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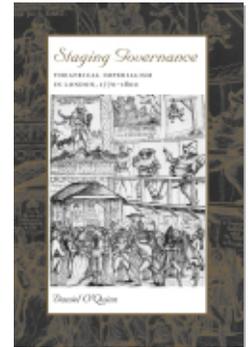
## Staging Governance

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PART *Women and the Trials of*  
TWO *Imperial Masculinity*

IN EARLY MARCH of 1788, while the impeachment of Warren Hastings was raging in the House of Lords, the recently divorced Lady Eglantine Wallace stepped into the gallery of the House of Commons dressed as a man.<sup>1</sup> While it was not uncommon for women to enter the visitor's gallery during this period, a woman's appearance in breeches was deemed sufficiently scandalous to warrant extensive press coverage. The following passage is typical of the reaction not only because it uses the event as an occasion for feeble sexual innuendo, but also because it ties the event to Lady Wallace's upcoming and ill-fated comedy *The Ton*:

Lady Wallace's *gallery frolic* has proved fatal to the repose of the married Members,—many of their wives, encouraged by her Ladyship's success, having ever since been trying to *wear* the breeches.

Lady Wallace, it is asserted, means to *dramatize* the late debate on the Declaratory Bill, and introduce some of the rising Members in her piece.<sup>2</sup>

The rising members joke, as lame as it is, took on a life of its own and the papers publicly scrutinized Lady Wallace's sexual morals over the next few weeks until her comedy was resoundingly damned after three fractious performances. I have written elsewhere about the relationship between Lady Wallace's gender insubordination and the disapprobation of her critique of aristocratic vice in *The Ton*, but the jokes regarding her visit to the Commons betray a certain anxiety about mixing two very different styles of sociability.<sup>3</sup> Adopting Peter Clark's terms, the "old style" of sociability endemic to Parliament was brought into contact with the "fashionable sociability" that is defined by the public presence of women. Lady Wallace's appearance in the gallery brought two conflicting modes of sociability together, and her performance of masculinity served not only to highlight her own transgression of social boundaries, but also to activate a certain confusion in the social performance of the parliamentarians. Is the honorable member's performance to be addressed according to the homosocial rules of conduct that define his governmental function or according to the sexual codes implicit in the performance of fashionable sociability? The confusion is captured perfectly in the double connotation of "rising member," and I would argue that this event has a certain heuristic value.

Both Parliament and fashionable society were traversed by complex forms of theatricality whose organizing principles are not easily reconciled. However, during the 1780s events such as the impeachment of War-

ren Hastings before the House of Lords brought these spheres together on a scale that had never been seen before.<sup>4</sup> The incursion of women and of new forms of sociability into Parliament was arguably the most spectacular instance of the incremental infusion of women into the public sphere more generally. As their spectatorial relation to governance became more immediate, women increasingly adopted positions ancillary to, but not disconnected from, the practice of social regulation, either through highly mediated forms of critique or as governmental agents in their own right. In the former category, we find women such as Frances Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah Cowley, Mary Hays, and Mary Wollstonecraft, all of whom engaged with the political life of the nation through media suited to forms of sociability deeply tied to the commercialization of culture—the novel and the theatre. In the latter category, we find not only the wives and mothers presiding over the domestic sphere, but also theorists of education and social amelioration, such as Catherine Macauley, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More. The writings of these women focused directly on problems in the configuration of British masculinity, and it is important to recognize that for all of these writers masculinity and male homosociality had to be reconstructed not only to resolve problems in the sex/gender system but also to stabilize the class aspirations of the middle ranks.<sup>5</sup> What has perhaps been underappreciated is that women's ethical spectatorship of governance—even in its most juridical forms—comes during a period of unprecedented upheaval in the history of British governmentality. As new forms of social regulation begin to achieve their effectivity, old forms of juridically based power found themselves under intense and sometimes tortuous reevaluation. And that process was a direct result of challenges to the very notion of sovereignty posed by the expansion of the empire. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that women such as Inchbald and Burney would link analyses of governmental corruption in the empire to constitutive problems in masculinity itself.

As my reading of Foote's *The Nabob* emphasizes, conventional arguments regarding the landed class's interest in maintaining political liberty were beginning to be hollowed out by the incursion of commercial interests. As the 1770s unfolded, the very term "liberty," which secured so much of British governance, would prove to be an extremely powerful fulcrum for colonial resistance to imperial rule. Despite repeated attempts to isolate liberty as a trait of British national identity, it was mobilized by the largely Whiggish inhabitants of the thirteen colonies in contexts that were welcomed by such prominent Whigs as Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox. In his famous speeches on the American Revolution, Burke found

himself in the curious position of arguing that the dismemberment of the British Empire was necessary to secure the very principles that define Whig imperatives for commercial expansion. The contradictions posed by this analysis are important because they point to a tension not only within the fusion of liberty and property but also in the commercial objectives of the state. And these contradictions open onto important instabilities in British identity. Dror Wahrman, Kathleen Wilson, Eliga Gould, J. G. A. Pocock, and others have offered detailed accounts of how the American Revolution forced Britons to distinguish themselves as somehow different from a constituency that seemed utterly British in origin and manners.<sup>6</sup> In addition to a recalibration of the relationship between the “sovereign monarchy” and the “extensive monarchy,” the necessity of self-definition exerted intense pressure on British subjectivity, and its effects suffused the everyday practices of Britons such that subtle shifts in discourse came to carry significance beyond their local context.

Because the act of self-definition was spread across a range of seemingly unconnected discourses and performances, British discussions of America in the 1770s or the 1780s provide only a partial account the transformation of governance in this period. Localizing analysis in this way would be far too simple and would ignore the degree to which the events in the American colonies altered the overall world system of imperial exchange. Furthermore, this would assume that the threat posed to British subjectivity by the American Revolution was comprehensible to Britons in the mid-1780s, and such an assumption underestimates the traumatic effects of these events. Some sense of the breakdown in comprehension can be gleaned not only from Wahrman’s documentation of internal contradiction around terms such as “brothers” and “foreigners” in this literature but also from Eliga Gould’s thesis regarding the silence of British commentators after 1785. If we envisage the American Revolution as a historical bifurcation, then its sheer magnitude renders it incomprehensible. For this reason, the bifurcation remains pervasive, insistently operative, but unsusceptible to direct analysis. So we have to move by indirection or as-if presentation. One such movement would travel through the violent history of the Caribbean, but for the purposes of this book we can track the emergence of a post-American British imperial identity in the complex debacles over British affairs in India. In short, I think it is rather simplistic to argue that Burke’s pursuit of Warren Hastings, for example, is only about imperial guilt in one colonial locale. The crises that beset not only the representation of the colonies, but also the performance of metropolitan masculinity during the impeachment are thoroughly inter-

twined with the recalibration of social strata in the metropole. Such a reading isolates new valences of imperial violence that need to be thoroughly considered—for instance, what does it mean for the Whigs to be exorcizing or exploring the wound left by the American war by means of a tropological romp through Indian atrocities. One benefit, of course—if we are thinking of Britain’s Atlantic empire as a traumatic subject struggling to deal with a remarkable moment of automutilation—is that India is distant both geographically and culturally. So despite the attempts of Burke, Sheridan, and Fox during the Hastings impeachment to render India and England commensurable, one could also argue that the effort, doomed to failure, provides an occasion for thinking through British identity from the far rather than the near margin.

Sheridan’s and Burke’s difficulties before the House of Lords are instructive for they demonstrate the degree to which the breakdown in the representation of India that haunts the impeachment is only part of the story. As Nancy Koehn has argued for the period following the Seven Years’ War, “In an order characterized by ideological realignment and parliamentary instability . . . imperial governance—the means for achieving the ends of empire—thus became a touchstone for political identity.”<sup>7</sup> At the end of the line, it is the destabilization of the subjectivity of the parliamentary orator and the ensuing deployment of sexualized figures to shore up metropolitan identity that arguably become the trial’s legacy. Much of the sexualized rhetoric that played a prominent role in the prosecution of Hastings reemerged in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in arguably more embarrassing forms. Early reception of Burke’s diatribe was marked by widespread ridicule not only of Burke’s panegyric to Marie Antoinette, but also of the specious deployment of sexual assault in his narrative of events in France. The early criticism of Burke is highly reminiscent of the visual satires of Burke’s and Sheridan’s chivalrous relation to the Begams of Oudh, which is discussed in chapter 4.<sup>8</sup> However, as the Foxite position on events in France became increasingly difficult to maintain, these same tropes became powerful political devices. They achieved political effectivity because the cultural distance between Britain and France was sufficient to allow for xenophobic consolidation, but insufficient enough to allow for the underlying assertion of similitude necessary for its articulation.

This resituation of the Hastings trial also allows for a reconsideration of the function of the French Revolution in this stabilization of British identity. Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is helpful here for it is clear that much of the analysis of appropriate government that in-

formed that book and prompted the meltdown in Whig identity had its origins in the Hastings impeachment.<sup>9</sup> If in the impeachment we see Burke examining what is constitutive of British government from the far side of the world, then one can argue that the *Reflections* brings the therapy a little closer to home. What changes, of course, is that Burke has a tangible history of French otherness with which to gird his emergent self and is absolved of the responsibility of having to create and specify Indian alterity. If this runs counter to conventional wisdom—that is, that the East functions as the self-consolidating other for the West—then what I am describing here is a relation to empire that is specific to the 1780s and subject to complex modulation and recalibration during the subsequent fifty years. The argument of *Orientalism* is appropriate to the nineteenth century, but even a cursory reading of the Hastings trial indicates that the alterity of India is far too vague and does not have sufficient critical mass in the cultural imaginary of metropolitan Britons to function as a consolidating agent for the traumatized British subject of the 1780s.<sup>10</sup>

If it sounds strange to be speaking of trauma and vulnerability at a moment when Britain remains globally dominant, then we need to reconsider a few key problems in the history of British imperial hegemony. The 1770s were characterized by cataclysmic economic and military reversals not only in the Atlantic empire but also in the Indian colonies.<sup>11</sup> Aside from the humiliating military losses in America, British forces acting under the direction of the East India Company, sometimes quietly and sometimes quite spectacularly, failed to quell resistance by ostensibly weaker Indian armies. These setbacks in India arguably had more impact on the assumption of supremacy that characterized British imperial fantasy than on the actual flow of power in the region. As Linda Colley and Kate Teltscher have argued, British losses at Pollilur and the spectacle in print culture of the emasculation of captive British prisoners in Mysore had a deep impact on the imperial psyche.<sup>12</sup> These military problems revealed a great deal about the mismanagement of both the American and Indian colonies, and India's first governor-general, Warren Hastings, would become the focus of widespread criticism of British military and commercial policy. Often military and commercial problems went hand in hand, and the sense that the military was unable to decisively put down colonial resistance was exacerbated by the growing sense that economic supremacy was also in a precarious situation. As we have seen, the collapse of numerous banks both in Britain and on the continent in 1772 was directly tied to the fraudulent manipulation of East India stock and to unresolved problems in the organization of colonial markets. With speculation rampant

in the metropole, a situation emerged in which bills of credit far exceeded the actual value of goods being imported from the colonies. Into this precarious situation, the American tactic of boycotting British tea not only was a blow against the ability to extract taxation but also laid bare the mismanagement of the East India Company.<sup>13</sup>

The newspapers of this period are overwhelmed, as one might expect, by reports of American anticolonial activity and by ever-intensifying scrutiny of East India Company affairs. As my reading of *The Nabob* demonstrates, a third discourse accompanied these explicitly colonial matters that not only blends them together, but also goes forward to become, I would argue, one of the most important elements of the traumatic fantasies that beset imperial thought in this period. This is the extraordinary outpouring of texts critiquing aristocratic vice. At roughly the same time that the imperial economy is being readjusted to prevent a second credit crisis, middle-class Britons latched onto the twin signs of luxury and sexual dissipation as symptoms of social decay that threaten to undermine the stability of the British constitution. It is not uncommon to see letters to the editors of the daily papers in the early 1770s weave together the American threat, the Indian mismanagement, and the dissipated character of the gentry into one seamless fantasy of national, social, and economic vulnerability.<sup>14</sup> It is for this reason that so many discussions of the state of imperial relations either get figured in terms of gender insubordination and sexual deviance, or deploy sexuality as a means of correcting errant forms of masculinity.

When the events of the American war confirmed this fantasy of vulnerability, questions of social and cultural legislation in the colonies and in the metropole become especially pointed. But legislation needs to be considered in its broadest possible signification because we begin to see an impulse to regulate excess at almost every level of social organization and often in the same sphere of action. In other words, the attempts to regulate the East India Company are not divorced from the persistent efforts to regulate the body that Foucault isolates as the harbinger of middle-class sexual self-stylization. That these forms of bodily regulation eventually result in the racialization of class identity should not escape our notice because the seemingly disconnected tributaries of middle-class sexual identity and governmental affairs in the Asian subcontinent not only respond to the same social turbulence but also quite frequently share the same channels.

The purpose of the three chapters that make up this section is to examine the way two related sites of instability and hence anxiety—the state

and the sex/gender system—found themselves entwined in the legislative attempts to deal with the East India Company in the 1780s. Unlike the American problematic, in which the demands for sovereignty operated according to principles almost indistinguishable from the British Constitution, the East India Company seemed to embody a form of sovereignty not only divergent from, but also threatening to, the careful accommodation of King-in-Parliament. As Bowen, Sen, and others have argued, the constitutional relationship between the state and the Company and its possessions was never established.<sup>15</sup> Koehn has demonstrated that “Adherence to the principles of the Glorious Revolution demanded that the supremacy of the legislature thus of the King-in-Parliament be upheld. . . . But metropolitan statesmen continued to argue . . . over how and to what extent that authority was to be exercised.”<sup>16</sup> As Sen argues, this lack of clarity was a source of palpable unease: “There was in general a great deal of anxiety about what rightfully belonged to an individual and what belonged to the state. Possessions of the East India Company as the monopoly of a chartered corporation, according to some political commentators, were in essence public property and reverted to the state either in the case of a national crisis or need, or naturally with the termination of the Company’s charter.”<sup>17</sup> However, others argued that any claim on the Company’s possessions amounted not only to a contravention of the laws of property but also to an incursion on the royal prerogative and thus on the Constitution. These positions were often held by the same persons at different historical moments: during his work on the Secret Committee and during the debate on the Regulating Act in 1772, Burke staunchly defended property rights, but during the debate on Fox’s East India Bill in 1783 and all through the Hastings impeachment, he called for direct parliamentary regulation of Company affairs. These conflicted claims regarding the relationship between the state and the Company and its property were all tied to anxieties regarding the nature of the Company itself. And from the earliest phases of his analysis of Indian problematics in the 1770s right through the Hastings proceedings, Burke figured these anxieties in terms of gender and sexual violence:

In the year 1767, [the] administration discovered that the East India Company were guardians to a very handsome and rich lady in Hindostan. Accordingly, they set parliament in motion; and parliament, (whether from love to her person or fortune is, I believe, no problem), parliament directly became a suitor, and took the lady into its tender, fond, grasping arms, pretending all the while that it meant

nothing but what was fair and honourable; that no rape or violence was intended.<sup>18</sup>

Burke recognized quite early in his engagement with Indian affairs that the East India Company was neither a commercial nor a governmental agency, but rather a hybrid of both. At times it behaved like a corporation operating according to mercantile imperatives, and at times it behaved like a nation-state mobilizing armies and signing territorial treaties. This hybridity had the potential to operate as a counterexample to the ad-equation of commerce and governance practiced by the British state. This was because the form of territorial sovereignty practiced by the East India Company was contractually based. As such, it constituted a state form that seemed to operate without the notion of landed property. In a sense, it exemplified a form of governmentality that threatened to make visible the obsolescence of the oligarchical social formations still lingering in the new imperial nation. This is why—despite its penumbra of moral justifications—Burke's critique of the East India Company was both pressing and self-interested, for it spoke directly to the fate of Whig governance. During the debates on Fox's India Bill of 1783 and during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Burke advocated an elimination of the Company's governmental hybridity by bringing it within the orbit of the British state and the reassertion of oligarchical patriarchal order to which he had been committed since the Rockingham era. This attempt to protect an increasingly obsolete governmental mode reached its culmination in the period leading up to the Permanent Settlement, when attempts were made to refashion the contractual relations between indigenous landlords and their tenants according to British models of landed property.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, modes of sovereignty that were themselves in a state of transformation in the British Isles were projected outward in what amounts to a form of self-consolidating nostalgia for a Britain that was rapidly mutating into a capitalist imperial power.

That mutation was accompanied by new forms of regulation that supplemented conventional notions of sovereign juridical power. Micrological forms of social control, located primarily in emerging discourses regarding the family and the racialization of class relations, began to play a vital role in the constitution and regulation of laboring populations. What is so striking about this period in the history of Anglo-Indian affairs is that the constitutional struggles precipitated in part by the East India Company's unwieldy hybridity and in part by internal pressures on the relationship between king and Parliament found themselves put on display

before a fashionable audience. Because the impeachment of Warren Hastings brought both Houses of Parliament and the cream of fashionable society under the same roof, women became witnesses and commentators on the trials of imperial sovereignty. All of the issues that preoccupied the autoethnographic practices of theatrical sociability were activated not only on the edges, but also at the center of debates on British governmentality in India. Questions of effeminacy, the decline of landed families, and the figuration of despotism as errant masculinity suddenly emerge as the substance of the Whig case against East India Company's flirtations with disturbing modes of sovereignty. It is as though the social frame that surrounded the impeachment infiltrated it to such an extent that the distinction between frame and picture, between new styles of sociability and old styles of governmental practice, began to dissolve in a fashion that revealed the overall composition of the social at this moment of regulatory transformation.