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The Political Economy of the English Rogue

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According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “rogue” first appears in use around the 1490s to refer to a vagrant or a vagabond. Subsequent usages show a slow gathering of many types of social misfits so that, by the eighteenth century, a rogue could indicate any one of a variety of deviants including atheists, scoundrels, thieves, tricksters, pirates, seducers, and libertines. The literary figuration of the rogue in England, however, is a later phenomenon. Rogues enjoyed wide circulation in the pan-European Renaissance literature of the picaresque in Spain, Italy, and France before manifesting (often as translations) in literature of the English Renaissance including plays, rogue pamphlets, and manuals.¹ From then on, leading up to the eighteenth century, there is no dearth of historical documentation about rogue-like social outcasts in English legal statutes and Poor Laws, or in prison records like the published confessions of condemned Newgate criminals. A literary history of the character of the rogue reveals not only when this ubiquitous figure of social history made its entry into the English novel, but also the textual conditions of its admission.

Rogues are some of the first figures to move from the historical record of criminality into a sort of fictional rehabilitation within this new literary form in the eighteenth century. Male and female rogues appear in early English novels as key instantiations not only of economic or political dispossession and non-governmentality, but also, in their seeming circulation as “masterless men,” as indicators of a new possessive individualism within which political liberty and private property can be imagined. The infamous rogues and vagabonds in Daniel Defoe’s novels—Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Roxana, Captain Jack, Captain Singleton, and so on—provide us with key examples of this double connotation of dispossession and freedom. The complexity of these figures does not allow us to imagine their meaning within a double-stranded history where one might have to choose one thread of questioning over the other: are rogues representatives of a political history, of debates about freedom from coercion and thus to be associated with the liberatory social move-

ments of their time, or are they instead interested figurations of forces driving governmentality—dangerous elements in the social that must be controlled, disciplined, and brought under the law? My sense is that these figures, through their ability to represent possession and dispossession at the same time, are able to transform fictional vicissitudes—their emplotment in stories of power and accumulation, subordination and penury—into a more abstract discussion of “rogue economics” that tells us much about early modern ruminations on the nature of political economy.

The formal link between literary narratives and figures, and the imagining of economic processes, is hardly specific to the early modern era. Indeed, one of the most important literary lessons about economic phenomena emerges in Karl Marx’s rumination on the commodity: that it is the particular historical form through which the value of the social character of labor is expressed. Thus cultural forms of appearance, whether they be things or people, are often important embodiments of economic phenomena, and their assemblages at various times form the ideological constellations through which present readers can see how past historical conditions were grasped imaginatively in particulars. So while rogues may have been recognized by their original readers as representatives of the demographic at a particular historical moment (the poor, vagrant, criminal, and dispossessed in seventeenth-century England for instance), their ideological value also lies in their narrative capacity to project a subject’s relationship to a system. Today, a comparison of consecutive remakes of similar stories allows us to detect shifts in these ideological constellations. For this reason, while my discussion in this essay will focus on a literary precursor, *The English Rogue* (first published in 1665), that predates the list of the fictional possessive individualists in Defoe’s fiction, my point of departure is the supposition that Defoe’s fiction of the early eighteenth century already reveals a break in the imaginings of political economy. The economic context within which the rogue circulates in the novel from the last quarter of the seventeenth century is very different from that of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and a careful unpacking of this difference can, I argue, enable an understanding of how writers and readers imagined human agency within the context of mercantilism as opposed to a later economic system that already exhibits key elements of modern capitalism.

To clarify the discursive break I am describing here, let us look briefly at the way in which *Robinson Crusoe* generated interest among economists when it was pressed belatedly into service for mythical narratives about capitalism in the nineteenth century. Marx famously complains in *Capital* (1867) about David Ricardo’s sleight of hand that makes the vagabond, prodigal son, cast away on an uninhabited island, into a blank slate on which to make appear a private owner of commodities. Marx argues that in Ricardo’s account of Defoe’s tale, Crusoe seems to “exchange [his] fish and game in proportion to the labor time which is materialized in these exchange values” but that the exchange values

for the fish and game were calculated using “the annuity tables used on the London Stock Exchange in 1817.”² Marx’s point is that the production of commodities belongs to a definite, historically determined mode of social production,” i.e. capitalism, but when Ricardo imagines Robinson to be a producer of commodities (as a primitive hunter and fisher on his island) he is not only disguising the historical specificity of the commodity mode (by moving it back to the inaugural stages of human history and anachronistically using contemporary price tables), but that he is also propagating a “bourgeois economics” that dissimulates the process of abstraction of value, a concept that is possible only if we think of labor and production as part of a total social product rather than as the result of any one individual’s work. Economic value of a commodity, in other words, can only be determined by thinking of labor as social labor. If Marx cannot press this point, he cannot also argue that the expropriation of surplus value is the channeling of a societal surplus as profits to the capitalist class without a distribution in kind to the workers.

How does Marx expose the sleight-of-hand? He does so by showing how the fictional figure of the castaway Robinson allows a reader to imagine a historical origin on the island in a way impossible within a fully functioning productive society with complex social relations. Man after all is not an island. Marx then points out that Defoe’s Robinson is not actually in capitalist society, for in such a scene the fetish-like character of the commodity would represent the relationship between people as a relationship between things. Instead what we have in Defoe’s fiction is a solitary man producing a number of things (clothes, bread, wheat, baskets, tables and chairs, and so on) for himself, for his personal consumption, as use values, not as exchange values: “despite the diversity of his productive functions, he [Robinson] knows that they are only different forms of activity of one and the same Robinson, and hence only different modes of human labour.”³ Thus necessity rather than social production is what compels him to apportion his time accurately between his different kinds of work. Here, Crusoe knows his relations to the product directly, there is no commodity fetishism to disguise the relations of production, just as there is no commodity fetishism in pre-capitalist feudal societies or peasant families where personal dependence between serfs and lords, or patriarchs and dependents, does not need products to “assume a fantastic form different from their reality.”⁴ On the other hand, in a community of free individuals where production is in common, the labor power of different individuals cannot be determined by their own social needs, rather it is determined by a social plan according to which workers are given a measure of the common social product, through a formula for distribution over which they have no individual control. So Marx concludes that while Robinson’s case allows us to see how abstraction works, when different kinds of work are made equivalent through a general equivalent, (although the general equivalent is not money or wages, but rather the time Robinson spends to make each thing)—this is not the scene of commodity production—

because no exchange is planned.⁵ This fictional fabrication, Marx concludes, also shows us ironically that many elements of capitalism are already present in the tale; abstraction is already at work in the eighteenth-century text, so that use value and exchange value are complicit with each other, and one holds within it the possibility of the other. But its ideological power lies in the way this substitution allows a fantasy of control and individuation of value that is actually impossible in capitalist society.

Fifty years on from *Robinson Crusoe*, when we come to the second half of the eighteenth century, a curious subgenre of works known variously as it-narratives or novels of circulation gains popularity. In these narratives, we see the association of an unobstructed movement of a character-like object with burgeoning commercialism, a growing imperial culture and the moral or economic ends to which things may be put.⁶ However, novels where "circulation" is the main structural motor of the narration predate this period. In the seventeenth century, instead of commodities that talk and think like human beings (coming to life as fetish), what we see instead is the circulation of human beings like goods. This circulation narrative is very much part of an earlier picaresque tradition of rogues and other social marginals in the mid to late seventeenth century, when mercantilism rather than laissez faire capitalism (or political economy proper) was the reigning economic science. Here, hypermobile human adventurers rather than commodities drive the plot, and because the characters of these "rogue narratives" eschew the trappings of the eighteenth-century economic man (the work ethic, religious morality and possessive individualism of the *homo economicus*), these narratives provide, it seems to me, a valuable way of understanding how dispossession was a sort of blank slate for the inscribing of economic value. Because value is finally the abstraction of equivalence between two disparate things, these stories also provide crucial insights into linkages between the economic and cultural, between value and human identity, and between equality and subordination. And in that the activities of these rogues-in-circulation involve debauchery and licentiousness, we also see provocative analogies drawn between a political economy of sex and gender and that of economic relations as such.

A reminder first: there is no place in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* for women. Except for a sole reference at the end of the novel, when women are shipped as wives to the new residents of the island, thoughts of sex, women, or children rarely cross Crusoe's mind in his solitary existence. The calculation of value through productive (as opposed to reproductive) labor requires even Marx to take no account of Crusoe's prayers and the like because they are simply a source of pleasure or recreation to him. In *The English Rogue*, however, we have a Crusoe in reverse. Here, our protagonist, a young runaway named Meriton Latroon, is not arrested on an island or given to work. Rather, when not engaged in criminal activity, he circulates like a commodity, inserting his body into endless circuits of debauchery, pleasure and consumption, thus making

visible an analogy between masterless men and mercantile exchange. In the seventeenth century when peddlers and mobile merchants are demonized or excluded from marketplaces or normal line of work and forced into circuits of roguery, a standard economic history might record this as the growth of retail consumerism fed by international companies like the East India Company, the Levant Company, or the Virginia Company, where unifying state regulation is displacing pre-modern and pre-capitalist forms of exchange.⁷ On the other hand, a literary text like *The English Rogue* produces, through its protagonist, an ironic counterpoint to the growing cultural power of the virtuous merchant by running alongside legal economic exchange other sorts of illegal and informal exchanges including robbery, barter, and sex.⁸ These two circuits are not, however, separate economic spheres for men with or without possessions. Rather, as *The English Rogue* demonstrates, the lower circuit, understood as a trafficking of bodies rather than commodities, understands political economy through the most obvious analogy of human intercourse—sex.

Critics like Pierre Macherey have argued that some of Defoe's female characters are no different from Crusoe: fictional destitutes like Moll Flanders, moving through her story of roguery as prostitute, spouse, pickpocket and proprietor, are "always accompanied by continuously catalogued commodities (which have a value whatever their source." While it may be true that Moll Flanders serves to reveal "social relations, class conflicts and the growth of capital . . . in a cruder light," Macherey argues that these relations are still mystified, for as a poor woman who cannot access the bourgeois ideal versions of "love, commerce and marriage, those basic categories of society," Moll's criticism is staged as a misrecognition of these categories as "things" from below.⁹ These social relations, Macherey points out, thus also appear to her as commodities, although she deals with them directly, and not by intermediaries as others do. The important point here is that, for Macherey, even direct relations between people (in love, commerce, marriage, or sex) can create fetish-like versions of social relations, if accessed by people who are dispossessed to begin with and not the originally intended subjects of those relations. What Macherey fails to note here, and what these rogue narratives that focus on pleasure, debauchery, and consumption actually reveal, is something else: things like love, prostitution, sex, and marriage are not outside a political economy. That is, they do not mimic political economy by turning intimate human relations into things, rather sex-gender systems are also sites of production of value, sometimes as use and sometimes as exchange, and like productive relations, they can also be a place for reading surplus and the appropriation of it through power and subordination.¹⁰

But why is the rogue inserted into a political economy of sex, rather than political economy proper? Here economic history can provide a useful site for understanding how any study of superseded economic systems must attend to the uneven appearance of human beings in that story. In his magisterial two-

volume study of mercantilism, Eli Heckscher acknowledges that the fifth and final part of his discussion—mercantilism as a conception of society—has been “entirely overlooked by economic historians.”¹¹ In this section Heckscher reads the philosophical arguments of seventeenth-century mercantilists, only to find a paradoxical strain. On the one hand, they opposed everything that bound down economic life to a particular place or obstructed trade within the boundaries of place. In a formulation like “liberty is the soul of trade,” they even predicated the human subject to be a free social animal (not unlike the one we encounter in *laissez faire* literature of eighteenth-century writers like Defoe).¹² On the other hand, along with this abstract idealizing of freedom of trade, mercantilist writers implicitly consolidated the power of the state through their demands to remove inequalities in the system of coinage, weights, and measures, and unify trade through legislation, administration, and taxation. However, subject predication went on with help from a liberal tradition that emphasized liberty rather than compulsion but with some limits. While “allurements” and “rewards” were to be the motors of economic activity rather than coercion, schemes of compulsory work that organized beggars and vagabonds were viewed only as a means of increasing the wealth of the country.¹³

I mention a disciplinary historian like Heckscher to make the point that even scholars who asserted a historical, statist, or conceptual unity to mercantilism could not have been unaware that in the arena of social and cultural pursuits, these unities were often contradicted by other ideologies that had considerable sway. In the exercise of judicial power, for instance, with stimulations for one set of people and coercions for the other, we see the creation of two circuits within governmentality—an upper circuit of virtuous mercantile economic accumulation and a lower circuit of roguery and thieving. The style of *The English Rogue*, its refusal to condemn the immoral and licentiousness of its protagonist, reveals it to be a parodic rather than a realistic staging of this lower circuit of governmentality in the English mercantilist state. So while sex-gender systems are usually read as supplementary sites, (outside economic labor for Defoe as well as Marx) or as a site to mine rewards for virtue (love and marriage for economically productive men and sometimes women), in *The English Rogue*, because the protagonist eschews work and engages in what is then regarded as illegal and non-economic activity, what the text generates through the sphere of immorality, as byproduct, is a valuable recoding of economic value within sexuality as labor power—a political economy of sex. Here the sex-gender system is the economy as such. The historical lesson is a paradoxical one: we see elements in the early modern text of what we now recognize, belatedly, after the work of Marxist and feminist analysis, to be a sex-gender system; however, even as it appears in that text only as a parodic substitution of sex for economic exchange, the articulation of one in terms of the other is already visible.

Richard Head's *The English Rogue: Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon a Witty Extravagant*, first appeared in the early 1660s. Controversial for its inde-

gency, it was printed secretly and sold at alehouses and other such gathering places for some years until it finally passed stamp and was published in 1665. The next year, Francis Kirkman, a bookseller, acquired rights to it and tried to persuade Head to write a second part. Head refused, believing that Meriton Latroon's scandalous adventures had been mistaken as autobiography and that his reputation had suffered immensely from it. So Kirkman set himself to the task of writing part II, which appeared in 1671. The edition I am using in this essay has Head's original volume and two of Kirkman's added volumes.¹⁴

In the novel, Meriton Latroon is set into play as a social marginal when he abandons normative economic and social identities (good son, student, and apprentice) and runs away to join a band of gypsies. The gypsies—the early modern period's exemplary figuration of circulation where people and things remain in the shadow of what is properly English and properly legal—provide Latroon with the initiation rites into a polymorphous system of exchange:

Most part of the night we spent in boozing, pecking rumly or wapping, that is drinking, eating or whoring, according to the terms they use among themselves. Jealousy was a thing they never would admit of in their society, and to make appear how little they were tainted therewith, the males and females lay promiscuously together, it being free for any of the Fraternity to make choice of what doxy he liked best, changing when he pleased.¹⁵

Here circulation changes from the movement of economic goods into a circuit within which people traffic freely in sex, food, and liquor—goods that are consumed immediately by the body for its needs, rather than stored or exchanged. As “incests” and “adulteries” become Latroon's pastimes in the camp, sex is also represented as an original exchange that produces strictly use values (mutual pleasure) when released from the regulation of social taboos. (Here, we might think by contrast how a domestic novel produces a patriarchal surplus value that is appropriated by men when the sex-gender system operates within incest taboos, which consolidate legitimate products like monogamy and marriage). As the narrative progresses, the novel produces an impressive list of the variety of “trades” in which Latroon dabbles after leaving the gypsy camp: burglary, poaching, conning, bartering, begging, domestic service, pick-pocketing, gambling, counterfeiting, and prostitution, but none of them serves to generate the inevitable accumulation of wealth that characterized the narrative progress of Defoe's *Crusoe* or *Roxana*. In a revealing moment when Latroon's brief stint as a domestic servant is cut short by the discovery of a sexual dalliance with his master's wife, he ponders his fortunes:

My stock was now very small, how to increase it I knew not. My invention was daily on the rack to find out expedient ways to supply my necessary expense. But my money being all spent, my belly began to grumble out of insufferable com-

plaints against me, seeming to charge me with want of ingenuity and industry, since I enjoyed my liberty; for want that man cannot, which wants not that.¹⁶

In this ironic counter to mercantilist ideologies about the natural inclination of man toward ingenuity and industry, Latroon asserts his "liberty" by arguing that he cannot want (lack) what he does not desire. Unlike solitary Crusoe, who stockpiles what he does not eat or need, Latroon's subsistence and physical needs consume everything without a surplus: "Notwithstanding I daily thus, almost cheated one or other, procuring thereby considerable sums of money, yet, by my drinking, whoring, and defending myself from such as I had wronged, I seldom kept any money by me."¹⁷

Through this comic staging of the impossibility of generating a surplus through virtuous frugality, the novel interrogates the very premises of commodity circulation as the basis of wealth creation. As the economy of wants consumes the fruits of his work, the novel provides a counter-narrative to the historical text of mercantilism. If we think of mercantilism as a stage before laissez-faire capitalism, the novel stages through the impossibility of surplus, a question that is decidedly important for thinking the transition from one mode of economic production to another—a question not unlike the one *Robinson Crusoe* stages about the origins of private property. If things (or people) circulate freely how is a surplus generated? How does profit arise from "free" trade if the world is also fantasized as a theater within which heterogeneous peoples and cultures barter use values (wants) in equal amounts without coercion?

The English Rogue poses these questions most provocatively when Latroon tries to use sex as a supplemental way of generating surplus. If *The English Rogue* is a textual staging of the coding of economic value—what can be exchanged for what and how a surplus is to be generated in such an exchange—then it is the sex-gender system that is most available to Latroon as a system of free exchange. It is also the most frustrating because, in the marketplace of bodies, exchange is driven by different forms of value. When the text presents sex as an originary exchange of use values (mutual pleasure) it offers a sort of imagining of abstract labor power—the various women who participate in sexual exchanges do so by abstracting value (what is common to all the different forms) through the general equivalents of money, love, pleasure, or marriage. Domesticates, virgins, housewives, and prostitutes exchange their bodies for one or the other, but Latroon soon realizes that sex can only generate surplus value for himself (as opposed to merely generating use values) when he does not pay for it or when sex is coded affectively like credit. For instance, Latroon announces that he profits most when he gets sex for false promises of love and marriage and when he avoids paying prostitutes for sexual services. Women, the text soon shows us, can be exploited not only as class victims in this lower circuit of exchange but also through manipulable sex-gender codes.

Latroon's appropriation of sexual surplus, we also learn, is hindered if the

women get pregnant because children cannot be exchanged as commodities; they only consume his wealth. Our canny protagonist keeps his head above water by abdicating responsibility for such children or abandoning pregnant women when they demand marriage. Unlike the upper circuit, the lower circuit of the dispossessed cannot generate women's property for transfer in marriage to men. The only wealth creation possible through women is in the transformation of sexuality into labor power, which Latroon discovers in his short stint as a pimp. For the most part, the novel shows the sex-gender system as a place of overlapping forms of value: barter or simple value (sex for food), exchange with a general equivalent (sex for money), and expanded forms of value (sex for love, love for money, money for marriage, and so on). However, even after all these exchanges, Latroon cannot accumulate any material possessions. The novel seems to provide the lesson that the sex-gender system imagined as a potentially free realm of sexual exchange between men and women cannot generate economic surplus as capital (it can only generate use values that cannot be accumulated). For surplus to appear, another form of transvaluing must take place (in terms of gender, race, or class), not unlike the surplus of patriarchal value that accrues only when men have real power over women. It is at this point that the novel makes a remarkable opening onto the scene of international trade—and it does so without leaving behind the political economy of sex.

Before I read the global economy of sex in this novel, it is important to note that *The English Rogue's* internationalization of the sex-gender system resonates also as counter-argument to a proposition that seventeenth-century mercantilists took a long time to acknowledge—that foreign trade, if constrained by bullion protectionism (the concern that precious metals leaving England would diminish national wealth), would ultimately lower profits. Circulating only within England in the lower circuits, the text seems to say, will not do anything for Latroon. The novel's plot obliges the reader with a quick set of transitions to expand this circuit: Latroon is captured while attempting a highway robbery, sent to Newgate to be hanged, is spared a death sentence, and clapped under the hatches of a merchantman for penal servitude in Virginia. The ship springs a leak while at sea. He and the other sailors are cast away at sea but are subsequently picked up by a ship bound for the Canaries. The ship is chased by a Turkish galley, and Latroon, captured again, becomes part of another popular story of European circulation—of white slavery.¹⁸ When Latroon's body becomes an economic commodity on the high seas, what is also manifested is the anxiety of English dispossession on an international scale. The stops on Latroon's itinerary resemble the lot of an English nation being at sea in a global economy where it has no way of negotiating simple value (one good for another) or a general equivalent (gold and silver), but must settle for the more complex negotiated exchanges of expanded forms of value.

In a recent book, Sanjay Krishnan puts Marx's theory of value to work at

the scene of English trade in Asia when he argues that the “representational modalities” intent on establishing a “global civil society” founded in imperial trade and commerce depended on reproducing, in the domain of representation, a general equivalent or a metric by which “the objects of the world can be described and compared within a single frame, just as material exchange in advanced societies take place through a universal measure known as the money form.”¹⁹ Krishnan shows that the social monopoly of a general equivalent is not readily available when trading partners are not able to dominate the processes of exchange and that in pre-colonial trade the form of general equivalence is more often than not interrupted by diverse linguistic terms (or money terms) which cannot be readily translated into equivalents from one culture to another. Here, instead of the general equivalent what we have is a realm of “constant connections” not unlike what Marx names as “total or expanded value.” Historically, we might say then, the ability to establish a general equivalent in place of this expanded value requires something else, like violence, to interrupt the circulation of commodities within trade. As Krishnan puts it, “to study the global is to see how the universal equivalent and the total or expanded form of value at once interfere with and supplement each other, challenging us to evolve new styles of reading.”²⁰

The story of value production and coding and its importance to the study of eighteenth-century global trade draws its theoretical beginnings from Marx. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx identifies four forms of value: the simple or accidental form where x quantities of commodity a equal y quantities of commodity b (there is no general equivalent or one commodity into which all commodities can relativize their value or be exchanged). The second form of value is the general form where one commodity mediates for all others. When this commodity is gold or money, the general form becomes the money form (or the third form of value). Finally, we have what Marx calls the “total or expanded form of value,” which he dismisses because it cannot allow him, in its limitless and endless work of coding, to come up with abstractions like capital. This form of value has no general equivalent. Here x quantities of commodity a are exchanged for y quantities of commodity b or z quantities of commodity c . So commodity a exchanges not only with commodity b , but also with c, d, e, f , etc. It is a matter of indifference which commodity is in equivalent form. While this link between a and all these other commodities reveals that any commodity exists in a social relation with the whole world of commodities, the limitless nature makes it unable to compute a single, unified appearance of human labor in general. This is why Marx eschews this “imperfect” form for the money or general form even as he admits that in the arena of foreign trade, this form of value reappears with a vengeance because the money form cannot function alone.²¹

The English Rogue’s narrative cross hatching of the sex-gender and economic systems tells us why the expanded form of value (useless for Marx) is very useful for reading cultural difference and globality. Gayatri Spivak, whose work

consistently reads Marx's economic *as* text, has suggested that if we dissociate the total or expanded form from a necessary economic coding, we can see the family resemblance and the structural similarity among different disciplinary fields.²² Disciplines endeavor to find a general equivalent in a field that is actually heterogeneous and discontinuous like the relations of commodity *x* to *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*. Thus in anthropology, the human (man) is read as the general equivalent in knowledge production across culturally differentiated space. In gender codings of value, the contentless thing, sexual difference, is read into value as "men" and "women." This sort of value-coding is already at work in the realm of cultural exchange in the early modern era, especially at the scene of cultural difference when the familiar has to be exchanged for the unfamiliar. If we, as readers, do not simply read for men and women as always already given, already coded as visible historical subjects, in such descriptions, we can render visible the practices of value inscription. As I will show below, as the rogue narrative enters foreign waters, this transdisciplinary value coding is already at work.

As Latroon arrives on the Malabar coast in South India at a place known as Delyn, the ships stays out at anchor. The sailors dared not land, he says, for fear of its "treacherous and bloody people." However, sailing further south, where people are "more civil," economic exchange could finally take place: "receiving things from the inhabitants of considerable value, for toys and trifles we gave them in lieu. We resolved to stay here for a while."²³ This sort of exchange—of useless things for items of value—is how early modern literary texts stage the mercantilist fantasy of capital accumulation. But the text leaves that aside for an ethnographic description of the locals—the "Nairos" as they are called—and then without much ado, gender coding is already in the picture. The text begins to represent other sex-gender systems as a form of expanded value where commensuration is endlessly repeated without a unifying center or a general equivalent. Men and women have little clothing, Latroon tells us, nothing but a "veil over their privities," which veil or flap, the women will turn aside, and "shew a man their Pudenda, by way of gratitude for any courtesy received, as if they would render satisfaction with that which could never receive plenary satisfaction itself."²⁴ Here, a native woman reverses the order of mercantilist exchange—she gives her "useless" trifle for an English service. Latroon's ethnographic account then marks the "strange custom of their marriages" where lower caste men gift the "maidenheads" of their young brides to upper caste men, who when swamped with such offers, then sell them to strangers, including sailors on arriving ships. Virginity, he soon reckons, can be transformed from gift to commodity as it moves from lower-caste Malabari men to upper-caste men, and finally to English men. Then Latroon records another anomalous sexual value also produced through exchange—the paradoxical figure of the monogamous prostitute—a woman, who, in a wage arrangement between her parents and a client, will offer sexual and housekeeping services to a single

person. Here, marriage and prostitution are recoded together into the same economic act rather than distinguished in European terms as women's free versus compensated sexual service.

As Latroon's ship moves further down the coast, patriarchal marriage is replaced in the description by a variety of heterogeneous sex/gender codings. At Ceylon, Latroon reports,

Polygamy, or plurality of wives is here permitted; and just as men are granted liberty to have more than one wife, so are the women allowed more than one husband. However, the woman hath the disposal left her of her children, giving them to him she hath greatest affection for; which he receives, not questioning his interest or right (by generation) unto the infant.²⁵

In this wonderful textual moment, Latroon reads the social in the way Gayle Rubin did in her classic essay "The Traffic in Women." In 1975, this essay used anthropological data to provide American feminists with the insight that a reading of the heterogeneity of sex/gender systems across the globe can deconstruct the normative power of such systems within Euro-America.²⁶

In that essay, Rubin's insight was not only that incest taboos and exogamy across the world produced "women" and "men" out of contentless biological difference, i.e. "males" and "females," but that prohibitions against some heterosexual unions also assumed a taboo against non-heterosexual unions. Similarly, in our rogue text, Latroon happily transgresses some incest and racial taboos in his attempt to show the variety of sex-gender exchanges he can indulge in, but he also stages its ultimate prohibition and structuring taboo, when he reaches Siam (present-day Thailand). Here, Latroon castrates a man for attempting to sodomize him, and this singular act of violence stands out against all the rest of his lighthearted sexual misdemeanors in the book.

What I want to emphasize about this fictional ethnography where *The English Rogue* is putting together, in the text of immorality, a global political economy of sex, is that the content does not really matter. The cultural work happens at the level of form, even if the ethnographic data may prove to be false. Indeed it could be argued that Latroon's sexual geography recodes a well-documented "fact" of Nair matrilineality into fabricated patrilineality through the general equivalent of "marriage" when no such arrangement existed among them at the time. To me there is something important about the theoretical fiction operating here as a whole. Is it possible that at a certain historical juncture, before the advent of the wage labor specific to capitalism, labor-power, or the capacity to produce economic value (as the surplus of one's own needs through labor embodied in human beings) could be thought through the bodies of women? In that use value and exchange value can coexist if sex-in-exchange produces both pleasure and profit—something that is not quite possible to think with menial work in the eighteenth century—sex, sexuality, and reproduction provide the illusion of em-

bodied value that seems more “naturally” inalienable from the body. In sex, after all, separating the labor from the product is much more difficult. Where economists dissimulate the relationship between sexual and economic coding by keeping them separate, in *The English Rogue* the coding of the sex-gender system and the economic system of value is run together, thus revealing the literary text’s potential for scripting value in both systems at the same time.

The ship soon enters Bantam near Java, a global market where Asian merchants abound and only gold and silver (bullion) can be traded for precious spices like pepper. Here, the English are at a distinct disadvantage because of their state restrictions on bullion exports, and it is the Dutch who control most of the spice supplies in and out of the peninsula. Economic history tells us why the English were seeking alternative spice sources in South Asia at this time, but in *The English Rogue*, the constraints on the English can only be read as Latroon’s lack of resources to enter the Bantam market on his own (leaving him to fall back on his older methods of “trade” to acquire capital). Donning a disguise, Latroon transforms himself from a penniless English factor into a local merchant. He clothes himself in Indian silk, blackens his face and claps a black patch upon one of his eyes, and finds a Banian (a merchant or money-lender of Indian origin) to sell him a box full of precious stones which he carries away with him on credit. In the text’s representation of an untranslatable linguistic exchange between the two men as a “broken exchange,” credit is the variable currency that establishes the possibility of commerce, communication, and sociality itself. The roguery is soon discovered and a great crew of Indians and Chinese (headed by the Banian) fall upon the disembarked English sailors, killing many of them. Although he survives this attack, a fearful Latroon is confined to his ship, unable to release his stolen stones onto the market.

The narrative rescue of Latroon enacted by the novel at this point is nothing short of a significant discursive transformation. The sex-gender system reappears at the failed scene of English economic trade and provides Latroon with a long-awaited opening for the realization of economic surplus. In this scene, the English woman (his earlier object of sexual relations) is replaced by a rich Indian woman from Bantam. What was previously unattainable for Latroon—economic mobility through marriage—is now produced through an “other” woman in a non-European circuit. Now Latroon can enter the sex-gender system with “natural” capital (his racial and sexual advantages) thus also creating, in foreign space, a subject position he could not attain in England: the middle-class married man of property. How does the text bring this about?

While avoiding the town to escape attacks by the irate natives he had conned, Latroon frequents a punch house and soon notices its owner, an Indian woman. The courtship and marriage are all taken care of with a textual efficiency in a single paragraph which can be summarized as follows: She was black, fascinated with him, and rich. And although he was nauseated by her, Latroon “persuaded” himself to marry her.²⁷

In this reckoning, the “other” woman is assigned a place in the narrative whereby she transforms the heterogeneous social and cultural spaces of Bantam, where historically the English have few advantages in trade. Whereas earlier it was marriage, monogamy, and pregnancy that temporarily arrested Latroon’s circulation within the sex-gender system, now the English “woman” is substituted with a figure of cultural, racial, and religious difference. And where earlier the text used moments of linguistic “broken expression” to show the lack of a general equivalent in Bantam, now there is perfect translation in Latroon’s broken verbal exchange with her: “She told me in a little broken English she had got, that she would ‘Money me’ marry me she meant: Aye money me, said I, that I like well.”²⁸

The novel makes it clear that there is no sexual surplus in this marriage because Latroon finds his wife’s blackness repulsive; however, he finds that he can tolerate sex in the marriage because it is yet another trade-off in an affective economy which will generate economic profit. After arranging a hasty marriage ceremony officiated by an English priest and persuading his bride to renounce her “paganism,” Latroon tells us: “what money was got by my wife’s trade, I laid out in such commodities the country afforded, as calicoes, pepper, indigo, green ginger, and sold immediately to the ships lying in the harbour, doubling what I laid out; so that I found my stock to increase beyond expectation.”²⁹ At the same time that the wealth of a native toddy shop owner is transformed from symbolic gift in marriage (dower) into merchant capital proper by Latroon to facilitate his entry into the market at Bantam, the sex-gender system is also manipulated on the other side to produce “wife” as a general equivalent:

Such satisfaction my black received from me, that she thought she could not do enough to please me. I was an absolute monarch in my family; she and her servants willingly consented to be my vassals; yet though I thus enjoyed the prerogative of a husband, yet I did not lord it too much; which won so much upon my wife’s affection and those that were concerned with her, that as soon as I desired anything it was immediately performed, with much alacrity and expedition.³⁰

The social contract that Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe as sovereign enacted as comic wishful thinking at the first pass (with animals) and then as serious political analogy (with Friday and other colonists) is here put into place as a sex-gendered arrangement: the companionate Lockean marriage.

What *The English Rogue* reveals at this point is the gradual reversal of sexual identities as economic value is redistributed: from economically dependent husband, Latroon becomes patriarchal head, while the economically self-sufficient female agent in the Bantam market becomes dependent wife in a new affective coding—one that curiously smacks of what we associate with the later historical emergence of the “bourgeois companionate marriage,” or the arrangement that produces the “domestic woman” as desirable sexual identity. As we watch

this important moment in the text when the money form of value is letting in the expanded form of value through the gift-exchange of women, the surreptitious gift miraculously given up by a resistant and intransigent local economy (represented by the Banian) is a remarkable staging of the creation of the general equivalence through peaceful means: sex rather than violence. But in so doing, the novel does not only analogize sex as economic exchange but reveals how sex-gender systems of other cultures can be recoded to increase mercantile capital. Even as economic exchange reveals the arbitrariness of the chain that fixes value economically and sexually, the patriarchal contract is normalized by scripting through the affective code—where forms of expanded value are transformed into cultural general equivalents like marriage, affection, wife, and sex. Here money as general equivalent for trade is released through a “gift” from the Indian woman, an exchange in which she ultimately submits to the very commodity she “buys.” We also see an imaginative articulation of the manner in which sex-gender systems are not only morphologically similar to economic systems of value, but how the two systems may be attributive and supportive of each other through the manipulation of the code.

In conclusion, the happy ending for the dispossessed Englishman reveals how a parody about the illicit economy of thievery and debauchery is a rich site for staging the cultural appropriation of meanings and identities, and how it does this without breaking English law. Reading for the expanded form of value in the manner enabled by *The English Rogue* not only makes the literary resonate with the historical scene of mercantilism, but also reveals how these illicit domains are not merely sites of non-productive activity. Rather, by parodying work as sex, and race and gender as exchangeable valuable commodities, *The English Rogue* produces, unwittingly, its own byproduct: an early modern deconstruction of the sex-gender system as a political economy in its own right, where the rescripting and absorbing of local heterogeneous sex-gender systems into a universal general equivalent produces surplus accumulation for a dispossessed rogue and transforms him into a white, Christian male of property like his historical successor, Robinson Crusoe.

NOTES

1. See Srinivas Aravamudan, “Subjects/Sovereigns/Rogues,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 3 (2007): 457–65.

2. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 [1867], trans. Ben Fowkes (New York, 1977), 169n31.

3. Marx, 1:169.

4. Marx, 1:170.

5. For this point, and a discussion of the mutual determination of use and exchange value, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 177–78.

6. See Mark Blackwell, ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, 2007), 13. In another illuminating study, Jonathan Lamb’s *The Things That Things Say* (Princeton, 2011), we are asked to attend to things

not as representatives of other objects or human qualities and values, but as substances with interests radically other to those of human beings. For Lamb, their existence outside systems of exchange is what makes them significant, not their capacity to embody human interests.

7. See Craig Donne and Steve Mentz, eds., *Rogues and Early Modern Culture* (Ann Arbor, 2004).

8. For a discussion of notions of “virtue” and transparency associated with merchants’ practices, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago and London, 1998).

9. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London and New York, 1978), 247.

10. The emphasis here is somewhat different from Erin Mackie’s reading of social marginals like rakes, highwaymen, and pirates as representatives of illicit modes of masculinity that are constitutive of licit forms like “the modern gentlemen.” In her reading, as sexual excess is transformed into proof of the gentleman’s sexuality, rather than his immorality, economic relations are synonymous with class transactions between the aristocracy and an emerging middle class (*Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* [Baltimore, 2009], 5, 9).

11. Eli F. Heckscher, *Mercantilism*, 2 vols., trans. Mendel Shapiro, (London, 1934) 1:28. For recent revisionary work that challenges the dominant models and historical stages that Heckscher and other historians retroactively ascribed to mercantilism, see Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, eds., *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire* (Oxford, 2013). The essays in this volume investigate mercantilism conceptually and historically as an object dispersed and crosshatched in a variety of political, scientific, social, and cultural pursuits of the seventeenth century. In a more polemical vein, Steven Pincus traces the ideological divisions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century party politics to show that the Whig and Tory had competing visions of how nations generated wealth. See especially Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (January 2012): 3–34. In this lead essay for a forum on rethinking mercantilism, Pincus reviews a considerable body of work by economic historians to assert that, contrary to the widespread belief that there was remarkable consensus about the role of the early modern state in international trade, periodicals and pamphlets reveal a schism driven mostly along party lines. Whigs were more often than not anti-conquest and believers in the infinite productive value of labor and manufactures; Tories advocated conquest of foreign territories in the belief that trade was a zero-sum game and that land, a finite good, was the source of all wealth.

12. Heckscher, 2:274.

13. Heckscher, 2:297.

14. Richard Head and Francis Kirkman, *The English Rogue: Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon, a Witty Extravagant. Being a Complete History of the Most Eminent Cheats of Both Sexes* [1671] (London, 1928).

15. Head and Kirkman, 23–24.

16. Head and Kirkman, 86.

17. Head and Kirkman, 180.

18. See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600–1850* (New York, 2003).

19. Sanjay Krishnan, *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives in Britain’s Empire in Asia* (New York, 2007), 101.

20. Krishnan, 102.

21. See Marx, 1:138–63.

22. Spivak, 103.

23. Head and Kirkman, 245.

24. Head and Kirkman, 246.
25. Head and Kirkman, 250.
26. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: On the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York, 1975), 157–210.
27. Head and Kirkman, 261.
28. Head and Kirkman, 261.
29. Head and Kirkman, 262.
30. Head and Kirkman, 263.