to industry and the arts through the ambitions of that middle class. Since Jürgen Habermas gave this public a starring role in the history of capitalism and democracy, scholars have worked to revise some of the least convincing parts of the story. As Erin Mackie points out in her survey, the two dominant lines of criticism that have examined the eighteenth-century public have argued for its existence either as a discursive creation or as an historically specific reality, but are often challenged to articulate a relationship between the two. In this chapter I suggest that the difficulty in reconciling these two perspectives is embedded in the nature of the public itself. As a loosely defined group of people, the public were the power behind the state’s revenue and its debts and were thus central to the existence of a political economy. But as a part of the mathematical calculations that imagined the political economy into being, the public can only be assumed, not represented. The result is not just a clash of two perspectives, but a temporal elision; the public is both an insistently embodied present and a concept seen only from the prospective or retrospective data intervals of mathematics.

To understand more clearly how this phenomenon occurred and how periodical authors responded, we need to look beyond the bodies depicted in conversation on the right side of the

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1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1989). The complete list of scholarship that expands on or critiques Habermas’ analysis is too lengthy to cover here. Some of the most significant contributions include Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); *The Public as Phantom: The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins for the Social Text Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), and within that volume particularly Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” 102-42.

coffee house drawing to the financial concepts implied by the other half of the picture. I begin this chapter with a review of the financial discourse that led to the founding of Britain’s first banks. From its reworking of the relationship between time and value, financial discourse created the economic concept of circulation, not to articulate that relationship, but to elide one of the most troubling gaps in political-economic theory. However, it was a different circulating medium, the periodical, that produced the most subtle and effective response to the inability of political economics to represent the public. Borrowing from Foucault’s analysis of representation and resemblances, I argue that Addison and Steele found in the older espisteme a narrative model that captured the temporal paradoxes and immense productivity of the modern public.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, while British coffee shops were taking in their first customers, British traders and merchants were increasingly dependent upon the pseudo-currencies created by notes of credit from private lenders, goldsmiths and lombards (early pawn shops). Britain’s supply of coin specie (primarily silver and gold) was inadequate to meet the needs of its marketplaces. But institutions like the Dutch Wisselbank offered a model for a more centralized, efficient system that used negotiable credit notes in place of coin. Moreover, a significant bank could act as a reliable lender for the Crown. In order for such plans to work, Britons would need to create public trust in both the new currencies and in the banks that issued them even while convincing the public to come to terms with public debt as a regular and indefinite reality.

Fortunately for the advocates of these banking schemes, the changes that made a national debt policy feasible were in place by 1688. Joint-stock companies were beginning to serve as repositories for long-term capital rather than short-term ventures as wealthier Britons became
accustomed to long-term investments outside of land. Long-term mortgages were emerging as a way for landholders to gain cash and manage debts. As these mortgages grew more common, Scotland and then the other British nations established land registries that streamlined the process by which land title holders could borrow. And despite ongoing concerns about the stability of the Hanoverian Crown, lending to the government became more appealing as Parliament showed itself willing to guarantee state debts with tax revenues. Finally, banking plans were offered up in a rhetoric of patriotism as advocates argued that the Dutch competition would continue to draw money from Britain so long as Holland had the advantage of its banks.

By the middle of the seventeenth century notables including Andrew Yarranton, the First Earl of Shaftesbury and Sir Josiah Child were advocating for the establishment of some form of public banks that could provide ready cash to the government and issue notes of credit to customers. The argument for banks was carried on in coffee shops and printed pamphlets as well as in political circles. Historian J. Keith Horsefield counts no fewer than six different types of


banking scheme, from lombard banks based loosely on the model of pawnbrokers, to land banks that claimed some or all of their security in the form of land titles, to the final development of banks secured by future revenues of the state. The proponents of these institutions produced as many arguments in defense of their plans: banks would lower interest rates for small merchants, would stabilize the government’s finances, and would raise the purchase price of land. Banks could deplete the power of the existing “money-men” (lenders to the Crown) and might lure capital investment from Holland by providing higher interest rates in Britain. Almost universally, banking advocates predicted that the banks would “draw out” trade, foil hoarders, and realign the various classes and factions under one common interest in the financial future of the nation. To accomplish these feats, even the authors whose plans relied upon goods or land rather than tax revenue recognized that the greatest challenge for the new banks lay in the need to pull value from the future.

In his analysis of the period’s financial discourse, James Thompson argues that the recoinage debates and the proliferation of credit produced anxieties about the changing conceptual relationship between materiality and value. From his Marxist standpoint, Thompson argues that the early eighteenth century witnessed an historical transition from previous conceptions of money as a representation of “accumulation or treasure – wealth itself,” to an understanding of money “as a means of wealth, as capital, or as ‘money in process.’” Thompson offers valuable insights into the cultural responses to the instability of value, but his discussion glosses over much of the complexity of this discourse. I therefore want to look more closely at

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8 Thompson, 33.
the ways in which financial schemers imagined and articulated value at the close of the seventeenth century.

In the earlier part of the century, Thomas Mun had been an important voice in shifting discussions about trade from a mercantilist emphasis on retaining bullion to an analysis of import and export ratios that did not distinguish between the export of wares and the export of bullion. Written in defense of the East India Company’s practice of exporting large amounts of bullion, *A Discourse of Trade from England unto the East-Indies* (1621) argued that wares and money bore the same relation to national wealth, “For let no man doubt, but that money doth attend Merchandize, for money is the prize [price] of wares, and wares are the proper use of money; so that their coherence is unseparable.” Using a comparison to the Venetians and French undoubtedly meant to provoke his countrymen, Mun argued for measures that would increase the national volume of trade and increase exports over imports, rather than targeting the importation of bullion. As Nicholas Barbon, Robert Murray, William Killigrew, and William Paterson entered the debates on trade in the latter part of the century, they adopted Mun’s belief in the sheer volume and movement of trade to create wealth. Banking would not necessarily produce more bullion (though it would deter hoarding), but their advocates argued that new banks would increase trade.

Most of the century’s banking proposals tended to rely at least in part upon land titles as a basis for the issue of credit. In one such scheme Robert Murray described how his proposed lombard bank would make use of values captured from the future. Noting that “It frequently

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10 Thomas Mun, *A Discourse of Trade From England unto the East-Indies: Answering to diverse Objections which are usually made against the same*, 2nd printing (London: Nicholas Okes for Jon Pyper, [1620] 1621), 25.
happens that several Goods are only proper to be sold at certain times and seasons,” Murray proposed to maximize both the value of goods and the amount of value in circulation by establishing magazines that would store “dead stock” until the time at which those goods could be expected to gain value. In the meantime the bank would issue notes of credit designed to serve as negotiable currency:

A clothier having a parcel of Clothes, which at present he cannot vend, must therefore attend the opportunity of a better Market: in the interim to carry on his Trade in the Country, he leaves them, as aforesaid, with order to dispose thereof at a price limited with the allowance of the customary Factorage, and thereupon forthwith receives the said Credit, which supplies him with all manner of Necessaries, as from the Salter, Oylman, Spanish Merchant, &c. who again furnish themselves, as their respective occasions require, by virtue of the same Credit.

Murray conceives of money in this plan as “no more than a deposite given for such Commodities as men part withal,” a placeholder for the eventual exchange of commodities. The word “deposit” refers to the storage of goods at the lombard: “such is the Credit which we propose to issue forth, which all men may easily obtain by depositing their dead stock.” In late seventeenth-century usage, a deposit refers to “something laid up on a place, or committed to the charge of a person, for safekeeping.” In this instance, however, Murray does not intend for either the money or the goods to be returned to the original owner as suggested by his terminology. He intends for both to be disposed of by the holder and for the goods in this way to

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12 Murray, 6-7.
13 Murray, 5.
contribute once again to the “circulation” of value in the nation. “Safekeeping” in Murray’s proposal is not a strategy for controlling possession, but a strategy for manipulating value via time.

The values of goods that each merchant or tradesman deposits with the lombard emerge at designated, culturally defined moments in the future. At a conceptual level they mark the intervals on the mathematician’s timeline. What makes money and its instruments different from these other commodities is that (excepting whatever incidental market value its materials might command at a given moment) money marks the duration between those intervals. Money is not value, for that comes from the negotiation of human relations in a larger marketplace (this is the variable that Murray incorporates into his plan by using “customary factorage”). In the period during which the first instruments of credit capitalism are emerging, money serves as the essential mediator between value and time, a trace of the conceptual lines that bind the present to the mathematical future. Whether in the form of paper, metal or wood, money becomes a sort of time traveler, a reflection of that fourth dimension that mathematics has created alongside our present reality. And while money’s financial value consists of a promise of future exchange, its imaginative value often lies in its apparent ability to “reveal” the past. Thus literature of the period often gave voices to bank notes, guineas and shillings in the form of “it-narratives.”

Thompson took the inspiration for his work on value from the traveling bank note in Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. Much earlier in the century, however, Joseph Addison’s talking shilling demonstrated a changing relationship between value and human time. Published in a November 11, 1710 edition of *The Tatler*, Addison’s essay recounts the narrator’s dream vision in which a shilling relates its history. The animated shilling describes its birth in Peru during the exploration period of Sir Francis Drake. Stamped in London with the image of Queen Elizabeth, the shilling

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15 In later periods I would have to make a second exception for market trading in foreign currencies.
moves freely around England, is hoarded by an old miser, “freed” by an ungrateful heir, and passed rapidly from hand to hand:

As for my self, I was sent to the Apothecary’s Shop for a Pint of Sack. The Apothecary gave me to an Herb-Woman, the Herb-Woman to a Butcher, the Butcher to a Brewer, and the Brewer to his Wife, who made a Present of me to a Nonconformist Preacher.\textsuperscript{16}

With a notable silence during the Cromwellian era, the shilling narrates a hundred and fifty years of modern English history.\textsuperscript{17}

This longer time frame creates a setting for the essay’s survey of human nature, suggesting as Mandeville had that the economy often turns on an array of human weakness. But Addison’s essay also creates a narrative structure for value. As in Murray’s example of the clothier, Addison’s fictional economy works in the continuous sequential time of narrative. The reader is expected to imagine this continuity even through those large temporal gaps left by the narration: “After this Manner I made my Way merrily through the World; for, as I told you before, we Shillings love nothing so much as traveling.”\textsuperscript{18} In this sense, Addison’s narrative structure mimics our most intuitive understandings of time. Time manifests itself as a continuous sequence of change like the succession of ideas in Locke’s theory or the common understanding against which Newton posits pure time.

But Addison creates this narrative structure in response to an apparent paradox. The essay begins with a conversation between Addison’s narrator and a talkative friend who proclaims that


\textsuperscript{17} Lynn M Festa, \textit{Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) includes a brief discussion of Addison’s shilling. Festa argues that the personification of objects like the shilling supported eighteenth-century efforts to create and secure the boundaries of the self even as those narratives helped to render interpersonal relations thinkable over the new expanses of empire.

\textsuperscript{18} Addison, 270.
“it required much greater Talents to fill up and become a retired Life, than a Life of Business.”

Businessmen, he argues, “valued themselves for being in Motion, and passing through a Series of trifling and insignificant Actions,” when in fact no such person could “produce half the Adventures that this Twelvepenny-Piece has been engaged in, were it possible for him to give us an Account of his Life.”

Addison’s narrator means for the shilling to focus the audience’s attention on a contemporary obsession with “being in Motion.” Time has become something to “fill up,” and businessmen, at least, are convinced that it must be filled with some sort of motion, apparently regardless of effect. In this context, the haphazard trail of the shilling in time parallels the way in which its leisured holders are filling their time. And men of business move with no more direction, though with greater attention to the importance of moving.

We must assume that these references to the value of activity in the early eighteenth century owe something to an early modern discourse of work and leisure and, perhaps ironically, to Addison’s Whiggish politics. But Addison’s reference to motion owes more to the discourse of political economy and its ubiquitous concept of “circulation.” In *The Growth of Economic Thought*, Henry William Spiegel credits John Law with introducing the term “circulation” into economic theory in the first years of the eighteenth century. Its use already is evident, though, in the pamphlets outlining bank proposals in the mid-1600’s. In a 1663 proposal to establish a bank based on future tax revenues to the Crown, William Killigrew notes the public concern that there be enough money to “Circulate our Trade.”

His argument for how the bank’s credit bonds will produce value for the nation demonstrates the role of circulation in this formula:

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19 Addison, 269.
20 Addison, 269.
22 William Killigrew, *A Proposal, Shewing How this Nation may be vast Gainers by all the Sums of Money, given to the Crown, without Lessening the Prerogative* (1663).
Now, I will suppose these Bonds, the one with the other, pass thro’ forty Hands only in a Year, every Trader gaining but 5 l. per Cent. then every 100 l. in these Bonds produce 200 l. per Ann. Gains to the Nation, as long as they are standing out. If so, then the Nation may well dispense with the Charges of the Office and Interest, since for 2000000 l. given, the Nation will gain 4000000 l. the first Year, little less the second and third Years: Consider, then, the Advantage accrues to the Nation on the whole, and before all the Bonds are paid off.23

The circulation in Killigrew’s plan consists, rather vaguely, of bonds passing through hands, but it is that circulation that produces Killigrew’s impressive projections for the future. The same dynamic appears in William Paterson’s Brief Account of the Intended Bank of England:

And if the Proprietors of the Bank can circulate their Fundation of Twelve hundred Thousand Pounds, without having more than Two or Three Hundred Thousand Pounds lying dead at one time with another, this Bank will be in effect as Nine Hundred Thousand Pounds, or a Million of fresh Money brought into the Nation.24

As Spiegel points out, the circulation metaphor and its usual companions, the “drawing out” of money and coins that “lie dead,” all derive from a physiological discourse built on Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of blood in the human body.25 To this extent, early political economists are drawing on an older tradition of figuring the nation as a corporal body. However, these physiological metaphors hide a conceptual blind spot in economic thought. Murray, Killigrew, Paterson and the many other public figures whose advocacy finally led to the

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23 Killigrew, 12-3.
25 William Harvey published his findings in 1628 in the Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus. Renée Descartes elaborated on Harvey’s findings in France and financial thinkers in France adapted it their own theory of political economy under the leadership of Barthémy de Laffemas, Jean Baptiste Colbert, Pierre le Pesant de Boisguilbert, Scotsman John Law, and Irishman Richard Cantillon, among others. See Speigel, The Growth of Economic Thought, 170-200.
establishment of national banks throughout Britain relied upon the use of mathematical thought to provide models of how values change within a marketplace. Within these models, the widest possible array of simultaneous events combines with an indefinitely long time frame to allow for patterns to emerge from a “field” of events. Banking models work very much like probability-theory diagrams in this fashion. Two or five or even ten rolls of the dice can result in any combination of results, but the recorded results of a hundred rolls over time will reveal a regular pattern. These patterns grow stronger and more predictable the greater the number of events, such that longer time frames can become an important way to gather the numbers necessary to making the mathematics work.

Using a similar logic, early banking plans made use of the growing time spans and the much slower emergence of mortality tables and statistical data to identify economic patterns in Britain’s marketplaces. In keeping with Bergson’s understanding of scientific time, banking models represented time as a spatial “field” of data, in which the mathematician could “see” all of his or her data simultaneously. The data is collected in calculations at a chosen point in time that demarcates each interval (Bergson’s points of simultaneity). In banking then, as now, these points usually marked intervals of one year (per annum), though the years could be compiled into longer time frames. For each of these intervals, banking advocates could estimated the number and amount of outstanding bonds, the amount of cash needed to cover redemptions, and the accumulation of interest paid and received. All of these considerations are represented as snapshots at the points that separate regular time intervals. And as we would expect from Bergson’s analysis, the intervals between those points are empty.

Mathematics made possible modern economic thought, along with the estimates of borrowing, trading, tax revenues and public consumption on which banking is founded. But it
has no direct way of accounting for the individuals that power a marketplace in the continuous
time between mathematic points. Banking proposals sometimes attempted to address this gap
with provisions that divided up that time for their credit holders; Killigrew’s bank, for example,
paid interest on its bonds every six months to support their function as currency. Likewise,
banking plans addressed the interim between future projections with gestures that acknowledge
the customer’s individual experience of timing. Most proponents of the new banks recognized
that the public would want the right to assign or redeem their notes at any time, regardless of the
term specified on the loan. In spite of these gestures, financial thinkers found no way around the
failure of mathematical thought to address the individual needs, activities, and desires that
actually determined the financial circumstances of the Empire. In lieu of a solution to the
problem, economic thought fell back on the metaphor of circulation.

Circulation, implying the persistent and fluid motion of blood in a living body, fills the
empty intervals of mathematical time with a rhetorical gesture at the living time in between.
Circulation suggests but never specifies anything about the integrated consciousness of motion
and time that is so central to human time experience. The physiological associations of the term
point to the fact that this is a motion that belongs to human needs and activities. Ironically,
however, the same associations strip that very vigorous human activity of any shade of agency or
consciousness. Killigrew’s assurance that under his plan the Crown and Treasury “remain still
the Fountain-Head” of this circulating wealth does little to negate the fact that a circulating
economy lacks an active subject.26 Because of its mathematical methods, political economy
presumes a public that it can never name and to which it can never attribute consciousness.

Early economic thought therefore put great value on the continuous activity of traders,
merchants and consumers, but could not represent either individual choices or anything about the

26 Killigrew, 7.
direction of that activity. In exchange for the numerical patterns that it sifted from human behaviors, mathematics sacrificed any representation of the embodied human beings that produced its patterns. Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century publics are left, then, with the ambiguous premium on motion so often referenced in Addison and Steele’s essays, but no corresponding sense of direction.

The obscurity left behind by mathematical perspectives on trade becomes a potent source of anxiety, for as Addison’s hoop-skirt trial shows, early eighteenth-century publics were aware that the large-scale futures they anticipated rested uneasily on blind consumer emulation. William Killigrew could proclaim optimistically that “all the Revenues of the Crown, all our Trade and Consumption, is Security, as well as the Taxes . . . which Security is far more than I have said, of a hundred times more than was ever given: This unites the King, and People by the strongest bonds.”27 The trade, consumption and taxable behaviors of a population massed together could create security on a scale great enough to sustain a nation. But there was always a danger of whole industries failing if the retailers and coffee shops should lose their appeal.

Mathematical time provided conceptual methods for predicting, projecting and manipulating value in Britain’s growing empire. But its fixed, spatial representation of time blended uneasily with the temporal experiences of human consciousness. As a result, the public that emerges during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is already defined in part by its relation to time. That public is, on the one hand, a byproduct of mathematical thought and, on the other, an active, unpredictable, constantly changing group of human subjects. The first lives solely in the abstractions of the mathematician or political economist as he surveys a national future. But the second public whirls about in a strange, modern time experience of

27 Killigrew, 9.
perpetual motion that becomes articulated in Addison and Steele’s early eighteenth-century periodicals.

In his study of modern nationhood Benedict Anderson looks at the development of newspapers as a symptom of the modern temporal concepts that formed nations from “imagined communities.”28 In the modern era, writes Anderson,

what has come to take the place of the medieval conception of simultaneity-along-time is,
to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.29

In a succeeding footnote, Anderson labels this modern time as “a conception of ‘meanwhile’” and argues that it is arguably the idea on which “every essential modern conception is based.”30 Modern societies imagine themselves to be linked by their participation in the horizontal simultaneity of this “meanwhile” even when the individuals who are so bound will never meet one another. Using newspapers as an example of how this dynamic manifests itself, Anderson defines two ways in which a daily periodical embodies our modern sense of the “meanwhile.”31 In the first case, writes Anderson, the relationship between stories on a news page reflects the temporal bond among members of a society: “the date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection – the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time.”32 As in the novel form, the reader is asked to imagine that the

29 Anderson, 24.
30 Anderson, 24 n.34.
31 In the previous pages Anderson applies his social time analysis to the novel form in a variety of global societies.
32 Anderson, 33.
“characters” of a news story continue their steady progression in time even as they move in and out of the news coverage.

But newspapers also embody our sense of a “meanwhile” in the manner in which we use them. Citing the tremendous growth in printing during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Anderson argues that the newspaper provides one of the earliest examples of mass consumption in modern economic history. The newspaper is consumed, in that it becomes obsolescent the day after printing, and it is consumed simultaneously by large numbers of readers:

each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? Anderson’s newspapers give support to a modern experience of time as horizontally shared and regularly flowing past universalized intervals. All human subjects living within the geographical and linguistic boundaries of the society experience this temporal plane as a further, shared set of boundaries to the community. The large-scale public of calendars and clock time (to which we can now add the mathematical public of political economy) blends seamlessly in this example with the psychological experience through which motion and change merge as time.

Addison, Steele and the numerous authors of eighteenth-century periodicals capitalized on the sense of simultaneous consumption that Anderson so eloquently describes. Marketed by their publishers as an alternative to newspapers, The Tatler and The Spectator carefully framed

33 Anderson, 35.
their essays within a daily format.\textsuperscript{34} In both periodicals the date and place from which each piece is written serves as the essay’s title. Combined with the narrators’ attention to well-known public landmarks, coffee shops, and topics of current interest, the date heading on each issue reinforces the sense that the reading audience is sharing a time frame as well as a cultural context.

Stuart Sherman argues that in the transition from \textit{The Tatler} to \textit{The Spectator}, Addison and Steele introduced a new relation between text and time in the public experience.\textsuperscript{35} Sherman builds on Anderson’s work and on Jürgen Habermas’ assertion that such periodicals fostered the development of a public sphere by providing the reading public with an image of itself. Distinguishing \textit{The Spectator} from its predecessors, Sherman argues that only with Mr. Spectator does that image of the reading public get refracted into the intensively private consciousness of a narrator who has willfully detached himself from his subject. \textit{The Spectator}’s blend of periodical and diurnal forms, writes Sherman, creates the experience of a diary turned inside out: the work not of a public or social figure composing a more secret version of the self in a single, sequestered manuscript, but of a wholly secretive sensibility imparting itself in print, to be read by a wide and varied public in the diurnal rhythm, and at the running moment, of its making.\textsuperscript{36}

Sherman compares this experience of a secretive, private subjectivity with the temporally structured secrecy that he has identified in Pepys’ truly private diaries. What \textit{The Spectator} participates in, he argues, is the making of a modern subjectivity defined through the closely

\textsuperscript{34} See for instance, Richard Steele’s essay on \textit{The Tatler} as a corrective to the poor influence of newspapers, No. 178, Tuesday, May 30, 1710, or Joseph Addison’s explanation of why \textit{The Spectator} is not a newspaper, No. 262, Monday, December 31, 1711. See also Addison’s discussion of immutable and occasional papers in \textit{The Spectator}, No. 435, Saturday, July 19, 1712. For a discussion of the development of \textit{The Tatler} and \textit{The Spectator}, see Erin Mackie, “Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background” in \textit{The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from ‘The Tatler’ and ‘The Spectator’}, ed. Erin Mackie (Boston: Bedford, St. Martin’s, 1998) 1-32.


\textsuperscript{36} Sherman, 113-4.
contained moments of measured time. Sherman’s argument elegantly attends to both the eighteenth-century periodical’s sense of temporal immediacy and the importance that it grants to the public. And he argues convincingly that *The Spectator* demonstrates the increasing value placed on the temporality of human consciousness. But what Sherman’s analysis does not capture is the necessity behind periodical time: the subjective time of Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator is not an extension of eighteenth-century discourse on the public, but a corrective to it.

The public to which Addison and Steele brought their new periodicals was a mass public, one that was already captured in and defined by the mathematical perspective of a capitalist economy. As Anderson suggests, periodical publications were arguably the first modern consumables. Printed and sold in bulk, they belonged to an economics of low margins and large numbers. And in fact, publications from this era reflect that the public understood itself in this way. Whether in the form of public opinion or public credit, Britons in the early eighteenth century had accepted the subject-less scale and duration of a mathematically conceived public. In financial discourse, that public congealed and functioned as easily as the hypothetical readers of Anderson’s morning news. In lived time, however, the clash between the mathematical public and its human subjects creates distortions. In the sublime or ecstatic moments when mathematical time seems to grant us a window onto the lived future and we feel ourselves part of the whirling motion of that future, the clash between these two frameworks can be as heady as Bickerstaff’s visions in the lottery crowd. In other contexts, the conflict between two dominant time concepts distorts active motion into blind wandering. Less than four months after publishing

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his essay on the shilling, Addison reproduced the conceptual strain between his period’s two timeframes with his vision of the valetudinarian, Lady Credit.\textsuperscript{38}

Written for the March 3, 1711 edition of The Spectator, the vision of Lady Credit responds to “the many Discourses which I had both read and heard concerning the Decay of Publick Credit.”\textsuperscript{39} The essay’s narrator describes a nightmarish vision that he has after visiting the Bank of England in Grocer’s Hall. In his vision, the hall is home to “a beautiful Virgin, seated on a Throne of Gold” and surrounded by symbols of English political and legal history. As the narrator observes her, Lady Credit cycles through a multitude of physical transformations in response to the symbols, letters with the latest news, and phantoms that assail or reassure her:

She was… subject to such Momentary Consumptions, that in the twinkling of an Eye, she would fall away from the most florid Complexion, and the most healthful State of Body, and wither into a Skeleton. Her Recoveries were often as sudden as her Decays, insomuch that she would revive in a Moment out of a waiting Distemper, into a Habit of the highest Health and Vigour.\textsuperscript{40}

Addison’s point here is that the well-being of public credit depends upon the political stability and cohesion of the nation. But the drama of his essay arises from those supernaturally fast shifts in the body of Lady Credit that transform her from a state of health to grave illness and back again.

\textsuperscript{38} The figure of Lady Credit has garnered significant critical interest. Erin Mackie argues that Addison’s essay demonstrates masculine efforts to control female sexuality during the period through a discourse of “natural” behaviors and female nature. “Lady Credit and the Strange Case of the Hoop-Petticoat,” Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in ‘The Tatler’ and ‘The Spectator’ (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 104-43. See also Sandra Sherman’s reading of Defoe on Lady Credit, in which she argues that Lady Credit’s deceptive presence becomes an allegory for his own authorship. Sandra Sherman, Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996). See also Terry Mulcaire, “Public Credit; Or, The Feminization of Virtue in the Marketplace.”


\textsuperscript{40} Addison, 15-6.
Given the financial frameworks from which it comes, public credit would be better figured in the moneybags that Addison’s narrator spots behind the throne. Whether we imagine it as money or as the airy value of government debt, public credit emerges from our financial estimates of trade, consumption and interest rates. By choosing a human body to represent the concept of public credit, Addison introduces the incompatible presence of consciousness into a mathematical discourse. In this regard the essay’s structure is similar to that found in his vision of the shilling written four months earlier; Addison animates a figure from financial discourse in order to provide his audience a glimpse into the hidden world behind “circulation.”

In the earlier essay, the shilling’s well-ordered narrative of its travels balances the doubly-blind motion of human activity, blind in that it cannot be represented in the framework from which it comes and blind because in lived time, we cannot “see” our own activity in the mapped time of our political economies. We thus move blindly with regard to the circulation that claims to be the reason for our activity. As disorienting as this vision is, Addison’s Lady Credit essay is even more disturbing because it delves below the motion of the human body in time to the motion of the mind. Captive on her throne, Lady Credit manifests the rapid turns of thought, fears, worry, and surprise that characterize the constant progression of conscious time that Locke characterized as a “succession of ideas.” Addison’s essay makes this very fundamental experience of time monstrous merely by writing its constant changes onto the body and from there into the mathematical realm of economy. Not only does Addison’s essay reveal concerns about the British public’s ability to leap the gaps between the lived time of consciousness and the mathematical time of the modern world, but it also suggests a particularly modern anxiety about the relationship between the individual and our conception of the public.
The modern public is defined through its participation in the conceptual motion of the new marketplace. Invisible to the political-economic thought that gave birth to it, it becomes tangible only in the products of its activity. The public manifests itself in all that is “current,” in shillings and papers and ideas that “circulate,” and those aspects of our world that most clearly embody the rapid changes that characterize modern time. But in no respect should we mistake these manifestations for a true representation. This difficulty in identifying the public as neither entirely embodied nor entirely discursive brings us back to the lines of critical thought delineated by Erin Mackie. According to Mackie, scholars who examine the eighteenth-century public generally struggle to articulate how these two possible perspectives relate to one another. In her own response, Mackie argues that Steele and Addison’s reforming project both inhabits and pushes off from the unruly physical spaces and behaviors of eighteenth-century London. Through this re-creation of the coffee house, The Spectator “produces those differences that distinguish a proper rational and polite discursive realm from its faulty competitors.” Greg Polly takes an alternative approach to the problem by exploring the allegorical function of Mr. Spectator. Under this rubric, Richard Steele draws from epistolary and contract forms to create a representative figure that embodies its public, thus enfolding the physically present people of London into a rhetorical space. Neither analysis, however, allows us to address the peculiar temporality at the heart of the discursive public. Moreover, the persistent tension between the historically specific public and its discursive counterpart suggests that the relationship between the two could never come down to a simple matter of representation. I argue, then, that the

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41 In this respect my discussion touches on Erin Mackie’s argument that The Tatler and The Spectator regulate the public through an aesthetics of current fashion even while they strive to be an object of fashion themselves.

42 Erin Mackie, 98. But see Anthony Pollock, “Neutering Addison and Steele: Aesthetic Failure and the Spectatorial Public Sphere,” ELH 74.3 (Fall 2007): 707-34, who argues that Addison and Steele are not engaged in a reforming project at all but portray the public sphere as beyond reform so that the reader’s only recourse is a neutralized, spectatorial detachment modeled in the essays.

appropriate framework for understanding how Addison and Steele engaged with the notion of the public is not one of representation, but of resemblance.

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault argues that, until the later part of the seventeenth century, language belonged to a world of resemblances below which lay the lost, but partially discernible text of divine institution. According to Foucault, the classical thought of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries swept away this concept of language as European cultures fell under the sway of a new epistemological framework of order and representation. The discourses on wealth and value that we see in early political-economic thought arise within and as a result of that shift. Foucault explains that at the beginning of the early modern period, language bore its own marks of a divinity such that it was integral to “an unbroken tissue of words and signs, of accounts and characters, of discourse and forms” of which the world consisted. Knowledge “consisted in relating one form of language to another form of language; in restoring the great, unbroken plain of words and things; in making everything speak.” Foucault’s description makes evident the magical quality of this process as the reader perpetually seeks out resemblances with an eye for an eternal truth that lies, not in the signs that he reads, but somewhere behind the harmony produced among them. Thus, language is “at the same time a buried revelation and a revelation that is gradually being restored to ever greater clarity.” Time, like space, has little importance here, since resemblances in their various forms obviate both: all is coeval with and beneath the divine. With the coming of classical thought sometime during the seventeenth century, however, the episteme of resemblances gave way to an episteme of order, one which Foucault identifies through the idea of representation.

45 Foucault, 40.
46 Foucault, 40.
47 Foucault, 36.
Foucault’s discussion of classical thought and the episteme of order accounts in more general terms for much of the financial thought that I have described above. With language stripped of its prior integral relationship to nature, the classical period re-imagined it as the transparent half of a binary between signifier and signified. From this position, eighteenth-century thinkers put language to work in a project that shifted the primary function of knowledge from interpretation to the creation of order. Foucault describes how the fields of grammar, natural history, and discourses on wealth and value emerged as analyses of representation in response to the new episteme. These discourses assumed grids of knowledge, laid out in time and representational space, whose echoes we can discern in the mathematical structures of banking plans and state financing proposals. Whereas the analysis of money as representation produced new ideas about wealth and the nation, the analyses of language as representation created a world in which representation constantly folds back in upon itself. Addison and Steele’s essays, and particularly those of The Spectator, reflect what Foucault identifies as the void at the heart of classical thinking on representation: “the profound invisibility of the person seeing — despite all mirrors, reflections, imitations, and portraits.”

We are tempted to place Mr. Spectator and his anonymous movements about London within this order. But Addison and Steele’s specific engagement with and representations of the public trouble Foucault’s history. The temporal paradox that deprives the early eighteenth-century public of any presence that might be represented forces those who write about it to employ the devices of the older episteme. Addison and Steele could not represent the public, but they could mimic its strange temporality, read traces of it in the figures, marks and signs in which it is imagined, and perpetuate in their own essays the commentary that creates a public out of an endless production of resemblances.

48 Foucault, 16.
Steele’s *Spectator* essay no. 454 has the narrator tour London for 24 hours in order to describe the public he finds there. The essay of August 11, 1712 begins with Mr. Spectator boarding from Richmond, “with a Resolution to rove by Boat and Coach . . . till the many different Objects I must needs meet with should tire my Imagination.” The “Objects” that the narrator encounters are in fact people, and he identifies them according to the hours of the day that bring them out into the streets, docks, and markets of London. Thus, “Men of Six a Clock give Way to those of Nine, they of Nine, to the Generation of Twelve, and they of Twelve disappear, and make Room for the fashionable World, who have made Two a Clock the Noon of the Day.” Steele’s narrator moves through this time-ordered succession of scenes, attentively describing those who come into his view but shunning interaction with most of those he observes. With his day divided neatly by the hands of a clock and his detached stance, Mr. Spectator seems to be engaged in those sciences of order that Foucault identifies. But the knowledge that Steele’s narrator creates is more appropriately named as a knowledge of resemblances.

Amidst the apparently unrelated variety of men and women at the docks, Mr. Spectator’s task is to decipher the signs, gestures, appearances and languages of London’s bustling public spaces. The “Air” of a figure can tell us to what part of town he is bound. The gesture of a coachmen constitutes its own language, as does the tilted head and shifting posture of a flirting woman or the slang by which the town names the functions of its citizens. Within this world the hours of the day become a basis for correspondences, rather than distinctions, as each provides a new layer of text, related to the previous one by a subtle network of resemblances. Just as the Thames provides a physical hinge rather than a separation between its well-peopled banks, the

50 Steele, 99.
dockland denizens of the morning portray the beginning of the day in both their language and in their very being. The narrator notes how this hour brings together women selling fruit and the chimney sweepers with their blackened faces, and he makes sure that we understand the structure that replicates itself in this meeting of two otherwise distinct groups as they rail one another about “the Devil and Eve, with Allusion to their several Professions.” The similitude is playful, but the narrator uses it as a point of departure for a string of associations that will carry the internal logic of its structure from one observation to another. From this mention of Eve, the narrator’s thoughts shift to the fact that he is in Covent Garden, and as he strolls the fruit shops like a man in an orchard, his original Eve multiplies to “Crowds of agreeable young Women,” and then to families for whom the women purchase their fruit. To be sure, Steele’s literary language contains within it an impulse toward metaphor and simile, but the essay’s tropes do not function merely to represent. Instead, they become part of the texture of the world they describe.

Steele’s writing participates in a process of endless production in which his own words add to the mass of textual threads that must be woven and re-woven through interpretation and commentary. His commentary in turn becomes part of the textual web that must be interpreted. For this reason, we see Mr. Spectator replicating rather than representing the character of the public. In the story of Mr. Spectator’s day in London, Steele gives us his narrator’s resemblance in the figure of a female “silk-worm,” a woman who travels half-hidden in her coach just ahead of Mr. Spectator, and whose function is to provide to the marketplace a running commentary on the newest fashionable goods, though she will never purchase any of them. The silk-worm becomes, in Foucault’s terms, one of Steele’s “signatures” that alert us to the correspondences

51 Steele, 99.
52 Steele, 99.
53 Steele, 99.
54 Steele, 100-1.
between the character of the Spectator and the public that is Steele’s great Text. Embedded in the essay, she comments on the “ceaseless motion” and the deferred moment of the public even as she embodies those qualities in her own character. So too does Steele’s narrator mimic the circulatory motion of our modern public. Invisible himself, Mr. Spectator reflects back to his public the invisibility of the concept about which he comments. Mr. Spectator shuns material transaction, for the mathematical public exists only by virtue of the market’s un-represented remainder, the “circulation” that is not many transactions, but all transactions as a system. Instead he draws value from the immaterial exchange of resemblances, which is not exchange at all, but the infinite production of commentary upon commentary, interpretation upon interpretation (with which we are still occupied). Here is the political-economic fantasy of endless production and accumulation realized.

Steele wants his audience to see the correspondences that his own words both create and resemble. He chides that audience for the blindness that leads to men dining alongside one another “in dumb Silence, as if they had no Pretence to speak to each other on the Foot of being Men, except they were of each other’s Acquaintance.” But the alternative to this silence is not the clear articulation of a representational language. It is the “confused Humming” in which “all the several voices lost their Distinction” and which rises up to the listening narrator who, in turn, finds a pun in the correspondence between his physical position above the crowd and the divine perspective on humankind: “What Nonsense is all the Hurry of this World to those who are above it?” (Steele’s italics). Here, “nonsense” spills over its definition as that which is foolish or incomprehensible to that which cannot be articulated. Only when we hear all the diversity of language as a “confused Humming” do we begin to sense the magical web of convergences,

55 Steele, 102.
56 Steele, 102.
correspondence, sympathies and signs that together still reveal only through resemblance the ineffable truth that binds the world together. Faced with such a task, Steele’s Mr. Spectator becomes a commentator in Foucault’s sense of that word.

Unlike Foucault’s early modern commentators, Steele’s commentator emerges in response to the strange temporality from which the eighteenth-century public is born. As a primary character in Addison’s and Steele’s daily periodical, Mr. Spectator moves swiftly in the imminent present of a text that will be read and bantered about on the very day on which it appears anew. And yet as a written record, the Spectator’s thoughts and movements are something that has always already occurred and that are in the process of changing even as the periodical’s readers strive to interpret and comment on its signs. Like the public itself, The Spectator’s present is revealed to be only a trace of something that has already moved on. The Spectator’s essays thus resemble rather than represent the process through which its audiences imagine a public in the blind gap of the mathematical present.

In insisting on the role of resemblance rather than representation in The Spectator, I am arguing for an alternative to those readings that position Steele’s and Addison’s later periodical as an early step toward the psychological mind of the modern subject. Steele, Addison and their many counterparts undoubtedly contributed to this formation in many ways, but the character of the Spectator is still just a character: a mark that bears the signature of its correspondence to one of the early eighteenth century’s most compelling creations. As part of that endless commentary that is the function and being of the public, Mr. Spectator also gives us a new vantage point on the nature of a present that we still inhabit. The buying, selling, borrowing, and consuming human bodies that give political economics its subject matter can never be represented by the concepts that created that science. We glimpse their totality only through correspondences of

57 See Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time*. 
motion and signs. But if this public has no present that we can grasp, it is nevertheless the force on which the entire future of the marketplace depends. Robert Mitchell argues that in the closing years of the eighteenth century, Shelley sought an antidote to a political-economic system that bound the future to an increasingly distant past. According to Mitchell, Shelley found his solution in “a fundamentally temporal dimension of sympathy, one that would reposition the present as the point of creation for the future.” My own reading suggests that in its very creation, the concept of the public carries within it a tendency toward that “speculative mode of time consciousness” with which Shelley sought to redirect public opinion. Political economics claimed the authority to link the past and a predetermined future, but it left in the unrepresented moment of the present a public whose ineffable being was always capable of changing everything.

59 Mitchell, 165.
Chapter Three

Crediting and Delay in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*

In December 1663, a recent immigrant to the island of Suriname named Henry Adis wrote to Lord Willoughby with a brief report on conditions in the colony.¹ Mr. Adis and his family were Protestant, part of a group of seven families who were inspired to move to Suriname by Willoughby’s promises and a royal indulgence for Protestants to practice their faith in the colony.² So it is not without a certain diplomacy that Adis commends the island, the King, and the British Government before getting to the reason for his letter; Adis finds that his colonial Eden is filled with “rude rabble” whose “drunkenness” and “debauchery” is matched only by their predilection for “bitter Oaths, Horrid Excecations, and lascivious Abominations,” which are on at least one occasion directed at Adis himself.³ Adis declares he is certain that those who claimed Willoughby’s promises and the King’s indulgence were “so many Decoyes to inveagle

¹ Francis Willoughby was the 5th Baron Willoughby of Parham. Charles II appointed him Governor of Barbados in 1650. In 1651, Willoughby sent a colonizing party to Suriname to establish Fort Willoughby on that island. Though previously a leader of the Parliamentarians, Willoughby had joined the Royalist cause in 1647. He therefore lost Barbados and his English properties following the Parliamentarian victories. In 1663, Willoughby resumed his post as Governor of Barbados with administrative power over the area’s English colonies. Maureen Duffy’s biography, *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn, 1640-89* (London: Cape, 1977), provides a brief overview of those involved in the colony at the time. See also Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Andre Deutsche, 1996).

² A Letter Sent from Syrranam, To His Excellency, the Lord Willoughby of Parham, General of the Western Islands, and of the Continent of Guianah, &c. Then residing at the Barbados. Together, with the Lord Willoughby’s Answer thereunto. With a commendable Description of that Country (London, 1664).

³ A Letter Sent from Syrranam, 5.
us, and to make us a prey” must have been wrong. Nevertheless, the colonist worries that in the absence of either Willoughby or his agent, the rabble is likely to continue in its “abuses.”

Taking leave of the Lord General, Adis prays “for your safe and speedy passage to us; and in the mean time, for a safe return of your faithful Lieutenant amongst us again,” noting that until one or the other official reappears on the island, Adis’ “temporal joy will in a great measure be eclipsed.” Willoughby responded to Adis with a mildly sympathetic note about new colonies (“you know of what sort of People they are made up”) and expresses his hope that God and civilizing influences might reform the colony “in time.” His letter makes no mention of a return visit from himself or his Lieutenant.

We have no reason to believe that Aphra Behn knew about Henry Adis, but her depiction of Suriname in *Oroonoko; or the Royal Slave* suggests that she shared his low opinion of the colony’s residents. Moreover, the novel’s strange plot, with its pattern of broken promises and its agonizing wait for a Governor who never comes, reflects the same practical concerns behind Adis’ anxious letter. I do not intend to argue here that Adis or any other non-fictional resident of Surinam inspired Behn’s novel. But I do want to argue that the financial structures of colonization offer more insight into *Oroonoko* than is usually imagined. Specifically, I examine *Oroonoko* with an attention to the link between two concepts that come up repeatedly in Adis’ exchange with Willoughby: credibility and time.

I argued at the beginning of this study that seventeenth-century Britain witnessed the emergence of a new time concept, a representation of time derived from the mathematical

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4 A Letter Sent from Syrranam, 5-6.
5 A Letter Sent from Syrranam, 6.
6 A Letter Sent from Syrranam, 6.
7 A Letter Sent from Syrranam, 7.
8 Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: The Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York: Norton, 1997). All further references are to this edition and are cited by page number within the text. Biographers have struggled to piece together Behn’s early life, but seem to agree that she made a short visit to Suriname as a young woman. See Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. 
structures of finance. Behn’s novel reminds us that colonial spaces not only participated in these innovations, they were in many ways the force behind Britain’s financial shift. Not only had colonial conquest brought about the first flood of Spanish bullion into world trade networks during the fifteenth century, but colonial wars contributed heavily to the need for a long-term state financing. Moreover, colonial expansion required more currency and more sophisticated credit arrangements. From a financial perspective, mathematical time allowed capitalism to speed up time; stock holders could profit immediately from colonial projects that would not produce substantial goods or resources for sale in marketplaces until years later, if ever. Free from the constraints of human duration, mathematics also could slow time to a crawl in order to keep financial and legal arrangements in an unchanging state over the long spans of corporations and colonies. These long, slow expanses of time were no better suited to the temporality of the human mind than was the rapid pace of the stock market, but Behn’s narrative suggests that they were more destructive to the human body.

Behn’s story of a Coramantien prince betrayed into slavery and then promised a freedom that never comes illustrates the most dire consequences of a world administrated in mathematical time. Scholars have noted that the endless promises and delays to which the prince is subjected play into a prevailing theme of truth and credibility. If we read Behn’s concern with credibility to be part of a straightforward binary between truth and falsehood, we are left with the

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proposition that at least theoretically, one could ascertain the truth value of a promise at any
given an accurate picture of the speaker’s intentions; truth transcends temporality. But Behn’s
novel reminds us that credibility, like financial credit, exists in the medium of time. And like the
value of a credit note, the truth value of a promise is never fully ascertainable until it is forsaken
or redeemed.

Trapped between an aristocratic identity and slavery, Oroonoko also is caught between
the mathematical time frame that now governs the young colony and the more intuitive time
frames of the human body. Oroonoko’s failure to grasp the colonist’s version of credibility as a
production of European mathematical time ultimately brings about his loss of faith in the
colonists. And while Behn never makes clear whether the colonists would have made good on
their promises had her protagonist waited, her narrator’s attempts to delay and distract the slave
become part of the author’s critique of this commercialized relationship between truth and value.
Behn’s narrative finally suggests that a modern, mathematically-based time threatens both
violence and betrayal to the human bodies that political economic thought subsumes into textual
representations.

In his analysis of race, class and slavery in Behn’s novel, Gary Gautier argues that the
apparent contradiction between Behn’s condemnation of Oroonoko’s slavery and her acceptance
of slavery as an institution arises because “The problem is not slavery per se; the problem is
commercial slavery.”11 Gautier is one of many scholars to approach Oroonoko with questions
about its place in the development of a British discourse on slavery.12 As Gautier explains,

11 Gary Gautier, “Slavery and the Fashioning of Race in Oroonoko, Robinson Crusoe, and Equiano’s Life,”
The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 42.2 (Summer 2001): 161-79, 163
12 See Laura Doyle, Freedom’s Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Adam Sills, “Surveying ‘The Map of Slavery’ in Aphra Behn’s
Oroonoko,” Journal of Narrative Theory 36.3 (Fall 2006): 314-40; Warren Chernaik, “Captains and Slaves: Aphra
Behn and the Rhetoric of Republicanism,” Seventeenth Century 17.1 (Spring 2002): 97-107; Joyce Green
MacDonald, “The Disappearing African Woman: Imoinda in Oroonoko after Behn,” ELH 66.1 (Spring 1999): 71-
Behn’s critique of commercialism warrants particular critical attention. Srinivas Aravamudan offers a more specific articulation of what makes the commercial context of Behn’s plotline so important to understanding the fate of her protagonist: “In the case of Oroonoko’s representation in England, the choice is between domestic pet and plantation laborer, or that of privatized fetish and public commodity.” Within Aravamudan’s discussion, Oroonoko functions as the former, particularly in relation to the narrator. His status as privatized fetish permits Oroonoko a temporary and highly contingent subjectivity that can be reversed by the owner’s option to return the “pet” to the public sphere as a commodity. However, early social-contract discourse offered an avenue for the women and slaves who were claimed as objects to claim possession of themselves. In this dynamic, “The subject is simultaneously alienated (this body is property that belongs to someone else) and empowered (as I’m property, I can own myself).” Aravamudan’s carefully nuanced argument reminds us that Oroonoko’s status as commodity object never disappears, even during the periods when his fetishization offers a provisional form of subjectivity. A complex set of cultural markers identifies Oroonoko as “pet,” but Aravamudan


14 Aravamudan, 38.
15 Aravamudan, 44.
does not need to mention the legal documents that mark Oroonoko’s status as a public commodity. As a slave purchased at market, Oroonoko would have been registered in legal documents as Caeser, part and property of the Parham Estate.

Behn’s narrative thus references a larger system of mercantile and bureaucratic documentation that turns out to be crucial to the action of the plot. Oroonoko’s purchase documents establish him as a commodity within the colonial marketplace, permitting his owners to buy, sell or borrow against him even in the absence of his physical body. We are told that the colonists receive Oroonoko “more like a Governor, than a Slave,” and our narrator claims that “he endur’d no more of the Slave but the Name” (37). And yet the name is more important than the narrator would have us believe. Even as Oroonoko is being reassured that his freedom is merely a matter of time, the narrator writes, “For the future therefore, I must call Oroonoko, Caesar, since by that Name only he is known in our Western World, and by that Name he was receiv’d on Shore at Parham-House, where he was destined a Slave” (37).

The colonists have set up a dichotomy between Caesar and Oroonoko in which economic forms designate Caesar a documented slave even as the narrator claims for him an existence outside those forms. Arguing for this existence outside commercial structures, the narrator insists that Oroonoko “shone through” his slave attire (36). Her description of Oroonoko’s relationship to the Governor’s estate seems deliberately ambiguous; Caesar is brought to “view his Land, his House, and the Business assigned to him,” as if he were the documented possessor, rather than possessed, of the Plantation (37). That ambiguity demonstrates how easily Oroonoko/Caesar’s status can slip back and forth as the embodied aristocratic identity that the colonists have conceded to him strains against the paper identity through which their culture has claimed him. As long as Oroonoko’s documentation identifies him as Caesar, the slave of the Governor’s
Plantation, his identity as Oroonoko remains in peril. And as the story progresses, both the protagonist and Behn’s audience begin to question the colonists’ will and ability to maintain this separation between Oroonoko’s embodied, aristocratic and documented, commercial identities.

But lest we imagine that Oroonoko’s character is unique in bearing a documented, commercial identity, Behn’s text reminds us that the duality between body and commercial identity pervades late seventeenth-century colonial culture. Oroonko’s aristocratic heritage and slave status make the tension created by commercial structures especially visible, but characters with great political power also find themselves represented in text within the new commercial system. The colonists’ inability to free Ceasar and reconcile the split in Oroonoko’s identity arises because of their Governor’s physical absence. Trefry purchased Caesar for the Governor in his capacity as the Governor’s agent. Though characterized as a man sympathetic to aristocratic values, Trefry nevertheless belongs to the commercial order that provided him with his colonial employment; he is, not coincidentally, “a very good Mathematician” (35). But Trefry’s authority is limited. His agency extends to transactions within the commercial order, but not beyond. He has no power to shift a slave from public commodity to free man. The contractual documents that legitimate Trefry’s agency on behalf of the colonial administration circumscribe his agency, so that in a very important sense Trefry is merely an inscribed body that represents authority in the Governor’s absence.

Such forms of limited agency had always been part of Britain’s power structures, allowing sovereignty to exert itself over large areas and in distant places. And to the extent that estates and posts were legitimated in documents, text was an essential part of those political systems. Britain’s colonial ventures adopted the basic concept of allowing text to articulate agency, but commercial needs took this idea in new directions. The joint-stock companies of
early colonialism depended on the legal fiction of incorporation.\textsuperscript{16} With the recording of prescribed documents, a group of investors could transform itself into a new legal body, capable of performing all of the financial activities of the individual merchant, but with a continuity in time unavailable to an actual human body. Where most early business schemes amounted to little more than single ventures, these new corporations could outlast life spans, weather the physical or mental disabilities of individual members, and through the magic of textuality, remain “present” for the purposes of business even when their members were not.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the mercantile world had grown accustomed to using documentation in order to provide a similar continuity for the individual merchant. A merchant’s records of partnership, contract or agency theoretically could not outlast the life of their maker, but they often functioned independently of that maker for long periods. Until legal documents lapsed or were terminated by an administrative authority, a merchant might easily collect income and engage in business transactions for years after his death. Like the incorporation of business organizations, the incorporation of individual identities remains a commonplace in our time. But its familiarity should not blind us to its conceptual repercussions.

The late seventeenth century introduced land-recording offices, modern treasury procedures and corporate bookkeeping to create these secondary textual identities for individual parties. Textual identities owned, borrowed, purchased, sold, and guaranteed, but were not always easily matched to the physical body they claimed to represent. What I am calling the incorporation of identity had the relatively simple effect of splitting the self into two subjects that reflected the fundamental split between the mathematical public and the embodied participants in

that public. In a world increasingly structured around the superhuman spans and speeds of mathematical time, text comes in as a proxy for the body to compensate for its limitations and replace its capacity for change and motion with the fixed abstractions of the printed word.

Henry Adis’ correspondence with Willoughby demonstrates the importance of printed text to communication during the period. Adis’ complaints also suggest the inadequacy of text to represent embodied authority over long periods of time. The colonial administration’s promises remain in doubt as Adis anxiously awaits the reappearance of Willoughby or his Lieutenant. With a great deal more at stake, Behn’s fictional slave also waits to see the final value of the colonist’s promises when the Governor arrives. Long before Oroonoko reaches Surinam, however, Behn sets up a pattern in which the characters fail to reach a future that has been promised. Oroonoko’s Coramantien story takes the form of an oriental tale embedded within the text’s first-person narrative. From the beginning of the tale, Oroonoko represents a fragile link to the future, the last remaining heir to a king in excess of a hundred years old. The usual oriental motifs of harems, deceit and tyranny support a tale of the king’s decision to take Imoinda for himself despite his grandson’s attachment to her and despite the king’s own impotence. The old monarch thus sacrifices the future of his line for a woman who can be a wife in form only. Rather than concluding the tale, the reunion of Oroonoko and Imoinda in Surinam begins a new story of failed beginnings.

Behn’s narrator thus picks up her first-person account of Oroonoko’s story with his arrival in the small British colony. Upon hearing Oroonoko’s story, the colonists assure the young slave that he will be freed as soon as the Governor returns. Their promise thrusts upon

Oroonoko a liminal status in which, though assured he is free for all practical purposes, he remains a slave in the political-economic world of the marketplace. In the long scale of mathematical time, Oroonoko’s wait is considered unproblematic, but when Imoinda becomes pregnant with his child, the clock begins to tick on a second level of time derived from the human body’s processes. Behn gives us a protagonist who is keenly aware of the embodied time invoked by Imoinda’s pregnancy; Oroonoko knows that he has nine months to obtain free status for his child. But Behn creates a conflict between this time frame tied to the body and the mathematically constructed time in which the colony operates. And in her protagonist’s inability to understand the colonists’ delays, she makes clear that this second, problematic understanding of time belongs to the colony’s new political-economic thinking. Behn gives us no way of knowing what would have become of Trefry’s request for the two slaves’ freedom. The Governor does not arrive to prevent Oroonoko’s rebellion, and in any case, Behn’s point is that Oroonoko can only grasp the colonists’ delay as a symptom of dishonesty. As a representative of older, aristocratic values, Oroonoko understands credibility as an imminent question of truth or falsehood, not a process of crediting in time.

Thus what the narrator comprehends to be an economic and social system based on deferred transactions, Oroonoko takes to be a symptom of deceit: “They fed him from Day to Day with Promises, and delay’d him, till the Lord Governor shou’d come; so that he began to suspect them of falshood” (41). The narrator’s phrasing here, her assertion that the colonists “fed” Oroonoko with their promises, reveals the narrator’s own doubts. As a member of the colonial elite herself, Behn’s narrator interprets the promises as sustenance, that which sustains over the long duration required by both economic and social “crediting” in her British context.

18 See Charlotte Sussman, “The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko.”
But “fed” can also figure Oroonoko as livestock to be fattened for the future marketplace.\(^{19}\) With his own life and that of his wife and child at stake, Behn’s protagonist recognizes the time that is tracked by Imoinda’s pregnant body. Fearful of what he might do, the narrator joins in the effort to “delay” Oroonoko by engaging him in a series of distractions.

The narrator’s first effort takes the form of heroic tales paralleling an earlier portion of the Coramantien story in which Oroonoko is distracted from his grief with battle stories: “I entertain’d him with the Lives of the Romans, and great Men, which charm’d him to my Company” (41). As these distractions wear thin and the narrator grows more wary of her charge, she changes strategies to present Oroonoko with physical challenges:

He had a Spirit all Rough and Fierce, and that cou’d not be tam’d to lazy Rest; and though all endeavors were us’d to exercise himself in such Actions and Sports as this World afforded, as Running, Wrastling, Pitching the Bar, Hunting and Fishing, Chasing and Killing Tigers of a monstrous Size, which this Continent affords in abundance; and wonderful Snakes, such as Alexander is reported to have encounter’d at the River of Amazons, and which Caesar took great Delight to overcome; yet these were not Actions great enough for his large Soul, which was still panting after more renown’d Action. (42)

In Behn’s representation of Oroonoko’s frustration, we recognize the untenable position of a body trapped in a mathematical identity. Like Addison’s busy merchants, the young warrior is trapped in an endless practice of directionless motion. However, Behn’s passage is also a critique of the relationship between her reader and the text. As she describes the period during which Oroonoko must wait, the narrator herself grows distracted. The reference to Alexander quoted

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\(^{19}\) In his discussion of Oroonoko as seventeenth-century pet, Srinivas Aravamudan argues that the frequent parallels between Oroonoko and animals in the text belongs to a largely visual discourse in which the upper-class mistress (here Behn) signals proximity to the political power of the throne through her possession of the exotic pet. *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804.*
above seems to have been brought on by a mention in the preceding passage that the narrator busied Oroonoko with stories of great men. The progress from didactic stories to embodied activities should lead to the heroism of a Caesar or an Alexander. But in this passage, the narrator only folds life back into stories, and the section concludes with a renewed plea for patience. The narrative wandering serves to shift the text away from its ostensible subject and back toward the exotic and curious qualities of the colonial space.

Such moments are common throughout Behn’s text, as the narrative follows an odd path of diversions, shifts in temporal perspective and gaps where the narrator inserts herself into the storyline as witness or actor. Behn’s use of these diversions is not insignificant. The trees, fruits and animals that she details carry particular valences in this early colonial context. Thematically, a passage about the native’s ability to shoot an orange from the stem without any harm to the fruit resonates later in the story when Imoinda’s head is severed from her pregnant body (11, 61). And Oroonoko’s presentation of the tiger cub that he has orphaned comments disturbingly on the dynamic between the slave and his “Great Mistress” (45, 41). But in each case the narrative’s sidetracks are designed to elicit curiosity from the reader, to distract us as the narrator’s stories distracted Oroonoko. In contrast to the hapless protagonist, however, Behn’s readers belong to a world that is already building on the long time frames of mathematics, credit schemes, and colonial growth. The narrator’s strategy should prompt us to ask why even the European reader cannot be trusted to wait out the “time” of the story. From what is the reader being distracted?

Behn sets the tone for her narrator’s relationship to the reader in the preliminary materials to her narrative. The introduction claims that the narrator has edited from the story “a thousand

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little Accidents of his Life, which, however pleasant to us, where History was scarce, and Adventures very rare; yet might prove tedious and heavy to my Reader, in a World where he finds Diversions for every Minute, new and strange” (8). The justification for this editing is a strange one. Behn’s narrative shows that adventures were far from scarce in the remote colony and diversions “new and strange” were many. But Behn’s readers were focused on a cognitive, rather than a physical experience of adventure. They found their diversions in those histories that began to proliferate at the end of the seventeenth century. Of course, these histories, novels and romances were a very different sort of text from the documents that floated commercial and political identities in the realm of mathematical time. They did, however, negotiate the reader’s relation to that long time frame.

Narrative form always contain within itself several temporal aspects. As Paul Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative*, narration negotiates the cognitive process by which human beings “think” past, present and future as a means of ordering experience. Moreover, textual narrative always reflects the overlapping temporalities of the plot, the moment in which the story was first told, and the present of readers who re-open the temporalities of the narrative through their embodied engagement with the story. Ricoeur, despite his grounding in Heidegger’s historical thinking, argues for a relatively timeless understanding of how narration works with the human mind. My own study indicates that the human mind engages with multiple versions of time, some tied more intimately to embodied experience. As Ricoeur’s work demonstrates, narrative form offers a useful structure for articulating and negotiating the complexities of time consciousness. But Behn’s distracted readers indicate that the manifestations of time in narrative literature have particular significance at the historical moment during which time became an

essential factor in the process of determining both economic and truth values. To understand how narrative time functions in this novel, we need to reevaluate the role of truth claims and credibility in Behn’s text, beginning with the forms in which Behn couches her narrative.

In contrast to most of the story, Behn’s narrator gives us a third-person recounting of Oroonoko’s early years in Coramantien. Building on a prominent tradition of the period, Behn has cast this section in the form of a seventeenth-century oriental tale. Typically set in the court of an Eastern empire, oriental tales developed around a loose collection of generic tropes: powerful tyrants, fantastic material luxuries, the enclosed spaces of seraglios, prisons and boudoirs, and the telling of stories. The oriental tale emerged as a part of the larger fable genre, regularly used by political pamphleteers during the English civil wars. Short texts like Aesop’s Fables were effective in encoding political meaning or moral imperatives just enough to gather force from the reader’s act of interpretation. Ros Ballaster’s study of these tales illustrates the variety of political and cultural purposes to which that branch of the fable could be adapted. During the second half of the seventeenth century, explains Ballaster,

The reigns of Charles II and George II in England both saw the publication of oriental scandal narratives concerning the monarchs’ sexual and political weaknesses, calling attention to Charles’s vulnerability to the influence of women . . . The analogy with the Ottoman dynasty proved a particularly fruitful one for English writers seeking to score points against a rival court faction: the covert pursuit of absolutism, effeminacy, and decadence in a court, the decline of empire as a result of luxury, were trends that could be

22 Richard Kroll argues that the oriental tale setting of Coramantien displays the concept of romantic kingship while the Suriname setting shows that kingship being tested, “‘Tales of Love and Gallantry’: The Politics of Oroonoko,” Huntington Library Quarterly: Studies in English and American History and Literature 67.4 (2004): 573-605.
located in Turkish contexts to suggest the imperiled nature of English limited
monarchy.25

This late-seventeenth-century context understandably tempts us to find an allegory in the
Coramantian Court tale of an aging king who destroys the future of his own dynasty. One could
argue, for instance, that Behn is placing Parliament rather than James II in the role of the foolish
king who would sacrifice the future to the country under its own control. Under such a reading,
Imoinda figures not as an eroticized “other,” but as the future productivity of England. And the
reading works nicely along standard eighteenth-century lines thereafter, with a country sold into
slavery by dishonorable political alliances and a worthy prince left to fend for himself amidst the
hazards and corruption of the modern political world.26

My point, however, is not to work out the veiled message behind the plot, but to
demonstrate the dynamics between reader and text in an allegorical form. As it was used in the
oriental fables of late-seventeenth-century Britain and France, allegory veiled a fixed object of
signification behind each major character, such that the reader was expected to substitute a real
king for a fictional one, a rumored mistress for fictional lover. This genre’s aesthetics were less
about distraction than about temptation as the reader squints to see behind more than one sort of
veil. But Behn declined to write the story of her royal slave as a straightforward oriental tale.
And in the contrast between her oriental tale and the very different hermeneutics of her first-
person narrative, Behn calls into question the nature of meaning in her story as a whole.

Associated with religious meditations, confessional and adventure stories, first-person
narratives of the late seventeenth century promised to produce a final cumulative, if not always
coherent, set of meanings for the patient reader; sailors return and souls are redeemed, but only

25 Ballaster, 171.
26 For a study of Stuart politics in Behn’s novel, see Richard Kroll, “‘Tales of Love and Gallantry’: The
Politics of Oroonoko.”
after many possible endings are deferred or avoided in the course of events. In the next chapter, I will look specifically at how spiritual narratives adapted the extended length and deferred meaning of this form in response to new temporal concepts during this period. For the purposes of Behn’s text, however, we need only consider the heightened sense of uncertainty with which *Oroonoko* confronts its readers.

Arguing that the ambiguities of Behn’s narrative continue to lure even modern readers into a fixation on the narrative’s truth claims, Robert Chibka describes the instability surrounding themes of language and truth in *Oroonoko*:

> From the novel’s opening paragraphs, we see anxiety associated with characteristic literary activities: invention, adornment, management of words and events at the poet’s pleasure. The narrator diverts this anxiety with a truth-claim, but proceeds to problematize truth, falsehood, and the grounds of belief throughout her narrative. (531-2)

The tension Chibka describes in this passage between the aesthetic pleasure associated with rhetoric and truth claims would have little bearing on explicitly allegorical forms like the late seventeenth century’s version of the oriental tale. The rhetorical flourishes and figures of the allegorical genre are specifically designed to serve the encoded meaning of the story, seducing readers to uncover the message that waits beneath. These tensions are, however, common to first-person narratives of the period. The tensions between language and truth usually arise in such narratives merely by virtue of the fact that the form makes us cognizant of the narrator as a character, which is to say, not simply as a human representation but as a literary signifier. As such, we simultaneously “read” the history and the narrator to determine their significations. Because we are reading the narrator and the history in relation to one another, however, the first-person narrative creates a radical instability within the text. Readers must shuttle back and forth
between what is being recounted and the narrator who is doing the recounting in a continual process of adjusting their interpretations of one element in light of the other.

This process necessarily invokes temporality in a different way, foregrounding anticipation and retrospection as part of the process for determining meaning. It creates an unsettling experience during which the reader cannot fully distinguish between true and not true, significant and insignificant, valuable and valueless until the narrative has played itself out. Like commodities in a marketplace, the value of characters and plot twists fluctuate pending the final redemption of the text. In her study of Defoe at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Sandra Sherman argues that “long-term credit implicated the culture in a new kind of narrativity, since promises in stock, annuities, and negotiable instruments were verifiable only with time. Until the moment of payoff, narrative verged on potential fiction.”

In Behn’s story, as in many other first-person narratives of the period, this process manifests itself in the narrator’s own moments of divergent anticipation and retrospection as the text struggles to construct a coherent set of meanings over spans of time and multiple events. Thus any first-person narration (not just Behn’s) tends to emphasize the temporal contingency that adheres to one degree or another in all narrative form: meaning only ever really comes to rest for the reader in retrospect.

In *Oroonoko*, Behn emphasizes the tendency of first-person narrative to blur distinctions between truth and falsehood and to defer final valuations. On a rhetorical level, she allows the meanings of key terms to shift and sway with the progress of the text. As Chibka demonstrates, Behn’s narrative creates a constantly changing terrain of meaning around any references to “belief, proof, and truth”:

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Placing such categories in volatile relation to one another, she endows key terms —
“adorn,” “entertain,” “divert” — with a range of application that undercuts their
presumptive value as indicators of sure distinctions between the aesthetic (toward which
she proclaims a profound distrust) and the historical (for which she professes a profound
regard). (532)
The problem here is not only that the narrator’s multiple uses of these terms blur distinctions
between the aesthetic and the historical, but that our ability to determine conclusively the “value”
of these terms at any given moment is itself called into question. Chibka argues that the
instability of key categories in Behn’s text ultimately points to the political and ideological
power that actually shape truth claims in European thinking. But we might just as easily trace
that instability to the political-economic thinking evident in Oroonoko’s commodification.

The sort of anxious truth claims and unstable meanings that plague Behn’s novel
belonged to a cultural moment in which financial and literary texts were involved in a mutually
inflecting discourse of credit. To borrow again from Sherman’s work, “As credit instruments
become complex embodiments of financial relations, issues of credibility arise homologous with
the ‘credit’ owed to literary texts.”28 I address Defoe’s narrative structures in the next chapter,
but this portion of Sherman’s analysis pertains equally well to Behn’s novel. The uneasy
fascination with truth claims found in both literary and financial discourse arises from a
marketplace dynamic that is quite new to Behn’s readers: “As this market develops, credit
creates a vast, reticulating network of players, indeterminate in time and space; it imposes a
disorienting distance between authors and readers of financial texts.”29 Value, whether it be

28 Sherman, 2.
29 Sherman, 2.
financial value or truth value, becomes something stretched out in and through a mathematically-conceived rendering of time.

This marketplace construction of value impinges on the narrative structures of Behn’s oriental tale, loosening the connections between character and meaning and turning the future into a space of chronic deferral. In selling Imoinda to a slave trader, the Coramantien king broke both cultural and narrative boundaries. Behn’s narrator tells us that Coramantien custom entitled Imoinda to an honorable death, so that the oriental tale should have ended with the demise of its female figure. But in selling Imoinda, the king defers this ending, and Imoinda’s borrowed time takes her beyond the boundaries of the oriental tale and into the first-person narrative. In this process, the text exchanges Imoinda’s value as a ceremonial possession of the king for commodity value in the colonial marketplace. This move prepares the reader for Oroonoko’s seduction and entrapment as a commodity himself, and it suggests that we need to focus our attention on that marketplace for an understanding of why deferral operates to such dangerous ends in Behn’s text.

The accumulation of value that political-economic practices were intended to produce depends on long-sustained acts of crediting. The first-person narrative structure that Behn chose required readers, like merchants, to hold out against promises of future redemption. The recurrent references to curiosity, delay and diversion in Behn’s narrative indicate just how easily a process of continual re-interpretation can slip into mere distraction. If readers fail in the hermeneutic process of integrating new meaning in time to existing understanding, they willingly take the position that has been forced upon Caesar. Like the restless slave, Behn’s readers are kept in motion by the constant stimulation of histories. But like the slave, those readers move
without direction, without progress, and without the accumulation of meaning or value that makes up the narrative’s promise. The result is a story replete with failed beginnings.

Having been thwarted first by the aging king and then by the events in Surinam, the story of Oroonoko and Imoinda and of the royal line ends violently. The child is killed in its mother’s womb. The colony also falters prematurely, leaving our narrator to lament that it could have survived and flourished if the British Crown had “but seen and known what a vast and charming World he had been Master of” (43). Behn’s claim in the dedication, “though I had none above me in that Country, I wanted power to preserve this Great Man” immediately raises the question of whether the narrator herself is engaged in same pattern of distraction and failure (7). After all, the narrator takes on the project of preserving Oroonoko early in the story, only to abandon him by her absence at crucial moments. Oroonoko’s body and Surinam’s future are both finally sacrificed, but Behn and her narrator attempt to salvage them, ironically, in text. In the final lines of the story, the narrator sets her own actions alongside those of Imoinda, the woman who fought by Oroonoko’s side. In pale contrast, the narrator can offer only a posthumous version of the public identity that Oroonoko fought to escape: “the Reputation of my Pen is considerable enough to make his Glorious Name to survive to all Ages” (65). She does, however, give him back his name.

The skepticism that we find in Behn’s text toward Britain’s new temporal structures and its new readers does not disappear in the more politically and economically stable years of the eighteenth century. Credit capitalism necessitates that modern subjects will always have a complex and ambivalent relationship to the future. For every population statistic and mortality
table that it provides, mathematical thought occludes the bodies that created it, all too often leaving real bodies amidst the uncertainty of endings that never come.30

30 For a discussion of how the numeral sign system hides the embodied experience that produces mathematical thought, see Brian Rotman, “Thinking Dia-Grams: Mathematics, Writing, and Virtual Reality,” South Atlantic Quarterly 94.2 (Spring 1995): 389-415.
Chapter Four

Daniel Defoe and the Great Clock of Public Credit

The officers of the Treasury and Exchequer, Defoe once argued, are like “the Wheels of a Clock, their Business is to go round; but they are subject to the Influence of their Position, the Operations of the Springs and Wheels that guide their Motion, they act passively . . .”1 If the passive activity of political leaders sounds eerily familiar to twenty-first-century readers, Defoe’s anxious attention to the swings of the marketplace is even more so. Defoe wrote An Essay Upon Publick Credit in 1710 in an effort to settle the public’s shaken faith in their markets following Queen Anne’s dismissal of the Lord Treasurer, Sidney Godolphin. Public credit withstood the political volatility and tax strains of 1710, but fell apart ten years later with the collapse of South Sea Company stocks.

Perhaps more than any other popular author of the period, Defoe seems to have understood and believed in the mathematical assumptions that made modern finance work. Beginning with An Essay on Publick Credit, I examine how Defoe advocates for a British marketplace that yokes together two disparate time concepts. Intervening as it does at a moment of potential crisis, the Essay illustrates the difficulties of trying to convince an embodied citizenry to conceptualize the marketplace in mathematical terms. Defoe draws upon the

1 Daniel Defoe, An Essay Upon Publick Credit, in The Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe, eds. W.R. Owens and P.N. Furbank, 8 vols., vol. 6 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000), 49-56. All further references to An Essay are to this edition and are cited by page number within the text.
metaphor of the great clock and an analogy to the religious experience of faith to make his case for a system that “act[s] passively.” Before he arrives at these tropes, however, Defoe experiments with a string of narrative forms and figural devices in an effort to articulate the strained relation between embodied agency and a public disembodied in mathematical time. These rhetorical experiments reemerge in Defoe’s writing in 1719 when Britain confronts another market crisis, this time stemming from an overconfidence in the promises of finance.

Written during the same short period, *The Chimera* and *The Life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* constitute two distinct genres for a twenty-first-century audience. In recent years scholars have dismantled the idea that eighteenth-century authors and readers recognized such hard generic distinctions, and this is particularly the case with Defoe, for whom religious and economic thought were formational to any text. I introduce nothing new, therefore, in arguing that *The Chimera* and *Robinson Crusoe* belong to the same project. My argument instead expands on previous work to reveal the specifically temporal concerns that inform these two texts. Share prices for France’s Mississippi Company and Britain’s South Sea

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Company had transformed the stock markets in both countries with the miraculous speed that only mathematics can produce. Both companies hid their slight assets and slighter potential for success behind a complex web of wealthy investors and state favors. In the year prior to the crashes that devastated both markets, Defoe struggled to articulate the difference between mathematical time and conscious time for a reading public that needed to understand the machinations of their financial market before it was too late. *The Chimera* uses France’s Mississippi Company as an implicit warning to British investors. But with the fictional narrator of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe creates a model for both the “sin” of not comprehending the fictional nature of mathematical time and the cognitive exercises necessary for financial redemption in a long-term credit economy.

The final pages of this chapter examine the conceptual repercussions of the South Sea Company’s failure on Defoe’s writing. Building on the economically-oriented readings of Sandra Sherman, John Richetti and others, I find in *Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress* Defoe’s effort to illustrate the nightmarish repercussions of confusing two time concepts and two notions of value for a British nation unwilling or unable to master the shift to modern credit-based capitalism.

**Defining Public Credit**

The *Essay* begins with an acknowledgment of the difficulties in defining the imaginary construct of public credit: “I am to speak of what all People are busie about, but not one in Forty understands: Every Man has a Concern in it, few know what it is, nor is it easy to define or describe it” (51). Public credit has, he writes, “no Whereness, or Whenness, Scite, or Habit” but is “the essential Shadow of something that is Not” (51). Faced with such a mysterious subject, Defoe proposes to explain public credit by showing “how it Acts rather than how it Exists, and
what it does, rather than what it is” (51). Defoe’s move here is a significant one. He cannot ask his readers to put their faith in shadows, or at this stage of the marketplace, in an “invisible hand.” He hopes instead to make visible for his readers the activity that guides that market, the motions of that invisible hand.

An Essay’s initial answer to the discursive needs of this marketplace comes in the form of spiritual rhetoric. As he begins the essay, Defoe muses, “If a Man goes about to explain it by Words, he rather struggles to lose himself in the Wood, than bring others out of it” (Defoe’s emphasis, 51). Borrowing from a religious metaphor that imagines the penitent lost in a spiritual wilderness, Defoe casts both himself and his readers in the tradition of spiritual wanderers. The wanderer loses his direction as a result of human shortsightedness, so that, limited by his own flawed perception, his only recourse is to credit the direction of a divinity who has, so to speak, the view from above. In a move that anticipates Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” Defoe asks his economic penitents to accept a similarly unattainable view out over the logic and order of credit capitalism. Defoe’s public must accept what Oroonoko never could: that the system that guarantees present value by recourse to a distant future works and that it does so by virtue of the faith of its participants.

Defoe’s use of Christian spirituality is by no means inconsistent with his subject matter. As critics have shown, Defoe’s religious beliefs constitute an important part of his political-economic beliefs. Written in the summer of 1710, Defoe’s need for this mingled discourse of faith and economics was particularly urgent. Lord Godolphin’s dismissal was just one more symptom of Britain’s unease. The Wars of Spanish Succession had cost the allied nations tens of

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thousands of lives during the year prior, and both morale and finances were heavily strained in Britain. A rapid turn of political leadership in Parliament was matched by an agenda of aggressive state borrowing, including the 1710 state lottery that contributed to Britain’s substantial state debt through to the end of the century. Defoe responds to the public’s anxiety by challenging his readers to maintain their faith in the system of public credit that had financed the nation since the Glorious Revolution. To do so, Defoe attempts to give at least a rhetorical substance to public credit and to the mathematical thinking that makes it work.

Like Behn, Defoe intuitively turns to narrative form to explore the dilemmas created by modernity’s long mathematical time frames. But where the delays and distractions of Behn’s novel cast doubt on the productivity of promises embedded in mathematical time, Defoe seeks a (deceptively) straightforward rhetorical formula to convince his readers of the efficacy of credit structures. Defoe attempts to narrate a political-economic plot that shows credit in time. In fact, Defoe includes two narratives of public credit in *An Essay*, one written in accordance with a tradition of historical writing and one that borrows from the mathematical and scientific exemplum. Defoe’s narrative strategy fails in both instances, forcing the narrator to abandon his efforts at linear narrative and retreat into metaphor.

The first historical narrative begins rather ambitiously with “The Brittain’s Inhabiting this Island were found to Exchange their Block tin with the Phenecian Merchants for Spices, Wines

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and Oyles, even long before Julius Caesar set his Foot upon this Island” (52). From this mythic setting, Defoe’s history moves at a brisk pace through the accidental establishment of metal as currency, the rise of gold and silver as the prevailing coin, the consequent use of price rather than in-kind exchange values, and a resultant shortage of coin as marketplaces grew. Thus, in a mere six sentences Defoe gives us a history of commerce up to the moment at which credit is to be introduced:

Tho’ this was a great Assistant to Trade, and gave a liberty to the increase of commerce more than ever it had before, yet such was the great increase of Trade, that it even over-run the Money it self, and all the Specie in the World could not answer the Demand, or be ready just at the Time Trade called for it. (52)

At this point, however, Defoe’s narrator abruptly abandons his historical narrative and interjects the phrase, “This occasioned,” followed by the sudden introduction of an entirely different sort of story (52).

The historical narrative with which Defoe began efficiently captures the longer time frames in which mathematical thinking functions. Their epochs marked only by the transitions between them, Defoe’s commercial eras take on the same fixed spatial quality that Henri Bergson identified with mathematical time concepts; whole centuries can be denoted by a single event and made to pass as quickly as the reader’s eye passing over a paragraph. And as Paul Ricoeur has demonstrated, historical writing borrows the character and plot structures that inhabit all narration by abstracting them to longer time frames. The introduction of historic epochs means that reifications take on the quality of active subjects. In this way Defoe’s narrative claims to provide active agents to direct the movement of public credit, so that “Trade”

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6 See my discussion of Henri Bergson and mathematical time in Chapter One.
demands coin, nations fall into the habit of trading with one another, and “commerce” flourishes (52).

But Defoe’s historical narrative fails at just the point where it most needs to succeed. Defoe’s worried readers need assurance that the crises of the present moment would not mark a great historical shift beginning, presumably, with the destruction of Britain’s financial market. What those readers need, in fact, is a narrative that reflects the embodied present and then leads them out of the woods. His narrative stalled at the historical status of the present, Defoe attempts another approach.

Within An Essay, the sudden termination of Defoe’s historical narrative leads directly into a different form of narration, this time involving characters “A” and “B” (52). “This occasioned,” Defoe writes, “That when A Bought more Goods of B than A had Money to pay for; and B having no Need of any Goods that A had to Sell; it behooved, that A should leave his Goods with B for a certain Time . . . ” (52). Defoe’s second narrative is an exemplum of the sort found throughout seventeenth-century political-economic pamphlets. The device was a convenient one for advocates of the controversial banking initiatives. By emphasizing the simple pattern of commercial relations among its characters, the exemplum suggested that modern banking consisted of the same activities in which Britons had been engaged for years, only in larger numbers and over longer time frames. Thus, with its simple credit transaction, Defoe’s exemplum promises to bring his readers back toward the human present with which they are so concerned: B is holding A’s goods as security, and A is assessing his ability to pay. Defoe concludes their transaction with the dramatic, “And this is the Great Thing call’d CREDIT” (53).

But of course, the narrator merely evades the problem. The simple transaction in the exemplum successfully describes credit as a “Thing” of value produced by the relation between
the characters and as an action. But the exemplum has not described public credit, and Defoe is aware of the discrepancy. Public credit, as Defoe’s historical narrative suggests, exists only in a framework that has no embodied subjects. It is not merely the proliferation of private credit transactions within a marketplace, but a completely different conception of the marketplace. Public credit takes place in a mathematical time in which all patterns of profit, loss, and debt are imagined to exist already at designated points in the future. We imagine the invisible consumers, merchants, and lenders who actually produce the financial conditions of the marketplace to be moving toward, rather than creating, those future realities. The mathematical foundation of public credit thereby erases the agency of the public; all action, everything that we “do,” has in some sense already been accomplished and accounted for.

Defoe’s history and exemplum, with their fundamental structure of character and plot in time, cannot make visible the imaginary systems of the modern marketplace. The moment we meet that marketplace on its own mathematical terms, we capture its long time frames and its plot movements only at the expense of the bodies that should give the plot direction. Defoe’s narrator therefore finally relinquishes narrative structure for the clock metaphor. Public or “National” credit, writes Defoe, is produc’d by the Nations Probity, the Honour and exact performing National Engagement. In this the Great Officers of the Treasury and Exchequer are, as we may say, perfectly Passive; their business is indeed Active; as the Wheels of a Clock, their Business is to go round; but they are subject to the Influence of their Position, the Operations of the Springs and Wheels that guide their Motion, they act passively, if that may be said, that is, of meer Necessity; and the punctual pointing of the Hand to the Lines shewing the Hour, the Minutes and the Seconds, are Consequences of these Motions. (55-6)
Defoe’s clock identifies the temporal nature of public credit without resorting to narrative form and emphasizes the mathematical nature of both credit and clock. Moreover, the metaphor has the benefit of invoking the clockmaker analogies that had helped explain the living body for Descartes and the universe for Boyle, among others. In those analogies as in Defoe’s, all movement and event is preset by the divine maker. The future is “spring-loaded” to unfold predictably over and across time just like a pattern created in mathematic logarithms. In finance, this mathematics of unfolding patterns spreads itself out over intervals of years rather than hours. But its structure of intervals is adequately captured by Defoe’s image of the clock face, its blank cyclical course punctured by labeled points to designate hours, minutes and seconds. The hands of the clock, argues Defoe’s narrator, represent the government officials who ostensibly manage the public credit. The narrator’s awkward unpacking of his metaphor — “they act passively, if that may be said” — catches at the sense that the mathematical economy is moving toward a future that it has already determined. So long as Britain’s government officials constrain themselves to the positions in which they are placed, their actions and the consequences of those actions will unfold as they are destined to do. In this great clock of public credit subjects are always active but never have agency.

Defoe undoubtedly knew his clock metaphor did not account for any action that fell outside the simple patterns of movement that its springs and wheels set in motion. Nor would it have been desirable in this Essay to do so. Defoe was asking his audience to trust in the mathematics of public credit. He was keenly aware of the dangers that would follow if even a few well-placed individuals ceased to believe in the imaginary mechanisms by which public credit was sustained. The speed of news and the attractions of emulation in England’s

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8 Stuart Sherman, Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), argues that the “spaces” of time created by new timepieces at the end of the seventeenth century provide a structure for the collection of narrative events.
marketplace could easily transform individual doubt into public panic, as they eventually did during the South Sea crisis ten years later. For the purposes of this essay, Defoe needed to occlude his readers’ sense of their own importance to the nation’s finances. He assured them that the rapid and unpredictable motions of human beings in the marketplace would smooth out into regular patterns of averages and probabilities. Offering the image of a smoothly ticking clock, Defoe asked his readers to think long, mathematical time spans about a crisis that threatened them in the urgent moment of their present.

_A New Economic Sin_

Faith in the future was a sufficient rallying cry for Defoe’s public during the political upheaval of 1710. But the fast-developing marketplaces of Europe had created an entirely new sort of crisis for Defoe’s readers by 1719. During that year, markets in England, France, and Amsterdam were reaching ominous heights under the influence of state-sponsored joint-stock corporations like the South Sea Company in Britain and the Mississippi Company in France. The rise in global ventures over the preceding century and the end of the Wars of Succession had inspired the public with an enthusiasm for investment that at times seemed to rival religious zeal. Defoe, like many others, was concerned that the sort of confidence he had argued for in the _Essay on Publick Credit_ had grown into foolishness.

As he turned his attention to the problem of the public’s excessive confidence, Defoe made use of conditions in France. The exiled Scotsman John Law had overseen the establishment of the Banque Générale Privée and the Mississipi Company under the patronage of the French Crown. Like the South Sea Company, France’s intertwined schemes would fail

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9 Mary Poovey argues that Defoe turns to emulation as the basis for stability in the modern political economy of Britain; *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 157-97.
dramatically in 1720 with a run on the bank and the consequent freefall of markets in France and throughout Europe. In one of the more compelling narrations of Law’s rise in France, *The Chimera* argues that the complex ties between the Banque, the Mississippi Company and the French Crown had been carefully manipulated by Law, all with an eye to the establishment of a public credit in France.

In keeping with the prevailing political theory in Britain, Defoe argues that France’s institution of absolute monarchy is incompatible with the establishment of public credit; the Crown’s ability and willingness to nullify debts or seize land adds too much contingency for an economy leveraged against the future. Moreover, France’s massive war debts, high taxes, and coin shortages means that the Crown needs to find its own instruments of public funding. Defoe explains that Law has attempted to solve the French dilemma by first creating public faith in the private bank through a well-secured supply of bullion. When the bank proved itself able to withstand a run contrived by ill-intentioned competitors, the new institution secured itself as the center of France’s public credit.

But Defoe argues that Law never meant for the Banque Générale (now the Banque Royale) to be an end in itself. Instead Defoe reveals that Law’s true plan was to create a fund of public credit from the establishment of a joint-stock company. In spite of the French Crown’s lack of financial credibility and despite the modest profits that could be expected from the joint-stock company’s actual business, Law would make the relation between the two into a structure

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that could swiftly bring in unimaginable funds for its directors and for the Crown. All of this would be accomplished by tapping into the French public’s naïveté about the mathematical structures of finance that were recreating the future.

Defoe explains how the new joint-stock company (and the Crown’s much-needed loan) were carefully birthed from the credit of the bank. Law’s plans were still an unqualified success in 1720, and Defoe describes the rise of public credit in France with an apparently equal mixture of awe and suspicion. Under Law’s direction, France has

rais’d an inconceivable Species of meer Air and Shadow, realizing Fancies and Imaginations, Visions and Appartions, and making the meer speculations of Things, act all the Parts, and perform all the Offices of the Things themselves; and thus in a moment their Debts are all vanish’d, the Substance is answer’d by the Shadow; [. . . ] the Name of the thing is made an Equivalent to the Thing it self, transposing the Debts from the King to themselves, and being contented to Discharge the Publick, owe the Money to one another. (161)

Defoe’s rhetorical flourishes, the oppositions of “the Name” to “the Thing” and “Substance” to “Shadow,” belong to a discourse of credit that, from Defoe’s time to the present, has articulated the conceptual nature of credit through the use of binaries. With its reliance on a future that only exists as hypothesis, credit provokes us to think in terms of real and lack, present and absent, symbol and value, or name and thing. Such binaries force credit into the category of that which is not there or is not, in some fashion, “real.” As Defoe sets out his expectations that Law’s public-credit scheme must fail in the end, we would be justified in reading the passage above as a reiteration of this figuration of credit as lack. In Defoe’s thinking, however, credit never falls into
such a clear binary. He does not contrast the “chimera” of the French marketplace to traditional symbols of value (bullion, land, or goods), but to English credit.

English nationalism informs this argument, of course, but Defoe is also offering a subtle caution to his countrymen and women. The narrator notes early in the essay that the French have “turn’d the Tables upon us” as Britain’s earlier borrowing schemes have obligated it to nearly a century of repayment, while Law’s scheme has rid France of its state debt with miraculous speed (160). England must not be tempted to put its own private bank or the flourishing South Sea Company to the same use as their French counterparts, argues Defoe, lest the English public should suffer the inevitable fate of its counterpart across the Channel. Defoe’s argument articulates a distinction between two kinds of public debt. As we might expect, Defoe insists that part of this distinction arises from the difference between France’s absolute monarchy and Britain’s parliamentary system. But he also emphasizes the slower, more realistic, speed at which Britain’s debt will be repaid. In contrast with the miraculously vanishing state debt of France, Britain’s slow repayment is testament to the reliability of British credit:

. . . so that very Limitation of Power, which is in other Cases our Glory and Advantage, is the Reason why, let our Credit be what it will, our Debts remain, and must be wasted or diminished off, by the slow fire of Parliamentary Proceedings, and by no other way.

(161)

English debt cannot vanish “in a moment” as did that of the French, but must be burned by a “slow fire.”

Defoe’s use of the word “slow” here transforms the metaphor from one of debt as paper that vanishes quickly to debt as something dense and substantial that fire struggles to consume. That slow burning of the English stands in stark contrast to Law’s ideas, which “burst out like a
sudden Fire,” and also to “the fluttering, rash Disposition of the People of France” that makes possible Law’s repayment of the massive French debt with such unimaginable rapidity. The English debt is preferable to the fiction “by which he [Law] has restor’d a Government overwhelm’d with Debt and which was turn’d Bankrupt to the People, and has deliver’d a Nation oppress’d with Taxes, in such a manner, and in so short a Time, that Posterity will never believe the Relation, but will all look like a Fable or Romance in their Eyes” (171, 173, 176).

France’s benighted public has confused the mundane human time in which colonies and products are grown with the mathematical time in which they are dreamed. The French (and implicitly their British counterparts) suffer from a “Volatile Temper” and “fluttering, rash Disposition” that “prompts them to push things up to the Extremity” such that time itself is no obstacle to desire (170-1). Moreover, the French public’s failure to understand the workings of mathematical time is also a failure to interpret the series of events with which they have been presented. Defoe’s essay reveals France’s recent economic events to be part of a complex plan, patiently spun by John Law. And that plan works only because the public fails to understand the interrelation of economic events in time.

The French public proves itself unable to interpret economic events as part of a larger pattern. Its “rash Disposition” is suited to the heady flights of mathematical time, but not the slow weight of human time. This lack of comprehension poses an imminent problem for the entire nation of France. But the French are not the only public suffering from a rash disposition. As Britain’s own joint-stock market expands beyond all reasonable expectations and the massive public debt sends political and economic leaders searching for a quick solution, Defoe returns to the economic narratives he ventured in 1710. This time, however, he narrates the behavior of the embodied public and leaves its credit in the shadows.
The Timely Hermeneutics of Robinson Crusoe

The political-economic circumstances at home and abroad gave impetus to the troubled protagonist of Defoe’s first long fictional narrative. Long read as a tale of capitalist success, of spiritual progress, or of colonial adventure, *Robinson Crusoe* offers equally compelling insights into the hermeneutic strategies that Defoe’s age developed to respond to the new credit-based political economies.\(^{11}\) Like characters “A” and “B” from the 1710 *Essay*’s exemplum, Crusoe enacts the plot movements that underlie public credit. With his slow development from stranded castaway to colonial leader, Crusoe can even be said to enact a sort of pre-trade history. But Defoe’s real emphasis in this novel is not on commercial transactions (for much of the tale there is no one with whom to carry on a transaction). *Robinson Crusoe* enacts the cognitive process of crediting and interpretation made necessary to negotiate a world structured in mathematical time. Sandra Sherman captures part of this dynamic when she argues that “Defoe’s texts instantiate the homology between financial credit and literary credibility, and engage both the discourse of emerging capitalism and the theory and practice of fiction.”\(^{12}\) But we can be more specific in articulating how Crusoe’s narrative pauses, progressions and regressions comment on the complexities of the credit marketplace. Crusoe’s original sin is identical to that of Defoe’s French public. He believes fervently in mathematical time, but cannot interpret the relationship between that disembodied temporality and the mundane time in which he must live and produce. Thus, after providing his readers with standard details of birth, parentage and upbringing,


\(^{12}\) Sherman, 8.
Defoe’s most famous character attributes his dramatic misfortune to the “rambling Thoughts” and “Propension of Nature” that tempt him to go to sea against the wishes of his parents.  

Critics have written volumes on the nature of Crusoe’s sin, but for my purposes the most important explanation is Crusoe’s own. In response to his father’s emotional pleas, Crusoe responds, “that I was now Eighteen Years old, which was too late to go Apprentice to a Trade, or Clerk to an Attorney; that I was sure if I did, I should never serve out my time, and I should certainly run away from my Master before my Time was out . . .” (6). Crusoe’s predictions for himself prove all too accurate. Crusoe refuses to commit himself to a business, and takes up his maritime career with no forethought at all: “being one Day at Hull, where I went casually, and without any Purpose of making an Elopement that time,” he boards “without any Consideration of Circumstances or Consequences” (7). Unable or unwilling to subject himself to the slow work of learning even a sailor’s craft, Crusoe survives the first years of his career through a mixture of good fortune, the generosity of strangers and divine mercy.

Crusoe’s subsequent fall into enslavement belongs to both the adventure tale and the spiritual narrative. And according to the latter genre, at least, Crusoe should have emerged a wiser, more devout man. But while Crusoe’s preparations for the escape from Africa mark some improvement over his rash departure from Hull, it is the young Moorish slave, Xury, who seems to have learned the moral lesson. While Xury willingly accepts religious conversion and ten years of service toward the promise of freedom, Crusoe lasts only four years on his Brazilian plantation. Crusoe makes clear to his readers that in spite of all that his experience should have taught him, he leaves the Brazils in the same impetuous frame of mind with which he’d departed from Hull:

13 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1994). All further references are to this edition and are cited by page number within the text.
As I had once done thus in my breaking away from my Parents, so I could not be content now, but I must go and leave the happy View I had of being a rich and thriving Man in my new Plantation, only to pursue a rash and immoderate Desire of rising faster than the nature of the Thing admitted . . . (29)

Crusoe’s restless ambition thus lures him out to sea again, this time to acquire the slaves that might speed the development of his plantation beyond reasonable expectations (notably, this slave labor is needed in part to replace Xury). Crusoe’s break with his parents is undoubtedly a cause for regret, but it is his unreasonable demands upon the future that repeatedly throw him off course. As a result, the protagonist finds himself shipwrecked on an uninhabited island, bound to an apprenticeship from which he cannot flee.

By highlighting the idea of apprenticeship in Robinson Crusoe, I want to emphasize the extent to which the entire narrative, and not merely the section that takes place on the island, challenges its protagonist with a fundamentally temporal problem. Crusoe’s accommodation to the slow time of human endeavor emerges in his long term economic success. At the same time Crusoe engages in a long process of spiritual endeavor that brings him closer to the self-revelation required by Defoe’s Protestant tradition. Defoe’s intertwining of these two apprenticeships around the question of time reveals the hermeneutic process that the two discourses share in common.¹⁴

¹⁴ The question of whether Crusoe’s story is meant to be interpreted from an economic standpoint, a spiritual standpoint, or some combination of the two has prompted some of the most compelling critical work on Defoe. Ian Watt argued that the spiritual tradition was of relatively little import to Defoe’s writing by 1719; *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) and *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). J. Paul Hunter and George Starr, however, demonstrated Defoe’s comprehensive use of Protestant spiritual biography and diary traditions in producing Robinson Crusoe. Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe’s Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1966); Starr, *Defoe & Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Maximillian E. Novak argued specifically for the importance of the Protestant spiritual-economic concept of “the Calling” in understanding the protagonist’s character flaw and his redemption; *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley: University of California
As I argued in the first chapter, late seventeenth-century mathematical thought constructed the future as a vast space of potential, very much like the open seas and unknown lands of the New World. Crusoe’s restlessness marks him as a product of that era in which the pure potential of time and of space beckoned in similar ways. But the spiritual discourse that eighteenth-century Protestants deployed to counter that restlessness had its anchor in a version of the very same time constructs. Commenting on a late seventeenth-century shift in Protestant belief, J.P. Hunter writes:

The broadened typology simply extended to contemporary history the principle of regarding one time in terms of another: biblical objects or events now might not only prefigure other biblical events or concepts but also the events of later history. Or put another way, the broadened typology offered contemporary history an extended mythic dimension based upon past history frozen into static form. (101)

The broadened typology to which Hunter refers is the modern version of an older biblical hermeneutics. In its earlier forms (scholars date Christian typology to the first century A.D.), typology invited the pious to find patterns of meaning and event from the Old Testament reflected in the narrative structures of the New. Typology later moved beyond the boundaries of the Old and New Testaments to become a method for interpreting contemporary history. As a result, argues Hunter, seventeenth-century religious thought re-imagines historical time as a “static” space, a blank page upon which the patterns of human error and divine redemption are acted and reenacted moving forward.
The re-conception of time described by Hunter bears more than a coincidental relation to the mathematical representations of time from the same period. Seventeenth-century Protestant typology differs in significant ways from the non-contingent temporality of applied mathematics. Whether in the theoretical work of Newton or in the daily practice of Christianity, the divine retains its potential to intervene in or end the time of human experience.\(^\text{17}\) Despite these ideological differences, however, eschatological time shares with its mathematical counterpart an articulation of time as fixed space. Moreover, the Protestant emphasis on both daily practices and centuries-long historical patterns produced for believers the same temporal conundrum that Defoe’s putative French public had met with in the marketplace: how to interpret accurately in two distinct time frames at once? While the Protestant faithful sought to interpret divine meaning and participants in the political economy sought to interpret economic value, both discourses found their solutions with the use of written text. Bureaucratic and financial documentation and diaries both served to spatialize intuitive time, to give a material representation to thought, experience and event. Arguably, however, the deliberate spatialization of intuitive time did not begin with narration or with personal diaries, but with ledger books.

In a passage that marks the intertwining of commerce and spirituality in *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist attempts to gain control over his rambling thoughts by drawing up a mock ledger book that he inserts into his narrative:

> I drew up the State of my Affairs in Writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few heirs, as to deliver my Thoughts from daily poring upon them, and afflicting my Mind; and as my Reason began now to master

my Despondency, I began to comport my self as well as I could, and to set the good
against the Evil, that I might have something to distinguish my Case from worse, and I
stated it very impartially, like Debtor and Creditor, the Comforts I enjoy’d, against the
Miseries I suffer’d, thus . . . (49)

Crusoe breaks his narrative form to arrange his thoughts into two columns, with line spaces to create a perfect correspondence between each item in the “Good” column and its “Evil” counterpart. The extent to which this spatial arrangement began as a temporal one is not obvious unless we consider the bookkeeping form from which Crusoe is borrowing.

In double-entry bookkeeping, the merchant keeps a running journal entry of daily transactions and arrangements in one book and then periodically extracts information from that journal to update entries in a second ledger book.18 This second book, with all entries streamlined and categorized as debit or credit, effectively freezes time by replacing temporal succession with spatial balance to such an extent that the bookkeeper must include anticipated profits or materials as if they are already received.

Crusoe, with his ledger of moral interpretation rather than commercial value, needs to tame the desperately rambling thoughts that the larger text has already recorded. The narrative account that the reader has received veers from one direction to another as Crusoe struggles to interpret his situation from within the narrow boundaries of the moment. Thus Crusoe’s initial account of his first day on the island includes an ecstatic celebration of his deliverance: “I was now landed, and safe on Shore, and began to look up and thank God that my Life was sav’d in a Case wherein there was some Minutes before scarce any room to hope ” (31). A subsequent period of sharp despair sees Crusoe change course to lament his “dreadful Deliverance,” while

18 Mary Poovey provides a critical history of bookkeeping practices in the early modern period. A History of the Modern Fact, 29-91.
still other passages highlight either the fatigue that caused him to lie down on the ground to sleep or the fear that drove him to make his bed in a tree (35-6). Within this jumble of impressions, emotions, and recollections, Crusoe’s bookkeeping constitutes one of his first efforts to grasp the longer temporal perspective that will fix (at least provisionally) and thereby order the significance of his experiences.

As one might expect from a protagonist who is overly infatuated with the flights of mathematical time, Crusoe skips a necessary step by bringing us straight to his ledger. He soon rectifies this oversight by establishing the text from which the ledger is meant to be derived: a daily journal. In having Crusoe begin his journal at this point, Defoe not only reminds us that his protagonist still has a ways to go in his development, but also emphasizes the cognitive and spiritual function of such texts. Hunter describes how, like the merchant’s journal, the Protestant journal recorded the raw data of life so that it could be ordered and interpreted retrospectively:

The popularity of diary-keeping among Puritans in the seventeenth century derives ultimately from the Puritan world view. Because all events were actively willed by God, and because a proper understanding of divine intention depended upon correct interpretation of the pattern of events, every individual was obliged to observe carefully all those events which impinged on his life. (83)

All events are worthy of attention under such a belief system. But a believer could not accurately assess the significance of individual events until they became part of a larger pattern in time. To this end, journals transferred the daily experience of time onto a spatial medium by virtue of which all recorded events could be viewed and interpreted simultaneously. Spiritual biographies

and autobiographies took this process one step further by affirming the universal patterns of meaning that governed even the most singular lives. As Hunter explains, each reader and writer of spiritual biography

is perpetually searching for the developing shape of his life, trying to draw everything he does and everything he sees into a unified vision that will simultaneously assure him of his own election and deepen his insight into the relationship of man to God. (86)

Hunter’s careful language, the “shape” of a life and the “unified vision,” reflects the importance that seventeenth-century Puritanism attached to giving time a material form and a textual space. The journal represented the relations between temporal experiences as spatial, and the biography gave those diurnal patterns a meaningful shape.

In his discussion of temporality and narrative form in *Robinson Crusoe*, Stuart Sherman positions *Robinson Crusoe* as an heir to Samuel Pepys’s diary, a seminal text in the development of diurnal forms. 20 According to Sherman, Crusoe’s famous journal marks the first use of a putative journal within a longer narrative text, but complicates its innovation by unmaking the journal even as that structure is being introduced. Using the first-day accounts as his example, Sherman argues that Crusoe tries out a variety of writing systems available for ordering information in time. Crusoe’s journal begins by trying to give a voice to his experience through a task-based narrative structure. His first entries prioritize the sequence of tasks that become necessary to his survival. In keeping with the larger cultural shifts of eighteenth-century Britain, the journal then shifts to adopt the calendar as its structure and the tasks as pure content “by first making, and then transcribing, the pages he calls his ‘Journal of Every Days Employment,’ Crusoe reconfigures task time as tasks timed” (229).

20 See also Paul K. Alkon, *Defoe and Fictional Time* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979); Alkon explores Defoe’s choice of temporal structures and time reference in the narrative to shape the reader’s experience of the text’s fictions as both particular and universal.
Sherman interprets Crusoe’s changing narrative structures as part of a larger project in which Crusoe must master the island and its inhabitants and make audible his otherwise silent story. Citing the attention to space in Crusoe’s longitude estimate, the temporal structure of his journal, and the topical cohesion of his balance sheet, Sherman argues that Crusoe is trying out conceptual structures through which he might situate rather than narrate himself:

Crusoe locates himself on many of the grids that according to Foucault were combining to produce a new order of things, and that according to de Certeau were facilitating the “scriptural economy,” under whose auspices the writing class was able to commute the blank page into a tool of cultural control. (230)

As Crusoe moves back and forth between the ordering of his physical space and the ordering of his narrative structures, the text reveals that “spatial and temporal order is an instrument of ownership,” but it is also an effort at communicating what Sherman (borrowing from Defoe) refers to as the “Silent life” of the individual consciousness (231,235). Sherman concludes that Defoe’s “heteroglossia of temporal templates” leaves both the reader and the novel form with a central question of telling and reading:

‘The Journal’ seems to me to suggest, early in the career, that what Defoe actually purveys (very successfully in Crusoe’s case) is puzzlement: an ongoing uncertainty as to the authenticity of the particulars (here the exactness of the copy), which ends by producing a heightened awareness of the degree to which mere textualization is a form of fiction, and all narrative making demands remaking. (235)

Thus Sherman reads the variety of narrative and non-narrative forms that we find in Robinson Crusoe as a deliberate questioning of the process of textualization.
But Sherman’s larger thesis questions the cultural impact of a new conception of time. His study begins with the spread of the pocket watch and its ability to demarcate small increments of time and its tendency to privatize that experience for the wearer. By tracing those effects in Pepys’ diary and subsequent diurnal forms, Sherman develops a subject-based approach to his time analysis before arriving at his reading of *Robinson Crusoe*. Thus Sherman’s reading focuses on the ways in which clock time produced new possibilities for imagining the modern subject as a property-owning individual within a spatially ordered, private time.

This reading diminishes the role of spiritual biography and autobiography, as developed by Hunter and Starr, to mere structural experiment. Not only does Defoe violate the basic structure of the spiritual genre (conversion occurs near the end rather than the beginning of the tale), but Crusoe’s conversion scene “tears apart” the time form that the journal provides. Sherman’s analysis of the binding between space and time in Defoe’s novel need not lead to a dismissal of the spiritual ideology identified in Hunters and Starr’s analyses. The transformation of thought and time into text in Defoe’s novel goes a long way toward explaining why long narrative forms became so critical to a period that re-imagined time itself. But rather than attributing Crusoe’s jostling narrative to “untellability” or to the early development of the novel genre, we need to recognize in Defoe’s text a new and crucially important hermeneutic skill. The seventeenth-century spiritual genres from which Defoe seems to have borrowed his hermeneutic model allowed subjects and readers a way to integrate the content of slow, intuitive time with the abstract patterns of historical time.

By insisting that divine significance could be read into the mundane events of human life, seventeenth-century Puritanism made human experience in time into a secondary text. A believer had to be fully engaged in the moment-to-moment acts of judgment and interpretation that make
up a spiritual life while also keeping one eye on the “longer” view through which these experiences were part of historic divine patterns. As a practical matter this meant that the believer always operated from a perspective of historical contingency; one’s interpretation of the moment is always cast in doubt by the fears, desires, and flaws that characterize human existence. All interpretations are prone to correction as experience accumulates like data, and judgments are adjusted. In his critique of nineteenth-century biblical hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer provides an account of the reading process demanded by text:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (236)\textsuperscript{21}

As Joel Weinsheimer explains in an essay on Gadamer’s hermeneutics, this process reorients interpretation from a vertical search for hidden meaning to a lateral negotiation or fusion with the author.\textsuperscript{22} Gadamer’s reader “penetrates into the meaning,” but this “into” is very different from the reader of allegory or, as Weinsheimer notes, the postmodern critic who searches “below” the level of text for meaning. It is this lateral dimension for interpretation that became so important in Defoe’s eighteenth-century reading culture. For if credit structures cast doubt on vertical binaries for value and its representations, Protestant belief systems also prioritized the sort of

\textsuperscript{21} In a critique of both Kant and nineteenth-century hermeneutics, Gadamer expressly denies the existence of a historically transcendent perspective. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritans certainly would have disagreed with this claim; God’s truth was both historically transcendent, and in limited ways, accessible to humankind. But interpreting one’s spiritual well-being was a lifelong process and one that prevented the closing of that hermeneutic circle.

lateral hermeneutic described by Gadamer as the only option available to a flawed human race reading in a corrupt language.\textsuperscript{23}

Defoe’s novel illustrates the processes of lateral hermeneutics and its demand for continual self-interpretation and revision in Crusoe’s constant narrative backtracking while on the island and in his shifts between present tense and retrospective analysis. These processes becomes especially clear in those sections in which Crusoe struggles to match his experience to biblical tradition. I have already noted the conflicting uses of “deliverance” in Crusoe’s description of his first day on the island. The term reemerges many times throughout the narrative, but nowhere more dramatically than when Crusoe comes across the term in the Bible. Crusoe comes upon the forgotten Bible during his illness, and his account of the moment is cluttered with varying temporal perspectives:

The Words were very apt to my Case, and made some Impression upon my Thoughts at the Time of reading them, tho’ not so much as they did afterwards; for as for being deliver’d, the Word had no Sound, as I may say, to me; the Thing was so remote, so impossible in my Apprehension of Things . . . (69,71)

Crusoe first interprets the biblical passage as a promise that God will rescue him from the island, but weeks later reinterprets the passage as God’s promise to deliver him from his dangerous illness. A few days afterward, however, Crusoe is ready to receive yet another meaning:

Now I began to construe the Words mentioned above, Call on me, and I will deliver you, in a different Sense from what I had ever done before; for then I had no Notion of any thing being call’d Deliverance, but my being deliver’d from the Captivity I was in; for tho’ I was indeed at large in the Place, yet the Island was certainly a Prison to me, and

that in the worst Sense in the World; but now I learn’d to take it in another Sense: Now I look’d back upon my past Life with such Horrour, and my Sins appear’d so dreadful, that my Soul sought nothing of God, but Deliverance from the Load of Guilt that bore down all my Comfort . . . (71)

And yet there is no real end to Crusoe’s conversions. Immediately following the passage above, Crusoe resigns himself happily to a life of solitude on the island, only to re-engage in a series of desperate projects to escape a few pages later. In fact, only Crusoe’s extended “apprenticeship” on the island forces him to engage in the perpetual act of self-projection and interpretive correction that Puritanism requires.

Crusoe’s apprenticeship is both spiritual and economic, and we now can understand the relationship between spiritual discourse and economic discourse in Robinson Crusoe as neither oppositional nor coincidental, but mutually instructive. Thus, even while Crusoe is wrestling with the question of his “deliverance” on the island, he is made to go through an exercise in determining material value. Crusoe wakes from his first night’s rest on the island to find that the ship he and his crewmates abandoned had beached itself safely during the night (37). Not for the first or the last time in the story, the narrator tells us that he would have behaved differently had he better understood his circumstances. The fate of the ship is a matter of chance, an outcome that no reasonable person could have predicted. But Crusoe’s salvage project is a matter for thought and interpretation.

He begins by meeting his most immediate needs: “being very well dispos’d to eat, I went to the Breadroom and fill’d my Pockets with Bisket, and eat it as I went about other things, for I had no time to lose” (37). Because he has boarded the ship too late, Cruse rushes the task, loads his raft too heavily and forgets to account for the tides that drag him away from his landing spot.
Crusoe consequently finds himself standing in a stream with his back buttressed against his raft waiting for the tide to rise (38-9). Having learned his first lesson, Crusoe returns to the ship eleven times more, each time aware that if another storm appears, the present trip will be his last opportunity to salvage the much-needed supplies. During this early period on the island, Defoe shows Crusoe adapting to the timing of the tides and adjusting his motions to their regular pattern. At the same time, Crusoe is learning to order his tasks and goods according to what is most likely to serve him in the future.

As he slowly creates his small kingdom, Crusoe’s long apprenticeship on the island allows him to build incrementally on his capacity to interpret the value of choices over time. Despite frequent setbacks, Crusoe gradually moves from the daily rhythms of the tides to the longer time spans of seasons and finally, to a colonial project that must be gradually extended out over years. As his ability to think in longer time grows, Crusoe’s new civilization emerges one man (and later, several women) at a time. Fortunately for Crusoe, the author spares him the actual enactment of his colonial plan. Crusoe and Friday are transported back to Europe, and Crusoe learns that his modest investments in England and in the Americas have grown exponentially. Crusoe becomes a testament to the rewards of a modern relationship to the future, one that offers a new version of value and meaning.

Just as our credit marketplaces prompt an unending process of prediction and re-evaluation, Defoe’s narrative was never meant to reach a true ending. Credit capitalism continually throws us forward in time to draw value from a potential that always lies one more year out, one more voyage away. This accounts in part for the sequels that quickly followed Robinson Crusoe and offered not only “Serious Reflections,” but also new trade ventures in
other parts of the world. Despite his concerns, Defoe’s version of the marketplace’s temporal structure is fundamentally optimistic; if the public learns to think in the interwoven motions of two times the future can be secured by the present. The financial crash of 1720 did not alter Defoe’s support for the credit-based marketplace, but it does seem to have changed his opinion of the public’s ability to function effectively in that marketplace. Published in 1724, *Roxana* depicts a public unable to disentangle the new economy from older ideas about value, representation and text.

**France, Holland, and Roxana’s Fortunes**

The strange complexity of Roxana’s character has earned the novel a place alongside *Robinson Crusoe* in studies of the early novel genre. Defoe’s choice of a female narrator has

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likewise inspired feminist approaches to *Roxana*'s narrative structure. Sandra Sherman works off these approaches with her argument that *Roxana* returns Defoe to the question of whether the author’s textual elusiveness is still viable in an England reeling from the market crash. Sherman’s reading of this novel focuses primarily on the character of Susan, the daughter that Roxana will not own and cannot escape. Reading Susan as a representation of the reader who has entered the text and insisted on an account of its origins, Sherman prioritizes the novel’s ending. But her argument also offers a useful starting point for understanding Roxana’s character. Naming Roxana as “the ironic reemergence of Lady Credit,” Sherman places Defoe’s female protagonist in a category somewhere between emblem and fully-fledged character and identifies her as part of Defoe’s long-standing project to describe and define public credit. Roxana’s multiple identities and sexual promiscuity support the argument that she is simply a reiteration of the early Lady Credit. However, her position in the market and her failure to master its concepts lead to the troubling suggestion that what Roxana actually represents is the English public itself.

Roxanna (née Susan) is French by birth, having fled to London with her parents in 1683 to escape religious persecution. By adulthood, Roxanna tells us, she has lost every French quality about her except the language. Her parents were part of the industrious middle class that brought about England’s financial revolution in the late years of the seventeenth century. Roxana nevertheless begins the story of her ignominious career with financial disaster. Her parents have died, her brother has lost her inheritance in a merchant venture, and her husband has failed at the business his father left him. The list of circumstances could begin a nineteenth-century novel, but

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27 Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality.*
28 Sandra Sherman, 158.
Defoe’s narrator is very keen to emphasize the foolishness of her late husband. His business fails particularly because of his attitude toward his business and his capital:

he had no Knowledge of his Accounts . . . it was below him to inspect his Books, he committed all that to his Clerks and Book-Keepers; and while he found Money in Cash to pay the Malt-Man, and the Excise, and put some in his Pocket, he was perfectly easie and indolent, let the main Chance go how it would.\footnote{Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, the Fortunate Mistress, or, A history of the life and vast variety of fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau: afterwards called the Countess de Wintselsheim in Germany: being the person known by the name of the Lady Roxana in the time of Charles II*, ed. John Mullan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10. All further references are to this edition and are cited by page number within the text.}

When her husband sells the business off, Roxana is relieved until she realizes that he continues to live and spend money just as he had before. With no trade to produce income, the couple begin their slide toward destitution. Roxana pleads with her husband, telling him, “how fast our Money wasted, and what would be our Condition when it was gone,” only to find that she makes no impression on him, “but like one stupid, he went on, not valuing all that Tears and Lamentations could be suppos’d to do; nor did he abate his Figure or Equipage, his Horses or Servants, even to the last” (11). Once the money is gone, Roxana’s husband abandons his family to “seek his Fortune” elsewhere (11).

In light of the recent turn in England’s fortunes, Defoe’s vivid description of the foolish, self-absorbed husband and the tearful wife serve as a commentary on the nation’s approach to its marketplace. Roxana’s critique of her husband mimics the verbal and printed attacks on officials the public believed responsible for the South Sea debacle. In the wake of the crash, officials were accused (probably correctly) of ignoring or hiding the Company’s lack of income and engaging in the sort of insider-trading cronyism suggested by the “scoundrels” with whom Roxana’s
husband spends his money (11). Roxana and her husband thus perform the mistakes leading up to the South Sea Company’s failure and the consequent blow to public credit.

In a typical reading of the novel, Roxana responds to this catastrophe by losing her conscience but improving her financial skills. As Christopher Gabbard argues, however, it is not at all clear that Roxana masters either finance or commerce. In his re-examination of Roxana’s business prowess, Gabbard argues that much of Roxana’s air of financial acumen comes with one of her chosen identities, that of a Dutch woman and wife to a Dutch merchant. Notwithstanding Defoe’s representations of the Dutch as brutally mercenary in the Crusoe trilogy, Defoe and his readers were all familiar with the common association between the Netherlands and efficient commerce. Roxana’s Dutch husband assumes that his wife will keep an eye on her own financial well-being and thus offers to let her see the household books and participate in the management of assets. Noting that Defoe himself advised women to learn bookkeeping skills for just this purpose, Gabbard points out that Roxana not only admits to the reader her inability to read the books, but turns over all management of her affairs to her various husbands or to Amy throughout the novel. The protagonist’s failure is particularly telling in light of her castigation of the first husband for just this omission.

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Roxana’s association with France is even more troubling, however. If, to borrow from Gabbard, “the Netherlands stands for economic discipline,” then France stands for the “luxury and corruption” associated with the aristocratic “vices of idleness, moral laxity, and sensuality.”

Roxana’s fascination with French power and luxury, and the necessity of her repeated escapes from France to Dutch territories and Dutch husbands suggests that the would-be businesswoman is caught between two financial systems. The novel’s ending suggests that she could not or did not choose the correct one. Defoe, after all, wrote *Roxana* as a tragedy, forcing his lead character into prostitution and then lashing her to a sordid past.

Expanding on previous studies of Roxana as narrator, Gabbard concludes that Roxana’s “deficient bookkeeping skills find an analogue in her equally inadequate literary ones . . . because she [Roxana] cannot take stock of herself or accomplish a serious personal reckoning, she cannot bring this spiritual autobiography to a meaningful close.”

But Roxana is not just misreading her account books and mis-writing her life, she also misreads her assets. Gabbard notes that Roxana’s fascination with the jewels she gains in France indicates that she has put her faith in an older form of wealth. Roxana repeatedly details her growing accounts, but she does not actually manage any portion of that wealth herself with the exception of her movable possessions. Leaving the account books, contracts, and commercial arrangements to Amy and others, Roxana prefers the physical manifestations of value. The coins that seal her contract with her first lover, the jewels that she accepts as security before his death, and the goods that fill her households receive particular attention from the narrator.

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34 Gabbard, 240-1.
36 Gabbard, 248.
Roxana’s fascination with material wealth extends to the fundamental concepts behind that wealth. Wealth in this older system depends upon the assumption that certain materials have intrinsic value, and valuation depends upon vertical binaries of truth and representation, employing the same metaphors of inside and out or surface and depth that also characterize allegorical figures. Just as a claim is either true or not true, so is a coin either real or not real. Roxana’s veiled and costumed figure at the masque gives embodiment to this older concept of value.  

This concept of wealth clashes in obvious ways with the credit marketplace that Roxana, Defoe and Defoe’s readers all inhabited. Roxana’s greatest failure is not that she participates in a system of wealth that Britain has abandoned, but that she participates in it only partially.

Scholars who have proclaimed Roxana’s character a successful businesswoman are correct at least in acknowledging in Defoe’s protagonist a certain understanding of her economic context. Roxana’s multiple fictions of identity mimic the proliferation of credit that a long-term credit market can produce. Roxana has produced not only her own fictional lives and her capital, but also the physical bodies of numerous children. But the credit marketplace gives birth to such a proliferation of wealth by disregarding the restrictions of linear time. Mathematical concepts gave the marketplace a way to view past, present and future simultaneously so that many possible results of a single transaction could exist at once, preparing the ground for their multiplication in more transactions, more credit notes. However, mathematical time is not the time of the human body, nor the mortal time given by the divine. Defoe recognized that mathematical representations of the temporal were limited constructs; to confuse them with

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human experiences of the world or to grant them more power than they had constituted a danger to the marketplace and a danger to the man or woman who was thus mistaken.

Roxana shapes herself in the image of the financial fictions that surround her, never understanding that those fictions operate in a time and space not available to the human being; the very corporeality that makes Roxana’s fortune is what binds her to the limited durational time of the human mind. Roxana does not have access to an expansive temporal realm in which to keep apart the multiple fictions and bodies that she has produced. The relentless presence of a child signifies more strongly than anything else the impossibility of a body escaping linear time. As Roxana once again relinquishes control to Amy in the handling of her daughter, Defoe’s novel seems to conclude that the British public has learned very little from the catastrophe that temporarily damaged the market. Worse still, *Roxana* suggests that the public finally might not be capable of understanding the complex temporalities on which the modern public and its nations depend.

39 In this final point my argument approaches that of Anne Louise Kibbie, “Monstrous Generation: The Birth of Capital in Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana,*” *PMLA* 110.5 (October 1995): 1023-34. Kibbie traces the figuring of interest (the self-generation of money) through rhetorical productions of the female body.
Defoe’s *Roxana* warned readers of the dangers of conflating older notions of materially-inherent value with the mathematically-derived value of political economics.\(^1\) Drawn to the productivity of a political-economic future, but seduced by the trappings of traditional wealth and power, the post-bubble British public of Defoe’s novel seemed bound to fail again. But was that conflation of old and new frameworks really a failure of the public’s understanding, or was the dynamic that Defoe critiqued central to Britain’s political-economic marketplace?

Throughout his work, Defoe sought to distinguish between two time concepts, one embedded in embodied experience, the other a mathematical construct free from the constraints of duration sequentiality. Defoe’s misdirected characters failed to recognize that the human body had no access to mathematical time, and they repeatedly endangered both their bodies and their purses as a result. But early-eighteenth-century literature offered other frameworks for constructing the body in relation to mathematical time. With *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Addison and Steele nurtured a public that belonged to mathematical time but gestured toward real bodies by fashioning their resemblances in narrative text.\(^2\) Addison and Steele might well have found

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\(^1\) See my discussion of Defoe’s novels in Chapter Four.

\(^2\) See my discussion of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in Chapter Two.
inspiration for Mr. Spectator in the same genre that Defoe mined when he named his famous protagonist, Roxana.

A reference to an Ottoman courtesan and a common prostitute, Roxana’s name came from the dress and character she adopted to gain the attentions of the English Court. Roxana’s careful blending of Ottoman adornments and French mannerisms invoked a literary genre that was well-established by the time that the South Sea Bubble struck the English stock market. Dominated in the 1720’s by the English-language version of Antoine Galland’s *Mille et Une Nuits*, the oriental tale genre elicited critique for its use of magical creatures, fanciful plots, and in earlier versions, erotic content. When Defoe wrapped his female protagonist in a thin veil of Turkish mystique, he made use of these associations and drew, as well, on the genre’s indebtedness to an illicit French print culture.

But the story of the oriental tale in Britain is more than the history of a literary fashion or of an early step toward orientalism. As they flirted with the cultural and material cross-currents between Europe and the Middle East, oriental tales negotiated the growing power of print culture to intervene in politics and in markets. Mid-seventeenth-century *romans à clefs* in Ottoman or Persian settings were self-conscious in their use of print forms. As the metaphor in the genre’s name suggests, *romans à clefs* envisioned printed text as a material form to be “opened” by a reader for whom the “key” would radically transform the text’s meaning. The fixed existence of print on a page thus contrasted significantly with the deliberate instability of language. Deploying this contrast of fixity and fluidity, oriental tales played with the notion of boundaries. Printed text presupposed the capacity to contain, if not stabilize, the possibilities for narrative meaning, and the genre mimicked that containment in the heavily-guarded spaces of harems, walled gardens, and palaces. Unlike their Aesopian counterparts, however, oriental tales
explored the permeability of those boundaries and the realignment of power and meaning that necessarily followed. The oriental tale thus reflected its own tendency to cross boundaries; these texts were commodities that traveled among the same international commercial webs as the silks and slaves depicted in their pages, often moving illicitly across national and social borders. Moreover, oriental tales accomplished their task through an erotic discourse. The sexual frissons among human bodies in their pages marked otherwise hidden shifts in real political power. With their focus on the political, seventeenth-century tales did not address overtly the conflict between political-economic and embodied time that so troubled Defoe, but they provided all the elements to do so.

John Paul Marana’s Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy and the English translation of Antoine Galland’s Mille et Une Nuits marked a re-deployment of the tropes and themes of the oriental tale to respond to Britain’s political-economic marketplace. In my reading of Marana’s 1684 text, I mark the decay of the genre’s focus on boundaries as allegorical gives way to an uncertain epistolary and print forms encroached on the centralized power of traditional authority. When the first Grub street translation of Arabian Nights’ appeared in England in 1704, the oriental tale genre shifted its tropes and themes again to address a marketplace embedded in mathematical time concepts. In this regard, Arabian Nights’ confronted the same dynamic among text, time and bodies that inspired Addison and Steele’s periodical essays. But Arabian Nights’ Entertainments offered a slightly different version of that dynamic. Where The Spectator drew on the endless commentary of what Foucault labeled an episteme of resemblance, Arabian Nights’ bred both wealth and pleasure from the charged interplay between deferral and anticipation.
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that capitalism first nourished itself on the decaying codes of feudal societies and continued to developed through the de-codification and de-territorialization of all cultures it encountered. Threatened by its own tendency toward chaos, capitalism averts its destruction by offering a mock replacement for the codes and territories it helped dissolve. Where once different signifying systems in a culture worked in correspondence, capitalism imposed only “axiomatics” that linked empty symbols to one another in an infinite progression that corresponded only to capitalism’s own syntactic rules. Deleuze and Guattari’s work provides an important critical perspective on the oriental tale’s fascination with the permeability of boundaries and the increasing fluidity of semiotic play. But seventeenth-century oriental tales introduced the flux and fluidity of semiotic value to their narratives through depictions of sexual desire, and it is in this regard that eighteenth-century narrative shifts offer new insights into how early capitalism framed its project.

Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desire as a starting point, I argue that *Arabian Nights*’ “story about stories” illustrated the wealth-producing potential of a semiotic system coded in time and mediated by the body. As it borrowed from the self-conscious textuality of the oriental fable tradition, *Arabian Nights*’ offered bodies and goods that, even within the narrative, slipped in disorienting fashion from material reality to mere story and back again. Within this layered narrative structure, *Arabian Nights*’ did more than illustrate the commodity value of semiotic signs. The collection emerged as an argument for the productivity of a system in which every material exchange only reproduces anticipation. My reading thus ends with an analysis of *Arabian Nights*’ as a text (and commodity) that participated in the development of a marketplace that resisted either boundaries or endings.

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From the East via France

The oriental tales and fashions that shaped so much of eighteenth-century British culture began with the very particular concerns of the seventeenth century. Scholars of seventeenth-century Britain have shown that print technologies were closely intertwined with the political conflicts of the period. As Nigel Smith writes, “Never before in English history had written and printed literature played such a predominant role in public affairs, and never before had it been felt by contemporaries to be of such importance.” Though somewhat dramatic, Smith’s assertion captures the significance of the printed texts for seventeenth-century leaders and their supporters. Literature was seen to be a powerful influence on the course of political events, as it provided a greater dissemination of the ideas of more of Britain’s subjects. The threat was not simply words, but printed words, those that could be easily and quietly disseminated. By the mid-1640’s, authors were working in a variety of new and re-fashioned rhetorical styles that “functioned as modes of simultaneous political commentary, explanation and satire.” Smith explains that these new styles were in part a response to the growing distrust of rhetoric, so that their authors increasingly turned to satirical or ironic forms.

Emerging from within these mid-century styles, short fables facilitated the volatile political and religious debates that Britons continued to wage in print. In her study of the Aesopian fable in England, Elizabeth Jane Lewis argues that these tales appealed to readers of the Augustan period because of the genre’s “aptitude for reactive mediation between opposing

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5 Smith, 44.
sides.”⁶ Fables, writes Lewis, were “often visibly driven by a combative sociopolitical context, and by a determination to confer on words the status of objects.”⁷ In their awkward binding of representational simplicity and discursive instability, fables demonstrate a self-consciousness about their own rhetorical processes that confronts the question of how words make and represent meaning:

More than their superficial invocation of the sensible world, it is fables’ demonstration of their own contingency — of the ways meaning is made — that, in Augustan eyes, invested them with something akin to natural authority. Indeed, fables’ thematic preoccupation with the phenomenal world may be seen as a trope for the concrete acts of meaning-making that they perform structurally. More than their actual invocation of sensible things, it was this complex materiality that made fables antidotes to a figural crisis that was also a political and cultural one.⁸

The threat of the printed word to political stability played itself out in these fables through a self-reflexive questioning of how printed words relate to the material world. At the heart of this questioning, of course, is a challenge to the truthfulness and reliability of printed rhetoric. According to Lewis, Augustan fabulists often played in their introductions with puns and irony that emphasized the difference between language and the material world it claimed to represent. And yet these authors finally needed to persuade their readers. The genre self-consciously turned the phenomenological qualities of print (the visible marks on a material page) into a trope to suggest that the author’s rhetoric was, in fact, anchored in a more credible material world:

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⁷ Lewis, 9.

⁸ Lewis, 7-8.
“Aesopian self-consciousness reflects not only contemporary thinking about figurative language but also an obsessive perception that figurative language is inseparable from the material forms (the very printed pages) that convey it.”\(^9\) According to Lewis, it was this self-conscious insistence that the printed fable belonged to the material realms that helped to counterbalance the radical instability of its discourses. A fable could be (and sometimes was) used to convey two opposing political positions, but the fable’s textual materiality was imagined to be a visible indication that there were discursive boundaries. Meaning was not stable, but at least its possibilities might be contained.\(^{10}\)

In contrast to the oral culture with which later critics associate fable forms, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fables insistently and self-consciously belonged to a modern, dynamic print culture. This context becomes all the more important when we consider the importance of the print revolution in the eighteenth-century construction of the nation. Beyond the act of reading the same texts or even the sense of a shared time, printed genres created a discursive space for debate and disagreement within the phenomenologically stable structure of the printed page. And as Lewis demonstrates, the simple allegorical structure of the fable doubly emphasized this balance, revealing “a symbolic economy in which objects are demonstrably equivalent to verbal signs, and vice versa.”\(^{11}\) Lewis concludes that Aesopian fables never lost touch with the power dynamics with which their authors and readers wrestled: “fables weld together the material, the political, and the symbolic.” Maybe it was only fitting, then, that the Aesopian fable became a marker of English liberty and progress, an affirmation of the nation’s

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\(^9\) Lewis, 4.


\(^{11}\) Lewis, 8.
commitment to the discursive process of Enlightenment thought that was also structurally bounded enough to nurture the sense of a cohesive nation. The Aesopian fable thus became part of the process of creating Englishness, “initiating generations of English readers into a common understanding of symbolic practice.”

Lewis’ study of Aesopian fables lays the groundwork for a better understanding of the oriental tales that also grew popular in Britain during the last half of the seventeenth century. Like their Aesopian counterparts, oriental fables worked self-consciously with allegorical structure and print medium to make use of the discursive space created between meaning and materiality. However, while Aesopian fables reinforced the self-contained space of the nation with their claim to a particularly English discursive field, oriental tales of the seventeenth century did just the opposite. Many, if not most of these tales traveled to England from France, where they had already acquired an air of intrigue for both French and English readers. French print culture made use of oriental fables and fairy stories to create a distinct structure for its own political discourse. From 1648 to 1715, while Britain wrestled with dramatic changes in government and government structures, the powerful Court of Louis XIV provided fodder for gossip, discussion and critique in France. The fable’s allegorical structure, preferably coupled with an anonymous printing, offered a discreet space for France’s political discussion and court gossip. Those with enough talent could make money from secretive printings and sales of these *romans à clefs*. But of course, the Eastern courts and harems in which these tales were often set were more than mere narrative veils. France’s merchants established their capitulations with the

12 Lewis, 8.
13 My argument approaches that of Srinivas Aravamudan, who observes that the oriental tale offers a different type of “cosmopolitan currency” than does the domestic novel: “If domestic realism performs endocultural reification, or the consolidation of the national stereotype from within, the oriental tale features a fluid circulation of endocultural and exocultural processes . . . ” Srinivas Aravamudan, “In the Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as National Allegory” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33.1 (Autumn 1999): 5-31.
Ottoman government well before Britain, and France took up a prominent role in Western Europe’s import routes. A small circle of elite English readers received their romans à clefs as part of the expansive movement of luxury goods and political intrigue that constantly circulated amongst the most powerful courts of the West and the Islamic East.¹⁵

Distributed in England during the late seventeenth century, The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary demonstrates the role of foreign courts and long-distance trade routes in these tales. In this story, the anonymous author makes use of a purportedly oriental tale to critique the influence of Charles II’s mistress, Louise de Kéroualle.¹⁶ The central plot is relatively simple; a Christian slave named Indamora seduces the Ottoman Emperor, Acmat, into granting her the title of Sultana of Barbary. When a former lover appears at the Court, Indamora must balance her own desires with the Sultan’s favor while fending off the conspiracies of the Sultan’s earlier mistress, Homira. As Ros Ballaster argues in her reading of the story, the plot plays out English suspicions that surrounded the court of Charles II and de Kéroualle during the 1670’s.¹⁷ De Kéroualle had come to Britain with Charles’ sister, Henrietta Maria duchess d’Orléans in 1670, and had begun her affair with Charles the following year. After news erupted of an alleged Popish plot in 1678, the public suspected de Kéroualle of serving as a French agent in the Court. The “key” to this tale, handwritten onto a copy of The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary held at the British


¹⁶ The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary, A Novel in Two Parts, the Story finish’d (London: R. Baldwin, 1689). The text used in this study includes the following handwritten notation on the title page: “i.e. Dutchess of Portsmouth.”

¹⁷ Ballaster, 172-4.
Library, reveals the analogue between the Sultan and Charles that readers were expected to
discern in the text.

Ballaster’s meticulous study of oriental tales places this narrative within a discursive field
of cultural analogies that seventeenth-century English and French readers drew between
European and Ottoman power struggles:

The analogy with the Ottoman dynasty proved a particularly fruitful one for English
writers seeking to score points against a rival court faction: the covert pursuit of
absolutism, effeminacy, and decadence in a court, the decline of empire as a result of
luxury, were trends that could be located in Turkish contexts to suggest the imperiled
nature of English limited monarchy. Moreover, the Sunni and Shi’ite split in Islam
provided a useful analogue between Catholic and Protestant controversy, not least
because the territorial distinction between the two (Turkey versus Persia) could provide
support for the complaint that English Protestantism was threatened by French
Catholicism.  

Settings in luxurious courts undoubtedly piqued readers’ interest, but the characters, plot twists,
and props of those fictional orients were meant to serve as relatively straightforward analogies to
the British and French courts that were actually under scrutiny. Ballaster adds to this framework
an argument about the oriental female as story teller. She identifies Indamora as part of a long
tradition of Roxana and Roxolana characters who, inspired by somewhat dubious accounts of
Ottoman history, repeatedly appear in text and on stage to coax Kings back to redemption or to
lead them astray. As Ballaster writes in her account of Richard Knolle’s 1603 *Generall Historie
of the Turks*, Roxolana displays all the elements of tales set in the Ottoman courts: “luxury,

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Press, 2005), 171.
concealed female agency, slave government, cruelty, despotism, the will-to-power, religious hypocrisy, and imposture.” 19 Focusing on the “concealed female agency” of women who seduce with language, Ballaster argues that The Sultana of Barbary demonstrates a recurrent power dynamic between female subject and male ruler. Though this tale’s version of Charles II eschews the conventional tyrant character, “Where these representations of Charles II do chime with conventional representations of the oriental despot is in their exploitation of the familiar contrast between the oriental ruler enslaved to the pleasures of the eye and the harem woman gaining access to power and influence through the subtle use of language.”20 Ballaster goes on to examine these female characters as part of a larger question about how oriental literary references registered changing British perceptions of the East. Ballaster argues that it is the gender dynamics in oriental fictions that open possibilities for change and transformation, whether in the relations between characters or the relations between East and West. With the ubiquitous figure of the female storyteller at its center, a tradition of oriental seductresses (and ocassionally, reformers) brings words and stories to an ongoing contest with the more overtly powerful male gaze.

As Ballaster’s reading shifts toward its post-Lacanian perspective, her argument leaves behind the attention to narrative structures with which she began and loses much of its historical specificity in the process. We do better to look at one of Ballaster’s other works. In Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740, Ballaster explores the interplay of politics and sexual tension in these narratives. Arguing that Aphra Behn conceals her own political ambitions beneath depictions of female desire, Ballaster explains:

20 Ballaster, 174.
Manley’s claims to be trafficking solely in love, the ‘proper’ sphere of the female novelist, are considerably more transparent than Aphra Behn’s. The disguise is meant to be seen through. Rather than engaging with and reworking contemporary ideological debates with politically charged meanings . . . Manley focuses on specific and personal satire in her ‘key’ novels. Nearly every character in her novels has his or her correlative in the ‘real’ world of political intrigue.\(^{21}\)

Rather than looking for psychology in the characters of another ‘key’ novel, we need to be looking at structural relation. Like other fables, oriental tales of this period produced characters who were read and identified in relation to one another. But the relations amongst them are not psychological. In the politically-charged world of Delarivier Manley, vivid sexual attractions between characters indicate the fickle shifts of political power in Britain and France. *The Sultana of Barbary* does not provide its readers with a stable “value” for any character, with the possible exception of the notoriously mild Sultan. With its nested structures, sudden plot twists, and above all, sexual liaisons, this tale explores the constant realignment of characters and the consequent change in their relative values. The sheer number of plot twists in this tale makes a detailed summary impractical, but the early development of Indamora’s fate demonstrates how this elaborate narrative structure operates upon its characters.

The first of the tale’s inset narratives has Indamora as a young girl without fortune living in isolation with her father. After a chance encounter with Alexander, a young nobleman, she falls in love. She nevertheless declines when Alexander makes his “first cruel Proposal of [her]..."

ruin.”\textsuperscript{22} A letter from Alexander threatening to end their romance unless she gives in to his sexual advances accomplishes what his verbal protests could not, and Indamora agrees to the meeting that Alexander has demanded. In the interim, however, a story dissuades her. The story, told to the Archduchess in Indamora’s presence, details the ruin of a young woman in the same circumstances as Indamora. Treating the story as an example of her own situation and the consequences that would likely come of it, Indamora writes a letter of her own offering an excuse for postponing their meeting. Alexander angrily spurns Indamora and a new lover, the Prince Augustus, presents himself. After telling the young woman that Alexander has provided him with all of their love letters, Augustus makes his own advances. Indamora gives in this time:

I still loved *Alexander*, and must look on him as the cause of all my Ruin; it was, to be revenged on him, that I abandoned my Honor, and suffered myself to be undone by a Man I then only esteem’d; ‘tis true, had I never seen *Alexander*, I should have loved *Augustus*, but the Prince had nothing of my Tenderness, though he possess’d, and, in a word, enjoy’d me.\textsuperscript{23}

The ruin of Indamora only spurs on further twists in the story. After growing to love Augustus as much as she had Alexander, Indamora learns that the Prince has told Alexander of their affair (Alexander has written to assure her that he is not offended by her choice since he had urged the Prince to use the letters in Augustus’ own sexual proposals). Indamora spurns both men, but then grows fond of them again through public meetings and further letters. Alexander then gains Indamora back by assuring her that the letter confessing his role in Augustus’ advances was actually penned by Augustus. Indamora believes the accusation, pens her own accusing letter to Augustus, and then regrets her credulity when Augustus challenges Alexander to a duel. This

\textsuperscript{22} The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary, 21.
\textsuperscript{23} The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary, 29.
elaborate shuffling of lovers ends with Alexander killed in the duel and Augustus exiled, though the plot will be taken up in new form near the end of the tale when Augustus reappears in the Sultan’s court to contend again for Indamora’s affections. Nor is this the only plotline in which the narrative indulges the reader’s sense of drama. A conspiring Vizier, Indamora’s own deceptions, and the strangely sympathetic character of Homira force the reader constantly to reassess the alliances and relative positions of each character. The *Amours of the Sultana of Barbary* demonstrates all of the qualities that Ballaster lists as standard for the oriental tale: “luxury, concealed female agency, slave government, cruelty, despotism, the will-to-power, religious hypocrisy, and imposture.” But it demonstrates one other quality that is typical of the *romans* of the period: an insistent and persistent shuffling of these themes amongst the various characters.

What is remarkable about *The Sultana of Barbary* and other oriental tales of this period is their ability to contain so many plot twists among a limited cast of characters and without leaving the relatively bounded setting of the royal courts. In large part this occurs because the tales, like the Aesopian fables, refer to a select few individuals who are made recognizable in the narrative through their relations to one another; the more characters and settings that the story introduces, the more difficult the reader’s task in interpreting. But the tight constraints of these tales does something else. As characters retreat to walled gardens and guarded harems, the genre reenacts that particular understanding of the relation between print materiality and discourse that is an established part of the fable genre in the seventeenth century. By its very nature, allegorical narrative affirms the tendency for language to take on multiple meanings. By its historical

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24 Ballaster, 61. See also Katie Trumpener, “Rewriting Roxane: Orientalism and Intertextuality in Montesquieu’s *Letters Persanes* and Defoe’s *The Fortunate Mistress.*”
association with print and materiality, the fable promises that if meaning cannot be fixed, it can at least be contained.

Like its Aesopian counterpart, the oriental fable makes use of the gap between language and that which it claims to represent. But where Aesopian fables help to circumscribe emerging ideas of Englishness, the oriental fable carried a different valence. Oriental tales unfolded almost entirely within the walls of palace gardens, harems, or palaces. They did permit, however, more than one such space. Just as Indamora travels the trade routes from Western European courts to the Russian Court and the Ottoman power centers, *The Sultana of Barbary* provides its readers with a constant reminder that in the real world both politics and finance constantly cross the geographical boundaries of the nation, changing the relative systems of value and meaning within. As the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, the existing articulations of meaning and of value were strained to breaking. Credit, after all, did more than unlock a stable cache of wealth; embedded in longer time frames, it could produce value that had not been there before. Likewise, print helped to produce a new, disembody and de-centralized political power in the form of a public. This destabilization of early modern concepts of wealth and political power finds articulation in a narrative that uses its troubled protagonist to undermine the semiotics of allegorical narrative.

*The Turkish Spy’s Uncertainty*

Exported from Italy to France and then to Britain, John Paul Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* played upon familiar elements of earlier tales by trading in the seductive body of an oriental woman for the malformed body of a world-weary and reluctant Muslim spy. The initial volume was first published almost simultaneously in France and Italy in 1684; an English
version of volume one appeared in London in 1687. Like the French and Dutch editions that had come before, the English edition varies very little from the original Italian, though English publishers redacted one of the 102 letters that indicated pro-Stuart leanings.

By way of advertisement, the 1702 English edition shows on its title page, “The Eight Volumes of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy, Who Lived Five and Forty Years, Undiscover’d, at Paris: Giving An Impartial Account to the Divan, at Constantinople, of the most Remarkable Transactions of Europe; And Discovering Several Intrigues and Secrets of the Christian Courts (especially that of France) from the Year 1637, to the Year 1682.” A divided section on the page goes on to advertise: “Written Originally in Arabick, Translated into Italian, from thence into English. And now Published with a Large Historical Preface and Index to Illustrate the Whole. By the Translator of the First Volume.” Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy thus gives a predictable if new twist to the oriental fables to which British readers were accustomed. Though playing with oriental settings and characters, the explicit function of the genre’s allegorical structure was always to reveal the “Several Intrigues and Secrets of the Christian Courts.”

25 Both the authorship and editions of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy have a tangled history. Marana apparently presented a manuscript to Louis XIV in April 1683, claiming that the papers had been found by an Italian in Paris in 1682 and translated from the original Arabic (this matches the editor’s claim in the introduction to the volume). Marana received permission for the printings in Italy and France in early 1684, the French version having been translated from the Italian with only minor changes. A French edition was published in Amsterdam that year. Two years later, Marana sought the King’s license to publish the second and third parts and was granted permission in 1686 after offensive passages were removed. Marana ceded his copyright to Henry Wetstein in Amsterdam, who published the letters in a single volume, but in four parts. More French editions appeared in 1689 and 1690.

The first London edition appeared in April 1687 from John Leake, licensed by Sir Roger L’Estrange. This edition named Marana as the author and claimed the text had been written in Arabic and translated to Italian before being translated into English. A second edition, also from Leake, claimed the volume had been translated from Arabic to Italian and then to French before its English translation. This second edition came in a single volume, divided in four parts, but omitted letter XCIX on the topic of the English Revolutions and the death of the Viceroy of Ireland (the letter praised Charles I). Thereafter, all English and all but one Dutch editions omit the ninety-ninth letter and are published as single volumes in four parts. Unfortunately, records from the period have created confusion about whether Marana is the author and about the number of volumes published. John Paul Marana is now widely viewed to be the author of the text. See C.D. Lee, “The Authorship of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy: The Oxford Connection,” Bodleian Library Record 18.4 (October 2004): 333-64; and William H. McBurney, “The Authorship of the Turkish Spy,” PMLA 72.5 (December 1957): 915-35.

26 Giovanni Paolo Marana [John Paul Marana], Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy, Who Lived Five and Forty Years, Undiscover’d, at Paris (London: Printed for H. Rhodes and S. Sare, 1702).
British audiences in the first years of the eighteenth century, the fact that these were secrets of the French Court was all the better. But *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* set the oriental fable genre on its head with a simple change of narrative structure. Unlike any fable, *The Turkish Spy* unfolds from within the unreliable perspective of the spy, Mahmut.

In the Introduction to the volumes, the reader learns that the Italian translator has found the letters in an apartment that he lets in Paris. From questioning the landlord, the translator learns that the previous tenant was “greatly Studious, of small Stature, of a very coarse Countenance, but of surprising Goodness of Life.”27 Claiming to be from Moldavia, the spy had lived in the house eighteen years before disappearing suddenly at the age of about seventy years. The Landlord suspects that his tenant had been disposed of in the river. Like other texts within the oriental-fable tradition, Mahmut’s collection of letters reveals the duplicity, ambition and betrayal hidden within the French court on which Mahmut spies. But *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* introduces an uncertainty into its narrative structure that was not present in earlier tales in England. As several critics have pointed out, the spy’s opinions, tone and moral grounding seem to change depending upon his correspondent. What seems established in one letter is undermined by another. In this way Mahmut’s letters accomplish the sense of relative value and instability that we find in the fickle characters of earlier fables. But the instability of meaning in the spy’s letters is made more radical by the narrator’s own position. Marana writes his narrator as a character chronically prone to doubt. We learn at the beginning of the letters that our spy embodies the dangerous distinction between the visible structure of the material world and the invisible world of meaning: “Being of low Stature, of an ill-favoured Countenance, ill-shap’d, and by Nature not given to Talkativeness, I shall the better conceal my self . . . I make two Figures; being in Heart what I ought to be; but Outwardly, and in Appearance, what I never

27 *Turkish Spy*, 24-25.
intend.” The Preface encourages the reader to accept Mahmut’s status as an outsider as assurance of the credibility of his writings. The marks on these pages are not subject to the partisanship and political maneuvering of those within the partially closed system of court or nation: “as we are, perhaps, less just than in Ages past, it is difficult to write things as they are, particularly during the Lives of Princes, whose History cannot be writ without Fear, nor the Truth said without Danger. For these Reasons, we ought not to question the Credit of our Arabian, who reports with Liberty what came to his knowledge.” And yet, Mahmut can never position himself entirely outside of the systems on which he reports.

Beginning with his narrator’s concerns about compromising his Muslim faith in the service of his mission, Marana allows own doubts and suspicions to creep into the letters. What he hears and observes colors his wavering belief systems, both religious and philosophical. The apparent inconsistencies of this character provoked a separate preface in the combined English-language edition:

It is though necessary to prefix something more by way of General Preface, not so much regarding the Translation, as the seeming Original Abruptness and Obscurity of our Arabian Author Himself in some Places, with his frequent Change of Subjects, his Digressions and Startings from Matter of Fact, the then present Wars, Transactions, and Intrigues of Christian Courts, States, and Kingdoms, (for which he was chiefly sent to Paris) and his Immethodical falling upon Philosophical, Divine, and Moral

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28 *Turkish Spy*, 1.  
29 *Turkish Spy*, Preface, 3.  
30 See Srinivas Aravamudan, “Fiction/Translation/Transnation: the Secret History of the Eighteenth-Century Novel,” in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. Aravamudan points to the narrator’s failure to remain outside the systems on which he spies as part of his argument that Marana’s novel takes part in a literary form that challenges national boundaries.
Contemplations, and even to Ancient, Obsolete Histories, which some think were altogether Foreign to his Business.  

Our editor attempts to remedy this “Original Abruptness” with his own version of a narrative “key,” in this case a brief history of political events in Turkey and Western Europe during the decades in which Mahmut wrote his letters. But he must also provide some sort of key for Mahmut himself, not an analogue for unlocking the spy’s identity but an interpretation designed to make the spy’s character more stable. Toward this end, the editor reminds his readers that change is natural over the long span of time captured in these letters, that Mahmut must negotiate changing circumstances, and that the apparent contradictions in his philosophical and religious views are best understood to be a product of his learning and general deism. Notwithstanding the efforts of the editor, the spy’s ability to provide a stable, objective perspective fails dramatically with the progression of the plot. When he is recognized by a former acquaintance, Mahmut finds himself imprisoned and subject to the power of the state he is meant to observe. And the imprisonment, coupled with his fear of letters gone astray and conspiracies against him, slowly draws Mahmut into the position of a player in this game rather than a spectator. The spy’s growing anxiety and dismay end with his sudden disappearance. In the final reckoning, Mahmut’s identity and that of his editor both elude the reader. Despite the claims of the volumes’ Preface, British readers debated the text’s authorship and origin. *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* successfully emphasizes the stable, material quality of its letters, but the narrative leaves open and uncontrolled the fickle nature of meaning in a world where both meaning and value are now always relative. 

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31 *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, General Preface, 2-3.  
32 See Ros Ballaster’s discussion of parallels between Marana’s life and that of his fictional character, *Fabulous Orient*, 145-60.
Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy thus marks an important shift in narrative structure, but it also makes one more pivotal change to the way oriental tales would function at the turn of the century. As one would expect from the oriental tales and dramas that preceded it, Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy makes use of its readers’ interest in luxurious courts and harems with its own references to both. But the narrator soon ventures into a different setting. The spy sent to report on activities at court finds his interest drawn instead to people he finds in streets and churches. By the end of Marana’s tale, it is life in France and the precarious position of the spy that come through as the dominant themes of this text. What Marana’s emphasis on French street life introduces to the oriental tale is a focus on a power that reaches beyond the immediate circles at court. Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy reflects the emerging power of the public, and not coincidentally, a public that finds its strongest articulation in figures of the gossiping female. Thus Mahmut notes quite early the importance of mingling with women:

I have not as ye\textsuperscript{t}t any Acquaintance with Women, and yet it is necessary I find Means to Introduce my self into their Companies. It is a Sex that will not pardon, when they think themselves neglected. They are proper to discover Things one would know, and to say them when one would have them published; and likewise, they as much penetrate into the Secrets of hearts, as the most refined and spiritualest Courtiers. Further, there are many of them that can conceal nothing, but what they do not know.\textsuperscript{33}

The narrator is merciless in his castigation; women are characterized by vanity, intrusiveness, and inability to be discreet. But the narrative is quite clear about the power of this group. Women facilitate an unrestricted flow of language. Though relying on different passages from Marana’s text, Ros Ballaster finds in Mahmut’s observations a tension between feminine language and the masculine gaze: “The axis of sight is paralleled with that of the tongue and language; rigid

\textsuperscript{33} Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy, 15.
control must be exercised over both if they are not to put the user in peril."\textsuperscript{34} Living within the narrow constraints of a secret identity forces Mahmut into constant acts of dissimulation. As a result, argues Ballaster, we find Mahmut struggling against a feminization of his own character: “He consistently represents dissimulation as a feminine characteristic displayed by women and eunuchs and asserts his preference for honesty and openness.”\textsuperscript{35}

Ballaster’s discussion reveals the text’s anxious preoccupation with both the visual and the verbal. But we have no reason to believe that the seventeenth-century readers of Marana’s text would have made a gendered distinction between the tongue and the eye. The vaguely grouped “Women” who “are proper to discover Things one would know, and to say them when one would have them published,” are indeed dangerous for their uncontrolled tongues. But they are equally dangerous for their uncontrolled pens. Mahmut’s seventeenth-century French “Women” are those same “women” who wrote, read, discussed and disseminated the oriental \textit{romans à clefs} that plagued the courts of seventeenth-century France (and continued to do so at the time of Marana’s publications).\textsuperscript{36} Marana replaced the allegorical characters of the \textit{roman à clef} and their carefully contained courts for a discursive structure that seems to have no boundaries at all. In this re-imagined Paris, words, wealth and power flow uncontrolled and all but unconstrained by the political center of the court. The battle of French authorities to control the dissemination of political commentary continued throughout the reign of Louis XIV as \textit{Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy} made its way swiftly around the market centers of Europe. In Britain, Marana’s popular tale of a spy in Paris paved the way for a new twist in the oriental tale.

\textsuperscript{34} Ballaster, 154.
\textsuperscript{35} Ballaster, 160.
\textsuperscript{36} We must put the term “women” in quotes, however, for whether in Marana’s fiction or in discourse of the period, the feminization of the reading public is itself a discursive trope.
By the time Galland’s *Les Mille et Une Nuits* appeared in its first English translation, the British marketplace was ready to receive a tale that privileged not politics, but credit.

‘Arabian Nights’ and Infinite Entertainments

The first English translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* probably came out in London sometime in 1704, though our earliest extant editions are dated 1706. As with so many of the oriental tales that entered the British marketplace, these stories came in through France. Antoine Galland, antiquary to Louis XIV and assistant to Barthélemy d’Herbelot on the *Bibliothèque orientale ou Dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tout ce qui regarde la connaissance des peuples de l’Orient*, gathered the stories from a number of sources. Galland’s linguistic abilities (he had studied Latin, Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Persian) and his penchant for rare artifacts led him first to a manuscript version of “The Voyages of Sinbad.” Galland had already published an array of treatises and translations related to his experience in the Levant, but the success of “Sinbad” prompted him to turn his hand to other tales. Between 1704 and 1717, Galland published *Les Mille et une Nuits* in twelve volumes. Galland found the majority of these stories in a three- or four-volume manuscript that he had received from Syria, known as *Alf Layla wa-Layla*.

As Galland’s interests suggest, *Alf Layla wa-Layla* belonged to a much older Middle Eastern culture. Middle Eastern scholars continue to unravel the myriad of origins and transmutations of the story cycle that includes settings in India and China as well as Turkey, Syria and Iran, and mixes Hindu and Persian names with colloquial Arabic and Arabic poetic

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37 Mushin Mahdi’s *The Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Brill, 1995) provides the most developed discussion of origins, translations and publication of the tales in France and Britain. Most of my discussion derives from this work. See also Husain Haddawy, “Introduction” to *The Arabian Nights: Alf Layla Wa-laylah*, trans. Husain Haddawy, ed. Mushin Mahdi (New York: Norton, 1995), ix-xxxi.
forms. Tales from the cycle can be found in various forms throughout the Near and Middle East and, in fact, seem to be related to ancient and medieval narratives from the Western canon. However, the cycle in its most recent forms seems to date back to the medieval period, and the places, people and customs that inhabit its stories situate it within the Islamic commercial culture of that period. *Alf Layla Wa-layla* obviously circulated among trading centers in oral form, but it also shows signs of having belonged to the strong literary culture in those cities. Galland’s Syrian manuscript continued to be one of our earliest textual sources for the tales. But as was the case with “Sinbad,” many of the tales had never been part of the cycle until Galland’s translation. Galland derived seven of these added tales from conversations with Hana Diab, a Christian Arab from Aleppo. We have no source at all for other tales, including “Aladdin,” “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” “Prince Ahmed and his Two Sisters,” and “The Ebony Horse,” which leaves open the possibility that Galland invented some of the tales in his effort to fill the volumes. In any event, the extant volumes of the manuscripts from which Galland worked and his notes from the conversations with Hana Diab indicate that Galland took great liberties with his translations, at least by twenty-first-century standards.

Notwithstanding the dubious origins of much of Galland’s text, it was from *Les Mille et une Nuits* that a Grub Street translator derived the English *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* in the first years of the eighteenth century. Galland’s volumes were selling well in France, and the anonymous Grub Street translators quickly churned out English editions as new volumes appeared in the French market. The collection was an immediate success, selling in great numbers to the much-disparaged “fair sex,” but also read by Joseph Addison and Alexander

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Pope.\textsuperscript{39} By the middle of the century, \textit{Arabian Nights’} functioned as a common touchstone for readers of English literature.

The majority of critical writing on the \textit{Arabian Nights’} stories takes some version of a comparative cultural approach. That perspective continues to resonate, given our current efforts to negotiate differences, alliances, and conflicts in a world that often seems intent on re-dividing along religious lines. Thus recent work on \textit{Arabian Nights’} includes such titles as \textit{The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective}, \textit{Literary Modernity Between the Middle East and Europe}, and \textit{The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West}.\textsuperscript{40} In their effort to redefine historic relations between the Islamic East and Christian Europe, these texts build on the work of Edward Said.

Though part of a larger effort to examine troubling characterizations of Islam in the contemporary U.S. and Europe, Said’s text was seminal in its clear articulation of how categories of East and West developed alongside one another in an overwhelmingly European tradition. Drawing on Foucault, Said defined orientalism as a self-perpetuating discourse of representations that stood in for anything we might identify with the actual cultures, politics, finances, and people who inhabited the Islamic regions of the Middle and Near East. The fact that orientalism was self-perpetuating, that it circumscribed what was observed and described by Westerners abroad just as it created what was imagined about the Islamic East within Western Europe, allowed that illusory East to serve as a foil for Western European self-articulations. These self-

\textsuperscript{39} Peter L. Caracciolo, \textit{The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of The Thousand and One Nights} (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988).

articulations in turn led to a now well-explored concept of “otherness” that consigns all Islamic culture to a static, timeless existence in contrast with European modernity. In this way the Islamic East becomes an early victim of what Johannes Fabian calls asynchronous time, the anthropological perspective that carved the earth’s populations into incommensurate zones of modern, primitive and past.41

Many of the themes that Said’s and later studies identify with orientalism are clearly evident in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century texts I have already discussed. To borrow again from Ros Ballaster, an eighteenth-century reader might reasonably expect to find in any writing about the Islamic East, “luxury, concealed female agency, slave government, cruelty, despotism, the will-to-power, religious hypocrisy, and imposture,” with “concealed female agency” frequently replaced by a depraved sexuality.42 The same tropes appear in the stories of Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. Critics, including Ballaster, point to the collection’s repetitious themes and structures and to Scheherazade’s famous deferral of her death sentence as evidence that these stories participate in consigning the Islamic East to an imaginary space of temporal stasis. Portrayals of a decayed and static East fit orientalist discourse of the late eighteenth century, when European empires sought to justify their colonial incursions. But this reading makes little sense for the earlier period, in which Britain and France were struggling for a foothold in a politically and economically dominant Ottoman Empire. The persistent repetitions and deferrals of Arabian Nights’ Entertainments require another explanation. Representations of the Islamic East in this period demand a more accurate understanding of their context.

One of two extant copies of a 1706 edition, the volume held at Princeton University proclaims on its title page:

*Arabian Nights Entertainments: consisting of one thousand and one stories, told by the Sultaness of the Indies, to divert the Sultan from the execution of a bloody vow he had made to marry a lady every day, and have her cut off next morning to avenge himself for the disloyalty of his first Sultaness, etc.* [. . . ] Translated into French from the Arabian Mss. By M. Galland, of the Royal Academy; and now done into English.

In keeping with England’s seventeenth-century oriental-tale tradition, the title immediately calls attention to its textuality; this tale, the advertisement tells us, is about stories borrowed from an authenticated manuscript and about the global trade routes to which it belongs. But *Arabian Nights*’ claims a representational quality in which its predecessors had little interest. Between the plot summary and the translation history, the 1706 edition promises to convey an understanding of the people and places of the East: “*Containing a better account of the customs, manners, and religion of the Eastern nations, Tartars, Persians, and Indians, than is to be met with in any author hitherto published.*” This new claim places the edition squarely within the early orientalist tradition identified by Said, a tradition in which both fictional and ostensibly non-fictional texts participating in the making of a discursive “Orient.” And as Said demonstrates, this discursive orient owes more to European efforts toward self-identity than it does to any “real” eastern culture.

The original stories of *Arabian Nights* did evolve from historically specific pasts and places along the trade routes from the Levant to China before being transformed for the French market, but the distinctive English edition takes up a British debate about representation and

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44 Hanford, 51.
boundaries within the framing tale. The narrator carefully sets out the events that will position Scheherazade for her storytelling. Two brothers who are sultans of distant kingdoms decide to reunite after a long absence from one another. Schahzenan begins the journey to his brother’s kingdom but, on a whim, returns to the palace to see his wife one more time. He finds her in his bed with a domestic servant, kills the lovers, and proceeds sadly with his journey. Arriving at Schahriar’s palace in a state of grief, Schahzenan initially refuses to share the cause of his sadness, but spies Schahriar’s wife in her own act of betrayal, this time with a large group of ladies and slaves in the courtyard of the palace. Schahzenan reveals to his brother that both have been betrayed by their wives, and Schahriar lays in wait the following day to witness his wife’s perfidy himself. He watches as the queen and her women unlock the gates of the palace to smuggle in an entire group of lovers. In the aftermath, Schahriar is inclined to blame these betrayals on his and his brother’s positions of power. He proposes, therefore, to quit their palaces and fame. Schahzenan agrees to this proposal only on the condition that the two brothers will return to their palaces if they meet with someone less fortunate than they. They do, of course, but what the sultans find only reinforces the pattern established by their queens.

Having stopped on their journey to rest, the sultans witness an immense genie emerging from the sea. In his possession, the genie holds a woman locked within a glass box. The box is designed to keep his mistress under his control, but while the genie sleeps, his captive leaves her prison and forces the two brothers to copulate with her under the threat that she would wake the genie if they did not comply. Having thus engaged in a betrayal of their own, the Sultans return to their palaces with the conclusion that women and not fame or fate are the real origin of betrayal: “do you not agree that there is no wickedness equal to that of women?” (9). In the

45 Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). All further references to the Arabian Nights’ will be to this edition unless otherwise specified and will be cited by page number within the text.
context of a genre that was always conscious of print and language, the story of the woman in the glass box is suggestive. Like a *romans à clef*, this box must be unlocked with a key. And for the two Sultans, the “contents” are clearly identifiable within their transparent walls. Reading his experience like a fable, Schahriar vows to kill each successive wife after one night: “being persuaded that no woman was chaste, he resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterwards marry, to wed one every night, and have her strangled next morning” (9). But in reaching this conclusion, the Sultan disregards an alternative interpretation offered by the woman in the box:

You may see by this, that when a woman has formed a project, there is no husband or gallant that can hinder her putting it in execution. Men had better not put their wives under such restraint, if they have a mind they should be chaste. (9)

The difficulty of determining a definitive meaning from this story emerges as a pattern once Scheherazade enters the framing tale. Scheherazade’s father, the Vizier, tries to dissuade his daughter from marrying the Sultan by telling her a fable about a farmer and his wife. In response, Scheherazade explains, “I beg you would not take it ill that I persist in my opinion. I am nothing moved by the story of that woman. I can tell you abundance of others, to persuade you that you ought not to oppose my design (15).” As she begins her thousand and one nights, Scheherazade makes no promise of a single, clear meaning behind each of the tales she tells. What the framing tale already communicates is uncontrollable nature of meaning. Like the woman in the glass box, language by nature surprises, deceives, copulates and produces more stories and more interpretations.

The collection reinforces the idea of language’s promiscuity in its own narrative structures and themes. *Arabian Nights*’ is permeated by repetitions that begin in the framing tale.
Not only are the brothers doubles of one another, but the story of sexual betrayal repeats, growing in intensity as the number of illicit lovers increases. Schahriar’s plan continues the repetition of sexual liaisons, but controls it by forcing sexual encounters into a lawful (by the Sultan’s standards) series of events rather than a proliferation of sexual encounters. Scheherazade, of course, offers a different response to the questions raised by those sexual betrayals. Her scheme and her tales create a pattern in which trust is temporarily extended in return for stories. Scheherazade’s stories seem merely to buy time, but as I will argue, the play of time and deferral allowed by trust are the real focus of this story collection.

My reading suggests that the gender battle set forth in the framing tale of Schahriar and Scheherazade and in the embedded tale of the woman and the genie serves to articulate the tension between language and meaning in a print culture. Such an interpretation does not conflict with the feminist readings that already have been brought to bear on the stories. However, the collection’s preoccupation with repetition and deferral implicates another layer to our language-based reading. In her meticulous study of “The Porter and the Three Ladies,” Sandra Naddaff argues that the story’s self-conscious use of repetition demands that its readers pay heed to the function of time.

Naddaff’s analysis begins with an Arabic-language version of the tale, but her attention to how repetition works with narrative temporality provides a useful starting point for looking at the later English tales. In her argument, then, Naddaff breaks down the various types of repetition

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that permeate the story of “The Porter and the Three Ladies.” One of the Baghdad stories from Galland’s manuscript, “The Porter and the Three Ladies” begins with a clever porter who is invited to dine with the three sisters by whom he has been employed that day. Before the evening is well underway, three dervishes, all blind in the right eye, come to the door begging entry. Next, Haroun Alraschid, the Caliph who ties together many of the Baghdad tales with his nocturnal ramblings, arrives at the door claiming to be a merchant. As happens throughout the collection of stories, this tale uses its characters as transitions to other nested stories. In this case the dervishes have never met and each has a different narration of the journey that brought him to this point. The women force each guest to tell his story as punishment for their curiosity. The women, after all, interrupt the evening’s merriment to bring out two black dogs, whom they beat brutally, though with obvious remorse. The women only tell their own story the following day on order of the Caliph.

The larger plot unfolds in the tension between two impulses. On the one hand, each visitor enters the ladies’ courtyard under condition that he will abide by the admonition carved at the doorway, “Speak not of what concerns you not, lest you hear what pleases you not.” The midnight courtyard thus acts as a magical space that opens up the strange occurrences and coincidences that occur there, but also attempts to constrain the speech acts that might threaten its boundaries. On the other hand, the repetitions of character, event and even word choice work to provoke speech, and the Caliph (still disguised as a merchant) demands the ladies’ story in spite of the admonition. The sisters respond by requiring stories from their guests on penalty of

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48 I am using Naddaff’s translation here, 77. In Arabian Nights ‘the characters above the gate read, “He who speaks of things that do not concern him, shall hear of things that will not please him,” 71.
their lives. In turn, the Caliph calls the sisters to his court the following day to hear their tale. The story ends with the Caliph rectifying the injuries that brought the sisters to their strange situation, thus creating a single happy ending for the tale.

Naddaff argues that the story takes the repetitions natural to any narrative and amplifies them; the tale “consciously manipulates its repetitive underpinnings, plays with them, mirrors and mocks them, so that even the reader who is not particularly sensitive to such manipulation is forced to come to terms with its significance.”49 After detailing the types of repetition that permeate not only the frame of this tale, but within the various stories themselves, Naddaff argues that the multiplication of character, theme, event and sign finally creates “a fundamental disturbance and confusion of temporal levels within the work as a whole and the cycle in particular.”50 Naddaff goes on to find a parallel between this deliberate destruction of a clear narrative temporality and the efforts of the stories’ characters to thwart death:

The motivating force behind Shahrazad’s telling of the 1001 Nights is, as it is for her counterparts in Baghdad, a desire to forestall death, to impede time’s natural flow, to ward off the sense of an ending . . . It is ironic but essential that in order to kill time, and thereby to avoid the inevitable end of time, the narrators must make time, create narrative time. Not surprisingly, they narratively manifest this irony by developing their tales according to repetitive structures of story and discourse which counteract the forward movement of time and in so doing undercut the fundamental impulse of narrative.51 Necessarily such efforts must finally fail, and Naddaff concludes that the relatively simple progression of the last sister’s narrative marks the slow return to a standard temporal order. In a move that Ballaster and others will also follow, Naddaff finally shifts the focus of her argument

49 Naddaff, 64.
50 Naddaff, 94.
51 Naddaff, 95.
to the power dynamics of gender in this text. The tale’s women, she argues, recognize “a discourse that focuses on the female body and on the relation of this body to metaphoric language” that allows them to “not only control their own bodies and celebrate their own sexuality, but also [to] determine their own language and their own narrative rules” in “an alternative society with radically different customs and laws that they themselves have determined.”

Whether or not we agree with the equation of character and bodies in this final stage of the argument, Naddaff’s attention to the relentless play of repetition and time merits further consideration. The characters in *Arabian Nights’* version (renamed “The Story of the Three Calendars, Sons of Kings; and of the Five Ladies of Baghdad”) must use narrative and repetition to forestall death. But if we recall this text to its British literary context, we need to ask whether repetition and deferral invoke something more specific than a basic human aversion to death. In British literature of the early eighteenth century, female characters also are used to invoke the powerful discourse of credit. Re-examined as a fable of economy, the framing tale demonstrates for its British readers the impossibility of controlling the directionless proliferation of the long-term credit marketplace; the more direct the efforts at control, the more excessive the failure. The complexity of *Arabian Nights’* lies in its ability, like a good fable, to serve multiple interpretations with equal force.

The oriental-tale genre in France and Britain was self-conscious about the technique its used to represent the real people and events of contemporary politics. The homologous

52 Naddaff, 101-2.
relationship between meaning and value was always at play in this tradition. As eighteenth-century financial shifts took hold, however, the question of value gradually came to the fore. Political power was increasingly shaped by political-economic thought, and more specifically by the long-term financing that sustained Western. Like the wandering Caliph of Baghdad, power in the eighteenth century circulated beyond the walls of courts in the crowded streets of trading centers. There was no coincidence in the fact that Scheherazade’s first tale portrayed neither Sultans nor harems, but a merchant on a long business trip.

*Merchants and Genies*

“The Tale of the Merchant and the Genie” tells the story of a merchant who is suddenly confronted by a terrifying genie as he stops for a rest by the road. Threatened with immediate execution, the merchant asks the cause of the genie’s wrath, to which the genie replies: “did not you take dates out of your portmanteau, and as you eat [ate] them, did not you throw the shells about on both sides? . . . when you threw your nut-shells about, my son was passing by, and you threw one of them into his eye, which killed him” (18). The merchant then begs for a year’s reprieve. The genie agrees with great reluctance, doubting the merchant’s promise that he will return. Nevertheless, when Scheherazade continues the story on the second night, the merchant has been granted a year to settle his estate, free his slaves, and say goodbye to his family. The story creates an obvious parallel with Scheherazade’s own predicament. The genie’s reluctance to grant the merchant his year reinforces the questions of trust and credibility that we see cast in gendered terms within the framing tale. In both cases, the character in a position of power is asked to accept words in lieu of the body that he has claimed.
As Scheherazade continues the tale these concerns with power, language and trust take on a decidedly financial overtone. Despite the cost of fulfilling his own promise, the merchant returns to the same spot to die; his promise, all the characters agree, is inviolable. But while the merchant waits for the genie to appear, a series of three passersby pause, one after the other, to hear the merchant’s unusual story and to witness its outcome. When the genie arrives and moves to cut off the head of his victim, the first man intervenes to offer the genie a trade: “I will tell you the history of my life, and of the bitch [dog] you see and if you think it more wonderful and surprising than the adventure of the merchant you are going to kill, I hope you will pardon the poor unfortunate man the third of his crime” (22). After the first tale succeeds, the second and third witnesses in turn offer a story, each more wonderful than the last, in return for a pardon of another third of the merchant’s crime. The first two stories involve human beings who are transmogrified into animals as punishment for their crimes and are then cared for by their human victims. The last witness’ story, however, remains a mystery to Scheherazade’s listeners as she only promises that it was, in fact, more wonderful even than the two stories of transformation told by the other witnesses.

“The Tale of the Genie and the Merchant” thus begins with a simple exchange of one life for another and becomes a complex transaction in which the one-year “loan” of a life produces an unlooked-for value in the form of three stories. The genie agrees to divide the value of the merchant’s life, trading a third of its value for each story. However, since each story must be more wonderful than the previous one, each third of the merchant’s culpability is of comparably greater value. The plot structure thereby extends the original “trade” of lives in time and in scope such that the merchant’s life serves as a sort of capital asset on which interest is paid in the form of stories. Because each story must provide more pleasure than the previous one, the witnesses’
tales produce a steady accumulation in value. And thanks to Scheherazade’s refusal to tell the last of these nested tales, the final value of these stories is left open; the audience is invited to imagine a story that produces infinite pleasure to the genie and the witnesses.

We could catalogue “The Tale of the Genie and the Merchant” as one more story about stories and dismiss the commercial implications of the merchant character, but in fact, merchants and traders are ubiquitous in *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*. Nor should this come as any surprise, given the commercial contexts in which these tales evolved. As recent scholars remind us, the Ottoman Empire and neighboring states all of the way to China sustained themselves with revenue from the port cities, entrepôts and land routes that for centuries constituted the world’s largest and most elaborate commercial network. These regions produced their own credit cultures in which financial success generally entailed capital investment in an assortment of enterprises. Long before French and British merchants maneuvered for a share of the global trade in the eighteenth century, cities like Aleppo, Baghdad, Cairo, and Constantinople grew large and rich from the far-flung trade routes of Asia, North Africa and the Middle and Near East. The medieval and early-modern stories that Galland fashioned into a European collection belonged to a much earlier period of economic growth in the Eastern hemisphere, but resonated with the later growth of trade in Western European states.\(^{54}\)

In many ways, the cultural assumptions needed to fuel these two periods of commercial expansion were similar. One must begin, for instance, with the simple assumption that the tendency of value to change across time and space can be harnessed to produce wealth. Such an assumption comes naturally in a region that gleans its revenue off the transportation of goods

\(^{54}\) Scholars note that the tales of *Alf Layla wa Layla* had lost their popularity in the Eastern trading centers by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Arabic scholars point to the tales’ subject matter and vernacular dialect as indications that they never belonged to the established literary tradition, though Robert Irwin rightfully points out that the stories existed in manuscript form and so reflect both written and oral literary conventions. See Robert Irwin’s survey of the tales’ reception history in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*.  

from places where they can be purchased cheaply to markets where they can be sold for a profit. Likewise, the very susceptibility of markets to disaster or windfall makes time an important tool in the search for financial opportunity. Marxist criticism has elaborated on how such markets reinforce our understanding of value as relative and produce the concept of the fungible commodity. But I am more concerned here with the relatively straightforward relationship that these tales create between financial value and narrative.

Scheherazade’s first tale creates a parity amongst saleable goods, stories and bodies by placing them all amongst the wide net of commodities. This in turn allows the tale to make a point about how value emerges from the interchange of unlike goods and allows Scheherazade to demonstrate the importance of trust, or more specifically of crediting, to the workings of this system. The genie’s dilemma models the question posed in a slightly different fashion by Scheherazade’s one thousand tales: can words stand guarantor for the bodies that create them? As in other British literature of the period, textual bodies emphasize the double nature of text as both a part of the material world and part of the immaterial world of language. In a system that depends on both political and financial texts to bind these two worlds together, textual bodies often signal an anxiety about the ability of words to maintain these bonds and likewise about the credibility of those who produce text. Scheherazade’s story works to convince the listener that the ties between credit and credibility can produce more than they would destroy.

Scheherazade’s merchant understands the inviolability of his oath and the importance of credibility within a larger economic system. His promise stands in for and guarantees the presence of a physical object (in this case, the body of the merchant himself) that will not be physically present until a designated time in the future. And to the extent that the merchant fulfills his promise, that future claims a certain predictability. However, this is where the
similarities between the early-modern Ottoman trade culture and its later British counterpart ends. Where eighteenth-century British culture built its financial systems on the predictability of a mathematical future, the stories of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* describe a commercial culture that finds opportunity in the unpredictability of a future shaped by the divine. *Arabian Nights’* reflects its stories’ origins in their valorization not just of trust, but also of risk. The most successful of the merchants and traders in the tales eschew the careful long-term planning of a Robinson Crusoe for the more immediate prospects of the unknown. One such tale, “The Story of Cogia Hassan Alhabbal,” introduces a poor rope trader turned wealthy merchant by the economic experiments of two friends. In Alhabbal’s story, the wealthier man gives the rope trader capital to invest in his trade. A series of chance events robs Alhabbal of his capital, including a bird who swoops down to steal from his head the turban in which he has hidden the money. Finally, the poorer man gives Alhabbal only a bar of lead. The lead’s usefulness on a particular evening sets off an equally bizarre series of events that finally bring Alhabbal his enormous wealth and win the poorer man his bet.

In “The Story of the Sleeper Awakened,” the emphasis on luck shifts to an emphasis on cleverness and trickery. A merchant’s son lavishes half of his inheritance on entertainments, only to discover that the friends he gains through his generosity depart as soon as his money runs out. Like Schahriar, the merchant’s son from “The Sleeper” attempts to solve the problem of false friends by swearing to spend no more than a single evening with any acquaintance. But on the evening he happens to choose the disguised Caliph for his evening company, Abon Hassan falls prey to one of Caliph Haroun Alraschid’s practical jokes. Slipping a drug into his companion’s drink, the Caliph has Hassan transported to the palace where an elaborate production by those at court convinces the victim that he has become the Caliph. The next day, he is returned
unconscious to his home, but is unable to recover from the illusion. After a stay in a lunatic asylum, poor Hassan is rescued by Alraschid, who reveals the truth behind his trick and favors Hassan with a place at court and a wife. The irony of the story is that Hassan learns again to be a spendthrift. When he and his wife run out of money to support their expensive habits, they raise cash by deceiving the Caliph and his wife with an illusion that the Sultan fortunately finds more entertaining than offensive. Specifically, Hassan pretends that his wife has died, presents her corpse to the Caliph and receives gifts in consolation. On the same day, Hassan’s wife tells the Sultaness that it is Hassan who has died as presents his corpse. The trick creates confusion between the Caliph and his wife until the ruse is revealed and the Caliph rewards Hassan and his spouse for their cleverness. If a lesson is to be learned from “The Sleeper Awakened,” it is surely not that wealth must be saved or closely managed. Success in the world that these characters inhabit belongs to those who are more resourceful than reasonable, more clever than cautious.

In creating his own collection of these stories, Galland chose to play up the elements of risk and chance. To the surprising adventures of Caliph Haroun Alraschid and his subjects, European editions added “The Story of Ali Baba, and the forty Thieves destroyed by a Slave” and, of course, “Aladdin; or the Wonderful Lamp.” Like the seven-part “Story of Sindbad the Sailor,” these tales depict wealth as something to be found, happened upon, and seized in the most unlikely of circumstances. Any culture for which wealth brings both luxury and power is bound to find such stories appealing. But the depictions of wealth in these tales have something more to tell us about the early-eighteenth-century cultures that read them so avidly. Added by Pétit de la Croix at the request of Galland’s publisher after the success of the first four volumes, “The History of Prince Zeyn Alasnam, and the King of the Genii” tells the story of a young prince who turns spendthrift after his father’s death, leaving his mother to hold together a
rebellious kingdom. Unconcerned, Zeyn loses himself in a series of dreams that lead him in search of a great treasure. The dreams finally lead him to the king of the genies, who orders the prince to bring him a virgin who is perfectly pure of heart in return for granting him an unimaginable fund of riches. The genie also demands of him a condition; “She must also be perfectly beautiful, and you so much master of yourself, as not even to desire to enjoy her, as you are conducting her hither” (579). The prince’s task is to gather up this rare treasure and to receive her solely as a commodity for exchange, rather than as an object of desire. At the end of the story the genie awards the prince with both the wealth and the virgin, the prince having successfully made the transition from thoughtless spendthrift to well-controlled capitalist.

In this tale of risk and capital, the prince’s desire serves a necessary function. Sexual desire was a regular component in seventeenth-century oriental tales, where it was used to denote the unstable shifts of political power. Just as the fictional bodies in these early tales were prone to equally swift gains and losses in political clout as players in the game crossed from one court into another, the bodies and goods of Arabian Nights’ belonged to a world in which commercial value fluctuated within a ceaselessly changing context. But we might better identify Prince Zeyn’s desire as anticipation. A story like “The History of Prince Zeyn” does not tell us much about the psychological experience of desire, but it can tell us a tremendous amount about the needs of the financial systems in which its readers operated. The difference between the virgin and the genie’s treasure is, for modern readers, disturbingly slight. Within this tale both are simply textual characters that denote exchangeable goods, and both derive their enormous value from their rarity. But unlike his thirst for treasure, Zeyn’s desire for the virgin threatens to destroy her value as a commodity. In her relation to Zeyn’s character, the virgin elicits an approach to wealth that prefigures its own end. The Prince already has found the limits to his
own coffers; if he is to avoid the destruction of yet another source of wealth, he must identify a form of value that promises continuing, perhaps even infinite, rewards.

“The History of Prince Zeyn” challenges its reader to discriminate between two forms of desire, one that is self-terminating and a second that is productive. In their analysis of desire in a capitalist economy, Deleuze and Guattari begin by insisting that desire “is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy.” Inseparable from the social, political and economic “assemblages” that constitute our world, desire is a productive force that (except in the case of the schizophrenic) is alternately shaped, thwarted and re-directed by capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari’s work thus places desire in correspondence with the potentials and capacities of human beings on the one hand, and at the heart of a system that perverts those capacities on the other. Arguing that desire is shaped by and invested in the social systems we inhabit, Deleuze and Guattari privilege pre-conscious desire over conscious interest or the psychoanalytic unconscious in the formation of the individual and the social system. Desire, then, escapes from the confinement of Lacanian imaginary order and blends the Lacanian “real” with the flow of semiotic fields.

Given their formulation of desire, Deleuze and Guattari necessarily confront the fact that desire can always take two directions. Because it belongs to the social machine, desire can have a conservative effect by pulling individuals or groups back toward the mechanisms that formed

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56 Deleuze and Guattari would make a distinction between a system and an assemblage, arguing that the various manifestations of the social, political and economic in our world are neither fixed nor unified as the word “system” implies. Nonetheless, I use the term system throughout this discussion for clarity.

57 Deleuze and Guattari do not distinguish clearly between desire and human drives, but argue that the “affects or drives form part of the infrastructure itself.” *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 63.
them. But desire can also allow individuals to “take flight,” and when it does this, desire rides the currents of capitalism’s fluid de-territorialization.\(^{58}\) In *Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka seized upon this latter form of desire in his novels as the only resistance to a social-political machine that has harnessed revolutionary desire. The thematic and structural proliferation that pervades Kafka’s novels serve to “accelerate the speed of segmentalization,” already underway in capitalism.\(^{59}\) Citing Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari describe literature in this vein as “less a mirror than a *watch that is running too fast*. Since there is no way to draw a firm distinction between the oppressors and the oppressed or between the different sorts of desire, one has to seize all of them in an all-too-possible future.”\(^{60}\) Deleuze and Guattari offers a critical perspective from which we can begin to explain the intertwining of semiotics, financial value and desire in the tales of *Arabian Nights*. The protagonist in “The History of Prince Zeyn” clearly is meant to learn the value of capital as a commodity, and in the process he learns that capitalism functions through a desire re-directed toward the future. As the character’s dream-visions indicate, this future is not defined by a binary between reality and imagination, but by its existence in an indistinguishable flux of reality and semiotics that is, in some sense already present.

As “The History of Prince Zeyn” casts its reader both backward and forward to the framing tale of Scheherazade and Schahriar, the text reminds us that material reality and the world of signs and symbols is conflated in this rapidly progressing marketplace. Like Prince Zeyn, Schahriar must master a different relationship to the woman before him, one that produces not treasure, but text. As we might expect from *Arabian Nights’* patterns of repetition, the self-

\(^{59}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 58. 
\(^{60}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 59
terminating quality of Schahriar’s desire finds a parallel in the traditional allegorical form of the fable. The Vizier’s original use of allegory to dissuade his daughter from her project works in just this way; once the analogue is opened and unpacked, the fable itself becomes superfluous, valueless. Scheherazade has argued that the fable does not in fact function in this manner, that for every fable that reaches one conclusion she can find countless others that reach the opposite conclusion. Allegory does not reduce narrative to a single fixed meaning, but that is not to say that allegory does not work. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis’ study demonstrates how the fable can create a bounded space in which conflict can be allowed a limited but necessary play. Scheherazade’s nested, winding, proliferating fables suggest a genre that resists even this notion of boundaries. Narrative always creates doors through which new characters, new events and new interpretations can enter, and Scheherazade’s tales open those doors time and again to remind us that no narrative ever necessitates its own ending and that no transaction is never “final.”

This infinite potential of narrative does not simply mirror the infinite production of value promised by credit and capitalism. For early eighteenth-century Britain, the relationship between sign and meaning that makes allegory work becomes the means by which capitalism fulfills its promise of endless desire and presumably, endless wealth. To collapse sign into meaning is to bring an end to the story, or in the financial world of credit notes, to exhaust or redeem. On the other hand, a representational language system, like a representational currency, can produce nothing but that which it represents. In between these two extremes, however, lies a type of language that can produce what never was and give it existence in the material world. Early eighteenth-century capitalism was heavily colored by a print culture and economic model that together resisted any boundaries being placed between the material and the textual world.\textsuperscript{61} The

\textsuperscript{61} Recent scholarship in Consumer culture emphasizes links between social information systems and the material world. Much of this overlaps with Baudrillard’s concept of sign value. See Grant David McCracken,
physical body participated in this framework such that, even when bodies were not being directly exchanged for money or goods, they could be deployed to produce sign value or transmuted into text. This fact helps us to explain the strange link between bodies and words that permeates *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, but also gives us those images and descriptions of eighteenth-century bodies clothed in Eastern-inspired garb.

Briton’s financial revolution created a future that was mathematically present. That future could exist and produce its own realities only through an interlocking semiotics of language and mathematics. Stories like that of Prince Zeyn reflect the penultimate step in the shift over to a new marketplace dynamic between sign and value. The young prince’s tale demonstrates the difference between an approach to wealth that produces more wealth and an approach that produces only its own endings. In the framing tale of Schahriar and Scheherazade, *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* reminds us that the immense treasure that Prince Zeyn obtains is no material treasure at all, but is composed of mere words on a page. The fables’ insistence on a correlation between language and bodies tells us that what Schahriar gains by deferring his wife’s execution is more substantial than mere words, or conversely, that Schahriar and Scheherazade are themselves less substantial than actual bodies. We can note that Schahriar’s delay provides his spouse with the time necessary to produce heirs, but these pregnancies and births are left out of the English-language editions of the tales. They are left out because they are immaterial (one cannot avoid the pun here); the tales privilege anticipation over consummation,

nurturing a relationship with the material world that emphasizes the extent to which all that is material is also in some sense sign. So long as one sign-object leads to another, the tales seem to say, there is no end to anticipation, no end to pleasures, and no end to production. Arabian Nights’ Entertainments illustrates how this dynamic creates an infinite potential for new stories and new pages, but also for more editions with greater sales. Quite appropriately, that proliferation will continue three hundred years later with movie deals as the stories merge again and again with the material world of our sensory experience.

Within a few decades of the first editions of Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, the oriental tale was shifting again to re-envision the relationship of bodies to things and the relation of the human mind to time. As Britain entered the second half of the eighteenth century, texts that once had enjoyed widespread popularity were considered crude and inappropriate by those espousing a more regulated British body.62 My final chapter looks at three authors who were instrumental in adapting the oriental tale to mid-century aesthetics and anxieties. In tales by Samuel Johnson, John Hawkesworth and Francis Sheridan, we see early efforts to distance the physical body from the sign world of the marketplace and, not coincidentally, from the conceptual future of mathematical time.

62 For a seminal study on this shift, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986).
Chapter 6
The Oriental Tale and the Future as Illusion:

Johnson’s *Rasselas*, Hawkesworth’s *Almoran and Hamet*, and Frances Sheridan’s *Nourjahad*

For all of the magicians, genies and tricksters that inhabit its pages, the stories of *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* show only the slightest interest in the power of illusion. Magic is always real, and with only one or two exceptions, those who believe in the unbelievable are proved right in the end. The oriental-tale tradition remained strong into the middle of the century, later reshaping itself under the cultural forces of Romantic thought. But by mid-century, oriental tales increasingly set aside the play of meaning and value so evident in earlier texts for an anxious new focus on illusion. More than a convenient literary trope or a commentary on the plight of mankind, the dangerous illusions that we find in mid-century oriental tales stem from a re-characterization of the body and its relation to the material world. From Johnson’s *Rasselas* and John Hawkesworth’s *Almoran and Hamet* to Francis Sheridan’s *Nourjahad*, oriental tales begin the process of separating the physical and material from the world of text and sign, and they do so most often at the level of the human body. In the process, these texts attack the mathematical time constructs that bind the future to an infinitely expansive present and leave us instead with a simple binary in which the present is no longer contrasted with the future, but with illusion.
**Rasselas**

In an often-quoted passage, Rasselas’ teacher, Imlac, succumbs to a moment of enthusiasm as he explains to his pupil the task of poets. The poet, he explains, examines “species” rather than individual characteristics and notes “general properties and large appearances”:

he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdue of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.¹

Imlac’s definition positions the poet somewhere between literary aesthetics and scientific discourse, between language and taxonomy, often associated with neoclassical thought. Johnson himself undeniably claims a place in that mid-eighteenth-century effort to categorize and universalize secular knowledge, and this project surfaces throughout *Rasselas*.

Johnson’s tendencies toward empiricism and even skepticism have been well documented, and they can make his concepts of universal knowledge difficult to establish.²

Johnson’s work makes clear that universal knowledge must be derived from local, experiential

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¹ *The History of Rasselas*, ed. D.J. Enright (London: Penguin, 1976), 61-2. All other references are to this edition and are cited by page number within the text.

knowledge, whether he is grounding the aesthetic standards of the critic or the moral conclusions of characters. A recent article by Mark Wildermuth demonstrates the importance of articulating an interplay of scientific and aesthetic discourses when framing Johnson’s effort. Wildermuth borrows from eighteenth-century science and twenty-first-century chaos theory to describe Johnson as “an early modern chaologist.” According to Wildermuth, Johnson responds “to the perturbations introduced by science and philosophy in the eighteenth century” by articulating “a complex mimetic system tracing emergent structures in the field of literary criticism implicated by the interplay between classical tradition and the new empirical skepticism.”

Wildermuth is primarily concerned with Johnson’s critical work, but his foray into science suggests a more obvious context for *Rasselas*. Johnson’s struggle to identify critical standards might foreshadow chaos theory, but the process by which he isolates the qualities of the human mind are more resonant of eighteenth-century botany. Whether Johnson knew anything of his contemporary, Carl Linnaeus, the search for what Imlac would call the “original” traits of human experience takes on distinct Linnean overtones.

The analogy is not perfect, of course. Where Linnaeus sought to find a universal set of classifications into which all plants could be fit, Johnson strives in *Rasselas* to articulate a single human nature, and specifically the aspect of that nature that constitutes the human mind’s relationship to the future. In his introduction to the tale, Johnson addresses those readers who expect too much from the future:

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4 Wildermuth, 46.  
5 In his biography of Johnson, Lawrence I. Lipking notes that Johnson is not known to have owned any of Linnaeus’ works or to have met the scientist during Linnaeus’ visit to England. *Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), n.64, p. 123.
Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and persue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia. (39)

The tale, of course, produces a series of disappointments for its characters as they journey to find a life that brings happiness. And while the survey of urban and pastoral, wealthy and poor lives, offers a myriad of particular reasons for disappointment, the real culprit in the story is the human mind’s flawed approach to the secular future. Noting the unattainable nature of happiness in this tale as well as the universalizing discourse in Imlac’s speech on poets, Samuel T. Joeckel argues that Johnson is simply shifting the search for universal standards from criticism to human experience:

    Such a conception, transposed into Johnson’s other discourse, works to universalize happiness into a type, not unlike the men and women of Shakespeare. Happiness becomes a transcontextual experience, unattainable precisely because it devalues the particularities, peculiarities, and individualities that are often the locus of true experiences of happiness. Working to encompass everybody, happiness “naturalized” touches nobody.  

Joeckel’s point that happiness as an experience emerges as a “type” in Johnson’s writing is well-taken; *Rasselas* performs similar tricks with parenthood, poverty, fear, and a number of other aspects of life that its characters come to know as stock experiences. What makes happiness, or more accurately the false anticipation of happiness, most interesting in Johnson’s tale is that it is not simply one type of experience among many, but the primary experience of human existence.

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Much as the sexual organ of flowers serves as the essential means for identifying and classing an entire planet’s worth of botanicals, this illusory desire is at the center of Johnson’s understanding of the human species.

Johnson’s argument that the imaginative relationship to the future modeled in *Rasselas* is central to human experience begins with his choice of genre. Fables in the British tradition have always nourished an exaggerated sense their own textuality. During the seventeenth century, fables invited readers to see the text’s (and its characters’) dual existence in the material world of objects and bodies and in the immaterial world of language. But the title-page advertisement for *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* showed that this framework already was beginning to slip by the opening decade of the eighteenth century. Readers most likely experienced the text as a printed story collection and as a luxury good. Now, however, fictional texts could promise to convey knowledge about the “real” customs and manners of people in the East. By mid-century, fables worked within a different understanding of the place of text. Rather than affirming a bond to the material world through its allegorical references to historically people and events, Johnson’s text provides him distance from his subject and from all of the cultural and contextual specificity of the world outside the tale. Johnson’s fable uses its self-conscious textuality to mark its subject, not as typographic, but as type. Much as a botanist’s sketch will detach its subject from climate and environment to isolate it on a blank background, Johnson’s allegory extracts its subject from the cultural specificity of politics, trade, and luxury marketplaces (even as Johnson offers his story to that very marketplace).

But Johnson has a problem in that his subject is not visible; the central theme in *Rasselas* is a persistent and always unsatisfied desire that exists solely in the immaterial world of the human imagination. For botanists, the troublesome context from which their subjects needed to
be isolated was conceived largely in terms of place and space. Place needed to be de-localized and universalized into pure space. Johnson must wrestle instead with a specificity of time, and he does so through forms of history: that of the species and that of the human mind. These two frames develop simultaneously in the story, but I begin with Johnson’s species history.

Like the artists of eighteenth-century botanical studies, Johnson needs a canvas uniform enough to show his “original” in its purest type. Johnson finds that canvas in a version of history that is only coming into its own at the mid-century. Time in this formulation is a scientist’s table, history spread out over centuries so that patterns and commonalities can be identified as simultaneous and thus ever-present. With an historical time that surpasses any effort to imagine its scope, Johnson presents as unchanging those aspects of the human mind about which he is concerned. Thus after his protagonists have completed their study of the present inhabitants of Cairo and its surroundings, Johnson turns their attention from novelty to history:

You wander about a single city, which, however large and diversified, can now afford few novelties, and forget that you are in a country, famous among the earliest monarchies for the power and wisdom of its inhabitants; a country where the sciences first dawned that illuminate the world, and beyond which the arts cannot be traced of civil society or domestick life. (103)

Imlac then leads his students on a trip out to the pyramids in order to provide them with evidence of this past. Notably, they are not looking for evidence of the Egyptian past, but evidence of the human past: “to see men we must see their works, that we may learn what reason has dictated, or passion has incited, and find what are the most powerful motives of action” (104).

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7 Paul Alkon, “Johnson and Time Criticism,” *Modern Philology* 85.4 (May,1988): 543-57, surveys some of Johnson’s uses of time, arguing that time in Johnson’s criticism most often carries a beneficial association with truth and in Johnson’s other work often denotes healing or a beneficent view of mortality.
This understanding of history differs considerably from the ways in which we as twenty-first-century readers are likely to think of it. Johnson’s narrator never shows any interest in establishing a line of continuity from the historical past to the present. Instead, the historian distills all information into knowledge that emerges as timeless natural law. Writing about an oriental tale published in *The Rambler*, Carey McIntosh captures the way in which Johnson’s allegory makes use of history: “Johnson’s allegory . . . approaches the choice of life from the largest of perspectives; it outlines the history of some of the human imperfections that sabotage the quest for a secure sublunary refuge.”

Johnson’s historical time operates as an expansive representational field in which we might discern the “general properties and large appearances” of the human being stripped of cultural differences. As a result, *Rasselas*’ use of Eastern settings has the effect of eliminating exoticism and subordinating cultural particularity. Claiming that “Human life is every where a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed,” Johnson’s tale does not concern itself with the differences in place, much less with the specifics of Ottoman or Persian territories (65).

And yet Johnson’s text relies on the cultural specificity of its eastern setting to prove its case. The previous century of oriental tales had used perceived similarities in the religious, political and economic dynamics of East and West. Johnson needs a different quality from his “Orient,” a sense of long duration. The function of the Islamic East in Johnson’s tale thus differs significantly from its function in earlier oriental tales. Johnson certainly makes use of the

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oriental tale’s association with sexual desire and absolute power (the abduction of Pekuah provides the tale with at least one harem). And the lead characters’ journey across a landscape dotted by commercial centers shows Johnson’s indebtedness to Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. But Johnson’s real interest in the Orient lies in its long past. The scarce comparative work that does go on in Rasselas indicates that by mid-century, Britons were beginning to imagine themselves as the greater commercial power. Imlac explains to his student:

In enumerating the particular comforts of life we shall find many advantages on the side of the Europeans. They cure wounds and diseases with which we languish and perish. We suffer inclemencies of weather which they can obviate. They have engines for the despatch of many laborious works… And, if we descend to the privacies of life, their habitations are more commodious, and their possessions are more secure. (65)

Clearly, Johnson expects his British audience to pride themselves on their superior technologies and wealth. But Imlac is careful to note that the ascendancy of Europe is only a small point in the great expanse of human history. Johnson sidesteps any suggestions of a progressive history when his teacher offers no reason for the European rise beyond “the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being” (64). Johnson’s East is not a place of commercial dominance, nor a space of luxury or voluptuousness, despite the utopic descriptions of the Happy Valley. This Orient is morally very much the same as the Europe with which it is compared; as Imlac would say, Europe and the Eastern Empires are of the same “species.” By tapping into the longer history of civilization in North Africa and the Middle East, Johnson can deploy his East as evidence that


The year of Rasselas’ publication coincidentally witnessed seminal military successes in both North America and in India. In addition, Britain had begun to make more substantial inroads into the trade routes and markets under Ottoman control, thus contributing to a British imagining of military and economic superiority for the first time. For recent work on the Ottoman empire during the period, see Colin Imber, Keiko Kiyotaki and Rhoads Murphey, eds., Frontiers of Ottoman Studies, 2 vols (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).
certain traits have always been present and are therefore essential to human nature, a conceptual maneuver that normalizes the marketplace dynamics with which Johnson was familiar.

We must not mistake *Rasselas’s* contextually neutral East for an expression of cultural tolerance on Johnson’s part, and it is certainly no less problematic than depictions of Eastern nations as threatening, irreligious or perverse. Johnson’s use of Eastern history as a site for scientific survey invokes the same assumptions about local culture and resources that funded the horticultural ventures of the period. Beth Fowkes Tobin has demonstrated how horticultural projects and botanical images served to subordinate local knowledge and local contexts, thus nourishing Britain’s underlying justifications for colonial management.11 Johnson’s text undoubtedly plays its part in Britain’s evolving ideas about the nations to Europe’s east, but *Rasselas* is more directly concerned with the management of people at home. In her discussion of political-economic discourse, Mary Poovey argues that early eighteenth-century efforts to collect, classify and use political-economic data gave way to an emphasis on moral philosophy in the middle part of the century.12 According to Poovey, changing perceptions about the nature and mechanisms of political power ushered in new approaches to managing Britain’s populations. Where seventeenth-century Stuart monarches imagined that an absolute monarchy might govern the nation’s finances and trade with the assistance of political economy, a limited monarchy and more powerful public required a different tack. Thus Poovey tracks through the works of Defoe and Hume a new emphasis on human taste and emulation as a means of understanding and

guiding human behavior. We might add to this list Johnson’s troubled fascination with anticipation and desire.

Johnson’s use of vast historical timeframes to isolate his subject still leaves him with one more time experience that must become universal before he can identify the true nature of its “original.” This second version of time lies within the human mind in the act of anticipation. For this history, Johnson develops a protagonist who will model the journey from a full, embodied present to a time construct in which the mind perpetually strays into past and future, leaving the present behind. The Happy Valley provides a spatial metaphor for the unadulterated present. Within its walls, residents mark time’s passage only by a series of delights and pleasures that come in abundance. Neither Rasselas nor those around him have any reason to think of the future or to recall the past. The Valley thus represents the satisfaction of all possible anticipations: a place in which future prospects are fully redeemed in the present and where time itself has little value or purpose. The original crisis in the text arises from the protagonist’s inability to be content with such a perpetually full present. Unaccountably disgusted with his life, Rasselas begins to isolate himself from those around him. Though Rasselas first appears unique in his discontentment, we later learn that none of the Valley’s residents are truly happy; this sort of contentment is impossible for human beings. And Johnson has his protagonist compare the insatiability of human appetites with those of the animals that populate the edges of the valley.

The protagonist’s discontent serves as Johnson’s device for introducing a time experience more familiar to his readers as, unsatisfied with the present, Rasselas learns to find solace in an

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13 Poovey, 144-213.
imagined future beyond the Valley. Rasselas’ imagination has changed the nature of his temporal experience, and the narrator adjusts accordingly by moving from the vague time references of the early part of the tale to more specific measurements. The tale tells us that Rasselas spends twenty months of his life in imaginary adventures and “hourly preparations for the various incidents of human affairs” (46). Rasselas himself realizes how much time has been wasted only when a particularly vivid daydream brings him abruptly back to the present. While sitting on a bank by the water, Rasselas imagines an “orphan virgin robbed of her little portion by a treacherous lover” and starts up to chase the villain “with all the eagerness of real pursuit” (46-7). The strange chase becomes a metaphor for Rasselas’ pursuit of happiness as he realizes that his object always lies slightly ahead of him in both time and space. But not until he comes up against the walls of the Valley does Rasselas comprehend that his target is a figment of his imagination. That realization prompts the young prince to reflect on the time that he has spent in imaginary pursuits, and it is here that Johnson introduces a use value for time.

Once time has a use value for the protagonist, Rasselas moves toward a simple version of the fixed, spatial understanding of time that I have called mathematical time. A pre-delineated space to be moved through and to “fill” with human activity, this conception of time allows Rasselas his first experience of modern regret:

He now felt a degree of regret with which he had never been before acquainted. He considered how much might have been done in the time which had passed, and left nothing real behind it. He compared twenty months with the life of man. “In life, said he, is not to be counted the ignorance of infancy, or imbecility of age. We are long before we are able to think, and we soon cease from the power of acting. The true period of human
existence may be reasonably estimated as forty years, of which I have mused away the
time. But by the end of the passage, the estimates of years and life spans suggest that Johnson’s
narrative is indebted to a political-economic discourse. The final sentence reads almost as much
like an early insurance pamphlet as a didactic tale. By measuring time as one would distance,
Rasselas can estimate a fixed span for his own usable time.

Rasselas’ first experience of regret operates as a mirror image of the anticipation that
filled his thoughts until that moment. He has only learned to turn his eyes backward to the space
behind rather than the views before him. Johnson’s protagonist has now modeled a sort of history
of time in the human imagination. From the first introduction of an alternative future to an
awareness of time as something to be spent or wasted, Rasselas learns to comprehend time as
fixed space in which one is compelled to wander forward or back in imagination. His progress
models a mythical development of the modern time experience. Johnson’s text arrives at the
same basic philosophical conclusion that inspired the second essay of The Rambler:

That the mind of man is never satisfied with the objects immediately before it, but is
always breaking away from the present moment and losing itself in schemes of future
felicity; and that we forget the proper use of the time now in our power, to provide for the
enjoyment of that which, perhaps, may never be granted us, has been frequently
remarked . . .

15 R.S. Krishnan, “‘The Shortness of Our Present State’, Locke’s Time and Johnson’s Eternity in Rasselas,”
Journal of Evolutionary Psychology 19.1-2 (March 1998): 2-9, also argues for the importance of Lockean temporal
experience to the development of Rasselas’ character. See also Regina Hewitt, “Time in Rasselas: Johnson’s Use of
We recognize this theme as what Scott Joeckel calls “Johnson’s paranoiac fear of the imagination.”\textsuperscript{17} But Johnson’s insistence on identifying illusions about the future as endemic to the human species, regardless of individual circumstance or of cultural or historical context, seems to have occluded the degree to which Johnson’s dangerous anticipation belongs to the very culturally specific temporal concerns of eighteenth-century Britain.

As he sets out from the Happy Valley, Johnson’s protagonist comprehends temporality in the same manner as did Isaac Bickerstaff some fifty years earlier.\textsuperscript{18} Rasselas is a creature in motion with regard to a fixed temporal landscape, one whose imaginative “views were extended to a wider space” (46). In 1710, Steele’s Bickerstaff demonstrated the sheer folly of confusing those mathematical representations of the future in averages and probabilities necessary to the emergent economy with the radically contingent future of the individual human being. Bickerstaff’s faulty calculations and detailed fantasies helped to stir his sense of heady excitement at the thought that he could not only foresee his future, but rush forward to meet it. But Steele’s essay did not reject the mathematical future that Bickerstaff so badly misconstrued. Johnson, however, does. \textit{Rasselas} provides no cultural context to explain why its protagonist should become entranced with this spatialized future or with the spatial past. The reader is left to assume that the cognitive developments Johnson has so carefully described with his protagonist are endemic to the human mind.

When eighteenth-century botanists sketched a subject in isolation from the flora, fauna, soil, and air in which it was found, they eliminated the complex environment that made that subject what it was. Johnson eliminates from his sketch those mathematically based constructions of the future that had become central to the British state and its marketplaces. So

\textsuperscript{18} See my earlier discussion of Richard Steele’s narrator in Chapter Two.
Rasselas shows us its protagonist in motion, but we no longer see the culturally-shared concepts that formed his imagination of the future. Rasselas now moves toward nothing at all as Johnson relegates the mathematical future to a mere illusion of the human mind.

Johnson’s protagonist is himself a type, a sketch of the human species in its most essential state, so there is some irony in the reality with which Rasselas leaves us. Johnson’s text argues that the future is nothing but an illusion, and that the human mind’s fatal flaw is its inability to remain in the present. In Imlac’s words, “The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments” (104). This forgotten present may be only rarely marked by the mind, but significantly, it is always marked by the physiological body. Johnson’s tale thus reveals how the shift that Poovey identified as a move from political economics to moral philosophy refigured the relationship between present and future into a binary of reality and illusion that is paralleled by a distinction between the material presence of the body and the non-existent world of the imagination. The present (and material presence) are now defined primarily by a human sensory experience that creates strong distinctions between that which is present to the body and that which is created only secondarily in the mind. Within such a framework, the future can exist only and merely in the individual human imagination. For this reason, desire in Johnson’s oriental tale no longer connects characters to the material world. The old tropes that let desire signal shifts in value over time no longer function. Now desire constantly threatens to disassociate the human mind from the material world that it seems to crave. Desire becomes the troubling point at which the material world and the human mind fail to meet.

Almoran and Hamet
Rasselas marks a turning point in how the oriental tale would interpret and misinterpret the workings of a sign-oriented marketplace. But Johnson was not the only author participating in this change. His protégé, John Hawkesworth, made use of the oriental tale as a didactic tool in The Adventurer during the years before Johnson wrote Rasselas. Though he is most well-known now for editing a controversial edition of James Cook’s journals, Hawkesworth’s contemporaries recognized him as a long-standing member of literary and theatrical circles. Hawkesworth took over as editor for The Gentleman’s Magazine in 1744 after Johnson gradually gave up his duties there. Hawkesworth left the magazine in 1752 to start The Adventurer. He then produced a well-received edition of The Works of Jonathan Swift and in 1756 began to take an active part as an author and editor, working with David Garrick on productions for the London stage. Hawkesworth’s own 1761 drama, Edgar and Emmeline; A Fairy Tale: In a Dramatic Entertainment of Two Acts, was played several times in London, raising the author’s hopes for the success of a new oriental tale for the stage. Hawkesworth wrote Almoran and Hamet: An Oriental Tale with the intention of having it also produced for the stage. But after Garrick declared the tale’s magical effects to be too expensive for the stage, Hawkesworth turned his drama into a narrative for publication in 1761.

The story of two eastern princes who inherit the throne jointly, Almoran and Hamet includes many of the tropes readers had come to expect from oriental tales. Combining genies and a strong didactic tone, Hawkesworth’s tale clearly shows the influence of both Arabian Nights’ and Rasselas, but Hawkesworth offers its own response to questions posed by the modern marketplace. In the early part of the century, Arabian Nights’ Entertainments modeled for its British readers a system of sign value in which consumerism produced meaning and

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meaning operated a type of value. In this system, eighteenth-century Britain’s two time frames worked in concert to create an endless source of value through the consumer’s acts of anticipation and deferral. Johnson’s tale sidesteps the complexity of this framework by casting anticipation as pure human delusion. Hawkesworth, however, confronts that framework more directly. Subordinating the issues of time and the human mind, Hawkesworth argues that it is not the future, but signs that are the dangerous illusion. This focus leads Hawkesworth somewhat coincidentally toward the same emphasis that emerge from *Rasselas*. In scenes like the one in which Rasselas sets off in a real chase after an imagined girl, Johnson’s work necessarily puts emphasis on the human body as the marker of a present from which the mind had strayed. Hawkesworth, too, relies on images of the body. But his bodies are determinately physiological, marking not the present, but a presence that lies beneath the illusions created by signs. Bodies produce, but signs deceive.

Hawkesworth began to develop this emphasis on the physiological in a short tale that he published before *Almoran and Hamet*, and notably, before Johnson wrote *Rasselas*. Published in *The Adventurer* in 1753, “Amurath: an Eastern Story” involves another ill-suited heir to the throne, in this case a young Sultan who is given a magic ring to aid him in his role as ruler. The ring works by applying pressure to his finger whenever the Sultan makes a poor decision: “’This ring,” said he, “shall mark out to thee the boundaries of good and evil; that without weighing remote consequences, thou may’st know the nature and tendency of every action.” The ring, of course, serves as a material representation of the Christian conscience and brings the tale in line with an older tradition in which believers struggle to interpret correctly the signs of good and evil. But Hawkesworth puts this tradition to contemporary use in a world that depends

on the changeability of every “nature and tendency” to produce value. Hawkesworth’s readers are accustomed to an oriental-tale tradition that plays with unexpected events and “remote consequences” as part of the seduction of its readers. “Amurath” recasts the genre’s dual interest in meaning and financial value into a study of moral value and offers its Christian message as a means of fixing that value in time.

Significantly, Hawkesworth chooses to register Amurath’s failures as a series of physical transformations. The Sultan begins a moral slide downward as he gradually becomes inured to the warnings of his ring. When he reaches his lowest point, the Sultan finds himself cast into the shape of a monster and banished from his city. Thereafter the Sultan starts on the road to redemption, transforming into something closer to humanity each time he improves his moral character. Hawkesworth’s narrator specifies that the Sultan experiences his circumstances throughout this process as the beast or animal that he is. Hunger and pain, loyalty and want, grow ever more complex as he approaches his original form. And though the tale falls well short of a Humean naturalism, “Amurath” suggests an emerging emphasis on the physiological body as an important factor in the making of human cognition. In “Amurath” we see very little concern for how this physiological body works with or against the traditional literary function of bodies as signs in the oriental-tale tradition. By the time that Hawkesworth publishes Almoran and Hamet, however, the effort to assert the physiological body over and against the sign appears as an important cultural project.

Almoran and Hamet begins with the two brothers ascending the throne upon their father’s death. The elder brother, Almoran, gives free reign to his desires while the younger Hamet takes a more moderate path. A supernatural being intervenes to support Almoran’s ambitions, fitting him with a talisman that permits the bearer to exchange appearances with a person of his
choosing. After Almoran has fallen into his own magical traps, the genius reveals himself to be a
divine messenger and grants Hamet the throne and the young virgin who has been the object of
both brothers’ desires.

Like a moral philosopher, Hawkesworth’s narrator delineates the various causes and
effects that have shaped the two main characters. Time appears as an important factor in the
shaping of both characters, though each approaches the future differently. Hamet is unaware of
his father’s bequest, so he grows up as a second son and foresees the likelihood of his
assassination at the first hint of trouble in his brother’s realm. This perspective leads Hamet to
dwell less on the secular world and more on the sacred domain of an afterlife:

as the first popular commotion which should happen after his brother’s accession to the
throne, might probably cost him his life, he was very inquisitive about the state into
which his spirit would be dismissed by the Angel of Death, and very diligent to do
whatever might secure him a share of the permanent and unchangeable felicity of
Paradise.²²

Though his subordinate position deprives him of the strength to lead, Hamet’s status means that
the divine future shapes and colors Hamet’s present: “to his mind futurity was present by
habitual anticipation . . . so that his devotion was not periodical but constant” (5). In contrast to
his younger brother, Almoran grows up with every whim satisfied and every honor easily gained.
His experience means that Almoran’s anticipation directs him no further than the immediate
secular future:

The views of Almoran were terminated by nearer objects; his mind was perpetually
busied in the anticipation of pleasures and honours, which he supposed to be neither

²² Oriental Tales, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5. All further references to
this text are from this edition and are cited by page number within the text.
uncertain nor remote; these excited his hopes, with a power sufficient to fix his attention; he did not look beyond them for other objects, nor enquire how enjoyments more distant were to be acquired . . . (6)

Almoran’s position as heir serves to support an imagination that is too much invested in the secular future to consider the divine future that lies beyond.

Hawkesworth shows the influence of mid-century moral philosophies in his delineation of these two characters as cognitive beings; the narrator painstakingly traces the remote origins of each thought and emotion in his characters throughout. But he clearly has reached different conclusions about the nature of human anticipation than those set out in *Rasselas*. Anticipation may be endemic to the human mind, but its object is constructed by individual experience. As in *Rasselas*, there is no reference to finance or the marketplace in Hawkesworth’s treatment of time. Instead, Hawkesworth articulates his characters’ time experiences through religious concepts. Hamet’s character thus demonstrates the necessity of subordinating the secular future to the sacred as a means of curbing the effects of the imagination and the strength of human desires. Hawkesworth makes no effort to discredit the secular future as mere illusion; he simply diminishes its importance by borrowing from a longstanding Christian conception of time.

By invoking Christianity’s sacred time, Hawkesworth’s narrative fixes an endpoint to the otherwise endless deferral and production imagined in *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*. Such a move necessarily operates as a critique of worldly desires, including the hunger for luxury goods that drives the trade in oriental tales. However, Hawkesworth’s use of Christian time is not simply a throwback to an early tradition. *Almoran and Hamet* responds to the oriental-tale tradition and to British capitalism of the period at their most complex levels. In Almoran’s transforming talisman and his magical death, the tale attacks a cultural framework that blurs the
boundaries between the material world inhabited by physical bodies and the immaterial world of language. It is not only that secular time is bound to give way to the divine, but also that text offers no miraculous transformations nor any escape from the inevitable ending.

When Almoran receives the talisman from the genius (genie) in Hawkesworth’s later tale, he takes it with the intention of deceiving the young virgin, Almeida, and seducing her. The genius already has granted Almoran the throne, the prevention of Hamet’s marriage to Almeida, and physical possession of the would-be bride. But Almeida’s continued refusals leave the Sultan angry and disappointed:

With the soul of Almoran, I should have the form of Hamet: then my wishes would indeed be filled; then would Almeida bless me with consenting beauty, and the splendor of my power should distinguish only the intervals of my love; my enjoyments would then be certain and permanent, neither blasted by disappointment, nor withered with satiety.

(66)

Almoran’s disappointment picks up on the argument set forth by Johnson in Rasselas, but also follows a path laid out by Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. To the question of whether desire can be productive, Johnson argued that anticipation will inevitably be met with either disappointment or satiety. Hawkesworth’s tale doesn’t need to reach this conclusion because it turns its focus instead on the binding of language and the material world that the earlier tales had proposed as a solution. Almoran receives an emerald cut with twenty-four facets:

on each side of it is engraven one of those mysterious characters, of which are formed all the words of all the languages that are spoken by angels, genii, and men… Point only to the letters that compose the name of him whose appearance thou wouldst assume, and it is done. (68)
The talisman encapsulates that magical tie between word and body that became a source of production in *Arabian Nights’* and in the British marketplace. Words, in this case names, do not represent their counterparts in the material world; they belong to a metonymic world in which materiality and textuality perpetually bleed back and forth into one another. Almoran’s talisman takes part in this cultural construction, but with one glaring limitation: this talisman produces nothing but illusions.

Once Almoran accepts the talisman, Hawkesworth uses this plot device to make a clear distinction between the self-perceived identities of his two characters (their minds, emotions, and sensory experiences) and the outer shells of their bodies. As a result of this dynamic, each character has two identities. The reader continues to follow Almoran as the selfish and strong older brother and Hamet as the upstanding younger brother, but each now has a visual character that “reads” differently from his true identity. Hawkesworth’s plot thus distinguishes between bodies that are physiologically present within the world of the narrative and bodies that, even within the confines of the narrative, are merely visual signs. The narrator gives us Hamet’s decidedly physical response to the talisman’s magic transformation: “Hamet was seized with a sudden languor, and his faculties were suspended as by the stroke of death. When he recovered, his limbs still trembled, and his lips were parched with thirst” (73). Hamet perceives no lasting difference in himself until he looks at his own reflection in a well and recognizes his brother’s face. The tale does not register Almoran’s transformation, but instead notes the difficulties it causes when the Sultan attempts to interact with those around him: “‘What I am,’ said he, ‘is, to this wretch, the object not only of hatred but of scorn; and he commends only what I am not, in what to him I would seem to be’” (70). Almoran’s confusion reflects the narrative’s strange direction; the magic device that should allow the Sultan to discover truth behind falsehood
instead serves only to create further confusion as both Almeida and the guards constantly shift their words to negotiate the responses they read on the Sultan’s assumed face.

In arguing for a political reading of *Almoran and Hamet*, Robert Mack says of these scenes, “The movement of loyalties and affiliations in the story leaves the reader with a slightly queasy, sickening movement of uncertainty.”

Amidst all of the confusion, character-as-identity remains strikingly stable in opposition to character-as-sign. Hamet remains loyal and steadfast, Almoran self-serving and insatiable, despite the changes to their readable surfaces. This distinction between the two functions of “character” ties Hawkesworth’s oriental tale to a larger shift in narrative forms during the middle of the century. Deidre Lynch argues in *The Economy of Character* that the early part of the eighteenth century understood character primarily in its visual function:

The uses of character at issue in the first part of the century reveal, in other words, enthusiasms that were adapted to what I will call “typographical culture”: an interest in the material grounds of meaning and a fascination with the puns that could link the person “in” a text to the printed letters (alphabetic symbols, or “characters” in another sense) that elaborated that text’s surface. In this context, most talk about character was not talk about individualities or inner lives. It is talk about the systems of semiotic and fiduciary exchange — the machinery of interconnectedness — that made a commercial society go.

The commercial society to which Lynch refers is the flooded marketplace of the early eighteenth century in which not only new texts but also new goods had yet to be defined and categorized as they would be in the latter part of the period. By the end of the century, however, character has

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taken on its second function as a reference to identity, psychological processes or so-called inner meanings. Lynch contextualizes this shift as part of an adaptation to a more established marketplace in which “the ground rules that had defined the interrelations of literacy, aesthetic competence, and literariness” have changed.\(^\text{25}\) The act of reading character in the later period promises an individuality detached from social circumstance on the one hand and signals social prestige on the other, as narrative forms get placed within a hierarchy of literary and cultural value.

Lynch’s analysis gives us an invaluable basis for understanding the emergence of this second function for character, and her study demonstrates how the act of reading character came to be associated with a private, psychological experience of narrative. Hawkesworth’s tale reminds us that the oriental tale always had been and remained even at mid-century a genre crucially entwined with issues of materiality. The tale constructs an insistently stable form of character-as-identity in *Almoran and Hamet* through its representations of the physiological body. Each brother’s identity, beliefs and behaviors develop in accordance with that character’s embodied experiences. The exchange of visual features has no effect on this new “inner self” because the mind’s sense of its own presence never changes.

As if to make perfectly clear the dangers of confusing text with body, Hawkesworth’s tale finally ends the life of Almoran with one more talisman. The genius appears a final time to offer each brother a magic parchment embossed with Solymon’s seal. Both brothers seem to require the parchment’s magic in order to avert death, but Hamet resists the temptation to save his life with magic and at the expense of his brother’s life. Almoran, however, accepts the parchment with glee and follows the instructions to burn the paper, thus prolonging his life and making all of his wishes come true. But just as the emerald talisman could offer only the illusion

\(^{25}\) Lynch 6.
of a different body and no real transformation of the material world, so too is the parchment a trick. Activated by Almoran’s guilt before god, the magic words transform the material body only insomuch as they turn the Sultan’s living body to stone: “the figure of Almoran, which was hardened into stone, expanded by degrees; and a rock, by which his form and attitude are still rudely expressed, became at once a monument of his punishment and his guilt” (112). In the final reckoning, Almoran’s reliance on the magical bonds between the material world and the world of signs proves fatal. But he is left ironically as a material object himself, to be read by future generations “that the world might know, that, to the wicked, increase of power is increase of wretchedness” (113).

Though Hawkesworth’s oriental tale has been largely forgotten in comparison with Rasselas, Almoran and Hamet was well-known in its own time. Like Hawkesworth, Frances Sheridan moved freely as an author among many genres. Her only oriental tale, The History of Nourjahad, might well have been influenced by Johnson’s Rasselas with its didactic focus on the human imagination. But the narrator’s attention to physiological experience in Nourjahad shows that if the dominant trend in narrative was a movement away from that earlier playful tension between body and sign, the oriental tale nevertheless retained its ability to confront the marketplace’s reliance upon bodies that were always partially signs and signs that had the power to produce value.

The History of Nourjahad

Frances Sheridan wrote The History of Nourjahad from a financial exile in France shortly before her death. The tale was published posthumously in 1767, and remained popular into the nineteenth century. Like Johnson’s Rasselas, Nourjahad was its author’s first effort at the

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26 See Robert L. Mack’s introduction to Oriental Tales, xix-xxvii.
popular oriental-tale genre. Sheridan made her name as a playwright and as the author of two very successful novels. And though her choice of genre might well have been partially determined by financial need, Sheridan nonetheless takes the oriental tale a step beyond its familiar uses. As in other oriental tales of the eighteenth century, *Nourjahad* addresses the challenges and seductions of the future, but Sheridan’s tale recognizes a complexity in time that other mid-century tales do not. Using the capacity of narrative to bind its readers to different temporalities, Sheridan reminds us that in the wake of the financial revolution, every subject lives in the tension between two times.

Set in a fictional Persian Court, the story involves a young prince, Schemzeddin, who has just inherited the throne. Elders in the court advise the new Sultan not to appoint his childhood friend, Nourjahad, as First Minister, cautioning that Nourjahad will show himself to be avaricious and pleasure-seeking in the future. When Schemzeddin lures Nourjahad into a confession of his deepest wishes during a seductive scene in the seraglio gardens, Nourjahad fails the test by expressing his wishes for infinite wealth and immortality. That evening, however, an angel appears in Nourjahad’s apartment to grant him both wishes. Immortal and infinitely wealthy, Nourjahad nevertheless remains imprisoned in a luxurious palace by the Sultan. The tale follows Nourjahad’s moral decay as he grows indolent, “effeminate” and ultimately cruel. At this point Sheridan introduces her most innovative plot device. Three times, Nourjahad’s self-indulgence results in a period of unearthly sleep, first for a period of four years, then forty, and then twenty. Each time the protagonist wakes to a thoroughly disorienting world, surrounded by people he cannot recognize and at a loss for his own context. The expected ending to the fable comes when Nourjahad realizes his errors and repents.
Only after Nourjahad’s repentance does Schemzeddin reveal to his friend and to the reader the fact that the entire experience has been staged. In fact, Schemzeddin’s agents have drugged Nourjahad at appropriate times, and made all of the necessary changes to the young man’s environment in order to convince Nourjahad of the passage of time. The angel turns out to be Mandana, Nourjahad’s favorite lover in disguise, and all of the story’s losses prove fictional. So, says Schemzeddin, “In the space of fourteen moons . . . thou hast had the experience of four times so many years.”

Critics note the compelling effect of the narrative’s temporal play. In her reading of *Nourjahad* and Sheridan’s earlier novels, Margaret Anne Doody notes that time in *Nourjahad* actually fails to progress in spite of the protagonist’s sense of duration. Placing this effect alongside the oddly circular plot movements of the novels, Doody argues that Sheridan is emphasizing in all three works a point of origin past which the protagonists cannot progress, thus opening up questions of moral ambiguity. In Doody’s words, “the most vivid effects concern the hero’s fatiguing immortality of error, stuck at age twenty-three over a period of sixty years, and his bewilderment after each fit of oblivion” (355-6). Sheridan’s innovation, writes Doody, “is found in her handling of time . . . time proceeds in a spiral, or rather a helix, doubling back on itself . . . the inner meaning of a series of actions or happenings can be understood only by circling back to an original point or time, a point of departure . . . Progressive time is annihilated.” Doody concludes that *Nourjahad* functions as a proto-feminist text, not so much because of the gender roles played by its characters, but because this formulation of closed-off

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29 Doody 355.
time and its failure to progress evokes a sense of powerlessness that characterizes the female experience in the British eighteenth century.\(^3\)

Doody’s analysis of time in *Nourjahad* bears a striking resemblance to some of the critical comments on time in *Mille et une Nuits* or *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* noted in the previous chapter. Confronted with narrative backtracking and deferral, the critic associates this temporal structure with a female effort to resist masculine authority. In the background of this critique lies an eighteenth-century culture that assigns rational causality and progress to a post-Enlightenment, masculine public realm. The presence of gender issues in all of these works is undeniable, but at this point we can articulate with more precision why Sheridan’s tale confronts Nourjahad’s “boundless” desire as an issue of temporality (25). Nourjahad’s wish for endless wealth and the limitless time of immortality reflects the structure of Sheridan’s eighteenth-century marketplace. When the magically immortal Nourjahad considers filling his leisure time with reading, he wonders at the limits of mortal knowledge:

> How circumscribed, said he, is the knowledge of a paltry historian! Who is at the pains of collecting the scanty materials which a life of forty or fifty years perhaps affords him . . .

> How infinitely superior will my fund of information be, who shall myself be an eye-witness to events as extraordinary as these, and numbered a thousand times over; for doubtless the same things which have happened, will happen again. (55)

The irony is that Nourjahad is not immortal within the confines of the tale’s plot, but he is immortal in the same way that the texts he dismisses are immortal. The historian’s texts span

\(^3\) In its attention to gender contexts, Doody’s analysis converges with Felicity Nussbaum’s reading of *Nourjahad*. Nussbaum argues that Nourjahad is feminized by his confinement and forced to indulge in romantic fantasies to make his imprisonment bearable. Sheridan’s protagonist, then, is forced to live the fictional genre to which women are drawn by psychological and cultural necessity. Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 114-34.
centuries and will themselves last for centuries beyond the limited years of their authors. In less grand fashion, the text of government bureaucracies, legal documents, and financial instruments conquered mortal time in Sheridan’s Britain and nourished a marketplace with apparently boundless potential. But to accomplish this, Britain’s marketplace obscured the purchasing, trading, investing, reading, and consuming physical bodies on which it depended. Sheridan’s fictional character illustrates the dangers of a system in which the mortal body’s limits are lost.

The secret authors of Nourjahad’s punishments create temporal disorientation in their victim by using the physical bodies of lovers, children and servants to indicate much longer expanses of time than have actually passed. The first punishment episode occurs after Nourjahad consumes alcohol in violation of Islamic law. He falls into a drunken sleep and, waking, calls for his lover, Mandana. As a servant informs Nourjahad that Mandana has died in childbirth, Sheridan draws our attention to a fundamental indicator of human time progression:

Ah traitress, cried Nourjahad, how darest thou thus mock the sorrow of thy master, and traduce the chastity of my beloved. Thou knowest it is not more than three moons since I received her a virgin into my arms, and does thou presume to impose so ridiculous a story on me as that of her having died in childbed? My lord, answered the slave, it is more than three years since Mandana died. Audacious wretch, cried Nourjahad, wouldst thou persuade me out of my senses? (37-8)

Sheridan’s wording is quite precise here; Nourjahad must be persuaded “out of his senses,” for his senses tell him, as they tell the unwary reader, that time should have progressed according to the pace of the story up to this point. That is to say, we have no narrative or descriptive indicators to help us through this transition, only the sudden revelation of a three-year-old child whose physical presence finally convinces Nourjahad that he now lives in a new time.
The two magical sleep episodes that follow will repeat this pattern with slight variations. In the second punishment, Nourjahad awakes twenty years later to the sight of a seraglio of “wrinkled and deformed old hags” in place of the beautiful women he had looked on only the night before (48). In the third and final episode, the bodily signs of time are replaced by Nourjahad’s first transgression of political or historic time. After a forty-year sleep, he wakes to find the sultan dead and the empire in mourning by order of the new ruler.

Sheridan’s train of punishments for her protagonist repeatedly isolates him. As a result she is able to draw a distinction between the fragile hold our minds have on an internal time sense tied to consciousness and an externalized social time indicated by standard markers of change (daylight, seasons, physical development, aging, historic era). What is more, Nourjahad’s isolation in time mirrors the text’s enclosed and isolating spaces. As a matter of internal plot considerations, Nourjahad’s isolation is necessary to make Schemzeddin’s staged illusion appear real. But the walls surrounding Nourjahad throughout this tale (first at Schemzeddin’s garden and then in Nourjahad’s palaces) serve a thematic function as well. The walls that isolate Nourjahad are a simple reflection of the desire and anticipation that isolate Nourjahad psychologically from his society.

Following the path laid out by Johnson, Sheridan illustrates the seduction of the imagined future in the scene that follows the angel’s first visit. Nourjahad’s pleasure in the anticipation is so great that he cuts himself off from other people and even from material realities in order to indulge in his fantasies of the future: “For the three succeeding days his thoughts were so perplexed and divided, that he knew not which of his favourite schemes he should first enter upon. Satisfied with having the means in his power, he neglected those ends for which he was so desirous of them” (31). More in love with his future than his present, the protagonist languishes
on his bed dreaming up possibilities, and only emerges at the Sultan’s command. Nourjahad finds it necessary to lie to the Sultan and to those around him about his new condition, a lie that originates a split in his character. At this moment in the text, Nourjahad begins living in two distinct times. He is lost in the false time of his own consciousness while also living in the socially shared time of those around him. Sheridan reinforces the sense of reality that attaches to the first time by including her reader in its experiences and durations. Of course, the trick is that it is the second time that is real and not the first.

Nourjahad’s infinitely deferred ending necessarily changes the way that he values the people, objects and experiences that are part of his daily life. Just as he dismisses the knowledge of historians for being “paltry” in comparison with the centuries to which he looks forward, Nourjahad chooses to avoid any attachment to the few people around him, as they are bound to die and be replaced over and over again. Believing that he will never face a divine judgment, Nourjahad dismisses religious stricture as well. As a result, he soon grows morally corrupt and murders his most faithful servant, Cadiga, in a fit of rage. And when he awakes this time, all of his slaves and servants have fled: “I rouse myself like a savage beast in the desart, whose paths are shunned by all the children of men” (60). Cadiga’s brother, Cozro, is left to care for Nourjahad, and he soon brings the guilty man to a state of remorse. Nourjahad will pass the final test by braving death to save Cozro, at which moment Schemzeddin and his cohorts reveal their ruse.

His immortality having become a nightmare, Nourjahad is relieved at the conclusion of the tale to find that his decades have been only a few months and his behavior during that time has brought no lasting consequences (Cadiga is found to be alive, and his erstwhile slaves and servants apparently harbor no lingering resentments). The story of Nourjahad’s moral decline
and redemption argues that the ephemeral nature of the human body is necessary to curb the excesses of the imagination, to limit the mind’s forays into an illusory future that political economic thought promotes. Without that limit, Sheridan’s tale suggests, moral systems shatter and social bonds disappear. Insisting on its own limitations, the physical body asserts itself against the temporal structures of the marketplace. And one is tempted to imagine this resistance as a battling back of human intuitive time against the mathematical constructs that had complicated and often supplanted it since the last years of the seventeenth century. But Sheridan’s tale leaves the most compelling question in the narrative unresolved. Nourjahad believes that, even as he indulged alone in his experience of immortality, he was also partaking in the shared time of those around him. He attempts to calibrate his own sense of duration through his bodily experience and through the physiological changes most basic to the human species. Nourjahad “reads” the aging bodies of his harem women, the pregnancy of his lover, and the growing body of his son as markers of a uniquely physiological time experience. And in spite of all of these markers, Nourjahad fails dramatically. The infinite spans of mathematical time Nourjahad believes he has been granted leave him isolated in his own imagination, but so too does his embodied experience of the present. In other words, Nourjahad’s morally unacceptable illusions make his temporal disorientation dramatic, but in reality, those who live within the abstracted world of finance are never fully oriented to its time frames, if only because mathematical time has no embodied present. In the tension between what Benedict Anderson called the “meanwhile” of social belonging and Nourhajad’s delightful but isolating walled garden, Sheridan seems to have offered no clear means for distinguishing between illusion and reality. The tale suggests that we have no choice but to live in a modern double-time, that we

are equally bound to the real time of consciousness and to the social moment for which we constantly recalibrate our minds and bodies.

Like the rest of her generation, Sheridan understood the sheer economic productivity of individual anticipation, its gift of voracious readers and theater audiences, fashionable masses and busy traders. And perhaps Nourjahad’s author was conscious of the financial and social changes that Joseph Addison and Daniel Defoe had promoted so vigorously. But in beginning with the assumption that modern temporal experience arises out of a binary of presence and illusion, Sheridan’s text struggles to present a remedy for the apparent isolation of the human imagination. As do other mid-century authors, Sheridan finds herself reaching for a physiological body “beneath” the sign, a materiality that will mark the presence of a public that has no presence and never did.
Conclusion

*The History of Nourjahad* reflects a final transition in the oriental tale as a narrative genre. After Sheridan’s death the genre makes a definitive move toward the tropes and themes that we now associate with the Romantic era. While texts like Maria Edgeworth’s “Murad the Unlucky” continue to play with the oriental tale’s capacity for allegorical didacticism, other narratives begin using the oriental tale’s boundaries as space in which to explore the inner world of imagination and consciousness opened up by the developments of previous decades. William Beckford’s *Vathek* and Lord Byron’s *The Giaour* take part in this shift, and there is no coincidence in the fact that both authors chose this genre to explore an imaginative social isolation expressed in insistently sexual overtones. From its beginnings in the seventeenth century, the oriental tale served as perhaps the primary expression of the magical bond between the expanding material world of the marketplace and the endless capacity of the sign. But as new conceptions of the human mind replaced early political economics, literary traditions tore apart those bonds, rendering the sign a mere transparent representation on the one hand and relegating its creative properties to a make-believe world of human imagination on the other.

Neither mathematical time nor its essential role in the marketplace ever disappeared, of course. In our own age, financial value continues to vacillate wildly and with a rapidity that only a time concept that has no sense of duration could create. In spite of this instability, both
individuals and states continue to rely on the economic future imagined by eighteenth-century mathematicians, political leaders and financiers. But the legacy of eighteenth-century financial innovations extends well beyond the realm of finance. In his work on the future created by state financing in the eighteenth century, Robert Mitchell notes the significance of that future to poetry as late as the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹ Literary forms continue to model, critique and promote the processes by which societies comprehend mathematical time and individuals imagine themselves as part of, or conversely isolated from, a mathematically-derived public.
