

ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 5, Issue 1

Pp: 49-66

2011

Published on: 1st Jan 2011

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ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Imagining India in the Waverley Novels¹

Sally Newsome

In 1810, four years before the publication of *Waverley*, Walter Scott wrote to his brother, confiding that ‘were Dundas to go out Governor to India & were he willing to take me with him in a good situation I would not hesitate (altho’ I by no means repine at my present situation) to pitch the Court of Session and the Book-sellers to the Devil & try my fortune in another climate.’² Scott never made this proposed journey to India. The furthest he travelled east was during his voyage to Malta in 1831, a year before his death. However, his imaginative attraction to and interest in India can be traced throughout the Waverley novels. While texts such as *Guy Mannering* and ‘The Surgeon’s Daughter’ make vital and overt use of India as a plot device in terms of setting, Indian allusions are also scattered throughout Scott’s entire output as a novelist. In *Saint Ronan’s Well*, for example, the indomitable Scots landlady Meg Dods complains, “‘Nabobs indeed! the country’s plagued wi’ them—they have raised the price of eggs and poutry for twenty miles round.’”³ During the opening epistle of *Redgauntlet*, Darsie Latimer puzzles over the mystery of his birth, writing to Alan Fairford:

Were it not that I recollect my poor mother in her deep widow’s weeds, with a countenance that never smiled but when she looked on me—and then, in such a wan and woeful sort, as the sun when he glances through an April cloud,—were it not, I say, that her mild and matron-like form and countenance forbid such a suspicion, I might think myself the son of some India Director, or rich citizen, who had more wealth than grace, and a handful of hypocrisy to boot, and who was breeding up privately, and obscurely enriching, one of whose existence he had some reason to be ashamed.⁴

¹ I would like to acknowledge the support I have received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council which has enabled me to undertake my doctoral research.

² Walter Scott to Thomas Scott, 1 November 1810 in H. J. C. Grierson (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (12 vols, London, 1932–34), VII, 452.

³ Walter Scott, *Saint Ronan’s Well* (1824), ed. Mark A. Weinstein (Edinburgh, 1995), 15.

⁴ Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet* (1824), ed. G. A. M. Wood with David Hewitt (Edinburgh,

This essay will explore Scott's imaginative mapping of India in his prose narratives, focusing on two works that straddle the career of the Author of *Waverley*: *Guy Mannering*, published in 1815 (a year after *Waverley*) and 'The Surgeon's Daughter', published in 1827 (a year after the financial crash that left Scott insolvent). As I shall demonstrate, in the *Waverley* novels India is frequently constructed as a dream-like space which is vulnerable to appropriation and domination. Both of the texts under discussion present India as a potent source of wealth and imaginative inspiration. Consequently Scott's novels may be positioned within British Orientalist discourses: as Ros Ballaster has noted, images of India as a dream of riches and exoticism have prevailed in European literature since the seventeenth century.⁵ However, as shall be argued, within Scott's texts India also becomes potentially incomprehensible and dangerous. As the opening section of this essay will suggest, this threatening depiction of India reflects Scott's own vexed attitude towards the place where several close friends and relatives died while in the service of the East India Company. The following reading of *Guy Mannering* will examine how the competing narratives of Britons returning from the East served to open up a shifting depiction of India as an unstable sphere containing both rich resources and dangerous alterity. Furthermore, the construction of India as a dream-like illusion reaches its height in 'The Surgeon's Daughter'; a text in which the action of imagining India is foregrounded by both characters and narrator alike. As I will propose, by repeatedly associating India with the dream-like the *Waverley* novels resist an essential and homogeneous version of India, while simultaneously interrogating the discourses of literary Orientalism that present a constructed and imagined East.

I

Before examining the representation of India in *Guy Mannering* and 'The Surgeon's Daughter', this article will first explore some of the biographical material that supports a reading of Scott's Orientalist texts as coloured by ambivalence and anxiety. Scott's letters and prose works reveal a vexed attitude towards India and, furthermore, towards British imperial activity

1997), 2.

⁵ See Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford, 2007), 254–359.

there. As Claire Lamont notes, ‘India was never out of the news in Scott’s youth’, and Scott could hardly have escaped some awareness of the activities of the East India Company after the impeachment trial of the Governor-General Warren Hastings between 1788 and 1795.⁶ Both Meg’s complaint about the economic chaos caused by returning Britons and Darsie’s fear that he may be the son of a Company employee reflect popular conceptions of the rapacious and avaricious nabob, a stereotype ‘applied to the servants of the East India Company who had returned to Britain equipped with ill-gotten prosperity, an insatiable appetite for luxury, and a desire to climb into elite spheres of power and influence.’⁷ However, Scott’s knowledge of British activities in India was greatly increased by his many personal ties with the East India Company.⁸ As both a child and adult, Scott witnessed many friends’ and relatives’ careers in India; amongst a long list of employees of the Company was Scott’s brother, Robert; his nephew, also called Walter Scott; and his brother-in-law, Charles Carpenter. Additionally, Scott recommended several young men, including his godson Walter Scott Terry, to his acquaintances in India. Scott’s connections extended to the highest level of Company administration: he described Governor-General Lord Minto as ‘one of my most intimate friends in that rank of life’.⁹ Scott perceived his influence with these men to be of such consequence that in 1808 he wrote to his brother-in-law Charles saying:

The present President of the Board of Controul in particular is my early and intimate friend since we carried our satchels together to the High School of Edinburgh... I am sure Robt. Dundas would like to serve my brother. I am also very well acquainted with your present Governor-General Lord Minto... If you see him and choose to mention our close friendship and connections, I am sure you will not be the worse received.¹⁰

⁶ Claire Lamont, ‘Historical Note to *The Surgeon’s Daughter*’ in Walter Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), ed. Claire Lamont (London, 2003), 361.

⁷ Christina Smylitopoulos, ‘Rewritten and Reused: Imaging the Nabob through “Upstart Iconography”’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 32 (2008), 39.

⁸ For a more comprehensive account of the many ties between Scott and Britons in India see Iain Gordon Brown, ‘Griffins, Nabobs and a Seasoning of Curry Powder: Walter Scott and the Indian Theme in Life and Literature’ in Annie Buddle (ed.) *The Tiger and the Thistle: Tipu Sultan and the Scots in India 1760–1800* (Edinburgh, 1999), 71–9.

⁹ Walter Scott to Dr Leyden, 5 July 1806 in *The Letters of Walter Scott*, I, 309.

¹⁰ Walter Scott to Charles Carpenter, 8 February 1808, *ibid.*, II, 14.

As this letter testifies, Scott implicitly supported British imperialism in India by playing an active role in the promotion of his friends' careers. He was clearly aware of the potential success a career in India could offer to young Scots. Nonetheless, his correspondence reveals an unease that frequently underlies discussion of India and Indian affairs. In 1824, he wrote a letter to Sir Robert Peel that displays both cynicism and anxiety in its consideration of the 'exportation trade' of young men between Scotland and India:

You are aware that Scotland is in every sense a breeding not a feeding country and that we send our children and relatives to India as we send our black cattle to England. I can only say that since I dealt in this exportation trade my cargoes from John Leyden's time downward have usually been of good quality and have given satisfaction to Mother Company. My present stock of *griffins* is very promising.¹¹

The irony directed towards 'Mother Company' is easily discerned in Scott's commodification of his countrymen into cattle and cargo. Furthermore, the apparently humorous tone of the letter is undercut by Scott's allusion to John Leyden, exposing a current of embittered cynicism. Leyden was a close friend of Scott who contributed towards *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–12) and was appointed as an assistant surgeon in Madras in 1803. In 1811, while on an expedition to Java, Leyden entered an unventilated library in search of oriental manuscripts and contracted a fever from which he subsequently died. Scott was clearly distressed upon hearing this news. His letters during late 1811 and early 1812 frequently turn to 'poor John Leyden'.¹² Leyden's death seems all the more tragic because, as Scott wrote in his memoir 'John Leyden M.D.', he was 'perhaps the first British traveller that ever sought India, moved neither by the love of wealth nor of power, and who, despising alike the luxuries commanded by the one, and the pomp attached to the other, was guided solely by the wish of extending our knowledge of Oriental literature, and distinguishing himself as its most successful cultivator'.¹³ This tribute elevates the memory of the young Orientalist, while simultaneously condemning the general activities of the British in India as motivated by a desire for money and domination.

¹¹ Walter Scott to Sir Robert Peel, 12 July 1824, *ibid.*, VIII, 331.

¹² Walter Scott to Matthew Weld Hartstonge, 22 December 1811, *ibid.*, III, 47.

¹³ Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (28 vols, Edinburgh, 1834–6), IV, 177.

When Scott wrote to Peel in 1824, Leyden had been dead for thirteen years: clearly, in Scott's view, the 'cargo' that was required by 'Mother Company' was not always guaranteed to find success in India. Indeed, the fatalities of close friends and relations continued throughout Scott's lifetime. In 1787, he wrote in his memoirs that his brother Robert 'made two voyages to the east and died a victim to the climate.'¹⁴ Walter Scott Terry died whilst serving as a lieutenant in the Bombay artillery and John Lockhart's brother Richard drowned in the Bay of Bengal.

These deaths affected Scott to the degree that when the possibility arose of his own son Walter going east with his regiment, Scott's ambivalence towards India erupted into anxiety. As a civil servant, a career in India might have been permissible but Scott could not give his consent to his son going in a military capacity. He wrote:

you can get neither experience in your profession nor credit nor wealth nor anything but an obscure death in storming the hill fort of some Rajah with an unpronounceable name or under the sabres of Hurry Punt, Bullocky Row or some such fellow's half starved black cavalry—or if you live it is but to come back 20 years hence a lieutenant or captain with a yellow face a diseased liver and not a rupee in your pocket to comfort you for broken health.¹⁵

For 'young men without connections or interest India is a good thing', but that was not the situation of young Walter, son of the Author of *Waverley* and the Sheriff of Selkirkshire. As Scott wrote, 'if you go to India you are entirely out of my reach and must lose every advantage which my connections might procure me.'¹⁶ Despite the large numbers of Scots in the country, many of whom were friends, India evidently remained for Scott a dangerous sphere, beyond the reach of his power and influence. He finished this impassioned letter with a postscript; 'I question much if one of your officers sees British land again till his beard is grey. The custom is to keep cavalry abroad till they are reduced to skeletons to save expence in bringing them back'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Walter Scott, 'Memoirs' in David Hewitt (ed.), *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1981), 9.

¹⁵ Walter Scott to Walter Scott, 1 May 1821 in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, VI, 433.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 434.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, 435.

This letter forms one of Scott's most overt articulations of the anxieties that generated his imaginative mapping of India in the Waverley novels. The evidence of Scott's correspondence and prose works demonstrates that his conception of India is one dominated by ambiguity. This unease particularly focused on the uncertain fates of Britons in India, from the young Scottish men who were packed off to the East like cargo to the elderly soldiers who returned with ruined health and empty pockets. India, in Scott's construction, could hold out the promise of a glittering career but equally it could bring corruption, violence and death.

II

The construction of India as a dangerous space which the British struggle to negotiate reflects a larger destabilization of imperial ideology that a number of critics have recognized in Scott's Waverley novels. Such criticism responds in part to the influential theory of Edward W. Said. In his 1978 study *Orientalism*, Said defined the discursive field of Orientalism as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient',¹⁸ and used Scott's novels to illustrate his conception of Orientalist discourse as internally consistent, promoting conceptions of an essential and inferior Orient. Said wrote, 'even the most imaginative writers of an age, men like Flaubert, Nerval, or Scott, were constrained in what they could either experience of or say about the Orient. For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").'¹⁹

However, Said's viewpoint has been challenged by several readings that find instability in Scott's construction of eastern spaces. James Watt, examining *The Talisman* and 'The Surgeon's Daughter', argues that 'these remarkable novels eschew the increasingly influential language of racial essentialism, and complicate the mythology of oriental despotism', concluding that 'it is difficult to translate such playful and disruptive works into more readable ideological terms'.²⁰ Andrew Lincoln sees 'the supposed superiority of the

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 2003), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁰ James Watt, 'Scott, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Romantic Orientalism' in Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson (eds), *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge, 2004), 94.

western observer' as 'represented—and tested—in relation to oriental "others"' in Scott's prose fiction. He continues:

As an Anglo-Briton Scott probably shared this sense of superiority, and he saw the British operations in India as an important opportunity for Scots, including his own family. But his work is also informed by the earlier respect for oriental culture, and by his awareness of the English sense of superiority to their northern neighbours. Scott's complex attitude generates a deeply ambivalent representation of cultural difference.²¹

The disruptions and complexities that Watt and Lincoln recognise in Scott's construction of Otherness and the Orient inform the present readings of *Guy Mannering* and 'The Surgeon's Daughter'. Indeed, the indeterminacy and equivocation that both critics identify in Scott's Orientalist texts can be connected with the *Waverley* novels' mapping of India in terms of an illusionary dream. By depicting India as a deceptive dream-like sphere, Scott's texts construct an ever-shifting Orient that resists monolithic ideological interpretation and essentialising discourses.

As indicated in the introduction to this article, Scott's portrayal of India as a dreamscape reflected an established trope of British literary Orientalism. In her survey of Orientalist fiction, Ros Ballaster identifies and explores the prevalence of this trope of the 'dream' of India. Ballaster argues that 'the specificity of the representation of "India" lies in this conjuring of the idea of a "dream" landscape ripe for appropriation but always enigmatic, indeed incomprehensible . . . India is a shape that shifts elusively away from the desiring subject, a brittle vulnerable illusion: a "dream of men awake" to the immense riches and power offered by the territory of India, but also to a risky alterity that may finally evade the covetous grasp.'²² While Ballaster's analysis focuses upon eighteenth-century literature, such criticism offers an extremely useful framework for the interpretation of Scott's Indian novels. The ambivalence that Scott expressed towards India in his letters is reflected in the *Waverley* novels' construction of India as an illusionary space that conceals danger and evades western domination.

Set during the early 1780s, *Guy Mannering* tells the story of three Britons who have just returned to Scotland from India. They are Colonel Guy

²¹ Andrew Lincoln, *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh, 2007), 91.

²² Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford, 2007), 262–3.

Manning and his daughter Julia, and Harry Bertram, who is the long-lost heir to the Scottish estate of Ellangowan. As the novel is set entirely in Britain, the reader must piece together the characters' experiences in India through their own personal narratives, most commonly through their letters which are interspersed throughout the novel. In *Guy Mannering*, therefore, India is a debatable space, located beyond the borders of the text, and constructed via the stories that returning Europeans tell. These stories, particularly the conflicting accounts of Julia Manning and Guy Manning, do not produce a construction of India as a fixed, ontologically stable space. Rather, the varied accounts of India contained in the narrative emphasise the instability of these characters' oriental stories. As Tara Ghoshal Wallace notes, 'just as it is difficult to uncover the true narrative among the multiple versions of a traumatic moment in Scotland, so it is about events in India.'²³ According to Wallace, 'the hyperbolic narratives woven around Indian experiences' may be 'dismissed by the careful reader'.²⁴ Guy Manning, Julia, and Harry Bertram can claim cultural authority due to the time they have spent in India but, as Wallace argues, the accounts they produce are nonetheless acts of imagining; 'narratives which inevitably interweave European fantasies and Indian experiences.'²⁵ The unreliable narratives produced by returning Britons open up India as a shifting sphere that is variously enriching, threatening and illusive. Consequently, the novel eschews a monolithic construction of an unchanging and essential India.

For the young and impressionable Julia Manning, India offers the rich resources of romance. Writing to her friend Matilda, she constructs India as a potent source of imaginative inspiration:

You will call this romantic—but consider I was born in the land of talisman and spell, and my childhood lulled by tales which you can only enjoy through the gauzy frippery of a French translation. O Matilda, I wish you could have seen the dusky visages of my Indian attendants, bending in passive attention round the magic narrative, that flowed, half poetry, half prose, from the lips of the tale-teller. No wonder that European fiction sounds cold and meagre, after the wonderful effects which I have seen the romances of the East produce upon the hearers.²⁶

²³ Tara Ghoshal Wallace, 'The Elephant's Foot and the British Mouth: Walter Scott on Imperial Rhetoric', *European Romantic Review*, 13 (2002), 321.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

²⁶ Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (1815), ed. Peter Garside (London, 2003), 92.

The India that Julia describes is thus a land of creativity, magic and storytelling; a space ripe for appropriation for the western viewer and, indeed, the western novelist. Julia's narrative is to a certain extent reinforced in the text through the emphasis placed on the creative talents of the returning Britons. Guy Mannering "draws beautifully" and writes poetry.²⁷ Harry Bertram plays a flageolet, and alerts Julia to his arrival in England by playing her favourite Hindu air under her bedroom by moonlight. Julia teaches Lucy Bertram music and dancing and is a born storyteller, entertaining both Matilda and the reader with her epistles on life in India and Scotland. While Guy's artistic talents may not necessarily have come from his lengthy sojourn in the East, those of Harry and Julia were presumably acquired while in India. Through the narrative's association of India with creativity and the art of storytelling, *Guy Mannering* reflects the 'the representation of India as a (re)source for fiction' prevalent in British literature throughout the long eighteenth century and Romantic period.²⁸

The depiction of India as a rich source of creativity intersects with the numerous stories of Indian wealth that circulate in the novel. The neighbourhood of Ellangowan regards Colonel Mannering, an officer returning from India, as a rich nabob and though (as Wallace points out) 'the text indicates that the bulk of Mannering's money is inherited from his uncle', it is clear that the combination of an English family fortune and career in India has made him very wealthy indeed.²⁹ When Harry Bertram is restored to both the title and the debts of the estate of Ellangowan, Indian wealth certainly becomes the means for the regeneration of the estate, as the hero vows that 'though he should be obliged again to go to India, every debt, justly and honourably due by his father, should be made good to the claimant'.³⁰ In *Guy Mannering*, the available wealth of India becomes the means by which a British son can right his father's Scottish debts. As Guy says, the rebuilding of the ruined estate of Ellangowan is made possible "with a few bags of Sicca rupees".³¹

However, the novel does not present an unproblematic depiction of India as a space rich in creative and material resources that is ripe for domination and appropriation. Julia's description of India as a land of talisman and spell

²⁷ Ibid., 114.

²⁸ Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient*, 267.

²⁹ Wallace, 'The Elephant's Foot and the British Mouth', 313.

³⁰ Scott, *Guy Mannering*, 352.

³¹ Ibid., 354.

suggests illusion and enchantment. In Guy's account of his time in India, illusion becomes intertwined with violence and potential corruption and the threatening alterity that exists alongside these rich resources becomes readily apparent. For Guy, the events that occur in India, most obviously the death of his wife Sophia constitute, in his words, "the catastrophe which has long embittered my life"; and it is a torture for him to revisit his memories of this time.³² In a long letter to his friend Mervyn, Guy depicts this eastern space as infectious, violent and ultimately fatal.

In Guy's narrative, the experience of the Mannerings indicates how the dream of India can give way to dangerous illusions that threaten the emotional and psychological tranquillity of invading Europeans. Guy recounts the breakdown of his marriage after a corrupt cadet suggested that Harry Bertram's courtship of Julia is directed at Mannerings's wife, Sophia. In this depiction of India, western perceptions become clouded by delusions: Sophia imagines her jealous husband a tyrant and Guy mistakes his daughter's lover for a man who would tempt his wife into infidelity. According to Guy, India acts as the catalyst that brings this tangled plot to a tragic climax. As he writes: "A very slight spark will kindle a flame where every thing lies open to catch it".³³ Guy challenges Harry Bertram to a duel that takes place beyond the walls of the fortress he commands. Harry falls at the first shot and is attacked and imprisoned by "some of these *Looties*, a species of native banditti, who are always on the watch for prey".³⁴ Sophia, who has followed her husband, is surrounded by a group of the bandits. Though she is quickly rescued, as Guy relates, "the incidents of this fatal morning [give] a severe shock to health already delicate" and she dies within eight months.³⁵ Mannerings continues: "Julia was also extremely ill, so much so, that I was induced to throw up my command and return to Europe, where her native air, time, and the novelty of the scenes around her, have contributed to dissipate her dejection, and to restore her health".³⁶

Guy's depiction of India is of a violent unregulated space where sexual jealousy and infectious illness are rife. India, in his construction, is a place that corrupts and destroys. His story immediately acts as a counter-narrative to his daughter's description of a romantic idyll populated by gentle Indian nurses telling captivating stories. Mannerings's Indian narrative, in contrast to

³² Ibid., 70.

³³ Ibid., 71.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Julia's, displays an anxiety in relation to empire that Nigel Leask has identified as common to much literature of Romantic Orientalism. Like the 'exotic, composite Orient of the Romantic imagination', Guy's construction of India portrays a space 'invested with an uncanny power to disturb.'³⁷ Mannering's empire-building activities in India have thus resulted in a violent disruption to the family unit and, in order to repair his relationship with Julia, Guy decides he must remove her from India, the source of corruption and illness. Harry Bertram's vow to repay his father's debts through Indian wealth at the close of the novel therefore contains an implicit threat of disaster coming after Guy's narrative of his Indian experiences. In Guy's account, India represents a perilous space that threatens colonial invaders with disease and death.

While Guy's narrative could be read as a 'realistic' construction of India that counter-balances the exotic imaginings of Julia, the varied accounts should not be placed in this kind of binary opposition. Rather, Guy and Julia's stories interweave as part of the novel's production of a shifting, indeterminate India. What connects their narratives is the illusionary power of India but, as Guy's letter forcefully emphasises, the dream-state is not always positive. The shifting depiction of India continues with Harry's own recollections of the East. His memories combine both the dream-like and the realistic. His letters range from discussing the "'trap-doors and back-doors'" of India that allow a Scottish man to pursue a promising career to describing "'the height and grandeur"' of sublime Mysore scenery.³⁸ However, his recollections insistently return to the trope of India as dream in a way that mingles memory and illusion. When he first sees the gypsy Meg Merrilies, he muses, "'Have I dreamed of such a figure? ... or does this wild and singular-looking woman recal to my recollection some of the strange figures I have seen in an Indian pagoda?'"³⁹ *Guy Mannering*, then, finally constructs a picture of India that remains elusive and indeterminate, a dream-like space that contains both fantasy and nightmare.

III

In 'The Surgeon's Daughter', Scott's vexed depiction of India as an illusionary space that evades western attempts at domination and understanding becomes

³⁷ Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1992), 4.

³⁸ Scott, *Guy Mannering*, 112, 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

heightened. This novella was published in 1827 as part of *Chronicles of the Canongate* and is presented to the reader by the fictional narrator Chrystal Croftangry. It tells the story of three young British people and their experiences in India during the mid 1770s, at the time of an uneasy truce between Haidar Ali, the ruler of Mysore, and the East India Company. At the outset, the framing narrative functions to situate the novella that follows as a British fantasy of India. Chrystal has taken up fiction writing, and is advised by his friend Fairscribe to do with his “Muse of Fiction” what “many an honest man does with his own sons in flesh and blood” and send her to India.⁴⁰ At this suggestion, Chrystal revels in the imaginative attraction to India that has persisted since reading the accounts of Robert Orme as a child, and exclaims:

Men, like Clive and Caillaud, influenced great events, like Jove himself. Inferior officers are like Mars or Neptune, and the sergeants and corporals might well pass for demigods. Then the various religious costumes, habits, and manners of the people of Hindustan,—the patient Hindhu, the war-like Rajahpoot, the haughty Moslemah, the savage and vindictive Malay—Glorious and unbounded subjects! The only objection is, that I have never been there, and know nothing at all about them.⁴¹

In response to this anxiety, the pragmatic Fairscribe replies, “Nonsense, my good friend. You will tell us about them all the better that you know nothing of what you are saying”.⁴² By placing this exchange between Fairscribe and Chrystal before the novella, Scott immediately dismantles any notion the reader might have that what follows is an authoritative depiction of India. Even before the novella begins, it has been emphasised that ‘The Surgeon’s Daughter’ represents Chrystal’s own act of imagining India.

Molly Youngkin argues that ‘Scott’s decision to have Croftangry adopt the view his friend expresses in the Preface seems to reiterate the idea that representations of the Orient may be merely that: simply representations.’⁴³ She continues:

⁴⁰ Walter Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), ed. Claire Lamont (London, 2003), 155.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Molly Youngkin, “‘Into the Woolf, a Little Thibet Wool’: Orientalism and Representing “Reality” in Walter Scott’s *The Surgeon’s Daughter*’, *Scottish Studies Review*, 3 (2002), 36.

Scott makes none of the claims to cultural authority made in the framing material to *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, the very claims that make Orientalist literature so objectionable to Said... He even states his thoughts on representing reality in a manner that discourages readers from looking for cultural authority in his work.⁴⁴

Even if 'The Surgeon's Daughter' may appear at moments to revel in stereotypical Orientalism of despotic rulers and exotic palaces, the narrative foregrounds from the outset that this is a fantastic vision of India created by a narrator who has no experience of the East beyond the imaginative.

Several characters within the novella itself repeat Chrystal's act of imagining India and thus the text explores the extent to which, for westerners in Britain, India functions as a dream-like space on which to project fantasies of a sensual, rich Orient. For Richard Middlemas, the illegitimate son of a Portuguese Jewess, the idea of India holds forth the promise of riches and adventure, the means by which he can escape his origins and achieve a high position in society. Indeed, Richard's act of imagining India directly parallels that of Chrystal. Just as Chrystal is prompted towards his effusions by the words of Fairscribe, Richard's dream of India is first articulated when the hero of the novella, Adam Hartley, mentions the possibility of becoming a surgeon in the East India Company. Richard exclaims, "Oh Delhi! oh, Golconda! have your names no power to conjure down idle reflections?—India, where gold is won by steel; where a brave man cannot pitch his desire of fame and wealth so high, but that he may realize it, if he have fortune to his friend!"⁴⁵ While Chrystal dreams of the imaginative stimulus India presents, Richard dreams of the money and status India offers. Material wealth and creative inspiration are intertwined in the western daydream of India, and such passages could be read in terms of a self-reflexive commentary on Scott's own imaginative appropriation of the East as a subject for fiction.

Richard is encouraged in his fantasy by the vivid descriptions of Tom Hillary, a recruiting officer for the East India Company. Hillary's account of India constructs an exotic image of a luxurious paradise, open for western possession:

Palaces rose like mushrooms in his descriptions; groves of lofty trees, and aromatic shrubs unknown to the chilly soils of Europe, were

⁴⁴ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁵ Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 198.

tenanted by every object of the chase, from the royal tiger down to the jackall. The luxuries of a Natch, and the peculiar Oriental beauty of the enchantresses who performed their voluptuous Eastern dances, for the pleasure of the haughty English conquerors, were no less attractive than the battles and sieges on which the Captain at other times expatiated. Not a stream did he mention but flowed over sands of gold, and not a palace that was inferior to that of the celebrated Fata Morgana. His descriptions seemed steeped in odours, and his every phrase perfumed in ottar of roses.⁴⁶

This dream of India is entirely illusionary: a narrative told to enchant men to the East India Company as it searches for recruits. It is the dream of India that in fact enables the Company to continue its imperial activities, for without such narratives as those offered by Hillary the Company would struggle to find enough willing bodies. As Wallace argues, these stories ‘bring to the subcontinent the ignorant and the self-seeking, the unemployable and the unmarriageable’.⁴⁷ Indeed, Hillary is far more useful to the Company constructing tall tales in Britain than actually participating in Indian campaigns and Scott highlights the imagined status of Hillary’s stories by emphasising his lack of experience in India. General Witherington later tells Richard that “‘Hillary’s services are too necessary in the purlieu of Saint Giles’s, the Lowlights of Newcastle, and such like places, where human carrion can be picked up, to be permitted to go to India’”.⁴⁸

When Richard becomes aware of the falsity of Hillary’s Indian vision, it is too late. He has already become part of the human carrion, recruited into the Company and drugged by Hillary. In Richard’s drugged state, his dream of India becomes a nightmare. Exotic fantasy slips into hellish visions that are filled with imperial anxiety. In his reverie, he dreams ‘a hundred wild dreams of parched deserts, and of serpents whose bite inflicted the most intolerable thirst — of the suffering of the Indian on the death-stake — and the torments of the infernal regions themselves’.⁴⁹ Awakening in a hospital ward in the East India Company’s headquarters on the Isle of Wight, surrounded by feverish and delirious patients, it seems that his nightmares have become reality. Richard’s dreams of the wealth and sensual luxury of India metamorphose

⁴⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁷ Wallace, ‘The Elephant’s Foot and the British Mouth’, 322.

⁴⁸ Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 231.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 212.

into horrific hallucinations as soon as he enters the East India Company's service.

Richard's nightmare hints at the disorientating danger of India that is realised when the narrative moves to Madras. The India of 'The Surgeon's Daughter' intertwines illusion and corruption to place the invading westerners in a position of vulnerability. What seem particularly under threat are the stable identities of the Europeans as they traverse this space. Richard's goal of promotion within the Company is abandoned after he murders his commanding officer and disappears from Madras for several years. When he next appears in the text he has assumed the disguise of a 'black domestic', Sadoc, and is part of the household of Adela Montreville.⁵⁰ His mistress, Madam Montreville, is a European who dresses in oriental clothing and commands a private army. In this oneiric space, the boundaries of gender and race display a potential fluidity and Adam Hartley appraises Madam Montreville as an "unsexed woman, who can no longer be termed a European".⁵¹ Negotiating India in 'The Surgeon's Daughter' does not necessarily result in the reinforcement of a stable sense of a European self. Rather, the novella views India as a sphere where identity can become radically indeterminate. Entering India in 'The Surgeon's Daughter' risks a confusion of the self with the illusionary and dream-like. While the novella destabilizes notions of India as a fixed, knowable space open for appropriation, it also reveals deep anxieties about the potential vulnerabilities of Britons attempting to dominate such an inscrutable sphere.

India also functions in the text as a realm of plotting and counter-plotting, where motives are seldom openly revealed. Richard brings his fiancé Menie, the surgeon's daughter, to India, under the promise of marriage. While plotting with Madam Montreville to give the beautiful Menie as a slave to Tippoo Ali in order to gain military power, Richard secretly intends to rescue Menie and betray Tippoo to the British. Madam Montreville, in her turn, intends to betray Richard herself. India is thus mapped as a space of intrigue, one that is particularly associated with concealed agency. Certainly, the Indian characters of the novella operate through collusion and disguise. When Adam Hartley finds out about the plot to enslave Menie, he enlists the help of Barak el Hadgi, a Fakir who, under the guise of a Holy Man, is 'one of those secret agents frequently employed by Asiatic Sovereigns'.⁵² In his attempts to liberate Menie, Hartley travels to Seringapatam and meets Hyder Ali, who is likewise disguised

⁵⁰ Ibid., 261.

⁵¹ Ibid., 259.

⁵² Ibid., 247.

as a Fakir. When Adam begs the disguised Hyder for assistance, the Nawaub remains absolutely inscrutable, regarding Hartley ‘with an inflexible and immovable aspect, similar to that with which a wooden saint regards his eager supplicants’.⁵³ Even the most powerful of Indians operates through artfulness and veiled agency, evading full comprehension and domination. Consequently, the novella destabilizes notions of India as a fixed space, populated by figures available for essentialist categorisation and description.

The description of Hyder’s palace in the encounter between Hartley and the disguised Nawaub indicates further the elusive nature of India. Here, the narrative reflects western dreams of oriental splendour, but the sumptuous description is intertwined with ambiguity:

Hartley entered without farther opposition, and was now in a grove of mango trees, through which an infant moon was twinkling faintly amid the murmur of waters, the sweet song of the nightingale, and the odours of the rose, yellow jessamine, orange and citron flowers, and Persian Narcissus. Huge domes and arches, which were seen imperfectly in the quivering light, seemed to intimate the neighbourhood of some sacred edifice, where the Fakir had doubtless taken up his residence.⁵⁴

This passage strongly reinforces the liminality of the space Hartley traverses and again pulls against a stable depiction of India. Scott’s description draws upon the vocabulary of British Orientalism in its portrayal of scented flowers, nightingale song and eastern architecture, but these objects are all seen imperfectly through ‘twinkling’ and ‘quivering’ light. Hillary’s stories of India present a visual and material India that is fixed in the gaze of the westerner, embodied in the oriental dancing girls looked upon by their English conquerors. In contrast, the passage above presents a fluid vision of India that seems poised to dissolve. It is an elusory space that retains the potential to escape European perception. In this text, Indian landscapes and people can only be discerned faintly, and it is not a Fakir that Hartley meets but the most powerful adversary of the British, Hyder Ali.

The climax of the novella reveals the full extent of the dangerous alterity of this illusionary realm. Reclaiming his identity as the ruler of Mysore, Hyder Ali puts an end to the conspiracies of Richard and restores Menie safely to Hartley. However, he still insists on Richard being named the Governor of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

Bangalore. The unsuspecting Richard readies himself to mount an elephant for his triumphal procession throughout the city. However, the magnificence that seems to confirm Richard's power is in fact the means of his destruction. Telling Richard to "accept now what is the fruit of the justice of Hyder", Hyder makes a small gesture with his finger, and the elephant throws Richard off his back, with one stamp of 'his huge shapeless foot' putting 'an end at once to [Richard's] life and to his crimes'.⁵⁵ Richard's Indian fantasies end with him being reduced to a "lump of bloody clay", his identity obliterated to the point where he is no longer recognisably human.⁵⁶ The moment in which he seemingly gains command of this space as the Governor of Bangalore is in fact the moment at which his own death is made certain. In India, the illusion of triumph conceals death, and the dream-like sphere finally resists western understanding and domination. At the close of the novella, Hyder Ali rejects an unstable truce with the East India Company and vows to be a "destroying tempest",⁵⁷ leaving the reader with a promise of more bloodshed in the Mysore wars.⁵⁸ Indeed, for Europeans in India, there can be no happy ending. Unlike *Guy Mannering*, 'The Surgeon's Daughter' ends not with marriage but with tragedy. Menie's health and happiness are so damaged by her experiences in India that she cannot consider marrying Hartley. The 'gallant and disinterested' Hartley himself only resists the dangers of India for two years before he contracts a contagious disease and dies.⁵⁹ The bleak ending of the novella thus reinscribes the danger that is inherent in Britain's dream of India.

IV

Imagining India in the Waverley novels is loaded with complexity and ambivalence. As this article has argued, the ambiguity evident in Scott's personal letters and non-fictional writing about the subcontinent continues to dominate the construction of India in his narrative fiction. *Guy Mannering* and 'The Surgeon's Daughter' together reveal a rising sense of imperial

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ For a succinct account of the Mysore wars and the representation of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan in British popular culture see Anne Buddle, *The Tiger and the Thistle: Tipu Sultan and the Scots in India 1760–1800* (Edinburgh, 1999), 9–37.

⁵⁹ Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 285.

consternation centred upon the vulnerability of westerners attempting to negotiate this eastern space. The various acts of imagining India in the Waverley novels produce a construction of India as an illusionary sphere which conceals danger and corruption behind its apparent treasure store of wealth and creative inspiration. Moreover, the texts' repeated foregrounding of the act of imagining India resist notions of an 'essential' India. In the novels, India does not function as an ontologically stable space existing in a fixed binary with Europe: it remains fluid, indeterminate and inscrutable. The various narratives of India, encompassing Julia's creative idyll, Guy's corrupting and violent realm, and Hillary's luxurious and sensual paradise, are placed in dialogue within individual texts and Scott's oeuvre as a whole, resulting in a complexity which is not accounted for in a Saidian reading of the novels. While *Guy Mannering* and 'The Surgeon's Daughter' may seemingly collude in an Orientalist daydream of the East by presenting accounts of an exoticised India, such narratives are persistently deconstructed. By returning insistently to the trope of the India-dream, Scott highlighted the constructed nature of British Orientalist discourse and positioned Orientalist narratives, including his own, as a western fiction.

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