
6. Legacies

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Thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized. (Glissant, 1997, p.27)

NARRATING ENGLISHNESS

In 1968, Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, heard on appeal a case involving the family settlements of a Mr Stanley Weston, the trustees having applied to the court for approval to a scheme varying the trusts.¹ His judgment was robust, a stratagem developed over his long judicial career when, as in this case, he was designing a shift away from the authority of established precedent. His technique for legitimating change involved combining a performance of assertiveness (of law) alongside a good story (of fact) framed in the style of oral narration: as the story unfolds, it leads to the inevitable, common-sense and equitably right decision, the conclusion emerging as if a natural outcome need not be hampered by impediment of law.

The back-story to the application would be good material for a contemporary novelist writing in the style of Jane Austen. A successful businessman, concerned with protecting his wealth for the economic benefit of his family, settled a series of family trusts designed to minimize tax liabilities. Unfortunately for him, a change in law meant that the trusts ceased to be efficient vehicles for their intended purpose. The best economic strategy was to move the trusts off-shore: the family moved to an off-shore island and began applications for settled status. The settlor and the trustees were all in agreement: the amounts of money which would be lost if the trusts stayed in England were huge. However, variation requires the consent of all the beneficiaries, which included grandchildren who were not of age and therefore lacked capacity. The family were forced to apply to court for approval to their scheme. The court, in deciding whether to approve, are tasked by the legislation to focus on the 'interests' of the under-age beneficiaries. All previous cases had interpreted 'interests' to be limited to economic interests, and so the family would, without doubt, have expected approval.

Lord Denning, however, decided that 'interests' should be interpreted to include social factors. His judgment hinged on presenting the family, and in particular the settlor, as more concerned with preserving wealth than ensuring the children's welfare. His narrative begins with a revelation:

In 1894 a young Russian, Abram Woskow, came to England [...] He married here and had a son, Sol [who] [i]n 1942 [...] changed his name by deed poll to Stanley Weston [...] he started as a small trader on his own. After a few years he prospered exceedingly. He built up a wholesale business and a large chain of retail shops.

¹ *Re Weston's Settlement Trusts* [1969] 1 Ch. 223.

The judgment is framed by being explicit about the foreign origins of Mr Weston. After reviewing the law and the settlements, Lord Denning makes his next move:

The court should not consider merely the financial benefit to the infants or unborn children, but also their educational and social benefit. There are many things in life more worthwhile than money. One of these things is to be brought up in this our England, which is still 'the envy of less happier lands'.

In a narrative replete with inter-textual references and pastoral imagery (Klinck, 1994), he reminds the family of the benefits of England and of be(com)ing English. He ends by asking, with a rhetorical flourish, if the children:

'[a]re ... to be wanderers over the face of the earth, moving from this country to that, according to where they can best avoid tax? I cannot believe that to be right. Children are like trees: they grow stronger with firm roots.'

The allusion is clear: Lord Denning recognises/presumes that they are of Jewish heritage and proceeds to chastise them for being too fixated on wealth and too willing to move on; not only from the benefits of England, but also from the responsibilities of be(com)ing English. In a narrative which draws on (and continues) a long history of anti-Semitic tropes, Lord Denning images a picture of Englishness which draws from Shakespearean myth-making, biblical referencing and pastoral imagery to invoke both pride in being English and the need to maintain 'true' Englishness. Behind and throughout this judgment a silent question, a haunting echo, reverberates: Could you ever be(come) English? The question hovers over the family in the courtroom. Chillingly, it is also posed for those outside court: Could such people ever be(come) English?

The power of Lord Denning's judgments was vested in his capacity to tell a story: to speak rather than read, and in a style which invites listening; to develop plot and employ shared references; and to suggest, as a subtext, that he and 'we' hold common values.

How is a (particular) nation, a collective 'people', a national identity, narrated? Sugarman and Warrington trace the extent to which the building of an idea of 'Englishness' is 'fostered by the narratives of law' (1995, p.126). Examining the development of the equity of redemption, they reveal the extent to which the space created in-between (English) common law and equity allowed an active jurisprudence to articulate both the central national significance of wealth held as property in land, as well as to negotiate the troubled relations between the respectability of land wealth and the destabilising challenges of commerce and monied wealth. Land wealth focused on intergenerational settlement of estates, monied wealth on markets and the circulation of liquid assets. The English paradox was that as much as land wealth required the financial support of money-wealth, money-wealth desired to 'become' (at least 'as-if') 'landed'. Land, the soul of the English establishment, focused on 'the estate': visibly, a country house with land, but so much more than simply (a) 'place'.² The estate was a node networked into the fabric of social and political ordering: 'as house with park', it came to represent, ironically, what it was to be English, to embody the virtues of Englishness.³

² 'The estate' includes non-corporeal, intangible assets carried within it as-if 'land' and is formed in temporal dimensions as much as spatial mapping.

³ The extent to which the landed estate captured the English imaginary is evidenced, paradoxically, by the contemporary presumption of shared national pride in the legacy preserved by the National Trust

Sugarman and Warrington argue that law's role is much more than simply providing technical resources, it also narrates and negotiates national identity. They conclude that 'the boundaries between law, economics, politics and culture as so blurred that they are best perceived as participating in the same social sphere' (1995, p.126).

In law, in literature, what it means to be English has been narrated and negotiated.⁴ At times of national anxiety, external threat or abrupt social change, there is frequently an intensification, or amplification, of the national story and the significance of identity.⁵ *Re Weston* was decided in 1968, during a period of racial tension following Commonwealth migration after 1945.⁶

In 1968, Enoch Powell MP, delivered his infamously racist, anti-immigration speech:

As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come.⁷

Powell's 'intractable problem' was one of numbers: playing on a fear of becoming-minority, he amplified this with a suggested threat of violence carried in/by what might become majority. Linking his scenario to one associated with 'the history and existence of the States' implied a legacy of enslavement limited to the States, not least because, over there, they could not geographically avoid or distance themselves from 'it'. Over here, the legacy could be denied and/or held at bay. The denied heritage of the practices of enslavement is evidenced in Powell's recounting, with rhetorical flourish, the concern of 'a working man': 'that in this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.'

In the 1960s, the Labour government was negotiating a pathway between legislation addressing discrimination on grounds of race, and legislation placing restrictions on immigration.⁸ The politics behind this strategy is evidenced in Roy Hattersley's speech made during debates leading to legislation in 1965: 'I believe that integration without limitation is impossible; equally, I believe that limitation without integration is indefensible'.⁹

(a nation sharing what was once limited to/by the privileges of class). When the NT accepted responsibility for investigating the sources of wealth which made the eighteenth-century boom in estate building and ownership possible (Fowler, 2020), significant sections of the establishment and public objected to being confronted with a problematic history (Fowler, 2020a). See further below.

⁴ Which is not to suggest that it is limited to this, but this chapter is (see further Bhabha, 1990).

⁵ Sugarman and Warrington (1995) describe the narration of English history as one characterised by English resilience and survival through a series of 'apocalyptic' threats to stability and security, invariably launched from, or sourced back to, external actors. This version of national historiography has, yet again, been evidenced in 2020.

⁶ The Immigration Act 1945 opened immigration from Commonwealth countries. Subsidised travel from the West Indies made Caribbean migration to England feasible: ships (including the Empire Windrush) taking de-mobbed Commonwealth servicemen back to the islands offered cheap passage to England. A need for labour is usually cited as the rationale behind the act, but it also served the purpose of keeping metro-isle central to a new Commonwealth order emerging from the 'end' of Empire.

⁷ Powell is referencing the Sybil's prophecy of 'wars, terrible wars, and the Tiber foaming with much blood' from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 6, 86–7. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_of_Blood_speech.

⁸ A brief history of the 1965 Race Relations Act is found at: <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2017/03/21/parliament-and-the-1965-race-relations-act/>.

⁹ Quoted above.

The Labour Party concern to somehow address and mollify the racist attitudes to which Powell so directly gave voice reflected a recognition that they were all too prevalent in many traditionally Labour communities. A native-English¹⁰ anxiety with what was perceived to be a crisis in what it meant to be English (a presumed mono-cultural environment), alongside an unwillingness to share (have taken away) access to good employment and decent housing, consolidated into an anti-immigrant/immigration politics.¹¹ Building an alternative politics focused on the prejudices of racism and the discrimination and inter-racial violence suffered by immigrant communities was slow, tortuous, often painful, sometimes courageous, and frequently marred by compromise.¹²

Recalling events which took place more than 50 years ago is not undertaken as a historical exercise, but as a reminder of their significance for understanding our present. What is important is to be attentive to the processes of selection and curation in what and how events are remembered or forgotten. To adopt a distinction developed by the cultural historian Aby Warburg: it is to distinguish between the production of an event as object (situated in a temporal/spatial specificity), and tracing its after-life (*nachleben*) as on-going process (a temporal/spatial mobility) (Gombrich, 1968; Johnson, 2012).

‘Our’¹³ history continues to shape ‘our’ present and threatens to continue to distort and limit a more equitable potential for ‘our’ futures. The political events of 2020, on both sides of the Atlantic – particularly those associated with ‘Black Lives Matter’ – make this very clear.¹⁴ As Stuart Hall pointed out in a speech delivered in 2008:

‘They are here because you were there, there is an umbilical connection. There is no understanding Englishness without understanding its imperial and colonial dimensions.’¹⁵

¹⁰ Not wishing to use the word ‘white’ in a bracket with English, and, given the use of the word ‘native’ by the English in relation to colonised peoples, it seems appropriate to deploy it in a reversed move.

¹¹ There is also evidence of a continued racist sexualisation of black bodies, of both genders, and a particular fear of, anxiety about, sexual relations between black (migrant) men and white (native) women. Typically, in the 1967 film treatment of E.M. Braithwaite’s 1958 autobiographical novel, *To Sir, with Love*, dir. James Clavell, the ‘mixed race’ love affair of the novel was recast as a platonic, work-based friendship.

¹² In part, the 1964 Labour Party Manifesto commitment to race relations legislation was in response to the political circumstances of the 1963 Bristol Bus Boycott. Supported by the union, the local authority-owned bus company operated an employment ‘colour bar’. Activists from local West Indian communities organised a bus travel boycott: after four months, the company (and union) gave in. However, legislation did not cover discrimination in employment until 1968. Powell’s speech was made in the context of debates leading to that, more extensive, legislation.

¹³ There is a conscious slippage within this chapter in the use of ‘our/we’: the reader is asked to be active in recognising distinctive positions and the movement between them.

¹⁴ In 1982 Denning, in his book *What Next in the Law?*, suggested that members of black communities might be unsuitable to serve on juries. After an outcry, the first edition was withdrawn and reissued without the offending remarks. He was persuaded to retire (Freeman, 1993).

¹⁵ Key-note speech on archives and memory, Rivington Place, London, 2008. See <http://kalamu.com/neogriot/2014/09/17/history-black-chronicles-ii/>.

ENTANGLED HAUNTINGS

On metro-isle, our cultural memory has, until very recently, been very successful in forgetting (or ignoring) the weight and extent (the material presence) of the legacy of our practices of colonial enslavement. Establishment patterns of memorialisation have encouraged us to treat ‘slavery’ as held apart from our ‘own’ national heritage, as if an unfortunate occurrence which existed in distant places (overseas) in far past times (before Britain led the campaign for abolition). Too often it is still as if, rather than being directly implicated in enslavement through colonisation, ‘we’ were just unfortunately linked into it.

In British universities, the increasing concern amongst progressive academics to ‘de-colonise the curriculum’ often has to begin with a move which might seem counter-intuitive: to re-call and re-member colonisation in a metropole which has been so eager to forget, and so good at it. In this sense, what might be understood as a post-colonial concern to reform the curriculum becomes, initially at least, a post/colonial¹⁶ need to recover.

Stuart Hall describes a ‘post-colonial amnesia’ which ‘enveloped Britain after the (1939–45) war’, endorsing ‘the strange imperatives by which the full force of the history of colonialism keeps slipping out of the collective memory of the metropole’ (2017, p.12). ‘Keeps slipping out’: a pattern of episodic acts of forgetting, an accretion producing a layered amnesia in which each act of forgetting further consolidates and legitimates an authoritative ‘collective memory’ increasingly selective, limited and warped.

As Hall suggests, the narration of a post/colonial politics both made possible and also required a collective amnesia: post-war Britain could no longer economically afford to maintain the trappings of Empire, and, even if a residual establishment group might have wished to remain imperial, public sentiment both in the metropole and ‘overseas’ (the term often employed to collectively reference the many dominions, colonies and protectorates which constituted Empire) was undergoing a sea-change. Imperialism was a past which, depending on one’s perspective, either had to be abandoned or rejected as a post-war world struggled into existence. Under the rubric of ‘Commonwealth’, the metropole and overseas territories negotiated a new political infrastructure – and, for many of those involved, forgetting a past of privilege and prejudice was understood as part of becoming focused on a different future. It was so ‘convenient’ to forget: it avoided having to confront the imperial legacy; and, in metro-isle, it neatly allowed an emergent non-establishment political order (the Labour Party) to distance itself from a history that many in the new leadership regarded as a distasteful and embarrassing heritage. The contrast in tone (in framing spectacle, curating exhibits and narrating story) between the 1924/5 British Empire Exhibition and the 1951 Festival of Britain evidences this very clearly (Banham and Hiller, 1976).¹⁷

¹⁶ Following Bongie (1998) a slash rather than a dash is deployed, in emphasis of our continued entangled histories. Separately, law/literature is used as a sign which implies a moving across or mixing: an ‘as-well-as’. This is in preference to the usual ‘and’ which brackets, but continues to hold apart: leading to such descriptions of the field as either law ‘in’ literature, or law ‘as’ literature (Ward, 1995), a formulation which blurs discourse with discipline.

¹⁷ The contrast is also visible in *re Dominion Students Hall Trust* [1947] Ch 183, an application to the court in support of a scheme to vary a charitable foundation for students from the Dominions. Established in 1930, beneficiaries were limited to those of ‘European origin’. The removal of the colour bar was agreed, as it conflicted with the objects of the college it funded (Goodenough) to promote a ‘community of citizenship’ among Commonwealth members (Harding, 2011).

The post-war use of symbolic memorialisation to refresh a national narrative was framed in three parts: the celebrations of victory, the coronation of the new Queen and the Festival of Britain. Films had already laid the groundwork for continuing the trope of a narrative arc linking significant historical events in a record of ‘England overcoming’, against the odds, the threat of external adversity. Drawing on two especially significant periods, the overcoming of the threat of Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century and the overcoming of the French in the eighteenth century, films such as Alexander Korda’s *Fire over England* (1937), an Armada saga, and *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), a naval romance, narrated a recurring cycle of England standing alone against the world. Post-war narration of renewed national pride built on this: circulating images which drew on the first Elizabethan period, marked by the victorious feats of Raleigh and Drake, and focusing on the naval figure of Lord Nelson, sacrificed in victory.¹⁸ These historical motifs were often supplemented with the allegorical figure of Britannia and the quasi-historical figure of Boudica: reaching back into the mists of history, from measured time into time immemorial, to draw on a mythic epic of ‘always’ and ‘forever’ (rather like common law).

This legacy of a necessary and useful forgetting has inhibited a fuller engagement with our past: denying our entangled colonial legacy and suppressing an acknowledgment of a heritage of extensive participation in the practices of enslavement.

What we have left to work with are traces, outlines, faint echoes, indistinct, fleeting shapes and movements: hauntings which can be re-animated, re-called to re-member. And then we (can) turn to see what has often, already, been visible, hidden in clear sight; not recognised, not heard.

The image of a ‘layered’ amnesia usefully reminds us that amnesia is not simply a result, but a process which is continually remade: a past shrouded in layers of fabrication, woven in the service of present imaginaries in an attempt to prefigure (guard against) a future. Finding a way through the density of this layering is, in Spivak’s words, a matter of locating and ‘measuring silences’ (1988, p.286), which can only be achieved through tracing ‘a necessarily circuitous route’ (1988, p.271).

The particular silence this chapter seeks to measure arises from (the forgetting of) the intimate entanglement(s) between the English metropole and the archipelago of islands which lie off the American continental mass in the Western Atlantic – islands which the European powers colonised and, in the pursuit of profit, ecologically destroyed with over-intensive farming made possible through the extensive use of enslaved labour. In contemporary travel

¹⁸ The view from the Caribbean islands of these two historical periods was/is very different: the first laid the foundations of colonisation and enslavement, and the second consolidated them (even when beginning the move towards restrictions on the trade). These differences in account of historical record are neatly presented in Peter Tosh’s ‘You can’t fool the youth’ (first performed 1973, released in 1977 on his *Equal Rights* album):

*You teach the youths about the pirate Hawkins
And you said he was a very great man
You teach the youths about the pirate Morgan
And you said he was a very great man
You can’t fool the youths ...
All these great men were doin’
Robbin’, a rapin’, kidnappin’ and killin’
So called great men were doin’ ...*

brochures, they feature as if a virtually untouched, exotically tropical paradise (often marketed with a ‘colonial’ aesthetic – rum punch served on the quiet veranda of a plantation greathouse). They exist in spaces which are distant enough, spatially and temporally, for the majority inhabitants of metro-isle to avoid being confronted with their/our part in histories of colonisation and enslavement, except when presented as a regrettable but long distant past. Distant enough, also, to avoid making the (obvious) connections between the ‘over there’ and ‘here’.

One way to begin to trace (and endeavour to understand) the processes of entanglement between metro-isle and island-archipelago is to work backwards into an engagement with the two historical conjunctures which the post-war period celebrated as foundationally English (not as beginnings, but as thresholds), and to move across law/literature (as cultural products and processes) in order to diagram the formation and transmission of the legacy of colonial enslavement.

Working within the shared domain of law/literature, Sugarman and Warrington were employed in the first section of this paper to focus on the narrational capacity and function of law. Narration is not merely about employing the arc of a story, it also privileges the ‘telling’ of the story in an oral/aural tradition. It is about speaking: even when written, narration employs an authorial voice which we, as readers, listen to. Narration is a poetic device – it seeks affect. Associated with narration is the deployment of image: to carry or illustrate, and thereby amplify, narrative. Listening, looking, thinking.

Recall Warburg’s distinction between ‘an image’ (the process of its making) and its ‘after-life’ (how it is later received and re-perceived). Warburg’s last project, his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, extended his interest in how in the after-life of an image is shaped as it is transmitted through time and across media. Warburg conceived the project as a visual mapping of key images and themes traceable back from contemporary use, via Renaissance referencing, into being sourced in classical origins. His interest was in the longevity and continued relevance of ancient themes, forms and figures. In building his atlas, he sought to discern the underlying patterns, the narratives, which were expressed through, and linked together, the received images. Across a series of thematic boards, he continually curated the images, moving them and reordering them (including changing the spacing between them) into constellations and series as he sought to reveal and make sense of underlying logics. For the two years preceding his death, he engaged in the process of mapping image-memory. When he died, the project ‘unfortunately remained unfinished’.¹⁹

The after-life of the image-map might however reveal a fortunate aspect to this lack of completion: the process of curating image in order to image/think the potential of patterns becomes an on-going process of being-open-to, an awareness of an ‘and-also’, rather than continually seeking the exclusiveness of closure. Warburg’s practice could be thought as anticipating Deleuze’s process of diagramming as an image of thought: a potential in the curation of image-clustering.

Warburg’s memory-atlas provides an image for bringing together material for one act of mapping Spivak’s ‘necessarily circuitous route’ (1988, p.271), and offers a pattern for practices of active listening and creative visualisation to work through the layered amnesia which has cloaked metro-isle. Silence is only an interruption.

¹⁹ Taken from the introduction to the online image-atlas available through The Warburg Library: <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/library-collections/warburg-institute-archive/online-bilderatlas-mnemosyne>.

Following Warburg's inspiration, the next section of the chapter is imaged as one panel, in three parts, to which other images/narratives/themes can be added. The distinctive differences between Warburg's purpose and technique and my design, is, of course, that I do not limit myself to image as understood by him, and that I work backwards, through and always in an after-life, not seeking an origin but watching, listening for and to an affect.

MEMORY PANEL: LISTENING TO DIDO

1. Plantations in the Park

The use of cultural artefacts in the post-war period to boost morale and to remind the British of core national values focused curation on the recovery and revaluation of images and narratives which spoke of the long duration of English stability and prosperity.²⁰ The rural landscape, land, was reinscribed as the site of national identity (Bottomley, 1996). Images which had not previously been particularly valued where now given iconic status: Gainsborough's 'Mr and Mrs Andrews', which had been left in a family attic for generations before being lent to a local East Anglian exhibition, was spotted by a London critic and declared to embody all the values of continuity and stewardship of land that made England great. Catapulted from family relic to national value, it was toured in 'Festival of Britain' exhibitions and was then purchased by the Tate Gallery (Bottomley, 2016; Hamilton, 2017).²¹



Figure 6.1 *'Mr and Mrs Andrews' by Thomas Gainsborough*

²⁰ In the 1951 Festival, modernity was presented as emerging from the past, rather than as a break with it (Banham and Hiller, 1976).

²¹ Ironically, given the context, the Andrews family did not settle the land as inheritance for the oldest son but treated it as an investment, later selling it and distributing the monies between the children (Bottomley, 2016).

The after-life of the Andrews portrait encapsulates a nostalgic reverence for patrician landed wealth, which was one trope deployed to resettle England after the trauma of warfare. With it came a resurgence of interest in the classical aesthetics of the Georgian era, and the associated sentiments of pastoral gentility: anything to escape and shake off the impact of the industrial-urban modern. Jane Austen, who for a long time had been dismissed as over-sentimental and too femininely domestic to be ‘good’ literature, was reappraised and became part of a new canon deployed as literature carrying the virtues associated with English national identity.

Central to all of Austen’s work is the question of wealth – not only how it is made, consolidated, distributed and threatened, but also the effects of wealth (or lack of it) on individuals and families. Unsurprisingly, Austen privileges landed wealth (and is well versed in the legal framings which enabled estates to be consolidated in settlements carried through generations), and she is also aware of the complexity of negotiating (often necessary and potentially beneficial) accommodations between land wealth and money wealth. For Austen, it is always a question of the value of wealth as effect: does it corrupt virtue or enhance it? Her stories examine the dilemma of wealth in a series of scenarios, allowing her to narrate, give shape to, an account of (English) virtue, as it overcomes challenges and negotiates change.

Mansfield Park was published in 1814. It begins, as good stories often do, with framing the narrative in/by time: ‘About thirty years ago’ (Austen, 1814, 1996, p.5).

Starting with a time-frame is significant: it specifically takes the reader back to the 1790s, and it signals that the novel takes form on the edge of remembered time, a near-past witnessed within living memory and now shared through direct transmission in(to) time-now. The sentence frames narrator and recipient together, positioned in a doubled temporality of shared time: the space–time within which the narrative will unfold, and the space–time which positions narration and reception. Close enough to be understood as implicated in a present-time, ‘we’ reach backwards with a certain familiarity; at the same time, it is sufficiently distant to open a space of unknowing, lacking an immediacy of knowledge, or a recognition of significance, or perhaps having forgotten, or nearly forgotten what, in the arc this novel, will be re-called and re-evaluated.

‘About thirty years ago’ is, in this sense, a timely working through of events before they move on, slip beyond, into the past-times of history. It is ‘now’ as much as ‘then’, a diagramming of the significance of the temporal in-between.

Orientated in time, Austen then maps the spatial co-ordinates of wealth:

‘Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton [...] with all the comforts and consequences of an (*sic*) handsome house and large income’ (p.5).

An astute reader familiar with Austen will note the nuances and silences in this introduction: there is no mention of Sir Thomas’ family; no reference to an established landed presence; no evidence of inherited wealth (and associated title and rank) in property, and therefore an absence of the hallmarks of a settled, landed gentleman. He is a ‘baronet’: someone who carries the right to be addressed with the prefix ‘Sir’, but remains a commoner. Although the title may be inherited, it is little more than a signal of status beyond being merely ‘esquire’, and was more often acquired through achieving wealth and using the connections of interest to ‘purchase’ advancement, rather than in recognition of accomplishments or service. In this context, it signals a ‘self-made man’ who aspires to join the respectable establishment.

It soon becomes evident that Mansfield Park is not an inheritance but purchased with money made from commerce,²² and probably involved the enclosure of land in order to create an estate featuring a mansion set in a secluded park: ‘a real park, five miles round, a spacious modern-built house so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen’s seats in the kingdom’ (p.41).

The source of Sir Thomas’ wealth is revealed very quickly, but in an elliptical move, as if entering from the side: the information is introduced as a reference made in a letter. His wife’s sister writes to Sir Thomas seeking a position or prospects for her son, William:

[...] a boy of ten years old, a fine spirited fellow who longed to be out in the world; but what could she do? Was there any chance of his being hereafter useful to Sir Thomas in the concerns of his West Indian property? No situation would be beneath him – or what did Sr Thomas think of Woolwich? or how could a boy be sent out to the East? (p.6)

In her survey, she summarises the key components of emergent imperial power (‘out in the world’) in the late eighteenth century: the colonies of the West Indies, the navy (Woolwich) and the East India Company (the East). And her request reveals Sir Thomas’s own source of wealth: his ‘West Indian property’.

Edward Said’s critique of Austen and the novel (1993) began a now extensive tradition of (re)reading her from a post/colonial perspective (Fowler, 2017). However, whereas Said was emphatic in his critique of her as an Englishwoman ignoring the circumstances and consequences of empire, more nuanced readings are now employed to tease out narratives and themes which haunt the text without being immediately visible (Fowler, 2017). Austen narrates in a style which is oral – you need to hear a voice in order to pick up tone and, for instance, irony. To add complexity, the voice of the narrator is mobile: sometimes it rests in/with a particular character; other times it is omniscient – this requires being sensitive to movement in oral/aural spatiality. Added to this, there are temporal shifts and lapses in memory, patterns of amnesia, which require being attentive to how, as a recipient, one is being positioned in time. All this requires an active engagement with the text which listens to the narrative and, at the same time, watches (images) the use of the voice.

Recent post/colonial interpretations of the novel have tended towards recovering Austen as an active supporter of abolition (Fowler, 2017). While there is evidence for this, both within the text and from other sources, what is certainly evident is her concern with the consequences of plantation wealth, and in this regard what is significant in the construction of the text is the way in which she moves, elliptically, to reveal these concerns: placing them within reach, so that they can be picked up and pursued by an active reader.

Austen tells us that Sir Thomas’ wealth is not secure:

‘His [...] circumstances were rendered less fair than heretofar, by some recent losses in his West India Estate’ (p.22).

²² A contrast is made between the Bertram residence and that of a near neighbour, the Rushfords, who own Sotherton Court, the ‘ancient manorial residence of the family, with all its rights of Court-Leet and Court-Baron’ (p.69). The reference to the (originally medieval) law courts grounds the Rushford family through their property in land: both temporally (of long duration) and spatially (carrying manorial rights and privileges, and being part of the juridical governance of the county).

Not securely invested in English rental income, but rather in riskier, if potentially more profitable, overseas estates, Sir Thomas is economically vulnerable. By the end of the third chapter, he has ‘found it expedient to go to Antigua himself for the better arrangement of his affairs’ (p.28). His absence in Antigua for the middle section of the novel leaves his family pursuing activities and plans without the presence of paternal authority: revealing weaknesses of character in some, and testing strength of character in others. Sir Thomas as absentee father is the counterpart to his position in Antigua: out of sight and sound in the novel, he visits the sugar estate(s) of which he is the non-resident proprietor.

In the previous century, Antigua had become one of the major sugar-producing islands in the archipelago: flat terrain and costal winds proved well suited to the cultivation and production of sugar, and colonist-planters benefited from the earlier experiments with production on Barbados (Parker, 2011). So economically successful was the sugar economy that, by the second half of the eighteenth century, the fertility of Antiguan soil was becoming severely depleted, and crops were less economically profitable than those produced on other islands (Parker, 2011). It is no surprise that Sir Thomas experienced problems, especially as an absentee owner reliant on resident managers and overseers (notoriously problematic). In addition to problems with production, the English–American war disrupted the island economy, especially in the limits placed on trade with the American states (policed by a strong naval presence stationed at English Harbour, from which *inter alia* Nelson led patrols). The expectations of wealth and profit on which the plantocracy depended were shaken. None of this is made visible in the novel, but it adds veracity to Sir Thomas’ situation and brings into account a concern which resonates throughout the text: how safe is money gained from activities other than holding wealth in (English) land?

‘Safe’ might be understood as simply referencing the risk that investors open themselves to when pursuing profit out of greed, rather than measuring risk with more carefully calibrated calculations. Austen expresses a concern, even anxiety, with the pursuit of (excessive) wealth. What are people willing to do to achieve it, and how might it taint the morals and sentiments of those who become involved – not only as entrepreneurs, but also as family members who benefit? ‘Safe’ is not only a question of economic viability and security, but also one of ethical–social mores: a concern particularly well illustrated when investment is made in colonial plantations.

Plantation wealth is associated with profit and the unlimited exploitation of land, rather than a more ‘home’-based model of careful, sustainable improvement. Without a resident proprietor actively involved in (the management of) management, things can go badly wrong. In Mansfield Sir Thomas is involved in the running of the estate, whereas Antigua is too distant for regular, careful oversight. When he returns to Mansfield, he

‘had to reinstate himself in all the wonted concerns of his Mansfield life, to see his steward and his bailiff – to examine and compute – and in the intervals of business walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest plantations’ (p.159).

‘Nearest plantations’ obviously refers to distance within the park, but it can be extended to provide a contrast with his plantations overseas, a site out of sight in Antigua.

An anxiety with the consequences of pursuing profit from greed blends with a concern with the impact extensive wealth gained from distant colonial enterprise may have on the morals (the propriety) of metro-isle. Might ill-gained wealth not only corrupt those who benefit from

such wealth, but also lead to a more general infection of society? Might a society driven by greed and conspicuous consumption be willing to excessively exploit others, or collude in their exploitation without concern for their condition? Might a ‘dead silence’ be the way in which metropolitan society responds to the sufferings of those who labour overseas on Sir Thomas’ plantations? Because, of course, plantation labour is predicated on the transportation and exploitation of enslaved persons: his property is not merely in land, it is also in people.

There is only one reference to enslavement in the novel, in a conversation between Fanny, a poor relation who has been fostered into the Mansfield family, and Sir Thomas’ younger son, Edmund, who is to become a clergyman.²³ Talking of Sir Thomas, Fanny asks Edmund:

‘Did you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?’

‘I did and was in hopes that the question would be followed up by others. I think it would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of further.’

‘And I longed to do it – but there was such a dead silence... my cousins were sitting by without speaking, or seeming to be interested in the subject...’ (pp.165–6)

What might Sir Thomas have had to say about the ‘slave trade’? Were the cousins simply ‘uninterested’, or did the ‘dead silence’ suggest something more? Were they unwilling to consider the origin of their own comforts? Did they want to distance themselves from any interest in (or concern with) the West Indies, preferring to be identified with their place and position in English society?

Austen very cleverly opens a space which soon becomes crowded, made loud, with a cacophony of questions and questioning. Again, the way in which the space is opened is elliptical: as a report, in the past and in another place, it is not a conversation which can be interrogated further. Instead, it operates as a series of echoes which ripple outwards, demanding of the reader that they too come to recognise the consequences of sharing silence.

Published in 1814, the novel recalls a time before the legislative abolition of the ‘slave trade’ in 1807 from the perspective of a period when enslavement in the colonies was still legal, although increasingly contested ‘at home’ (Hall, 2002; Hall, 2014; Parker, 2011). In this temporal space, the issue of slavery can no longer be a ‘dead silence’; it has become vocal. The novel asks how in the near-past the reality of enslavement could be covered in silence, while also questioning the extent to which it can remain a silence: a past forgotten and a present repressed. The suggestion is that there can never be an absolute silence or amnesia:

²³ The novel ends with them marrying and moving into the Mansfield vicarage, his father holding the ‘living’ as part of the intangible Mansfield estate. Their Christian goodness and virtue redeem what remains of Sir Thomas’ family after a sequence of social misfortunes. This is, essentially, a conservative, evangelically Christian, moral tale. The narrative does not resolve the issue of the Antiguan estates: their future is left open. It is as if it is now for the reader to intervene and insist that the implications now be confronted. Legal enslavement in the British colonies was ended under the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. Austin is writing in a time-frame when generations of Bertrams, including Edmund and Fanny, would become owners of enslaved persons through inheritance. Although many enslaved people, on the death of an estate owner, ‘passed’ with the estates on which they laboured to a male heir, as chattels in law they could be devolved to other relatives, including women. Bequeathing an enslaved person, or a portion of one, was often used as means through which to provide for other family members – to be used as rental income from labour or sold as capital. The details of compensation claims for loss of assets held ‘in’ enslaved persons after the legislation leave an archive evidencing the extent to which inheritance practices distributed ‘ownership’ through family networks: see the University College, London, Legacies of Slavery’ database (and analysis) at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/details>.

faint shapes emerge, and echoes resound which can never be totally excluded or repressed, however much work is put into trying to keep the silence dead. Mansfield can never, in the end, be a secluded park, absent from the world. The text underlines the impossibility of ignoring what is (just) out of sight and sound, because it is as also right here and now, embedded in the foundation of Mansfield. The way in which the key conversation emerges in the text signifies this: recorded through a process of recall and confirmation, it is already at one remove. As readers, we are positioned within a chain of witnessing which extends, spatially and temporally, out of such a small and brief enquiry, neither answered or pursued at the time, but now becoming an on-going conversation: not just about what happened, but about the significance of remembering.

Temporally and spatially mobile, and richly inter-textual, the text opens out to reach beyond the immediacy of the enclosed world of Mansfield Park, to reveal the entanglements between (tropical) island and (rural) metropole in order to raise questions about the potential consequences of the relations between the two.

The enclosed park is a central motif. On the surface, it is no more than a design which makes the house, in situation and prospect, pleasantly genteel. But this design is not only about the construction of a picturesque rustic setting, it is also about a removal: from (and of) the outside world of all that is distasteful and threatens the peace of enclosed gentility. Enclosing a park uses land to hold commerce at bay: out of sight, sound and smell. It also excludes the impoverished: having enclosed common land and fields, and removed as unsightly (not picturesque enough, and socially unpleasant reminders of poverty) the cottages and hovels (and sometimes whole villages) of the landless poor. But such an enclosure can never be absolute: the trajectory of the novel reveals the entangled inter-connectedness between the house in the park and the world beyond the gates (the more distant plantations). The enclosed park becomes an ironic symbol, recognising the many entanglements which have made the park possible and continue to sustain it: interconnections between families, wealth and land, 'society' and 'interest', production and consumption. Mansfield Park emerges out of the mists of the English countryside and takes its place as a node in an emerging global network: as much a part of the metropole as the city of London.

Austen's contrast between the new, commercial wealth of Mansfield and the old, landed wealth of nearby Sotherton²⁴ reveals another layer to the embedding of colonial enterprise in(to) English homeland. Sotherton is described 'as amply furnished in the manner of some fifty years back, with shining floors, solid mahogany, rich damask, marble, gilding and carving, each handsome in its way' (p.71), the chapel with 'a profusion of mahogany' which had replaced the plainer wainscoting when it was 'fitted up [...] in James the Second's time' (p.72).

James ruled from 1685 until he was deposed in 1688, and mahogany was not imported into England (in any quantity) until the turn of the eighteenth century. It seems unlikely that mahogany would have been used so extravagantly in the chapel, but an interesting combination of references suggests that Austen's use of 'mahogany' might be symbolic rather than intended to be accurate.²⁵ James was deeply involved in the slave trade: while Duke of York

²⁴ See n 22 above.

²⁵ Symbolic referencing is made more obvious after viewing the filmed version of the novel released in 2000, dir. Patricia Rozema. Rozema emphasises the theme of slavery, and contrives to bring it closer (in)to Mansfield Park: from the sound of singing coming from a ship transporting enslaved

he was a founder of the Royal African Company which, under Royal Charter, transported captured persons over the Atlantic to sell as enslaved. The ‘triangular traffic’, between England/Africa/Caribbean islands, required that the ships be loaded with ‘commodities’ for each of the stages of voyaging, and the importation of mahogany into England proved to provide both good ballast and good profit. Mahogany became a fashionable wood for furniture and panelling, replacing the use of the native species of, for instance, oak or elm. In the Sotherton chapel it would have replaced oak: the replacement of honest, plain oak by imported, glossy mahogany in a religious setting, during the reign of a royal trader in slaves, is a strong symbol and reminder of the establishment of a trade in people around a century before the setting of the novel.

There may be a suggestion that even a family as respectably established as the Rushfords have benefited from, or been implicated in, the trade. We are told that Sotherton was furnished ‘fifty years ago’, as if money was then available for such expense and the family ready to spend it on such conspicuous consumption. ‘Fifty years before’ would be just after the rise and collapse of stock in the South Sea Company, commonly referred to as the ‘South Sea Bubble’, incorporated to benefit from transporting and trading enslaved people into Spanish territories on the South American continent.²⁶ Many in the English establishment benefited from early lucrative investment; other, later investors suffered severe losses (including many trust beneficiaries whose funds had been unwisely invested by trustees who were often family members). Greed for profit overcame discretion. If the Rushfords did benefit from early investment and were wise enough to have divested their shares in good time, then a subtle message is left for the Bertrams: your current investment in Antigua may seem sound, but read the warnings.

Lady Bertram, frequently described by Austen as indolent, embodies the characteristics of unthinking, superfluous consumption. On hearing that William, who has entered the navy, is to join his ship for duties overseas, she expresses the capacity of the metropole to consume:

‘William must not forget my shawl, if he goes to the East Indies; and I shall give him a commission for anything else that is worth having. I wish he may go to the East Indies, that I might have my shawl. I think I will have two shawls, Fanny.’

William is highly unlikely to travel to India, given the focus of the navy on the West Indies/Atlantic. Possibly Lady Bertram is muddling West/East Indies in a vague geography of ‘over-seas’: what is evident is that it is not really important where the source of the commodities she craves actually comes from; she is only interested what can be brought ‘home’ in terms of wealth or goods for consumption. Perhaps it is more comfortable not to know anything very much about the source of the wealth or commodities: the exploitation of labour which produces it, and the expropriation of territory which has made production possible. But what is the cost of this lazy or purposeful ignorance?

persons moored in an English bay, through to the use of an almost ruined house as the set for the house, symbolism is used to destabilise and undermine the secure idyll of metro-isle. Sir Thomas, played by Harold Pinter, relishes the silences, and, *inter alia*, casually mentions that he might, next time, bring back a domestic slave with him (seething with sinister sexuality, one is left in no doubt about his sexual misuse of enslaved women).

²⁶ An interesting economic analysis of The South Sea Company’s activities by Helen Paul is found at www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/326F907A8F434B.

2. A Plate of Fruit

Doody (2015) points out the numerous naming references in *Mansfield Park* which identify the novel as concerned with the issue of slavery – not least the naming of park and novel: Mansfield.

Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice from 1756 and primarily remembered by lawyers for his role in establishing commercial law (Posner, 2017), sat on a number of cases involving issues of enslavement. One of these, the 1772 case of *Somerset v Stewart*,²⁷ became significant as establishing the precedent that no person could be enslaved in Britain, and that therefore an enslaved person brought into Britain was freed as soon as s/he set foot on land. In fact, Mansfield himself did not think that he had made such a broad judgment – having done everything he could to try and avoid having to make a decision in the case, he had intended his judgment to be construed narrowly – but campaigners for abolition were astute in circulating a broad (and credible) interpretation which, as the after-life of the decision, became the received, embedded understanding of Mansfield’s text (Posner, 2017).²⁸

The Somerset case, both in the circumstances which gave rise to it and in the concern with which it was followed over the extensive period in which Mansfield ‘sat’ on it, evidences the extent to which enslaved people *were* being brought onto metro-isle. The careful archival work of historians such as David Olusoga (2016) has begun to uncover the limited historical record we have of this presence, and the ‘Legacies of Slavery’ project (Hall et al, 2014) has been instrumental in opening up pathways to newly recovered data. Recently, National Trust research into links between properties in their custodianship, and colonialism and ‘historic slavery’, has sourced new caches of archival evidence (Huxtable, 2020).²⁹ Slowly, fragments are being brought together to present a fuller picture of the presence of enslavement, or the presence of people as a consequence of enslavement, in the metropole.

One source of material has been found through paying close attention to, actively reading, pictorial images (Bottomley, 2020). European portraiture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sometimes includes black figures – almost invariably deployed as ‘props’ to enhance a central white figure. Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz married George III in 1761: just before traveling to England her portrait was painted by Ziesenis (a Danish–German artist). She is under 17: against the background of her family’s palace, clothed with rich fabrics and ermine, her hair dressed with pearls and, around her wrist, a bracelet displaying a portrait of her betrothed; she takes a pink rose from a basket held by a young man, also richly dressed, with a turban and plume, in his ear a pearl and, clearly visible, around his neck a silver slave collar.

²⁷ *Somerset v Stewart* (1772) 98 ER 499.

²⁸ The first edition of Blackstone (1765) followed the formula that slavery could not exist in England; however by the second edition (1766) he had modified his statement of law with ambiguous phraseology. It is quite possible that this revision was made under the influence of Mansfield (Posner, 2017, p.201 and p.289).

²⁹ See n 3 above. The report describes country houses as ‘dynamic sites in which global politics are played out in a local setting’ (p.8).



Figure 6.2 Portrait of Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz by Johann Georg Ziesenis

The slave collar is the visible marker of (lack of) status³⁰ – black figures portrayed in roles of service but without a collar leave a little space for possible ambiguity, and there are a number

³⁰ In Charlecote Park, Warwickshire, a 1680 portrait of Thomas Lucy by Kneller depicts Lucy with an unidentified young black groom or page wearing a metal collar. A guest of Lucy's wife recalled her morning chocolate being served by a black child, and local records document the presence of black people. In 1690, a young 'black girl', Margaret Lucy, was baptised; as was Will (or William) Archus,

of such representations which cannot be definitively described (without more evidence) as portraits of enslaved people. But the overwhelming sense one is left with is that, even with the benefit of ambiguity, portraiture of black ‘servants’ is actually portraits of enslaved people, and therefore further evidence of the practice of enslavement in metro-isle.³¹

Around 1778, Lord Mansfield commissioned a double portrait of two young relatives from David Martin,³² a protégé of the royal portrait artist, Allen Ramsey.³³ By then Mansfield’s career was so well established that he had been elevated from being a baron (a status given in 1756) into the peerage, in 1776. He was successful, wealthy and had married well. He had managed to distance himself from problematic Scottish roots (a taint of Jacobite sympathies marred his family), and overcome the disadvantages of being a younger son. He had purchased a country house with a park (Kenwood, in Hampstead). His marriage did not, however, produce children: he identified a nephew he could appoint, and promote, as heir to his estates and title. The Mansfield household was extended by offering a home to unmarried female relatives and fostering children from the extended family. His domestic and familial arrangements could well have been the setting and plot line for another Austen novel.

In 1766, Elizabeth, the young daughter of his designated heir, was received into the household. Her mother had died and her father, a diplomat, was so frequently abroad that living with the Mansfield household was a good solution. She was six years old and would live at Kenwood until her marriage in 1785. In the same year, a baptismal record for five-year-old Dido Elizabeth Bell, daughter of Maria, wife of Bell, is recorded in a Bloomsbury church used by the Mansfields when resident in town. We know from family records that Dido was in fact the illegitimate daughter of John Lindsay, another nephew, a naval officer serving around that time in the Caribbean. Her mother was an enslaved woman, possibly taken by Lindsey as part of seized ‘booty’ from a Spanish vessel or possibly ‘released’ from Spanish transportation into enslavement. Unsurprisingly, of her mother Maria we know little: although much more is known than is usually acknowledged (a point returned to below). The favoured narrative of Dido’s beginnings is that her mother died and her father brought her back to England, asking

‘a black man’, in 1700; and in 1735, Philip Lucy, a six-year-old ‘black boy’ (Huxtable, 2020). This record, particularly of children bearing the family name, suggests the presence of enslaved persons, or the children of once enslaved persons, at Chalecote over a lengthy period.

³¹ Of course, one has to be careful with such sweeping statements: it is more than possible that either persons once enslaved, or born free, took on roles as paid servants. The assertion is made here because I think that too often there is a tendency by contemporary commentators to use ambiguity to avoid confronting the issue of (the responsibility for) practices of metropolitan enslavement. However, I am also aware that ambiguity was often purposely deployed by contemporaries to blur status and familial relationships: see below.

³² Both the date and the artist have been the subject of controversy. The final attribution was the result of a 2008 BBC documentary which used investigatory techniques developed in art history, as well as finding new archival evidence. See www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06j7zc5.

³³ Ramsey was favoured by George III and his wife, Charlotte (see above). Controversially, and somewhat improbably, one of his portraits has been used as evidence for a claim to Charlotte being of mixed heritage (see eg Stuart Jefferies, ‘Was this Britain’s first black queen?’, at

www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/12/race-monarchy). Ramsey, in repeating blog entries, is described as ‘a well-known abolitionist’ – as if this would account for the subversive text he is said to have inscribed in portraying the queen. I have not been able to find an authoritative source for this assertion. Ramsey, who painted both Mansfield and his wife, eloped with his second wife, the sister of John Lindsay, father of one of the girls in the Martin portrait. Despite a long and happy marriage, Ramsey and his wife were never accepted by her family.

his wealthy English relatives to care for her; or, possibly, offered her to them as a playmate/companion/(servant?) for their newly acquired foster-child, Elizabeth.

A certain ambiguity in household position is not unusual in extended families of this kind: recall Fanny's position as a poor relation in *Mansfield Park*. But here there is also a certain ambiguity in civil status: was Dido, as the daughter of an enslaved woman, herself born into slavery? That this status could certainly be alleged clearly at times worried Mansfield, who in later life did not 'free' Dido – to do that would be to accept her status of origin – but who did include in his will, drafted in 1783, a clause recognising (asserting) that she was 'free'; and, on the evidence we have, that is certainly the way she was treated in the household (Posner, 2017).

Did the Mansfields take the pragmatic decision to pursue a policy of ambiguous discretion? From the evidence, they became very fond of Dido and she remained in the household until, after the death of Lord Mansfield, his wife having predeceased him, she left and married soon after in 1793.



Figure 6.3 *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray*

Elizabeth, a legitimate daughter with very good prospects, and Dido, not merely a 'poor relation' but an illegitimate child born to an enslaved African woman, are portrayed together in Martin's portrait. We know, from recently recovered archival evidence, that Mansfield com-

missioned and paid for the painting.³⁴ We do not know what discussions took place between him and Martin about the subject matter. They are young women of about 17/18. Slightly in the foreground, the blonde Elizabeth, corseted stiffly in pink, rosebuds in her hair and a book in her hand, reaches out to the exotic, mobile figure of Dido, dressed in fluid clothing, a turban on her head and a platter carrying an abundance of exotic fruits on her arm. With one hand she points to her face as she turns towards the viewer; the other seems lost in the folds of her dress, emphasising the contours of her figure. Elizabeth, full face on, has a direct, uncomplicated gaze with just a hint of affection around her mouth and eyes. Dido, in contrast, is full of mischief and amusement: a seductive invitation set against, as a foil to, the calm authority of Elizabeth.

The portrait is not mentioned in Mansfield's will, nor is it identifiable in the inventory taken at his death. In a catalogue of Kenwood pictures compiled in 1909, it is described as a portrait of Elizabeth, with 'a Negro attendant' (Byrne, 2014, p.10). As with other pictures which included black figures, it was assumed that Dido was a slave/servant of no name or unimportant name. However, given the naming of Dido as a beneficiary in Mansfield's will, and the evidence that her presence at Kenwood was the consequence of family connections,³⁵ there must be a suggestion that there had been a purposeful forgetting of Dido, a useful amnesia, at some point in the Mansfield history and that no one wanted to look too closely at a picture which, even on the surface, would disturb presumptions about the rightful place (and pose) of an 'attendant'.

Dido's re-employment in the picture was made possible by careful local research undertaken in Camden in the 1980s (Adams, 1984), leading to the picture being used as part of an English Heritage exhibition on slavery mounted at Kenwood. The recovery proved timely – the picture became celebrated as evidence not only of black presence in Georgian England, but as a portrait of 'equality' between two young women within an aristocratic household (Byrne, 2014). Using Dido as evidence of the presence of people of colour who were *not* enslaved added to the establishment of a narrative of the forgotten, denied black presence within the received historical narrative of native-Englishness.³⁶ The problem was/is that this positive spin on her recovery became a vehicle for a narrative which fails to confront either the actual ambiguity of her position, or the responsibility of her father and his family as they negotiated a (marginal) place on metro-isle for her.

Amma Asante's 2013 film *Belle* embedded a celebration of the portrait as representing nothing more or less than equality and affection between two young women living in the household of their shared relative, who happened to be the judge who had ended slavery in England. The story is, of course, too good to be true. It makes a strong storyline for a film, but it has had the unfortunate effect of feeding back into popular discourse as if true: serving as a convenient spin for enhancing the role of the key native-English players, as well as building a more positive image of the majority inhabitants of metro-isle. This, a straight lift from the film, is the descriptive history used on the Mansfield website at Scone Castle (where the portrait is now hung as a major visitor attraction):

³⁴ See n 32.

³⁵ She is mentioned in Lord Mansfield's obituary published in 'The London Chronicle' as a 'Mulatto, who has been brought up in (his) family almost from her infancy' (Byrne, 2014, p.10).

³⁶ On recovering a history of the presence of people of colour on metro-isle before post-45 migration, see Olusoga (2016).

Dido Elizabeth Belle was a girl born into slavery of mixed race, whose mother was a black African woman, Maria Belle and whose father was Rear Admiral Sir John Lindsay, nephew of the 1st Earl of Mansfield.

When Dido's mother died, making her an orphan at the age of six, her father came to claim her before returning to his family home at Kenwood House in Hampstead. There he beseeched his uncle, the Earl of Mansfield, to take the child into his care and to raise her alongside her cousin, Elizabeth, in a manner befitting her aristocratic blood line.³⁷

Her mother had not died: in 1774 Maria was in Pensacola, America, where she is recorded as having been granted land by Lindsay (on what became the corner of Lindsay and Mansfield Streets), on which she built a house. Referred to as 'a Negroe Woman of Pensacola in America but now of London afore and made free', she confirmed her free status by paying for a manumission transaction 'the sum of two hundred Spanish milled dollars' (Clune and Stringfield, 2009).³⁸ There is no record of any communication between her and her daughter after Dido was taken (in)to the Mansfield household. This is not surprising: when white fathers took steps to provide for illegitimate, mixed-heritage children, it sometimes included removing them from their mothers (and the islands) to send them to metro-isle to be brought up as adjuncts to their white relatives (Liversay, 2018). Liversay records a wide range of 'adjunct' statuses and practices: a few metro-families did receive mixed heritage children into the family network,³⁹ but many held them at a distance, finding their presence something of a burden and embarrassment. A great deal depended on the family politics of wealth distribution and inheritance: how financially secure and socially established was the metro-family and, if the father married, did his mixed heritage children threaten the economic-social standing of his legitimate children? A constant factor is the severance of mixed heritage children from their maternal and island heritage: a need to distance them from any record of enslavement, and from the perceived immorality of the islands.

Lindsay's delivery of Dido to Kenwood follows a well-established pattern. Having left her with relatives, there is no record of him having any other communication or contact with her. The filmic portrayal of him as a rescuing hero (echoed in the version of history sponsored at Scone) is somewhat tarnished by the recent recovery of archival material in Jamaica.⁴⁰ We now know that Dido was the first of five 'island' children fathered by Lindsay, all with different mothers and all soon after Dido's birth. The other 'island' children were baptised with Lindsay recorded as their father and carrying his surname: two died young, the remaining two were sent to Scotland to be fostered with relatives. When Lindsay returned to Scotland, he married but did not father legitimate children. In his will, he left sums of money to his two 'reputed'

³⁷ <https://scone-palace.co.uk/dido-elizabeth-belle-her-story-1761-1804>.

³⁸ Recorded by English Heritage, if not by Scone Castle: www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/women-in-history/dido-belle/.

³⁹ A small number of children were sent to England with large fortunes, especially in circumstances where there was no legitimate family and a chance for them to become assimilated into English society. However, this process of translation into (something akin to) Englishness became increasingly contested (Liversay, 2012). Anxieties over the corruptive power of plantation wealth carried into England through mixed heritage children seems to have been one theme influencing Austen's novel *Sanditon*, unfinished at her death. A later fear of plantation wealth being used to trick and corrupt racial purity is expressed with force in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

⁴⁰ Joanne Major, *Dido Elizabeth Belle – New Information about Her Siblings* (2018) 'All Things Georgian' blog entry: <https://allthingsgeorgian.tumblr.com/tagged/Dido-Elizabeth-Belle>.

children, the island children living in Scotland, asking his widow to distribute the money to them: clearly, she knew of their existence.⁴¹ Dido, in England, was not mentioned. One stark difference seems to mark Dido apart from her ‘recognised’ half-siblings: their mothers are recorded in the baptismal records as free and/or ‘mulatto’.

It is not just that a positive portrayal of family relations smooths out a much more complex picture of familial entanglements – it is also that focusing on the positive story detracts from the disturbing narratives so overtly present in the doubled portrait.

Between the two portraits used in this paper, there is an obvious (and welcome) distinction in the portrayal of the black figures. But there is also an underlying continuation in the tropes of how they are figured and deployed. Both act as a foil to a white figure, and both are clothed to characterise them as foreign and exotic. In Dido’s case, her clothing is also used to convey a sexualised, eroticised woman. In contrast to the well-corseted and virginal Elizabeth, Dido is a seductive, disturbing presence.

Popular reception of the portrait has resulted in a number of experts interpreting aspects of the image: not least the clothes worn by the two women. In a recent blog entry posted by Kenna Libes,⁴² a fashion historian, she challenges the dating of the portrait on the basis of the clothes worn by the women. She presumes that the portrait should be read literally, rather than considering that it might be composed symbolically. The women, in my reading, are dressed and posed with symbolic care to convey a strong message centred on the civilizing virtues and benefits of England and Englishness carried out into the world. Dido’s exotic plenitude is tempered by Elizabeth’s gently restraining hand.

The portrait evidences a theme which will become increasingly strong in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the historical mission of the civilising presence of England-in-the-world, also known as Empire. Within this trope, an image of the practices and legacy of enslavement is re-cast: as a horror to be suppressed, and as a threat to be feared. The aesthetics and politics of the late eighteenth century responded to the mood of Enlightenment, which set civility in opposition to perceived ideas of ‘blackness’ and the savage world of slavery (Dresser and Hann, 2013; Fowler, 2020; Gikandi, 2013; Kriz, 2008). As this narrative was carried forward by Evangelical Christians into the campaign for abolition, it began to morph into an emergent skin-colour racism (Hall, 2002; Liversay, 2012)⁴³.

3. ‘Had I Plantation Here’

It is a parody, but as with all good parodies it carries a significant insight, one of Austen’s mannered and problematic characters in *Mansfield Park* exclaims:

Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman’s constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere, one is intimate with him by instinct. – No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays, without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately. (p.279)

⁴¹ Wills, both in naming children and in leaving an inheritance, were used as a significant means through which to ‘recognise’ ‘reputed’ children (Beeson, 2010; Liversay, 2018).

⁴² 10 August 2020, at <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1778-martin-dido-elizabeth/>.

⁴³ See n 39 and Bronte’s expression in 1843 of a fear of contagion by racial impurity: the perceived need for separateness becomes the legacy of post-enslavement. Hall (2002) traces this as it is carried in Evangelical Christian sermons and practices, recalling an early Evangelical presence of *Mansfield Park*.

The eighteenth century adopted and constructed Shakespeare as the national poet, the foundational narrator of England and Englishness (Dobson, 1992). Denning (above) evidences an inherited tradition of referencing him as a lodestone of pride in English heritage, which, it is presumed, would be a recognised and shared by other Englishmen and so operate as a marker of national character (rather like allusions to cricket).

Chantal Zabus describes Shakespeare's *The Tempest* of 1611⁴⁴ as an 'interpolative dream-text', a text taken from the Anglo-literary canonical tradition in not merely inspiring a plenitude of interpretative readings, but also becoming an inspiration, source material, for new writings: 'Such texts serve as pre-texts to others; they underwrite them' (Zabus, 1994, p.81).

The Tempest has proven a rich source for post/colonial re-interpretation, acting as a kind of foundational narrative for the beginnings of modern colonisation and enslavement (Bottomley, 2020; Hulme and Sherman, 2000; Zabus, 2002). Since Césaire's *La Tempête*, written in 1969 for performance at an arts festival in Tunisia, there has been a productive sequence of literary texts exploring the dynamics of Prospero's relations to (property in) land and people.

Complex intertextuality, dense use of metaphors and light use of language, create a text sufficiently open and mobile to invite engagements which can remain within the framing of the text without being restricted by it. It is not a question of orthodox interpretation, of trying to pin down meaning, but rather of opening out into translations and transmissions which can be placed in conversation with each other because of a pre-text shared in common.

The play has been deployed to exemplify processes of colonisation and enslavement, and to create counter-imaginaries through which practices of resistance can (come to) be narrated (Bottomley, 2020; Hulme and Sherman, 2000; Warner, 1992; Zabus, 1994, 2002). It can be usefully read within the contested arguments concerning legitimisation of land seizure and governance in colonial settings (Sokol and Sokol, 1996; more broadly Greene, 2010, and Part VII of Brewer and Staves, 1994). My purpose here is more limited: there is a moment in the text when we stand at a threshold (although we know that we have, already, stepped over it).

In Act 2, Scene 1, Gonzalo, described in the cast list as an 'honest old councillor', says that had he 'plantation of this isle' (152) he would maintain it as (a) 'commonwealth' (157) and:

'would with such perfection govern [...]
 T'excel the golden age' (177–8).

Contrasted with Prospero's usurpation and patrician governance of the island, this 'golden age' vision of an alternative way is passed over, in text and plot, very quickly. But it serves to leave a trace: that things could have been different. There was, at some point, figuratively if not literally, a moment of choice: not merely in terms of whether to colonise, but of how to colonise (Bottomley, 2020). Constructing a threshold, even when we have already passed beyond it, opens a space for thinking choice and responsibility: a trope taken up and explored in Marina Warner's 1992 novel *Indigo*, which turns and extends *The Tempest*. Warner is particularly aware of the nuanced complexities of choice and responsibility in early colonisation and its legacies, not only because of her scholarship but also because of her own family

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Austen and her contemporaries would not have been familiar with Shakespeare's play – from 1667 Dryden's version ('The Enchanted Isle') was performed (with many rewrites and modifications); Shakespeare's 'Tempest' was restaged in 1838 (Hulme and Sherman, 2000).

history.⁴⁵ How to remember? What to re-call? How to reimagine? How to turn text? What to make possible?

In the same act as Gonzalo's dream of a golden age, there is an opaque exchange about a Queen, herself a coloniser, whose after-life has been a contested story of choice, loss and responsibility:

'Tunis was never graced before by such a paragon...'
'Not since widow Dido's time' (75–7).

And later:

'Widow Dido, said you? You made me study of
that, she was of Carthage not Tunis.'
'This Tunis sir, was Carthage' (82–4).

Even for Shakespeare, few women appear on stage (a daughter, a handful of goddesses and their retinue): of the small number of off-island women referenced, all but one of the women are either 'of Africa' or taken to Africa to be married. All are recalled by men, glimpsed through a prism held by men. Neither seen or heard: no more than outlines and echoes that haunt the text. The reference to Dido draws a parallel between antique and contemporary worlds, in a trope which looks to classical sources to provide patterns, precedents and lessons for the modern world. Shakespeare, however, undercuts this: he shows a character with ignorance in mapping historical events onto contemporary geographies. Virgil's *Aeneid*, the narration of Aeneas' travels and travails as he follows his fate to establish Rome,⁴⁶ was a popular (English) Renaissance source of/for classical learning, and used as a pattern for contemporary storytelling;⁴⁷ but as an account of actual events, a 'history', even contemporaries had their doubts as to its veracity. The reference to Dido as 'widow' is probably alluding to a then current debate as to the extent to which Virgil was unfair in his characterisation of Dido, portraying her as little more than a woman intent on trying to seduce Aeneas away from his destiny. Of course, that is her role in the text: to both be a threat to Aeneas and operate as a foil to his understanding of, and commitment to, his princely role. She might have founded a city, but she also deserted it. Aeneas escaped her clutches – he survived, and she didn't. In this sense, Aeneas overcame the dangerously seductive wiles of women: in particular, women of Africa.

⁴⁵ Warner describes the legal documentation of the Royal Charter which, in 1625, granted authority over St Kitts, Nevis, Barbados and Montserrat to the first English governor, Sir Thomas Warner: 'Boundaries between legal documents, zoological anthologies and dramatic fantasies were wide meshed' (Warner, 2000, p.108).

⁴⁶ Referenced by Enoch Powell in his 'Rivers of Blood' speech; see above.

⁴⁷ It had been particularly popular with the Tudors, who extended the narrative by sending Brutus, Aeneas' son, on a journey to northern islands where he became the founder of 'Britain'. The Brutus narrative was deployed by the (Welsh) Tudors to enhance their claim to the English throne. A similar tactic was used by James I to imply, in iconography and private documentation, that the English throne encompassed all Britain, despite the Scottish throne devolving by separate descent until the 1707 Act of Union.

Purcell's 1689 opera *Dido and Aeneas*⁴⁸ contains the well-known aria often referred to as 'Dido's Lament', which, while beginning by addressing Aeneas, opens out to be heard across history, in long time:

'When I am laid in earth,
May my wrongs create
No trouble in thy breast;
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.'

Remember *me*, not 'my fate'. It seems apposite that Dido Belle was given that name. How do we move towards a place, and find a means, with which we can begin to hear, and respond to, what has been silenced? In part, by learning how to employ the magic of 'as if', and the potent logic of 'and as well as'.

NOISE, AIR, BREATH

Throughout this chapter it is noise, especially in silence, which has been significant: speech and sound, the oral/aural, as it moves off the page, and out of the image, reaching out to insist on being heard. To be attentive is to listen – not as a passive recipient, but as an active agent – in order to become part of an ever-extending, opening, pattern of relations based on 'and as well as'.

Where Denning sought to activate the privileged sanctuary of 'this sceptred isle', a safe place removed from the perfidies of the outside world where the English could carry on being English, we can now turn Shakespeare around and say, in the voice of Caliban: 'Be not afeared, this isle is full of noises' (3.2.142). The silences which must be measured, and the muffled noises which will be heard: the creolisation of an England/English which has already happened. That threshold has been passed and the task that is left is to re-examine our histories, our inheritances, in order to reimagine our futures. In law, in literature.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen regularly references the wholesomeness of 'English air'. This is likely to be an allusion to William Cowper's 1785 abolitionist poem, *The Task*:⁴⁹

We have no slaves at home – then why abroad?
And they themselves, once ferried o'er the wave
That parts us, are emancipate and loosed.
Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free,
They touch our country and their shackles fall.

The poem celebrates Mansfield's 1772 decision *Somerset v Stewart*,⁵⁰ and is a classic example of a positive reading of the decision, cast as a recovery of previously established law. The evocative image used by Cowper ('if their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free') references the strong symbolism associated with the judgment, which is actually sourced

⁴⁸ Libretto by Nathan Tate.

⁴⁹ Cowper is known to have been one of Austen's favourite poets (Fowler, 2017).

⁵⁰ See above.

to Somerset's counsel rather than Mansfield's decision. The problem which counsel faced in arguing for Somerset's freedom from enslavement was not a precedent, but a powerful opinion. In 1729, a group of men with 'West Indian' interests commissioned the two senior government law officers to write an opinion, in their private capacities, on whether enslavement was legal in England. In what became known as the Yorke–Talbot opinion, they wrote:

We are of opinion, that a slave coming from the West-Indies to Great-Britain or Ireland, with or without his master, doth not become free, and that his master's property or right in him is not thereby determined or varied; and that baptism doth not bestow freedom on him, or make any alteration in his temporal condition in these kingdoms. We are also of opinion, that his master may legally compel him to return again to the plantations.

The opinion has been commissioned as a result of a fear that judgments by Lord Justice Holt⁵¹ could be interpreted as deciding that enslaved people who had been Christened could not continue to be enslaved, and, more broadly, that English law did not recognise property in people. Rather than testing this in court, the stratagem of commissioning an opinion, without danger of a contrary decision, was a clever tactic. Clearly and forcibly expressed, it had the desired effect until challenged in the politically charged litigation of 1772.

Somerset's counsel did not want to depend on resurrecting Holt; Yorke–Talbot made that too problematic (despite it being no more than an opinion). Instead, after extensive research, he found *Cartwright's* case, a purported decision of 1569 which, it was said, declared that the air of England was too pure for slaves to breathe (Alsford, 2001; Posner, 2013). The source used was John Rushworth's *Historical Collections*, a multi-volume compendium of historical commentary and sources written and published from the mid- to late seventeenth century by Rushworth, a lawyer and former member of parliament. The relevant passage uses the symbolism of air:

'In the eleventh of Elizabeth, one Cartwright brought a slave from Russia, and would scourge him, for which he was questioned; and it was resolved, That England was too pure an air for slaves to breath in.'

After 1772 the 1569 case was cited frequently, becoming established law, and the symbolic use of air and breath entered the cultural imaginary as a means through which to reference the 1772/1569 recognition of the special status and spatial specificity of English freedom (see more broadly Greene, 2010).

Despite the slim evidence of *Cartwright* for authority, and the efforts made by Mansfield to avoid establishing a precedent which would negate the Yorke–Talbot opinion, the 1772 decision became seen, and used, as a foundational moment in the struggle against enslavement, and one grounded in a recovery of the ancient English traditions and practices of common law. This is a judgment which evidences the power of 'affect'. It was not so much *what* was decided, as *how* it was received. And what operated as a particularly powerful vector was the evocative symbolism of 'pure air' 'to breath in'.⁵²

⁵¹ *Chamberlain v Harvey* (1697) 1 Ld Raym 146; *Smith v Gould* (1705–07) 2 Salk 666; *Smith v Brown* (1702) 2 Salk 66.

⁵² There is an obvious echo here of the German 'Stadtluft macht frei' ('city air makes you free'), referencing a principle established in the feudal period which argued that escaped serfs who lived in a 'free' city for a year and a day became freed (Alsford, 2001).

Of course, the Somerset decision fed the trope of English exceptionalism; but it also opens a judicial door for thinking differently about what it might mean to be English or resident in England. Moving that narrative forward into a potential for more equitable future(s) requires that we face and understand how partial our received narratives have been, and how they have operated to silence the voices, the noise in silence, that we now need to learn to listen to and to allow to breathe.

In law, in literature: How do our current imaginaries constrain us? How do we move beyond them, to recover or reimagine other narratives, other futures? (Gulick, 2016)

[T]hought [...] spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized. (Glissant, 1997, p.27).

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