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'Nymphs', Plural: Plurality among Scots in the East India Company

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Why did Scotsmen living and working in Calcutta describe their South Asian domestic companions as 'nymphs' and their mixed-race children as 'legions'? This article explores the coded, classical metaphors that Scots abroad used to romanticise and normalise their interracial, non-monogamous relationships. While 'plurality' was common practice among British East India Company men, Scottish contexts imbue George Bogle and his friends' classical metaphors and plural lifestyles with additional meanings. On the one hand, the permissibility of marriage by habit and repute in Scotland threatened to legitimate their plurality as polygamy. On the other hand, Enlightenment-era theories positioned travel to South Asia as going back in time, to a time when one could encounter pre-civilised societies where polygamy was deemed normal. Using letters exchanged between George Bogle and his family and companions at home and abroad, the author argues that Scots in the East India Company used temporal plurality to excuse their sexual plurality. These letters also reveal that, though eighteenth-century understandings of the classical body rendered all 'nymphs' sexually desirable and available, Bogle and others used racial modifiers to differentiate between South Asian and Scottish women. Despite this racialised epistolary discourse, a contextual and comparative analysis reveals that South Asian women and their children actively denied and defied the classical descriptions that attempted to objectify and silence them.

> I don't know what the reason but marriage seems to be quite out of fashion and I believe I must for the support of the family couple myself to some of the nymphs of this country – I don't think you would be pleased with a Black sister in law – would you Chuffles – Coulour you know is all the custom, and then I should be connecting with such ancient families our oldest families are but of yesterday when compared to them.
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> George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 15 January 1773.

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> The mention of plurality, may possibly startle many of my readers, especially those of the fair sex; but such is common among natives of opulence, and is not unprecedented among Europeans. I have known various instances of two ladies being conjointly domesticated; and one, of an elderly military character, who solaced himself with no less than sixteen.
>
> Thomas Williamson, *The East India Vade-Mecum*, 1810.

Spring had come to Glasgow. It was April 1773, and Annie Bogle had just removed the straw brooms that protected her brother George's South Asian plants from the cold, Scottish winter. Warming her toes by the hearth, she sat down to read another of his letters lately arrived from Calcutta.[1] As always, his letter opened with apologies for not answering hers. Four letters later, at last he had responded. She read hungrily, knowing she would devour the pages again and again and recite them to family and friends. But she paused on the eighth page: 'I don't think you would be pleased with a Black sister-in-law – would you Chuffles?' Anticipating her apprehension, George explained, 'I don't know what the reason but marriage seems to be quite out of fashion and I believe I must for the support of the family couple myself to some of the nymphs of this country'.[2] Nymphs, plural. In Scotland, couples living together—like the Bogles' servants James and Janet—could be considered legally married simply by cohabitation, and bigamy was permitted in more than a few cases.[3] Had Annie's brother openly admitted to plural, interracial marriage? Perhaps, and George Bogle was not alone in his plural relations with South Asian women. Bengal Army Officer Captain Thomas Williamson's guidebook for East India Company recruits, with its Latin-inspired title, *East India Vade-Mecum* (published postmortem in 1810), described the sexual profligacy of eighteenth-century East India Company men as 'plurality'. Though it might 'startle many of my readers', Williamson wrote, 'plurality … is not unprecedented among Europeans'.[4]

'Plurality' and its many meanings and implications offer a new approach for examining the East India Company's culture of interracial conjugal relations and cohabitation. On the one hand, plurality implied non-monogamy. Company

1. All place names are contemporary to the period unless stated otherwise and all quoted spelling errors are original.

2. George Bogle to Anne Bogle, 15 January 1773, Glasgow City Archives (henceforth GCA), TD1681 (14).

3. Leah Leneman, 'Wives and Mistresses in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Women's History Review*, 8 (1999), 685.

4. Thomas Williamson, *The East India Vade-Mecum; or, Complete Guide to Gentlemen Intended for the Civil, Military, or Naval Service of the Hon. East India Company* (London, 1810), 412.

men had sex with multiple women and often lived domestically with numerous women of different statuses. For Scots abroad this could connote irregular, albeit legal, plural marriages in line with Scots law. On the other hand, however, Company men excused their sexual profligacy in India through temporal plurality. In line with Scottish Enlightenment stadial theories, multiple time periods (barbaric, savage, civilised) were thought to coexist simultaneously around the globe. This, in tandem with an increased interest in Greco-Roman history and association between the British and Roman empires, inspired Glasgow-born East India Company emissary George Bogle and his friends to liken themselves to Roman imperialists living amongst 'nymphs'. Using the lives and letters of Bogle and his contemporaries, this article illuminates how and why Scotsmen abroad evoked classical allusion to mollify potential critics of their non-monogamous lifestyles and differentiate their sexual profligacy from the polygamy of 'Oriental tyrants'.[5] Behind this epistolary discourse, however, are glimpses of a reality in which, unlike the Greco-Roman 'nymph' of classical literature, South Asian women did not metamorphose away.

While scholars have revealed much about the extractive, economic, and genealogical implications of interracial families in eighteenth-century Calcutta, they have not yet considered how the epistemic violence of archival silences and renaming was facilitated by coded, classical metaphors that functioned to romanticise and normalise interracial plurality among Scots abroad. This article explores the possible implications of plural marriages for colonial Scotsmen living in India by situating Bogle and his contemporaries' descriptions of South Asian 'nymphs' within varying, often conflicting, contexts: Scottish Enlightenment stadial theories, irregular marriage in Scotland, and the rising obsession with and racial whitening of Greek and Roman histories in Britain. Bringing these together, a multi-context analysis reveals that sexual and temporal plurality were co-constituted and axiomatic to Scottish participation in East India Company cultures of interracial cohabitation. Wherever possible, too, this article integrates additional contemporary accounts of interracial relationships in Calcutta to reveal the potential realities of Bogle's relationships despite his attempts to hide behind classical imagery. This paper will therefore couple an analysis of Scottish epistolary discourse with the reality that South Asian women and their children lived contrary to the insinuated meanings of Bogle's 'nymph' and his friend David Anderson's 'legion'.

5. Sudipta Sen, *A Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (New York, 2002), 108.

Contexts and Contributions

Scholars have long speculated on the 'ignoble' yet 'inevitable' interracial sexual liaisons of British men abroad, particularly in the East India Company.[6] They have shown that cohabitation was accepted practice among all ranks of Company men and have illuminated the different relationships that South Asian women had with British men in Calcutta, from household concubinage and slavery to politically motivated marriages with noblewomen, both monogamous and not.[7] Scottish historian William Dalrymple uses the bigamous marriages found in Company wills to make visible British non-monogamy.[8] Literary theorist Betty Joseph similarly identifies that there were a 'range of [domestic] positions available to colonials in the eighteenth century', despite European tendencies to villainise South Asian polygamy. She uses Major William Palmer's proud polygamous portraiture to show that British men's non-monogamy could be outwardly permissible because it was a form of colonial extraction.[9] The work of social historian Peter Robb, however, indicates that some Britons abroad described their non-monogamous arrangements as 'left-handed' or 'irregular'—related to but not the same as Christian marriage—to evade censure.[10] Sudipta Sen likewise argues that exercising paternal responsibilities was a crucial way in which British men distinguished themselves from the South Asian polygamists they deemed 'Oriental tyrants' and Durba Ghosh has shown that most men British men kept their interracial sexual-domestic relationships 'under wraps' for fear of the 'social and professional costs', but ultimately provided for their families after death or departure in line with British 'codes of masculinity'.[11] Neither the practices of 'plurality' amongst Britons abroad nor their desire to differentiate their profligacy from South Asian polygamy are new subjects of historical inquiry.

The same archives that strove to differentiate British non-monogamy from Mughal polygamy have rendered South Asian women silent and nameless, and scholars have developed diverse creative methodologies for recovering women

6. Kathleen Wilson, 'British Women and Empire' in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds), *Women's History, Britain 1700–1850* (London, 2005), 273, 275.

7. Indrani Chatterjee, 'Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India' in *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi, 1999), 49–97; Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), 69–105.

8. William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London, 2002), 29.

9. Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840; Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago and London, 2004), 96–7.

10. Peter Robb, *Sex and Sensibility: Richard Blechynden's Calcutta Diaries, 1791–1822* (Oxford, 2012).

11. Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, 108, 128; Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 108, 110.

from that 'colonial amnesia'.[12] Gayatri Spivak has argued that subaltern women cannot speak but that we must continue to ask how and with what implications colonial archives purposefully silence them.[13] Durba Ghosh and Betty Joseph have built upon Spivak's work by looking for and at the ways in which South Asian women strained against the categories they were situated in—'woman', 'concubine, mistress, single mother, Hindu'.[14] Anjali Arondekar and Durba Mitra have similarly investigated the archival construction of 'sexuality' and the 'prostitute', respectively.[15] Their findings reveal how colonial 'conspiracies of silence' are rooted in simultaneous '*objectification and erasure*'.[16] Rather than taking colonial categories at face value, Ghosh writes that archival erasures are 'instructive' because of their unevenness, and Mitra argues that their 'definitional fluidity requires a history' because they are 'testaments to a prolific sociological imaginary'.[17] This article adds 'nymph' to Ghosh, Joseph, Arondekar, and Mitra's list of categories. It examines the 'nymph's' definitional fluidity across Scottish and imperial contexts and then pairs a discursive analysis with more forthcoming contemporary examples to uncover not only how classical allegory was a form of objectification and erasure but also the ways in which South Asian women defied that allegorical description.

In many ways, George Bogle was no different from the men that Ghosh, Sen, and Joseph have studied, many of whom were also Scotsmen. Bogle was evasive about his relationships, used coded language, and omitted names. He also provided for his longtime domestic companion, 'Bibi Bogle', upon his death. She received a pension of twenty rupees a month between his death in 1781 and hers in 1838.[18] A century later, Bogle's descendant Robert Gardiner would also ensure that 'nothing of "*family matters*"' would be printed in Clements Markham's late-nineteenth-century account.[19] However, most of the aforementioned authors do not distinguish between Scottish and English East India Company men, let alone Highland and Lowland Scots. Highland Scots in India used Gaelic phrases and

12. Margot Finn and Kate Smith (eds), *The East India Company at Home* (London, 2018), 9.

13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke, 1988), 28.

14. Durba Ghosh, 'Decoding the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in Reading the Archives of Colonial India' in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *New Imperial History* (Cambridge, 2004), 297–316.

15. Joseph, *Reading the East India Company*; Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham N.C., 2009); Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton, 2020).

16. Emphasis original. Mitra, *Indian Sex Life*, 22.

17. Ghosh, 'Decoding the Nameless', 318; Mitra, *Indian Sex Life*, 9, 180.

18. Hugh Richardson, 'George Bogle and his Children', *The Scottish Genealogist*, 29/3 (1982), 76.

19. Emphasis original. Robert Gardiner to Miss Brown, 1875, GCA, TD1681 (57); Clements Markham, *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet* (London, 1876).

terminology to describe their interracial and plural domestic relationships. This not only reflects trends of Gaelic patronage in late-eighteenth-century British India, but also suggests that Highlanders sought to avoid censure for their interracial relationships among non-Gaelic readers while romanticising it for Gaelic-speaking family and friends.[20] Lowland Scots, in contrast, like Bogle and his companions, used classical imagery to navigate and convey a culture of interracial plurality that they embraced in India. Bogle's use of the term 'nymph' thus offers an inlet for exploring Lowland Scots' plural relationships within specifically Scottish colonial, Enlightenment, legal, and cultural contexts.

George Bogle Jr was born to merchant and 'Tobacco Lord' George Bogle Sr and Anne Bogle of the influential landed Sinclair family in 1746.[21] He was the youngest of seven children after Martha, Robert, Mary, Elizabeth, John, and Anne. George attended courses at the University of Edinburgh under the tutelage of various Enlightenment savants and had additional informal connections through his father's rectorship at the University of Glasgow. In 1761, George left Scotland to pursue a commercial course at a 'counting house' in Enfield. Afterwards, he nursed a sick family friend (a 'Dr Wark') in France and, by 1768, was working with his brother Robert in London in their family trading corporation, Bogle and Scott.[22] He returned to Glasgow one last time in 1769 before setting sail for India.[23] Bogle arrived in Calcutta in August 1770 and quickly climbed the Company ladder from writer to assistant secretary and then private secretary of Governor-General Warren Hastings. In Calcutta he made and reunited with Scottish friends, viewed and performed in local renditions of Shakespeare, and acquired a romantic-domestic partner or 'Bibi', roughly translated as 'wife or lady,' who contemporaries and historians have variably designated as a poor man's wife or a gentleman's mistress.[24] In 1774, Hastings chose Bogle to spearhead an expedition to Tibet which saw him in the Himalayas for upwards of nine months. George Bogle remains most known for his role in the first British expedition to Tibet, and it is rumoured that, while there, he became romantically entangled with another woman: 'Tichan', sister of the Panchen Lama, who exercised religious and stately authority in Tibet.

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20. Many thanks to Thomas Archambaud for this insight at the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society meeting in Stirling, 2025. Thomas Archambaud, 'Enlightenment, Education and India: Sir John Macpherson and King's College, Aberdeen' *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 11/2 (2024), 117.

21. Tom Devine, *Tobacco Lords: Scotland and the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic* (1975; Edinburgh, 2024).

22. Gordon T. Stewart, *Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774–1904* (Cambridge, 2009), 17.

23. George Bogle to Elizabeth Bogle, 4 November 1769, GCA, TD1681 (7/3).

24. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 33; Robb, *Sex and Sensibility.*

While most scholarship on Bogle has focused on the 1774 expedition, particularly its implications for cultural exchange, colonial extraction, and Hastings' conciliatory politics, few scholars have speculated on the plurality of Bogle's kinship practices—with 'Bibi Bogle' and 'Tichan', among possible others—and the children who returned to Scotland after his death.[25] According to Tibetologist Hugh Richardson, Bogle had upwards of six children in South Asia, and two (possibly three) of them returned to Scotland after his death in 1781. In 1948, a Mrs Nora Heathcote claimed to be a descendant of George Bogle's through his 'Tibetan wife … sister of the [Panchen] Lama', and Richardson 'had no doubt about the authenticity of her family's tradition regarding George Bogie's Tibetan marriage from which she and many others were descended'. She also admitted that the marriage had initially been 'concealed' because it was not 'blessed by the church'.[26] Yet marriages did not require a church's blessing in Scotland. While Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 sought to prevent 'clandestine marriages' in England, Bogle would have been aware that his cohabiting relationships with Tichan or Bibi Bogle could be considered marriages of 'habit and repute' under Scots law. Though historian George Woodcock has disagreed with Richardson over the proof of Bogle's relationship and surviving daughters, Bengal's Ecclesiastical Registers list Bogle's multiple 'natural' children in 1784 and letters exchanged between George's siblings date their arrival in Scotland to 1785. This article considers Bogle's domestic partners and children not only as matter of fact, but through his use of racialised classical metaphors.

Multiple connected circumstances can help to situate the unique approach of Lowland Scots like Bogle to interracial plural sex abroad. First, Scotsmen were only able to join the East India Company *en masse* in the 1760s through networks in London.[27] This meant that they navigated cultures of Scottophobic Englishmen as much as they did South Asians while abroad, seeking to prove themselves as 'North Britons' and worthy contributors to the British empire. Second, marital laws in Scotland were much more flexible than those in England. Katie Barclay has shown how, with the rejection of Hardwicke's Mar-

25. Kate Teltscher, *The High Road to China: George Bogle, the Panchen Lama, and the First British Expedition to Tibet* (New York, 2006); Kumar Pradhan, *The Gurkha Conquests: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal* (Oxford, 1991); Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India* (Oxford, 2013); Stewart, *Journeys to Empire*; Joshua Ehrlich, *The East India Company and the Politics of Knowledge* (Cambridge, 2023).

26. Hugh Richardson, *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture* (London, 1998), 470.

27. Andrew Mackillop, 'A Union for Empire? Scotland, the English East India Company and the British Union' in Stewart J. Brown and Christopher A. Whatley (eds), *Union of 1707: New Dimensions* (Edinburgh, 2008); Andrew Mackillop, *Human Capital and Empire: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British Imperialism in Asia, c.1690–c.1820* (Manchester, 2021).

riage Act in 1755, Scotland 'developed a flourishing trade in irregular marriage', and Leah Leneman and Rosalind Mitchison have explored how such marriages could be established by a promise, statement of mutual consent, or cohabitation.[28] In fact, irregular marriage and exogamy increased in Scotland during the eighteenth century, particularly in Scotland's Southwest regions. Religion was not an impediment for irregular marriages, as the Scottish Presbyterian Kirk viewed non-conformity as negotiable and less significant than sexual sin, and there is evidence that Scottish marital leniency could be extended to Scots living in India until the end of the century.[29] Third, Scottish Enlightenment intellectuals designed a grandiose theory of human social change over time that mapped progress onto four stages from savagery to commercial society. Using contemporary travel accounts and surviving sources from antiquity, Adam Smith, John Millar, David Hume, and others placed Britain at the pinnacle of modernity and used other existing societies to exemplify past states of society. Historians have long noted the consequences of these theories, in which whiteness and the hetero-monogamous patriarchal family were associated with civility, for the emergence of modern racism and the gender binary.[30] Fourth, eighteenth-century Britons had an 'infatuation with the ancient'.[31] In Scotland this manifested in a literary-cultural investment in classical learning and a national-political debate regarding whether Romans had settled in Scotland, both of which were used to situate Scotland as an advocate for rather than adversary to a growing British empire.[32] The first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency Robert Clive compared the British empire to Rome in 1764 when he wrote, 'I am returning to Bengall, like Caesar to Rome'.[33] Six years later, as Scots flocked to

28. Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 2011), 42–3; Leah Leneman and Rosalind Mitchison, *Sexuality and Social Control: Scotland 1660–1780* (Oxford, 1989); Leah Leneman, 'Legitimacy and Bastardy in Scotland, 1694–1830', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 80/1 (2001), 45–62.

29. Katie Barclay, 'Marriage, Sex and the Church of Scotland: Exploring Non-Conformity Amongst the Lower Orders', *Journal of Religious History*, 43/2 (2019), 163–79; John Grame Esq. to the East India Company Home Office, British Library (henceforth BL), HOME/MISC/730, 1.

30. Nicholas B. Miller, *John Millar and the Scottish Enlightenment: Family Life and World History* (Oxford, 2017); Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* (New York, 2013); Rosi Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014).

31. Rosane Rocher, 'British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government' in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993), 229.

32. Felicity Loughlin and Alexandre Johnston (eds), *Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Boston, 2020); Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford, 2013).

33. Allen Edwardes, *The Rape of India: A Biography of Robert Clive and a Sexual History of the Conquest of Hindustan* (New York, 1966), 281.

the Calcutta streets, Bogle and his friends compared their domestic-romantic partners to 'nymphs'.

Bogle and other Lowland Scots in India used classical allegory to convey a hypocritical culture of practicing what would in Scotland be considered legal, clandestine marriages. The duality of 'plurality'—as both sexual and temporal—thus illuminates a heretofore unexplored attempt to mimic Roman imperialism by observing firsthand, plural cohabitation. Inspired by Kathleen Wilson's concept of 'imperial mimicry', which she defines as the colonisers' attempt at 'mastery over all forms of difference' by performed repetition, I propose the concept of classical mimicry in an attempt to understand the Scottish colonial-Enlightenment desire to observe and embody forms of the past.[34] Removed from the civilising improvement efforts in Enlightenment Edinburgh and Glasgow, Bogle and his contemporaries were in a place where (and when) they believed sexual plurality was permissible and 'nymphs' abounded. Differentiating it from the concomitant polygamy of 'Oriental tyrants', classical allusion functioned to represent Bogle's non-monogamy as something familiar and desirable and sex with South Asian women as available. In line with Enlightenment histories, if the Romans had 'civilised' Britain and Julius Caesar had observed polygamy among Scottish Picts, perhaps Bogle's plural relationships abroad could be considered natural for a Scot transposed to that time. His racialisation of the 'nymphs' he encountered in Calcutta, however, meant that only he could return to a civilised space. Bogle thus used the phrase 'nymph' as a literary trope through which he situated himself as akin to a Romano-British imperialist, offering his sisters a speculative and palatable glimpse into his romantic life while ultimately objectifying and obscuring the South Asian women with whom he cohabitated.

The Many Meanings of 'Nymph'

In eighteenth-century literature, the nymph was a widely used classical figure that implied beauty, mutability, and sexual consent, and yet also reflected contemporary social criticisms of those very same things. Most young Scottish adults received a classical education and so were familiar with the multitude of meanings ascribed to the nymph. In his teenage years, for instance, George Bogle attended logic classes at the University of Edinburgh, where Professor John

34. Wilson's definition and use of 'mimicry' is different from Homi Bhabha's, for whom it describes colonised people taking on characteristics of colonisers, not the other way around. Kathleen Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire: Theatre and Performances of Power in the British Imperial Provinces, 1656–1833* (Cambridge, 2022), 18–20.

Stevenson taught Greek and Roman history and classics.[35] During his residence in South Asia between his arrival in 1770 and death in 1781, Bogle's personal library contained dozens of books on Greece and Rome—both factual histories, such as Nathaniel Hooke's *Roman History*, and contemporary translations of epic poetry, including Alexander Pope's translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—most of which associated the nymph with otherworldly beauty.[36] In one such text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, nymphs were beautiful feminine figures who were associated with nature, whom humans prayed to, and who had the agency to leave their male lovers. One of Ovid's characters, Daphne, transformed from a water nymph into a laurel tree to evade Apollo's love chase.[37] Bogle drew upon the nymph's beauty and chameleonlike qualities in his descriptions of his friend, 'Miss Nancy'. In a letter to his sister Mary, written in September 1771, he celebrated Nancy's return to Scotland for her ability to 'shine in the front box of the Playhouse, and … be the life and joy of a country wedding'. He then referenced John Milton's 'L'Allegro' (1645), writing, 'come sweet nymph and bring with thee'.[38] Nymphs were classical literary figures associated with feminine beauty and mutability, and they could be allegorically deployed to attribute those qualities to living women.

Yet, as art historian Cora Gilroy-Ware has identified, the classical body was contested and protean in the eighteenth century. While it was associated with feminine beauty, it was also a somatic vessel for 'competing claims over Greco-Roman Culture'. Two competing schools of thought vied for the meaning of the classical body: politicised classicism sanitised it, focusing on Greek freedoms in principle, whereas many artists portrayed the classical body as 'mysterious and erotically charged'.[39] Though Bogle represented 'Miss Nancy' positively and echoed contemporary associations between the nymph and beauty, he would also have been aware of the negative associations of classical figures. His library in Calcutta contained early-eighteenth-century mock epics like Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1717), which used the image of the nymph and the fall of Rome to levy critiques against luxury.[40] It also included Ephraïm Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*

35. George Bogle, 'Edinburgh Journal, 1760–1761', GCA, TD1681 (39); 'Book of essays written by students in the class of John Stevenson, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, Edinburgh University, 1737–50', John Stevenson's Papers, University of Edinburgh Archives, DC. 4. 54.

36. 'Account Sales', GCA, TD1681 (21); George Bogle to Elizabeth Bogle, 22 August 1774, GCA, TD1681 (11); George Bogle to Robert Bogle, 1 September 1771, GCA, TD1681 (12); George Bogle to Elizabeth Bogle, 22 August 1774, GCA, TD1681 (11); George Bogle to Robert Bogle, 1 September 1771, GCA, TD1681 (12).

37. Ovid et al., *Ovid's Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books* (London, 1717), 425, 574.

38. George Bogle to Mary Bogle, 1 September 1771, GCA, TD1681 (25). Emphasis mine.

39. Cora Gilroy-Ware, *The Classical Body in Romantic Britain* (New Haven and London, 2020), xii, 10, 15.

40. 'Account Sales', GCA, TD1681 (21); Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (Edinburgh, 1751), iii–iv, 9–10, 29.

(1743) and John Kersey's *General English Dictionary* (1708), both of which defined 'nymphomania' as 'a kind of madness attended with lascivious speeches and gestures' and associated the nymph with female genitalia via the surgical process of nymphotomia.[41] Bogle's library also contained a copy of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Antiquities of Herculaneum Exposed* (1757–92), a compilation of engraved archaeological findings from Pompeii, which popularised the idea that classical statues were white and sanitised rather than erotic, 'barbaric', and painted.[42] The plural meanings ascribed to nymphs in Bogle's library suggest that he could have associated them with luxury, lust, and sanitised whiteness all at the same time.

Bogle was also both personally and intellectually familiar with contemporary intellectual discussions of classical antiquity.[43] His father, George Bogle Sr, was Lord Rector of Glasgow University six times between 1737 and 1757, and he maintained lifelong connections with many faculty members. Based on this connection, George Bogle Jr corresponded regularly with Professors at Glasgow University including historian William Richardson, philosopher John Millar, and linguist George Muirhead.[44] In 1766, Millar gave talks about the 'origins' of social and political institutions, and Muirhead gave lectures on Greek and Roman poetry as well as the 'rise and fall of Rome'.[45] Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1778) argued that the excess of pleasure—especially in lust and luxury—was an impetus for social decline and cited Rome as an example. He argued that it was 'the excessive opulence of Rome' that had given rise to the 'common prostitution of women' and the 'liberty of divorce'. As a result, he said, Ovid and Horace 'degraded the woman of virtue, [and] … exalt[ed] the character of a kept-mistress'.[46] If pleasure and a lack of marital commitment was a cause for social decline and liberated feminine sexuality was at its heart, the nymph was a figure worth condemning. Why, then, would Bogle refer to his friend Miss Nancy as a nymph if there was the possibility of negative association?

41. G. S. Rousseau, 'Nymphomania, Bienville and the Rise of Erotic Sensibility' in Paul-Gabriel Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 1982), 101; Ephraïm Chambers, *Cyclopaedia, Or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* vol. 2 (London, 1743); John Kersey, *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum; Or, A General English Dictionary* (London, 1708).

42. Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York, 2010), 61–2.

43. Colin Kidd, 'The Scottish Enlightenment and the Matter of Troy', *Journal of the British Academy*, 6 (2018), 97–130.

44. Mary Bogle to George Bogle, 21 February1776, GCA, TD1681 (19/26).

45. D. William James Duncan, 'Records of the Literary Society of Glasgow, 1764–79. Transcribed from the Society's Minutes, 1830', National Library of Scotland (henceforth NLS), MS. 3113–3114.

46. Millar, *Origins*, 95–105.

Miss Nancy provides an opening for considering the contrasting and colligate meanings ascribed to the nymph. In 1772, George Bogle's brother John Bogle alluded to Nancy's lack of sexual experience. John wrote, 'Miss Nancy remains a virgin which I am surprised at as she is very deserving of a good husband'.[47] Nancy was both a nymph and a virgin to the Bogle brothers, which echoes the eighteenth-century medical theorists who argued that women could abstain from 'nymphomania' by cultivating their sensibility and avoiding sex.[48] '[Good] husband' suggests that Nancy belonged to a social class that ensured a respectable marriage. The nymph could thus straddle two realms of desirability: that of the imagination (the erotic) and the normative (courtship and marriage). However, the Bogle family did not just represent Nancy as a sociable virgin. Soon after he arrived in Calcutta, Bogle wrote a letter to Annie wherein he included a longwinded and detailed hypothetical story in which she might try to visit him. *En route* to Calcutta, however, Annie would be kidnapped by 'Hords of Arabs … and married to Haram Alrasheid', the Iranian Calif who was immortalised in Antoine Galland's translation of *Arabian Nights* (1717). Bogle speculated that, back in Glasgow, Nancy would be happy for Annie, admiring that 'she seems to have fallen on her feet, and I wish everyone could get as good a match, I dare say he will treat her vastly well'.[49] He portrayed her as someone desirous of marriage and the luxuries associated with Eastern harems. After some debate, however, he conceded to Annie that Nancy would persuade their father to ransom her: perhaps she would recall contemporary European associations between Arab men and the treatment of women. In sum, Nancy emerges as complex individual and family friend. The plurality of meanings held in the figure of the 'nymph' allowed Bogle to render Nancy's desirability sociable and virginal while also being cause for concern.

'Nymphs' in Calcutta

'Nymphs' in Calcutta were imbued with further meaning. Though Bogle's use of the term nymph still insinuated femininity and desirability, he always acknowledged race when using the term to describe South Asian women. Writing to Mary from West Bengal in February 1771, Bogle described his journey to Calcutta 'on the banks of the Ganges', where he saw 'women dressed in their thin muslins and bathing in the river'. These bathing women, he recalled, 'brought to

47. John Bogle to George Bogle, 22 March 1772, GCA, TD1681 (21).
48. Rousseau, 'Nymphomania', 101.
49. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 31 October 1771, GCA, TD1681 (14).

ones remembrance the pictures of nymphs and goddesses – their fine postures, their flowing hair, and their dresses answer exactly'. However, Bogle added a caveat: 'it must have required a Don Quixotes fancy to have turned [the bathing women's] Lully Complexions into Lillys and Roses'.[50] Bogle thus suggested that the distinction between South Asian and classical 'nymphs and goddesses' was skin colour. 'Lully' could refer to a cow's kidney in Britain and 'lal' or 'lali' as a feminine adjectival means 'red' or 'ruby' in many South Asian languages including Persian, which Bogle was studying at the time.[51] He most likely derived meaning from the comparable British and South Asian meanings of the term, as kidneys could be ruby or red in colour. Perhaps Bogle's use of 'lully' as a descriptor of skin tone also came from contemporary descriptions of seventeenth-century Italian-French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully as having a 'black' 'complexion'.[52] In any case, 'lully' had a negative connotation in Bogle's writings because he juxtaposed the complexions of South Asian nymphs to 'lillys and roses', flowers associated with beauty, whiteness, and purity in Britain—a synecdoche of British women.[53] Moreover, Bogle's reference to *Don Quixote* recalls how the epic novel's protagonist, lowborn noble Alonso Quijano, fashioned himself a knight-errant after reading too many chivalric romances; and, on his adventures, took a servant to be his princess. Bogle suggested that the nymph-like image of South Asian women bathing in the Ganges was just a façade and that, like Quijano with his 'princess', Britons abroad required a romantic imagination to see past South Asian women's complexion and reality.

Upon reading his letters, Bogle's sisters would have been familiar with his literary tropes. All four frequented their family's library and 'maps in the north room'.[54] They had likely read, as he had, John Henry Grose's *Voyage to the East Indies* (1757), which described the South Asian 'lungee' as 'a long piece of silk, or cotton-stuff' that 'descends to about mid-length' and 'gives that loose flow … of which the statuaries are so fond of for expressing the garb or drapery of a

50. George Bogle to Mary Bogle, 17 February 1771, GCA, TD1681 (25).

51. 'Lully', OED Online. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/lully_n?tab=meaning_and_use#38691220 [Last accessed 8 April 2026]; 'Lali', Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. University of Chicago Library. https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?qs=%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact [Last accessed 8 April 2026].

52. John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London: T. Payne and Son, 1776), 242.

53. 'Lily, n. 3.a'. OED Online. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/lily_n?tab=meaning_and_use [Last accessed 18 March 2026]; 'Rose, n. IV 14', OED Online, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/rose_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#24937256 [Last accessed 18 March 2026].

54. 'Edinburgh Journal, 1760–1761', GCA, TD1681 (39).

nymph'.[55] Perhaps Bogle was explicitly parroting Grose's classical comparison when describing the women he had seen bathing in the Ganges. If so, he was also invoking Grose's associations between contemporary India and pre-modern 'Romans and Western Heathens' for their supposed 'similarity of customs, religious and civil'.[56] In this context, Bogle's references to *Don Quixote*, which was set in medieval Spain, would have made sense for the temporal separation between himself in India and his audience in Scotland. British literature often associated Mughal India with 'medieval gloom'.[57] Bogle's letters also suggest that his sisters had some shared knowledge about the stereotypes pertaining to harems. Bogle speculated that if Annie were 'confined in a Seraglio' she would 'Pas[s] the day in Cool and Shady Bowers with Melodious Birds and Cascades of Rose water' and would be covered in 'Riches and Jewells'.[58] Playing on the stereotype of beautiful, lush scenery, Bogle assumed that his sisters had at least rudimentary understandings of the stereotypical British abstraction of India. The romantic allure of India despite its supposed backwardness could amalgamate in the figure of the nymph.

A month later, in March 1771, Bogle used the term 'nymph' again. The heat of the day was burning off less at night. He was homesick. He sat to write a letter to his sister Elizabeth and lamented how much he wanted to dance with her and converse over a fire. He admitted that though the Company had 'the appearance of a good society', it lacked 'that jest and glee it has with you'. He then played on the trope that women were treated worse in non-European cultures, writing that 'the natives of the country have … no society' largely because 'women are intirely excluded from it'. Perhaps he had forgotten that his previous letter shared that 'European ladies are very often not invited till supper, or at least till the evening' in Company society.[59] In any case, Bogle finished his letter by asking Elizabeth to send him 'a waistcoat, or sword knott or something of your Handicraft' as well as 'some patterns for ruffles or aprons etc'. The latter, he said, he would 'get worked here by some of the *Sootie coloured nymphs*'.[60] Here, he distinguished Elizabeth's embroidery 'handicraft' from the 'patterns … which I shall get worked here', insinuating a hierarchy in complexity that painted his sister as more skilled than the women he would commission to sew her patterns in India.

55. John Henry Grose, *A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing Authentic Accounts of the Mogul Government in General* (1757), 143.

56. Grose, *Voyage*, 228–9.

57. Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India,* 10.

58. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, May 1770, GCA, TD1681 (7/9); George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 31 October 1771, GCA, TD1681 (14).

59. George Bogle to Martha Brown, September 1770. GCA, TD1681 (7/11a).

60. Emphasis mine. George Bogle to Elizabeth Bogle, March 1771. GCA, TD1681 (25).

Bogle's description of South Asian women as 'Sootie' ambiguously marks them as raced, lower class, and sexually available. In the mid-eighteenth century, soot and dirt had many connotations—some connected to race, others not—making the term an ambiguous middle ground between skin colour and social stature. Where some contemporary European intellectuals associated dirt with race,[61] others associated it with the lower orders, and others still associated it with the corrupt vices of fashionable women and the 'female willfulness' of prostitutes.[62] Being 'Sootie' and 'nymphs' positioned female servants and seamstresses in Calcutta as doubly sexually available—for their associations with dirt and classical beauty. Bogle and others' references to nymphs in South Asia thus established a desirability that incorporated and excused race so long as their subjects remained anonymous. His descriptions of nymphs in South Asia made space for the realities of racial difference and the fantasies that India existed in a pre-civilised time, while masking their actual identities. Here, however, is an opening for us to consider the financial and material systems that relied on South Asian women's labour as seamstresses and companions.

Bogle's letter to Elizabeth uses the metaphor of the 'nymph' and racial-sexual descriptor 'sootie' to minimise what would have been a process of negotiation. We know from the diaries of contemporary architect and surveyor Richard Blechynden that many South Asian women were able to broker allowances, both as manufacturers and as live-in companions with monthly stipends. Blechynden's diary recounts how he discussed payment with two intimate companions (he mentions two 'Bibis'), a housekeeper ('the Dhye'), and a guardsman ('the Durwan'). He writes that one 'Bibi', 'Mary Wilson', the daughter of a South Asian woman and European father, desired unrestricted access to 'Victuals & clothes' and money 'to purchase … cloth', in response to which Blechynden articulated, 'this does not suit me … if she has a fixed salary I shall be more easy in mind'. They eventually agreed on '40 Rs pay' per month, but this was complicated by 'her mother' who 'want[ed an] allowance out of her pay', as well as '2 Rupees per Diem' for 'the Durwan' and 'a Cook.' A month later, Blechynden had similar negotiations with another unnamed 'Bibi'; according to him, she similarly wanted unrestricted access to clothing but 'at last she asked for 1 Rupee per Diem said she shall have 32 Rs per [month] … she seems pleased and

61. French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc speculated that Black people would be as fair as any European if they 'did not perpetually dawb themselves with dirt'. Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Natural History: General and Particular* (London, 1749), 400.

62. Lisa T. Sarasohn, '"That Nauseous Venomous Insect": Bedbugs in Early Modern England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 46/5 (2013), 517; Clark Lawlor, '"The History of Half the Sex": Fashionable Disease, Capitalism, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Literature and Medicine*, 35/2 (2017), 365.

so am I'.[63] If Blechynden's diary is any indication, Bogle would have discussed finances, including payment for stitching Elizabeth's patterns, with 'Bibi Bogle' or the other women he referred to as 'nymphs'. Bogle's letters to Elizabeth thus use the image of a racialised 'nymph' to obscure the reality in which South Asian women negotiated their financial ties.

Bogle was not the only aspiring imperialist to describe South Asian women using classical metaphor. Dublin-born linguist and merchant's son William Marsden, who was in a similar position to Bogle and other Lowland Scots for his interest in benefitting from the English East India Company, similarly referred to Sumatran women as 'nymphs'. Marsden's *Brief Memoirs* include poems that he wrote in Sumatra between 1771 and 1779, some of which were addressed to real, though unnamed, women. He dedicated his 'Birth-day Ode' to someone who was simply not an 'imaginary person', and wrote that it was 'the genuine feelings of the writer', which 'Coax'd ev'ry *nymph* that haunts our woods, / [and] Each *Naiad* of Sumatran floods'.[64] Marsden gave himself credit for coaxing Sumatran 'nymphs' out and then said it 'was their duty' to 'pay a just respect to beauty' on 'this auspicious day' and to 'inspire … your poet'. Here, his focus on Sumatran women's supernatural ability to appear when called echoes the classical nymph's associations with nature and metamorphosis. He was channelling the nymphs of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, albeit in Sumatra rather than Greece. Yet, Blechynden's diaries emphasise that Marsden's desire to supernaturally summon Sumatran women at whim was purely fantasy. When inquiring after 'a Girl' he fancied, Blechynden inquired if she had been 'any Gentleman's Bibi' and whether she 'had left his service from dislike or ill usage'.[65] South Asian women could leave Company men on their own volition; they were not at the beck and call of Britons abroad as Marsden and Bogle's nymphs suggest.

Although Marsden was silent about his muse's identity, writing 'description cannot say too much', he did equivocate about her complexion. He wrote:

> You can't conceive what pains and toil,
> Lest Sol her blooming cheek should spoil,
> By which attentions, as you know,
> Her skin's still white as northern snow.[66]

63. Richard Blechynden, 'Diary Vol. 33', Blechynden papers, Vol. XXXVI, BL, Add MS 45613, 27–28, 156–57, 392–93, 358.

64. William Marsden, *Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late William Marsden; Written by Himself: with Notes from his Correspondence* (London, 1838), 17–18. Emphasis mine. Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire*, 369–420; James Mulholland, *Before the Raj: Writing Early Anglophone India* (Baltimore, 2021).

65. Blechynden, 'Diary Vol. 33', BL Add MS 45613, 376.

66. Marsden, *Brief Memoir*, 18. Emphasis original.

He admitted that keeping Sumatran women's cheeks from spoiling takes 'pains and toil', as if to suggest that the 'white' of 'northern snow' is something that they must work for. Just as Bogle referred to Bengali seamstresses as 'sootie' 'nymphs', Marsden was attentive to skin colour but used classical euphemism to communicate desire and fantasise a supernatural power over her regardless. Though eighteenth-century Britons increasingly imagined the nymphs of antiquity as white (an inaccuracy spread by Winckelmann's *Antiquities of Herculaneum*), it was their supposed sexual desirability and availability rather than their race that was inherent in the term 'nymph'. By analogising South Asian and Sumatran women to the nymphs and naiads of antiquity, Marsden and Bogle thus idyllically likened themselves to Greco-Roman heroes at the beginning of Western civilization. As Blechynden's diaries reveal, however, their classically inspired 'nymphs' were not representative of reality.

Marriage and Nymphs, Plural

In January 1773, George Bogle addressed a letter to his sister Annie in which he admitted to a lifestyle of interracial domestic plurality. He knew she would not be 'pleased with a Black sister in law' but divulged that he had 'coupled' himself to 'some of the nymphs of this country'. While non-monogamy was not unusual in Company Calcutta, Bogle's use of the term 'nymphs' raises questions about Scottish ideas about marriage, promiscuity, and polygamy. Distinctly Scottish understandings of marriage and the presence (albeit contentious) of bigamy in Scotland would have shaped Bogle's mentality concerning the Company culture of non-monogamy, how he represented his relationships to his brothers and sisters back in Glasgow, and how they received the news of his domestic-sexual exploits. It would thus have been possible for Annie to envision his 'coupling' with 'nymphs of this country' as polygamy.

Marriage was a familiar subject of written communication for the Bogle family. They often discussed Hardwicke's Marriage Act, which had passed in England in 1753. The Marriage Act and similar legislation in Ireland instituted the requirement of parental approval and a ceremony in a register office or registered Church. The Act did not, however, pass in or apply to Scotland or anywhere else in the empire. A comparable bill was read and proposed in Scotland in 1755 but was dropped due to popular opposition and a clerical desire to keep Scotland's Presbyterian Kirk separate from the Church of England.[67] Though it was

67. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 42–3; Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland, 1660–1780* (Edinburgh, 1998), 58; T. C. Smout, 'Scottish Marriage, Regular and Irregular' in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriag*e (London, 1981), 204.

not proposed again, it was an ongoing subject of debate. In 1763, the Belles Lettres Society in Edinburgh argued that 'the extension of the marriage act would be of large disadvantage to this country'. Secretary of the Society Anthony Ferguson cited examples from Roman history, Enlightenment notions of civilised government, and the specificities of certain customs to nations to make his case against Scotland adopting the Marriage Act, insinuating that Scotland and England were distinct nations. Ferguson also emphasised the necessity of marriages to be lasting, which he said parental interest and increased formality might hinder. He argued that England's Marriage Act would prevent marriage altogether in Scotland, and thus forestall what he considered to be the virtues of marriage: 'continuing the species and for training up the offspring in such manner as best to serve the interests of the state'.[68] As late as March 1772, Bogle's brother John reported that 'nothing is talked of' in Scotland but 'the marriage Bill', and that 'as I am no politician and suppose you get the publick papers, I shall leave to your own observations'.[69]

Bogle's 'observations' on marriage and extra-marital sexual relationships were shaped not only by the rejection of Hardwicke's Marriage Act in Scotland, but also by the legal status and popularity of clandestine marriages under Scots law. 'Irregular' (but still valid) marriages could be established by a 'statement of consent by both parties', 'a promise of marriage in the future', or by 'habit and repute' wherein a couple essentially lived as husband and wife.[70] 'If one party denied the marriage, the other could raise a declarator … before the Commissary Court', and women frequently raised a 'Declarator of Marriage' either to legitimate or disprove a marriage.[71] The Bogle family witnessed at least one clandestine marriage. Soon after George left for India, the family's 'sometimes servant' James Bogle was charged with an 'unnatural marriage'.[72] According to Janet Miller, she had married James Bogle in 1767 with witnesses. In 1772 and 1774, however, Janet petitioned for the poor roll, claiming she had been financially abandoned by her husband. At first, James Bogle denied marrying Janet at all, and, in 1774, George's brother Robert got involved in the case, defending James. The legal back-and-forth that ensued was resolved in August 1774 when both parties signed a petition that they had in fact been married in 1771. By the close of the decade even George Bogle, who had been away from Glasgow for the entire legal skirmish, identified them as a married couple. Writing to Daldowie

68. 'Speeches on some questions debated in the Belles Lettres Society', NLS, Adv.MS.22.3.8, 139, 141.

69. John Bogle to George Bogle, 22 March 1772, GCA, TD1681 (16).

70. Leneman, 'Legitimacy and Bastardy in Scotland', 46.

71. Leneman, 'Wives and Mistresses in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', 673.

72. 'Conjoined Processes of Declarator of Marriage, etc., and Declarator of Freedom., etc: Janet Miller v James Bogle. 21 January 1773 and 19 August 1774', NRS, CC8/6/536.

from Rangpur in 1779, George Bogle told Annie to 'Remember me kindly to James and Jenny'.[73]

Scottish family law could also be applied to Scottish families stationed in South Asia. An extract of a letter written in Edinburgh and addressed to the East India Company Home Office suggests that Scottish courts could recognise clandestine and bigamous marriages abroad. In 1799, John Grame Esq. in Edinburgh wrote to the East India Company office in London to instruct upon the distribution of Mr Leighton's estate. 'From the conception of Mr Leighton's contract of marriage, which Mrs Leighton shewed me', Grame wrote, 'there is an express obligation in it to make the children of *both* marriages equal'.[74] Grame did not specify whether it was Mr or Mrs Leighton who had been married twice, nor did he specify whether the named Leighton's marriages were concurrent or consequential. Despite Enlightenment preoccupations with polygamy, it is possible that Mr Leighton, like Bogle and others, had more than one wife. The letter also does not mention the names of Leighton's children, but does specify that, while the 'eldest son may be nominally heir, he must communicate ratable share of his Father's estate, leases, as well as others to his Brothers and Sisters'.[75] In line with Scots law, daughters could and did inherit land and property and there were certain cases in which bigamous marriages were legally acknowledged.[76] As late as 1799, Scottish legal notions of marriage and inheritance could thus be extended to Scots living abroad.

Stationed all over the world, the Bogle siblings often discussed marriage. In 1772, George teased Robert about 'the daughter … of an Old American planter', who he had hoped to marry. He then consoled him for his unrequited love, writing, 'I expect in your next letter to have accounts of your marriage to some charming creature, and that happy in the possession of her you have intirely forgot the loss'.[77] Katie Barclay's study of marriage in eighteenth-century Scotland reveals that regular and endogamous marriage remained important for first-born social elites despite the popularity of irregular marriage.[78] As the eldest son to a landed mother and merchant father, Robert Bogle would have felt some pressure to marry, despite his older sister Martha's marriage to Thomas Brown. George teased, however, that 'Robin' would not give his heart to a 'Scotch Lass' while visiting Scotland because his heart was already taken in the Caribbean. Despite social expectations, Robert likely had relations with a mixed-race or enslaved woman while living and working in Grenada. George also discussed marriage

73. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 22 November 1779, GCA, TD1681 (44).
74. HOME/MISC/730, BL, 1. Emphasis mine.
75. BL, HOME/MISC/730, 1.
76. NRS, CH1/2/35 and GD248/182/3.
77. George Bogle to Robert Bogle, 1 September 1771, GCA, TD1681 (12/12).
78. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 44.

with his eldest and married sister Martha. In 1772, he described his conversations with the 'widows of the late Nabobs' in Murshidabad and concluded that 'the inhabitants of this country were never possessed of many respectable qualities … except an attachment to their own family'. It is in this context that he relayed to Martha that 'there are a great many ladies come out [to India] this year, but not many marriages'.[79] As he commented upon foreign marriage customs, Bogle also admitted to Annie that 'I must for the support of the family couple myself to some nymphs of this country'.[80] Bogle's use of the phrase 'for the support of the family' suggests that, because only Martha was married and neither of his older brothers was married, it was his responsibility to marry. Perhaps he was toying with Annie, as she was also unmarried and women faced more pressure than men in eighteenth-century Scottish courtship.[81]

George Bogle and his family-friend Alexander Kynynmound Elliot alike admitted to family members that they might seek out some sort of heterosexual interracial relationship akin to marriage for the 'support of the family'. Elliot, Company official and Bogle's 'intimate' friend, attested in a letter to Maria Amyand, his sister-in-law to-be, that 'I must be married myself to save the family'.[82] Elliot was visiting London and wrote this letter in the context of unrequited love for its recipient. He understood that marriage was a financial and familial obligation, having discussed it at length in a letter to his mother after the death of his father.[83] Like Bogle, Elliot also reflected that there were few European marriages in South Asia, writing that 'the three young ladies' that his mother knew in Calcutta would have 'every prospect of [marital] success' if only they were to 'accept any offer'. He even conceded that, of the three, 'Charlotte is my favourite as you know or seem to know', but that 'I would not give her for a touch when I was asked for an Indian Beauty'.[84] In a convoluted way Elliot admitted to his mother that in Company Calcutta he would choose an 'Indian Beauty' over a Scottish one. Perhaps he was already 'coupled' before Charlotte's arrival.

What would Bogle and Elliot's 'coupling' with South Asian women have looked like? Blechynden's diaries reveal that financial ties were negotiated and that relationships were, at least in some instances, chosen rather than forced. Despite the silence of Elliot's 'Indian Beauty' and 'Bibi Bogle' in the men's letters home, love and feeling were encouraged in Scottish cultures of courtship and Blechynden's diary reveals him grappling with the love he had for Mary Wilson in Calcutta. After Mary left him, Blechynden wrote, 'I am continually thinking of

79. George Bogle to Martha Brown, 10 December 1772, GCA, TD1681 (7).
80. George Bogle to Anne Bogle, 15 January 1773, GCA, TD1681 (14).
81. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 63.
82. Alexander Elliot to Maria Amyand, September 30, 1776, NLS, MS. 11020.
83. Alexander Elliot to Gilbert Elliot, 23 April 1777, NLS, MS. 11020.
84. Alexander Elliot to Agnes Elliot (neé Dalrymple), 8 November 1777, NLS, MS. 11020.

her … I loved her I should not have let her quit my house'.[85] Durba Ghosh has shown, too, how interracial 'coupled' households merged European and South Asian cultures.[86] 'Bibi Bogle' would have worn European clothes, and George Bogle would have smoked hookah and eaten South Asian food. Bogle's estate, executed by his friend David Anderson, corroborates this fact. It included a 'silver hookah plate' as well as 'stockings' and 'ladies ruffles'. However, the listing of such items and the absence of 'Bibi Bogle' on his auctioned estate suggests that European ladies' items were not guaranteed for Bibi Bogle to keep. Where clothing and furniture was a source of financial security for Scottish wives, 'Bibi Bogle' did not leverage the same authority over the goods she shared with Bogle.[87] Perhaps her belongings were simply not listed, or perhaps she was one of multiple unlisted domestic companions. Interestingly, many items from Bogle's estate were auctioned off to other women in Calcutta: 'Durga Churn' purchased the silver hookah plate and 'Nilly Dutt' purchased a tablecloth, ladies' ruffles, stockings, and hats.[88] The omission of Bibi Bogle from Bogle's estate can thus illuminate the material culture she would have had access to while he was alive, but does not represent the experiences of South Asian women in interracial relationships writ large.

Scholars have long observed the variety of relationship structures present in Company Calcutta, and another more visible form of permissible plurality can be evidenced by Bogle's friend and executor David Anderson. Anderson lived with multiple 'Bibis' in Calcutta. In May 1775, one of them visited Company man Samuel Charters at midnight and afterwards was given thirty rupees.[89] In June, another of Anderson's 'Bibis' visited Scottish company man Thomas Graham. Three months later, Graham wrote to tell Anderson that 'She is still in my Zenana' and 'She would not let me be familiar with her until I paid her the 100 Rupees *you* ordered'.[90] In August, Charters chastised Anderson, saying 'You are a Devil of a Fellow at getting Children – You will have a *legion* by and by'. These Scotsmen's exchange of women reveals how interracial non-monogamy within Calcutta households could resemble arranged prostitution and consensual adultery between households. Their exchange of words reveals that Scots in Calcutta did not just use classical metaphors in letters addressed home, but also in community abroad. Like Bogle's 'nymph', Charters used the Roman 'legion'

85. Richard Blechynden, 'Diary Vol. 33', 196, 429; Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 3.

86. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 47–8, 136, 147.

87. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 49.

88. George Bogle, 'Residue of Estate', GCA, TD1681 (81).

89. These are likely different women because of the significant difference in payment—Graham paid 100 rupees, and Charters paid thirty rupees. Samuel Charters to David Anderson, 4 May 1775, BL, Add 45425, f. 78.

90. Thomas Graham to David Anderson, 11 June 1775, emphasis mine; Thomas Graham to David Anderson, 1 September 1775, David Anderson Papers, BL, Add 45422, f. 102.

to jest, romanticise, and temporalise Anderson's lewd lifestyle.[91] 'Nymphs' and 'legions' suggest that they not only justified their own profligacy by imbuing it with romantic imagery but also used allegory to deny fault and tout purpose. Sexual-domestic plurality was either blamed upon fictitious female sprites or served a greater military-imperial function.

It is not clear whether Bogle contributed to Anderson's economy of inter-household sexual relations, but it is not out of the question. After teasing Annie with the phrase 'I must for the support of the family couple myself to some nymphs', Bogle conceded that 'Coulour you know is all the custom'. He then followed with, 'I don't think you would be pleased with a Black sister-in-law – would you Chuffles', which either satirised his partner's race or his sister's prejudice.[92] The 'nymphs' that Bogle 'coupled' himself to were, in his words, 'Black'. His phrase 'couple' leaves open the possibility of copulation, marriage, or both, as eighteenth-century authors used the verb 'couple' variably to define informal sexual relations and formal marriage.[93] Interracial marriage was also a popular motif in eighteenth-century literature, though it came under scrutiny during and after the 1770s for its real-life implications.[94] In this context, and in the context of legal marriage by habit and repute per contemporary Scots law, permissible to him as the youngest son, Bogle's use of the phrase 'nymphs', plural, suggested at least *laissez-faire* promiscuity in line with Anderson's traffic in women and at most nuptial non-monogamy.

Bogle followed his provocative question ('I don't think you would be pleased with a Black sister in law') with a statement: 'and I should be connecting with such ancient families … our oldest families are but of yesterday when compared to them'.[95] Bogle's use of 'ancient families' reflects the duality of contemporary reverence for India's social and political longevity and the notion that past and present India were one and the same. The Enlightenment philosopher Adam Ferguson argued that progress was inhibited by hot climates, implying that 'the modern description of India is a repetition of the ancient'.[96] But he also admitted a semblance of positivity for the supposed 'ancientness' of South Asia, positing that

91. Samuel Charters to David Anderson, 17 August 1775, Add. 45425, f. 109, David Anderson Papers, BL. Emphasis mine.

92. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 15 January 1773, GCA, TD1681 (14), Papers of the Bogle Family, ML.

93. 'Couple, v'. OED Online. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/couple_v?tab=meaning_and_use#8116447 [Last accessed 8 April 2026].

94. Susan B. Iwanisziw, 'Intermarriage in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Literature: Currents in Assimilation and Exclusion', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 31/2 (2007), 59, 61; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in the Eighteenth-Century* (Philadelphia, 2000), 139, 141.

95. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 15 January 1773, GCA, TD1681 (14).

96. Adam Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh and London, 1767), 186, 193, 198, 202.

the 'arts of mechanism and manufacture were [first] found in hotter climates' and that these arts had 'survived … the ruins of time, and the revolutions of empire' in India.[97] Other texts in Bogle's library, including Grose's *Voyage*, likewise associated India with a past version of Britain's present.[98] By establishing India's present as also its past and comparing contemporary India to either classical antiquity or 'medieval gloom', Britons abroad could reason that travelling to less civilised places was the equivalent of time travelling.[99] Bogle thus drew on this imagined past-tense version of India to legitimise his unofficial polygyny there. If, per Scottish stadial theories, 'barbaric' civilizations treated women worse than advanced civilizations *vis-à-vis* social institutions such as polygamy, it would not be out of the question for Britons to participate in polygamy while in India. The 'ancientness' of Bogle's supposed South Asian in-laws could even represent the marital longevity that the Belles Lettres Society lauded, and his reference to 'family' could have served to assuage the contemporary emphasis on familial reputation in Scottish courtship.[100] Bogle's use of nymph thus rendered South Asian women part of a past that was otherworldly yet accessible and commensurable.

Along with the surviving letters to his sisters, letters from family-friend Isabella Morehead indicate that George Bogle's family and friends in Britain knew about or at the very least inferred the plurality of his relationships with women in India. Writing from London in May 1776, Mrs Morehead thanked Bogle for his 'present of muslin' and 'string of beads', and in return wrote that she included a 'piece of Paisley gauze' for him. She admitted that it might be 'a poor return for the fine things you send me, but I thought it might be a curiosity in your part of the world, and might please one of your female acquaintances'.[101] The plurality with which she referred to Bogle's 'female acquaintances' hints at either the increasing trend that British women sought husbands abroad or the increasing visibility of British men with multiple South Asian wives.[102] In any

97. Ibid., 185.

98. Grose, *A Voyage*, 78.

99. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Subject* (New York, 2002) 13, 23.

100. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 78.

101. Isabella Morehead to George Bogle, May 1776 in 'Notes' in Charles Morehead, M.D. (ed), *Memorials of the Life and Writings of the Reverend Robert Morehead* (Edinburgh, 1875), 396–8. Emphasis mine.

102. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, increasing numbers of British women ventured to South Asia. Though previously limited by the Company, British women were increasingly galvanised to be agents that might uphold British morality abroad. Oftentimes, however, the reputation of those women was coloured by an assumption that they only sought fortunes through marriage in India. As a result, they were donned the moniker 'nabobina' after the male version of a British agent who had 'gone native' or acquired a fortune quickly and supposedly immoral ways, 'nabob'. This trope was reproduced in various cultural theatres, including in Marianna Starke's *Sword of Peace; or, a Voyage of Love* (London, 1788) and Samuel Foote's *The Nabob; A Comedy, in Three Acts* (London, 1772).

case, Isabella's letter takes for granted the plurality of Bogle's heterosocial and potentially romantic relationships.

Between the letter he addressed to Annie in January 1773 and the arrival of his children in Scotland after his death in 1785, George Bogle's familial correspondence is silent about his interracial non-monogamy. This can partly be explained by his role in the East India Company's 1774 expedition to Tibet. Governor-General Warren Hastings commissioned him to observe and describe socio-cultural differences, politics and property, as well as the environment and potential crops.[103] Once *en route*, George Bogle's letters and journals discussed South Asian and Himalayan women in a way that merged his preoccupations with sexuality and beauty with the observation-based language of a natural historian. He described Kashmiri women as 'far more beautiful than the Damsells of Thibet; but … more wicked, and apt to go astray'.[104] He also relayed differences between Bhutanese, Kashmiri, Chinese, Bengali, and Tibetan women's clothing, social responsibilities, and natures, comparing them to each other rather than to Greek and Roman nymphs.[105] His surviving descriptions of Tibetan women also omit any inkling of a romance with 'Tichan, sister of the Panchen Lama'. It is possible that George Bogle had, by 1774, acclimated to a culture of silent paternalism.[106] However, even as he grew silent about his relationships and his descendants restricted what '*family matters*' were evident in the archive, it is clear that Bogle practiced interracial non-monogamy in Calcutta and had children with at least two Asian women.[107]

'Family Matters'

There are records of at least four of George Bogle's children—three daughters and a son. He sent one of his daughters, Mary Bogle, to London to be educated in 1780. The note he received of her wellbeing does not reflect a familial relationship but rather one of property. 'Mrs Stewart', the wife of John Stewart, who published an account of Bogle's mission to Tibet in 1777, addressed a letter to Bogle in August 1780 thanking him for 'the present', who, she wrote, was 'a fine creature'. She added:

103. Warren Hastings, 'Appointment of Mr Bogle' in Markham, *Narratives*, 6–13.
104. George Bogle, 'Account of priestly orders in Thibet, c.1774', GCA, TD1681 (1).
105. 'Account of Thibetan experiences', GCA, TD1681 (31).
106. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 110.
107. Robert Gardiner to Miss Brown, 1875, GCA, TD1681 (57). Emphasis original.

> I shall regret my inability if I cannot educate her in the manner I should wish. What is in my power I will do for her with the most heartfelt satisfaction for the sake of him she belongs to. She often mentions you and whenever anything is not quite to her wishes, she says she will go back to Bengal to her Papa Bogle.[108]

The letter was signed by another hand which read: 'Mary Bogle from Bengal'. Language such as 'belongs to' and 'the present' makes Mary Bogle out to be an object rather than an adopted daughter. She was likely six years old, as that was the age when children were typically sent back to Britain from South Asia.[109] Mary was therefore not the daughter of a Tibetan woman because she would have been born in 1774, and Bogle did not arrive in Tibet until October 1774.[110] 'Mary Bogle from Bengal' was most likely the daughter of one of the South Asian women Bogle described as a 'nymph' between 1770 and 1773.

Bogle's other three children remained in South Asia with him until his death. His son George Bogle Esquire passed away shortly after he did in 1782, and two of his other daughters, Mary and Martha, were sent back to Glasgow in 1784. His friends Claud Alexander and David Anderson arranged for them to be baptised in Bengal on 10 February 1784, in anticipation of their departure. The Bengal Ecclesiastical Registers refer to them as the 'natural children of the late Mr George Bogle'. It is possible that their move was influenced by the founding of the Military Orphan Society in 1782, which Captain William Kirkpatrick established in part to limit 'Anglo-Indian' children from returning to Britain. While it is unclear whether Bogle intended for his children to return to Scotland before his death, his homesick epistolary discourse and the fact that most children were handsomely provided for suggest that he intended for them to return to Scotland and that Alexander and Anderson implemented his desires in light of the Military Orphan Society.[111]

Mary and Martha boarded the *Southampton* on 10 December 1784. On 7 June 1785, Robert Bogle informed his cousin William Scott, 'I have received advice that two of poor George's children is on board the *Southampton* … I shall await their arrival in order to get them settled'.[112] Three years later, Annie Bogle wrote to Robert from Daldowie to inform him of their wellbeing. It was long rumoured that Mary and Martha Bogle were the daughters of 'Tichan, sister of the [Sixth Panchen] Lama', who, according to Richardson, was listed on the Bogle family

108. Richardson, 'George Bogle and his Children', 78.
109. Stewart, *Journeys to Empire*, 73.
110. George Bogle to Warren Hastings, 5 December 1774, GCA, TD1681 (8/13).
111. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 56.
112. Richardson, 'George Bogle and his Children', 79.

tree. However, the only family tree I came across did not mention 'Tichan' and listed George Bogle as having 'died unmarried'.[113] It is possible that multiple family trees exist, in which case Bogle's daughters Mary and Martha Bogle were only considered family in some cases. Regardless, they were forced to leave their mother behind and spent the rest of their adolescence on the Bogle family estate of Daldowie. They even ended up marrying in Scotland; Martha married Mr William Brown in 1807, and Mary married Mr Josias Fairley in 1808 and, later, a Mr Hamilton.[114] Records left of Bogle's children therefore confirm that he had multiple sexual relationships while in South Asia and that his children were able to return to Britain in the 1780s regardless of Company attempts to prohibit it.

The different circumstances in which the first daughter and second and third daughters were sent to Britain—to a friend as a gift and to family members as orphaned children—also reveal the possibility that Bogle placed more value on one of his multiple partnerships. Perhaps it was his younger daughters' maternal proximity to whiteness that decided their propinquity to the Bogle family. As Bogle and Marsden's references to 'nymphs' have shown, skin colour was used to distinguish South Asian women—both at home and abroad. Ellen Filor's research on Alexander Hall has shown that Scottish families were concerned about the appearance of returning mixed-race children. In 1777, siblings John and Isabella Hall inquired after their deceased brother's mixed-race daughter Peggy. John asked the executor of his brother's estate in Sumatra whether she was 'Tawney Colourd' and cautioned that they could only 'have her here', in the Scottish Borders, if she was 'of the ordinary Complexion of this country'.[115] In the end, Peggy was sent to Scotland like Bogle's younger daughters, suggesting that all three had a certain proximity to whiteness.

Complexion mattered to Scottish families, but we cannot deduce that the value Bogle placed on one of his romantic-domestic companions over another was solely due to race. Status also mattered. Muslim noblewoman Faiz Baksh had a non-monogamous family with Company official William Palmer; and Khair-un-nissa Ali, the granddaughter of a court nobleman in Hyderabad, had a family with Company translator James Kirkpatrick.[116] It is therefore unclear whether it was complexion, status, caste, or something else that led Anderson to commodify his sexual-domestic partners, requesting thirty rupees for one and 100 for another. Though it was not unheard of for Company men to leave goods and pensions to multiple sexual-domestic companions, Bogle only accounted for

113. 'Family Tree', GCA, TD1681 (A).

114. Richardson, 'George Bogle and his Children', 79.

115. Ellen Filor, 'The Intimate Trade of Alexander Hall: Salmon and Slaves in Scotland and Sumatra, c. 1745–1765' in Finn and Smith (eds), *The East India Company at Home*, 329.

116. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 81, 91.

'Bibi Bogle' in his will.[117] Had Bogle assumed a monogamous relationship before his death, or were other partners simply not mentioned? His letters, will, and estate auction are all silent on this front.

Despite the paternal intentions of pension schemes, research has shown that Company wills and programmes like Lord Clive's 1770 Military Fund did not benefit South Asian widows. They remained in Calcutta with insufficient funds while their children were sent to Scotland; and though they were well-informed about what they could receive, they often had to seek professional assistance to stake their claims.[118] While Hugh Richardson writes that Bibi Bogle received twenty rupees a month from Bogle's estate between his death in 1781 and hers in 1838, the figures do not add up.[119] Bogle's auctioned estate totalled at 16,160.14 rupees.[120] If Bibi Bogle received twenty rupees a month for fifty-seven years, there would only have been 2,480 rupees remaining for his daughters and Scottish relatives. As Andrew Makillop and Durba Ghosh have shown, most funds were sent home to Scotland and it was the children, rather than the Bibis, who were handsomely provided for.[121] It is therefore most likely that Bibi Bogle would have had to turn to Lord Clive's Military Fund, although it was during this time that the Home Office attempted to limit it to white widows. She would have fought to maintain her stipendiary benefits, straining against Bogle's discursive category of 'nymph', which represented her as metamorphosing and temporary like the naiads of antiquity. If Bibi Bogle received twenty rupees a month until her death, that indicates her ability to successfully resist the colonial systems that intended to overlook her.

South Asian women like 'Bibi Bogle' had financial and familial ties to Scottish men. However, the figure of the 'nymph' obscured that reality. Bogle's use of classical metaphors shows that he embraced both the fantasy that Britons had inherited of Rome's empire and of a colonial culture of interracial domesticity, and he used the former to excuse the latter. As Durba Mitra has argued, the 'definitional fluidity' of archival categories like the 'prostitute' or 'nymph' 'requires a history'. To Bogle and his readers, the term 'nymph' implied beauty, intangibility, and sexual consent, and yet also reflected contemporary social criticisms of the same. Bogle and other Lowland Scots' uses of classical allegory is thus a 'testament to a prolific sociological imaginary that was systematically built' and 'predicated on the ongoing assessment of women through their sexuality'.[122] While Scots abroad rendered their relationships palatable to family back home,

117. Dalrymple, *White Mughals.*

118. Usha Devulapalli, 'Pension Schemes in Colonial India: Beneficial for Native Women?' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 7/6 (June 2018), 22–3.

119. Richardson, 'George Bogle and his Children', 80.

120. Bogle, 'Residue of Estate', GCA, TD1681 (81).

121. Mackillop, *Human Capital and Empire,* 142; Ghosh, *Sex and the Family,* 33.

122. Mitra, *Indian Sex Life*, 5, 9, 21.

they also reinforced the notion that sexual deviancy and polygamy were tied to race and place, and that India reflected Rome before its 'fall'. For Bogle's family in Scotland, plurality would have been abhorrent, and so 'coupling' with 'nymphs' from 'ancient families' was a way for him to offer his sisters a speculative glimpse into his romantic life while distancing it from them geographically and temporally.

Playing Caesar

Fifteen years after Annie had received George's letter, she watched his daughters play in the parlour. Martha and Mary sat on the same nursery stools that she and George had used to stage plays.[123] Annie smiled thinking of George's proclivity for playing Julius Caesar. He had stood on those very stools to command an audience of Romans upon his return from conquests abroad. She had played Portia, of course, the voice of reason warning him of conspiracy. Annie sighed, returning to the present, and picked up her quill to share with her brother Robert, 'our little girls are in good health and doing well'.[124]

Unlike Caesar and Robert, George never returned home and was buried in Calcutta. Though Anne did not get to see her youngest brother again, she did have a small piece of him in the form of his youngest daughters, who lived under her care from 1785 onwards. They would have grown up around strong women. Elizabeth Bogle took them on walks around the country and one included viewing an industrial spinning machine in 1798.[125] After Robert Bogle died in 1808, his surviving sisters Martha Brown (neé Bogle) and Anne Bogle inherited the Daldowie estate, and it was predominately Anne who managed the house and finances.[126] She made sure their little girls had everything they needed, from soap and satin bonnets to sugar from the Caribbean.[127] After Anne's death, Martha and Mary remembered their aunt fondly, particularly the hoop skirts she continued to wear to parties despite changing fashions.[128] What we cannot know, however, is how they remembered their birth mother and whether she was in fact 'Bibi Bogle' or 'Tichan'. Martha and Mary likely knew her full name, but imperial Scottish archives have since obscured her memory by way of the ephemeral Greco-Roman 'nymph'.

123. George Bogle to Annie Bogle, 24 March 1772, GCA, TD1681 (25).
124. Annie Bogle to Robert Bogle, 22 March 1788, GCA, TD1681 (48).
125. Annie Bogle to Robert Bogle, 26 April 1798, GCA, TD1681 (48).
126. 'Extract from the settlement of Robert Bogle Esq. of Daldowie', GCA, TD1681 (59).
127. Annie Bogle's Housekeeping Book, GCA, TD1681 (123).
128. 'Account of Brown family genealogy, 1853', GCA, TD1681 (85).