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Working, Lauren Noemie orcid.org/0000-0002-9475-7498 (2023) '*Not as a poet, but a pioner*': *Fancy and the Colonial Gaze in William Davenant's Madagascar (1638)*. *Renaissance Studies*. pp. 319-344. ISSN 1477-4658

<https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12835>

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‘Not as a Poet, but a Pioner’: Fancy and the Colonial Gaze in William Davenant’s *Madagascar* (1638)

LAUREN WORKING 

In the late 1630s, the court poet William Davenant applied his literary energies to Madagascar, an island off the eastern coast of Africa: ‘Thus in a dreame, I did adventure out.../Betweene the Southern *Tropick* and the *Line*’.¹ His twenty-one-page poem appeared in print in 1638, with prefatory verses by fellow courtiers and wits including John Suckling and Thomas Carew. The poem cast Charles I’s nephew, Prince Rupert, as a dashing conqueror, subduing Madagascan and European rivals with his beauty and taking control of the island for the English. Despite its more fantastical elements, the work emerged out of actual projects to colonize Madagascar in the 1630s, including hopes that Rupert would lead the expedition.

Like the paintings by his friend, the artist Anthony van Dyck, Davenant’s poem presented a lush, dramatic vision of elite interference in other geographic spaces. By the 1630s, the English held multiple colonies in the Americas and had established direct trade networks with a number of eastern polities, building on the diplomatic missions led by Thomas Roe, Robert Sherley, Thomas Herbert and Dodmore Cotton to India, Persia and the Ottoman Empire.² Court interest in Madagascar flared in 1635 after Sir William Courteen secured a royal charter to establish Courteen’s Association, a company that operated outside the aegis of the East India Company (EIC), and again several years later with the support of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel.³ As a result, scholars have tended to situate Davenant’s poem within

The author would like to thank Nandini Das and the anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback on earlier drafts; and the organisers of the Oxford Early Modern English Literature seminar and York-CREMS for the opportunity to share and discuss iterations of this research.

Initial research for this publication was supported by the ERC-TIDE project, under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 681884).

¹ William Davenant, *Madagascar. With other poems* (1638; STC 6304), 2.

² James Knowles, ‘“The faction of the flesh”: Orientalism and the Caroline Masque’, in *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline Era*, eds. Ian Atherton and Julie Sanders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 111–137.

³ Edmund Smith, ‘“Canaanising Madagascar”: Africa in the English Imperial Imagination, 1635–1650’, *Itinerario*, 39 (2015), 277–98, at 280. See also Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin P. McDonald, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

these interests in eastern trade and trafficking. Historians have read the poem as an example of the ‘imperial imagination’ that helped fuel English commerce in the Indian Ocean, while literary scholars have focused on the slipperiness of its genre, somewhere between epic, romance and dream vision, contextualizing the poem alongside Caroline voyaging drama and Davenant’s other works.⁴ As Claire Jowitt and others have discussed, the poem’s endorsement of empire is ambiguous, containing a critique of wealth as potentially corrupting, and ending with the narrator waking from his dream, bringing grand hopes of dominion to an end.⁵

This article revisits the poem’s genre and social context by focusing on its specific engagement with colonization, a topic that is sometimes lost in broader discussions of empire or global travel. Despite its position in ‘the Oriental Indyes’, Madagascar was the first region beyond the Atlantic that the English attempted to colonize, and its proponents specifically cited Virginia and the Caribbean as models.⁶ At the same time, the language of romance and fiction suffused the project from the start. Rupert’s mother Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia, deemed her son’s plans ‘Don Quixotte like’, and asked those around him to ‘put such windmills out of his head’.⁷ Although written to support the project, the poem itself, framed as a dream and focusing on its blithe lovers, seems to discourage an overt reading of the colonialism at its core.

As this article argues, the concept of fancy is key to reconciling the seeming incongruities between the playful, at times mocking language of Davenant’s poem, and the colonial aspirations that underpinned it. Cavalier poets drew heavily on the playful variance and delight that fancy provided.⁸ While it later became illustrative of decorative imagery or dangerous illusion – of baroque effusion, unfavourably contrasted to a healthy, reasoned imagination – fancy in the early seventeenth century could denote ‘the creative or productive imagination, which frames images of objects, events, or conditions that have not occurred in actual experience’.⁹ ‘[E]ndlessly inventive’ and seeming to ‘fly from one Indies to the other’, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, fancy became a means for writers to probe the

⁴ Marlin E. Blaine, ‘Epic, Romance, and History in Davenant’s “Madagascar”’, *Studies in Philology*, 95 (1998), 293–319; Smith, “Canaanising Madagascar”.

⁵ Claire Jowitt, “‘To sleep, perchance to Dream’: The Politics of Travel in the 1630s”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 44 (2014), 249–64; Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95–6.

⁶ Smith, “Canaanising Madagascar”, 280, 290; Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile* (1634; STC 13190), frontispiece.

⁷ Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, to Sir Thomas Roe, 25 March/4 April 1636, The National Archives, SP 16/317, fol. 21. On Tudor and Stuart romance, see Nandini Das, ‘Romance Re-Charted: The “Ground Plots” of Sidney’s *Arcadia*’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 41 (2011), 51–67; Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction, 1570–1620* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

⁸ Maura Smyth, *Women Writing Fancy: Authorship and Autonomy from 1611 to 1812* (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), 6.

⁹ ‘Fancy, *n.* and *adj.*’, *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68025?rskey=r8WYD&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 20 April 2022].

relationship between truth, fiction and fantasy in the context of colonialism.¹⁰ The first section explores the poem's genre alongside the literary culture of early Stuart wits and the emergent fashion for writing pro-imperial poetry in the 1620s and 30s, where fancy's relationship to literature and to the eye – to visualizing an English colonial world – served to graft emerging colonial spaces to the 'cartographic imagination' of late Elizabethan poets such as Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser.¹¹ Elizabeth of Bohemia's reference to the 'romance' of Madagascar, meanwhile, raises attention to women's familiarity with the genre. The second section places the poem within the wider context of female networks of colonial interest and self-fashioning at Henrietta Maria's court, investigating how women might have helped direct Davenant's subject and style.

While studies on the 'social life' of objects have opened up connections between material culture and colonialism in anthropological, archaeological and art historical approaches, 'far less writing exists on race and the representation of objects in literature'.¹² Moving from the social spaces of London and the royal court to Madagascar itself, the final section discusses the poem alongside descriptions of commodities in merchant texts and the material culture of Madagascar's Malagasy peoples, making a case for how English tastes developed through and against knowledge about the island and its inhabitants. Despite fancy's ostensibly boundless variations, Davenant's imperial vision in 'Madagascar' is deliberately selective, involving the omission of Malagasy ways of life while elevating luxury consumption and equating the acquisition of global goods with virtue. The poem emerges as an important example of how cavalier poets helped shape a particular colonial gaze at court, where an awareness of the more brutal conditions of colonial expansion accompanied an aesthetic that harmonized convivial lovers, virtuous beauty and geopolitical exploitation.

LOVERS AS CONQUERORS: FANCY, ROMANCE AND THE DREAM VISION POEM

Davenant's poem, sitting somewhere between epic, romance, and dream vision, and operating as both call to action and escapist fantasy, can be difficult to categorise. The fanciful nature of the project did not escape observers at the time. In addition to Elizabeth of Bohemia's dismissal of the scheme as a 'romance', one Venetian ambassador referred to these efforts as 'light

¹⁰ Quoted in Smyth, *Women Writing Fancy*, 21.

¹¹ On the cartographic imagination, see D.K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England: Re-Writing the World in Marlowe, Spenser, Raleigh, and Marvell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹² Sarah Wasserman, 'Representation', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 54–73, at 65.

fancies'.¹³ This section provides an overview of Davenant's involvement with the scheme and its influence on his poem. Connecting 'Madagascar' to the social world of early Stuart wits offers a new perspective on the dream vision poem, where cavalier poets deployed erotic persuasion to encourage colonial participation.

Davenant penned the poem during the visit of Rupert and his brother, Charles Louis, to London, where many gentlemen hoped to convince Charles Louis to lead a fleet to the West Indies while Rupert conquered Madagascar. Kevin Sharpe, Claire Jowitt and Marlin Blaine have seen Davenant's poem as a kind of 'victory poem, for a man who had lost his homeland' – a celebration of martial vigour intended to encourage Rupert to strengthen his ties with Northern European Protestant states during the Thirty Years' War.¹⁴ As Blaine demonstrated, the 'highly politicized Platonism of Caroline aesthetics' were not entirely divorced from the martial heroism of epic conquest, seen in court performances and translations that drew parallels between Persian military strength and Charles's subscription to a monarch's absolute authority.¹⁵ Multiple poems in the *Madagascar* volume celebrate military strength and elite participation in warfare. In the sea perils faced by those who followed in the footsteps of Columbus and Magellan, Davenant wrote, 'majestick, Epick-Historie' was best suited to the deeds of gentlemen.¹⁶

Printed promotional literature drew parallels between the Roman conquest of the British Isles and England's burgeoning imperial power. 'The Nobleness of [Caesar's] Example serves you for encouragement', the merchant Walter Hamond wrote.¹⁷ Madagascar was 'a great Island...never yet coloniz'd'.¹⁸ 'The Earl of Arundel has maintained...the enterprize more vigorously than any one else', the Venetian ambassador reported. 'They have already arranged that Prince Rupert shall have the sovereign rule of the country'.¹⁹ Davenant incorporated a vision of Rupert's reign into his verses, where military power brought political stability and 'traffique' (16):

Thy selfe I saw, quite tir'd with victorie...
Here in a calme began thy regall sway;
Which with such cheerefull hearts, all did obey,

¹³ Elizabeth to Roe, 25 March/4 April 1636, fol. 21; Antonio Correr, Venetian ambassador in England, to the Doge and Senate, 10 April 1637, in *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Vol. 24, 1639–1639*, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1923), 180–5.

¹⁴ Blaine, 'Epic, Romance, and History in Davenant's "Madagascar"', 297; Jowitt, "'To sleep, perchance to Dream'", 258; Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment*, 95–6.

¹⁵ Blaine, 'Epic, Romance, and History in Davenant's "Madagascar"', 298; James Knowles, "'The faction of the flesh": Orientalism and the Caroline Masque', 127–8.

¹⁶ 'Written, When Collonell Goring Was beleev'd to be slaine, at the siege of BREDA', in Davenant, *Madagascar*, 121–2.

¹⁷ Walter Hamond, *Madagascar, the richest and most fruitfull island in the world* (1643; Wing H627), sig. A2r.

¹⁸ Quoted in Blaine, 'Epic, Romance, and History in Davenant's "Madagascar"', 295; Martin Butler, 'Entertaining the Palatine Prince: Plays on Foreign Affairs, 1635–1637', *English Literary Renaissance*, 13 (1983), 319–44.

¹⁹ Correr, in *Calendar of State Papers*, 180–5.

As if no Law, were juster than thy word;
 Thy Scepter still one were safe, without a Sword.
 And here *Chronologers* pronounce thy stile;
 The first true Monarch of the *Golden Isle*.
 An *Isle*, so seated for predominance,
 Where Navall strength, its power can so advance,
 That it may tribute take, of what the East
 Shall ever send in traffique to the West.

In a 1646 text that reflected on recent initiatives to colonize Madagascar, the merchant Richard Boothby praised the '[e]xcellent Encouragement for Setling' that flourished at court, where prominent patrons including Arundel and the queen's favourite, Endymion Porter, supported Rupert's intention to 'plant at Madagascar'.²⁰ Boothby's account, like Hamond's from several years before, established an overlap between courtly and merchant interests, praising the '[h]onourable Endimion Porter and that noble well affected Gentleman John Bond' for urging the seventeen-year-old Rupert to undertake the voyage.²¹ Hamond, a physician, had spent four months in Madagascar in 1630 with the East India Company before entering Courteen's employment. The 'largeness and fertility of the island of *Madagascar*', he wrote, 'promiseth' a 'rich returne'.²²

The endorsement of conquering and 'rich returne' echoes the framework of Davenant's poem, which presents a feverish dream in which Rupert and his band of 'lovers' encounter a series of conflicts on the island: first, the opposition and quick submission of its Malagasy peoples, achieved without bloodshed; next, the single-handed combat between an Englishman and a European rival, which the English win; finally, after their rivals break the agreement, a bloody, decisive victory, glutting the rivers with blood. This victory leaves the fertile abundance of the island open to the English, who prey on its abundance. As Jowitt has pointed out, what follows is a scene of 'aberration and excess', as the English search out the island's commodities, lapsing into rapacity in the face of yielding nature.²³ Davenant's narrator admits: once '[s]uch hopes of wealth discern'd, tis hard to say/How gladly reason did my faith obey' (20). His solution, however, is not to reject conquest but to advocate temperance, for 'reason soone will with our faith conspire,/To make that easie which wee much desire' (20) (Fig. 1).

It is this 'desire' that propels the poem, aligning renown and spoil with elements of romance as well as epic. 'Madagascar' is, at its core, a tale of refined conquest carried out by a legion of lovers, with Rupert as the prince

²⁰ Richard Boothby, *A briefe discovery or description of the most famous island of Madagascar* (1647; Wing B3744), preface.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2; Walter Hamond, *A paradox* (1640; STC 12735).

²² Hamond, *Madagascar*, sig. A2r.

²³ Jowitt, "To sleep, perchance to Dream", 261.

of love. 'You may esteeme them Lovers by their haire', the narrator explains, conjuring the courtly fashions encapsulated in Van Dyck's portrait of Rupert and Charles Louis from the year before, in which the princes appear in full armour with large lace collars, and locks of hair tumbling to their shoulders (8). Davenant evokes Philip Sidney as the model chivalric Protestant hero, but also celebrates the values of the Catholic Henrietta Maria's court, where divine beauty became manifestations of authority and power. As lovers, these conquerors are made as much 'for comelinesse, than strength' (8). When the Malagasy submit to the English, they 'with jealous Opticks trace/Lines of thy Mothers beauty in thy face:/By which, so much thou seem'st the God of love' (3). Rupert's beauty, which refracts that of his mother Elizabeth, radiates with a power that impels the Malagasy to relinquish their weapons and profess their allegiance (2):

For when thy selfe, with thy advent'rous Youth
Were disimbarqu'd; strait with one lib'rall minde,
That long-lost, scatter'd-parcell of mankind,
Who from the first disorder'd throng did stray
And then fix heere, now yield unto thy sway.

Scholars writing about the poem have cited romance and fancy to emphasize the sense of doomed adventuring that seemed imbedded in the project from the start. But the literary fancy that runs through early Stuart writing suggests something more dynamic, in which the hyperfertility of the romance genre meets with the eroticism of dream vision poetry and the highly-stylized, witty irreverence of social performance. As Nandini Das has argued, the multi-dimensional layers of possibility that existed in romance defied the linear teleology of epic, allowing its proponents, including Sidney in his *Arcadia* (1593), to seek virtue through its imaginative explorations.²⁴ It is hardly a coincidence, then, that 'God-like *Sidney*' features in *Madagascar* as a romantic poet-hero (8).

A useful way to read the romance in Davenant's poem is through Joe Moshenska's idea of 'lived romance'.²⁵ Focusing on the courtier Kenelm Digby's privateering in the Mediterranean in the late 1620s, and Digby's choice to pen an autobiographical romance, 'Loose Fantasies', on the island of Milos in 1628, Moshenska has demonstrated how romance influenced the way early Stuart gentlemen fashioned themselves as travellers and adventurers.²⁶ Digby was in Spain in 1623 during the 'Spanish Match', when Charles I travelled to Madrid in disguise to woo the Spanish Infanta, witnessing firsthand how 'literary plots, especially the plots of adventurous romances, might

²⁴ Das, 'Romance Re-Charted'.

²⁵ Joe Moshenska, 'Sir Kenelm Digby's Interruptions: Piracy and Lived Romance in the 1620s', *Studies in Philology*, 113 (2016), 424–83, at 424.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 426–9.



Fig. 1 Anthony van Dyck, *Prince Charles Louis Elector Palatine and his brother, Prince Rupert of the Palatinate*, 1637, oil on canvas, 84×52 in, [Wikimedia](#) (Public domain/CC-BY-SA-3.0)

serve as motivating templates for human action'.²⁷ As Moshenska argues, Digby did not set off on his voyage and belatedly write it as a romance. Instead, the decision to undertake the voyage in the first place demonstrated his desire to live out and experience 'the tropes and the patterns of experience integral to the genre'.²⁸ Davenant cast Rupert as the archetypal romantic adventurer, a role that Rupert himself seemed to adopt a decade later in his Atlantic voyages. Navigating the waterways of Cape Verde and the Caribbean, Rupert concerned himself with the 'Exchange of Civilities' while encountering local inhabitants 'hoping to greatiate with him', both African allies and 'Indians' who 'brought us divers sorts of fruits for refreshing, which wee exchanged for glass beads and such like commodities'.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 445.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁹ 'Prince Rupert's Voyage to the West Indies', 1648, The British Library, Add MS 30307, ff. 16v, 20r.

In ‘Madagascar’, Davenant brought overt discussions about colonial expansion into the performative milieu of London sociability. In its elevation of wine, conviviality and the lover as conqueror, *Madagascar* is the product of the literary and political networks that Michelle O’Callaghan identified in her study of early Stuart wits.³⁰ Porter, Suckling, Carew and Habington’s contributions to the text reveal the influence of court friendships on how ideas of empire were articulated. Porter was a key supporter of the Madagascar scheme (Fig. 2), having backed Courteen’s appeal to Charles to grant a charter for a new company. Suckling and Carew were members of the king’s privy chamber, and Habington, educated at Catholic seminaries in France, was close to the queen. Suckling, Carew and Habington’s responses to ‘Madagascar’ operate as a dialogue, exploring the relationship between poetics and empire by reflecting on Davenant’s work. ‘What mighty Princes Poets are?’ Suckling asked. ‘[T]hose things/The great ones stick at...they venter on; and with great ease,/Discover, conquer, what, and where they please’.³¹ Carew celebrated masculine fraternity – how freely one could travel ‘[w]ithout a *Dido* to retard his course’ – and specifically outlined the value of poets crossing genres as well as seas.³² What might be gained, Carew mused, ‘through Romances lye/Thus blended with more faithfull Historie?’:

Wee, of th’adult’rate mixture not complaine,
But thence more Characters of Vertue gaine;
More pregnant Patterns, of transcendent Worth,
Than barren and insipid Truth brings forth.³³

To imagine colonizing the island, Carew seemed to suggest, presented a richer vision that its actual conditions; and to mix ‘romance’ with ‘history’ would bring greater possibilities (‘pregnant Patterns’) than what lay solely in the realm of reality. Habington expressed a similar view. While the stage was fitting, he wrote, for dramas of love and wit, it was limiting for a topic like conquest. The ‘nobler flight/Of Poesie, hath a supreamer right/To empire’.³⁴ Those who had, in Suckling’s words, ‘redeem’d’ the times by mastering wit were well suited to endorse the ‘civilizing’ project abroad.

With their celebration of masculine adventuring and artful persuasion, these verses provide an important context for interpreting the dream vision element of the poem. The dream vision framework allows for a certain ambiguity. Since the poem ends with the dreamer waking, leaving Madagascar

³⁰ Michelle O’Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith, and the Order of the Fancy* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994).

³¹ John Suckling, ‘To my friend *Will Davenant*; upon his poem of *Madagascar*’, in Davenant, *Madagascar*, preface [un-paginated].

³² Thomas Carew, ‘To *Will Davenant* my Friend’, in *ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ William Habington, ‘To my Friend, *Will Davenant*’, in *ibid.*



Fig. 2 John Hoskins, *Endymion Porter*, 1630, paint on vellum, 80 × 66 mm, New York, Met Museum (Public domain/CC0)

behind, the colonial project seems forsaken, relegated to a feverish reverie.³⁵ A greater endorsement of colonialism emerges when the poem is considered alongside other cavalier dream vision poems, often about erotic desire.

³⁵ Jowitt, “To sleep, perchance to Dream”, 260.

Examples include Carew's 'A Rapture', Suckling's 'The Dream', Robert Herrick's 'The Vine' and 'The Vision', and John Cleveland's 'The Senses Festival'. In 'The Vine', Herrick dreams of transforming into a sprawling plant that can creep between his mistress' thighs as she slumbers. In 'The Vision', the dreamer encounters a beauty dressed as a Spartan woman, causing him to attempt to 'kisse that tempting nakedness'.³⁶ From Petrarch to Herrick, dream vision poems provide 'one of the accepted ways for a poet to describe the yielding of his mistress' by claiming 'that "it was only a dream", thus to disimplicate her and excuse himself'.³⁷

The dreamer's 'godlike omnipotence is characteristic of fantasy', and often includes some sense of unrealised or potential violence.³⁸ Carew's line in 'The Rapture', that to '[l]ike, and enjoy, to will, and act, is one', specifically encourages dreams and actions to collapse into each other, heightening the pleasures of anticipating possession.³⁹ Davenant's friend, the poet Edmund Waller, lamented the failures of male suitors to impress disdainful mistresses by likening them to '*Don Quixote*', advancing '[a]gainst a windmill our vaine lance'.⁴⁰ Dreams allowed more license than the conventions of courtly romance. It was through a dream – 'as I wander through the ayre...with fancy unconfin'd' – that the fruition of desire could occur.⁴¹ The moment of waking may bring disappointment, or the resolve to seek out the gratification so elusively promised in the dream.

In 'Madagascar', the poet-dreamer also begins by conjuring a moment of travel and encounter: 'Thus in a dreame, I did adventure out' (2). Prince Rupert is an 'advent'rous Youth' exploring the 'Southern *Tropick*', enraptured by the secret groves and abundance of 'fruits for taste and odor' (2–3, 19). Like poet-dreamers, Davenant's colonists are lovers. Malagasy submission, like female submission in dream vision poems, is achieved with little physical resistance; Habington even equates Madagascar to 'a proud Virgin tempted', a 'trophie now of thy Wits Victorie'.⁴² While eyewitnesses who had travelled to Madagascar frequently commented on Malagasy skills in war, Davenant 'unplumes' the warriors, reducing them to figures of bland pastoral harmony. Like Herrick's 'The Vine', 'Madagascar' glories in the erotic qualities of an invasive fantasy that dwells in the pleasures of power and surveillance ('virgin Mines; where shining gold they spie', 18). Both naked mistress and Madagascan landscape offer a 'rich Mine, to the enquiring eye/Expos'd'.⁴³ To imagine

³⁶ Robert Herrick, *Hesperides* (1648; Wing H1595), 54.

³⁷ Paul Jonson, 'Carew's "A Rapture": The Dynamics of Fantasy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 16 (1976), 145–55, at 148.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁰ Edmund Waller, *Poems* (London, 1645; Wing W513), 120.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Habington, 'To my Friend, *Will. Davenant*', in *Madagascar*.

⁴³ 'A Rapture' in *Poems by Thomas Carew* (1640; STC 4620), 84; Louis Montrose, 'The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery', *Representations*, 33 (1991), 1–41.

conquest as a dream is to step away from the consequences of unleashing such desires, allowing the veneer of civility to obscure the violence of sexual aggression or exploitation.⁴⁴

Despite the Venetian ambassador's dismissal of the court's 'light fancies', therefore, court poets were concerned with establishing a difference between fancy and the vain efforts of an errant imagination. It was by 'thy bright fancie dazzled', Habington maintained, that Davenant moved and persuaded his audience.⁴⁵ When Thomas Hobbes responded to Davenant's later writings on art and poetry during their exile in Paris, he acknowledged the role of poets in advancing civil society. What ultimately distinguished 'the civility of *Europe*, from the Barbarity of the *American salvages*', Hobbes told Davenant, was precisely this 'workmanship of Fancy'.⁴⁶ Such fancy must be guided by the 'Precepts of true Philosophy' – not unreason, in other words, but an imaginative possibility undergirded by literary skill and a grounding in reality.⁴⁷ When Davenant placed Madagascar within actual geographical confines as a 'spacious Country found', he did so 'else wee supplie/With dreames, not truth, long lost Geographie' (13). 'I wish'd my Soule had brought my body here', the narrator sighs, 'Not as a poet, but a Pione[r]' (18). The word 'pioneer', a term that in the seventeenth century conveyed one who digs, mines, or 'takes part in beginning some enterprise' or 'course of action', might be taken to refer as much to the poet's own imaginative industry, as to the physical labour of those artificers and tradesmen who travelled to colonial spaces in the service of the elite.⁴⁸

In using fancy to articulate a benign vision of colonial expansion, Davenant's poem might be read alongside such works as Waller's 'The Battell of the Summer Islands' (published 1645, composed 1630s) and Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1637). Like 'Madagascar', Waller's poem about Bermuda evokes the gentlemanly plantation sociability that had its roots in the early seventeenth century.⁴⁹ With its superabundant citrus trees and shady groves, Waller presents Bermuda as an elite pleasure ground, not unlike a Mediterranean garden or country estate.⁵⁰ This 'happy Island' had with 'sweet *Palmetta's* a new *Bacchus*', under 'the shadow of whose friendly boughs' colonists 'sit carousing' with liquor and tobacco.⁵¹ As with 'Madagascar', the island's yielding abundance lends itself to poetry

⁴⁴ On romance, gender, and race, see the 'Spenser and Race' special issue of *Spenser Studies*, 35 (2021).

⁴⁵ Habington, 'To my Friend, Will. Davenant', in *ibid.*

⁴⁶ William Davenant, *A discourse upon Gondibert* (Paris: 1650, Wing D322), 132.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ 'Pioneer, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/144355?rskey=yaOpha&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 1 March 2022]. With thanks to Katie Murphy and Lorna Hutson for their insights on this term.

⁴⁹ On sociability and colonial poetics, see Lauren Working, *The Making of an Imperial Polity: Civility and America in the Jacobean Metropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁵⁰ Waller, 'The Battell of the Summer Islands', in *Poems*, 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

and love, so that 'I doe these pleasing dreames indite' and with 'amorous ayres my fancy entertaine'.⁵² Thomas Morton composed similar verses while in New England, painting the colony as a blissful composite of English civility and localised pleasures. The songs and poems in his text brought English revellers together with feasts of lobster and maize, in the company of Indigenous women clothed in beaver furs.⁵³ Morton compared the colonial landscape to a virgin woman whose subordination to English governance became an act of political submission. America was '[I]like a faire virgin, longing to be sped,/And meete her lover in a Nuptiall bed,/Deck'd in rich ornaments t'advace the state'.⁵⁴ In addition to reflecting an interest in European politics or Asian trade, 'Madagascar' is an important example of an emerging literature that deployed fancy to convey elite refinement through colonial domination.

In the end, colonization was not an abstract or inconsequential idea to Davenant, who made serious provisions to go to North America following Charles I's execution in 1649. Appointed Treasurer of Virginia, then Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, and finally a member of the Council of Virginia, Davenant set out to join fellow playwright William Berkeley in the Chesapeake in January 1650 after months of preparation.⁵⁵ These plans, likely encouraged by Henrietta Maria, were cut short by Davenant's arrest by parliamentary forces at sea. 'But, oh, *America* must breed up the Brat', went one anonymous, caustic send-off to Davenant's voyage. 'From whence' twill return a *West-Indy* Rat./For *Will* to *Virginia* is gone from among us,/With thirty two slaves, to plant Mundugus [tobacco]'.⁵⁶ Davenant had turned projector, the poem mocked, abandoning his laurels for tobacco plants. But such was the stuff of dreams and romance: the poet turned pioneer.

MADAGASCAR AND FEMALE COURT PATRONAGE

Carew's complaint against Dido's interference with masculine adventuring both valorised male friendships and acknowledged female presence.⁵⁷ In addition to 'Madagascar' and its prefatory verses, the *Madagascar* volume contained dozens of shorter poems which have been largely overlooked in assessments of the longer poem. Many of these shorter works were addressed

⁵² *Ibid.*, 98–9.

⁵³ Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (1637; STC 18203), sig. R4r.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. Bv.

⁵⁵ Dawn Lewcock, *Sir William Davenant, the Court Masque, and the English Seventeenth-Century Scenic Stage, 1605–1700* (New York: Cambria, 2008), 23–4.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 23; John Stubbs, *Reprobates: The Cavaliers of the English Civil War* (London: Viking, 2011), 397.

⁵⁷ The reference to Dido, queen of Carthage, may also suggest a sense of 'imperial destiny', discussed in Nandini Das, 'Time and Memory in Carthage', *Renaissance Studies*, 35 (2021), 360–85, at 362.

to court women including Henrietta Maria; Endymion Porter's wife, Olivia; Lady Bridget Kingsmill; Lady Mary Villiers; and Lucy Hay, Countess of Carlisle. Investigating Davenant's wider court network helps to place women within the culture of projecting, and demonstrates their influence on imperial self-fashioning at court.

Scholars have established that Henrietta Maria was actively involved in dictating the themes and subjects of court masques and poems.⁵⁸ In Davenant's *The temple of love* (1634), she played Indamora, a 'glorious Indian Queen' who converts a band of Persian youths into 'Platonically Lovers' who surrender to 'you Ladies of this Ile'.⁵⁹ The performance was unusual in that it included male and female masquers acting together, which, as James Knowles has pointed out, was 'deployed to advance female dominance' and to 'celebrate the superiority of refined female Will'.⁶⁰ In 'Madagascar', Rupert's band of lovers bring harmony to the island when the Malagasy behold the beauty of the English with their own eyes; in *The temple of love*, female grace equally directs the devotion of others, for the queen guides 'those Lovers that want sight,/To see and know what they should love'.⁶¹ As with Anne of Denmark's masques from the 1610s, *The temple of love* demonstrated the willingness of court women to engage with other polities and geographical spaces beyond those of Europe to express ideas of virtue.⁶²

Such interests were not removed from the business of commerce and expansion. Court women demonstrated financial interests in colonization, buying stock in trading companies and financing ships to the Americas.⁶³ Several places in the Atlantic were named in honour of Henrietta Maria, including 'the Islands of providence Henrietta', leading to the establishment of Providence Island, and the Maryland colony, chartered in 1632 by the Catholic Calvert family.⁶⁴ Numerous tracts about exploration and travel were dedicated to women, such as Richard

⁵⁸ Karen Britland, 'Recent Studies of the Life and Cultural Influence of Queen Henrietta Maria', *Recent Studies in the English Renaissance* (2015), 303–21; Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sara Wolfson, 'The Female Bedchamber of Queen Henrietta Maria: Politics, Familial Networks, and Policy', in *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting Across Early Modern Europe*, eds. Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 311–44.

⁵⁹ William Davenant, *The temple of love* (1634; STC 14719), sig. B3r; Amrita Sen, 'Playing an Indian Queen: Neoplatonism, Ethnography, and *The Temple of Love*', in *Indography: Writing the 'Indian' in Early Modern England*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 209–22.

⁶⁰ Knowles "The faction of the flesh", 123.

⁶¹ Davenant, *The temple of love*, sig. A4r.

⁶² Knowles "The faction of the flesh"; Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court, 1590–1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'Temperature, Temperance, and Racial Difference in Ben Jonson's "The Masque of Blackness"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 28 (1998), 183–209.

⁶³ Misha Ewen, 'Women Investors and the Virginia Company in the Early Seventeenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 62 (2019), 853–74.

⁶⁴ Malcolm Smuts, 'Religion, European Politics and Henrietta Maria's Circle, 1625–1641', in *Henrietta Maria: Piety, Politics, and Patronage*, ed. Erin Griffey (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 13–38, at 26; 'List of various letters patent granted during the sixth year of King Charles I', 26 March 1631, The National Archives, SP 16/187, fol. 66; Games, *Web of Empire*, 209.

Willes' epistle to Lady Bridget, Countess of Bedford, that prefaced Richard Eden's translation of Peter Martyr's *The history of travayle in the West and East Indies* (1577) and Robert Stafford's *A geographical and anthropolgicall description of all the empires and kingdoms* (1618).⁶⁵ Walter Raleigh wrote letters to Anne of Denmark, rather than James I, asking for her intercession in advancing colonialism in Virginia and South America.⁶⁶ In 1627, the merchant William Payne wrote to Katherine, Lady Conway, wishing that her husband or his associates would 'come in for a proportion in the lot of St John's at Newfoundland', where there were '[g]reat hopes of good commodities'.⁶⁷ Letters sent the following year updated Lady Conway on 'the Newfoundland business', listing hopes for iron and silver mines, as well as the more certain and immediate profits gained by fish, furs and sarsaparilla.⁶⁸ Misha Ewen's study of female colonial investors references a 1633 letter by Richard Berkeley, who mentioned 'friendes (2 of them gentlewomen)' who 'were willing to go along with me in the [Virginia] adventure'.⁶⁹

It is within this milieu that Davenant penned 'Madagascar', in support of a scheme which elite women demonstrated an active interest in. Courteen's project depended on garnering sufficient court support, and his wife, Lady Katherine, daughter of the Earl of Bridgewater, likely advocated for the project on his behalf.⁷⁰ Although Elizabeth of Bohemia dismissed the endeavour as a 'romance', her letters suggest that she did so after some deliberation, and not out of a disregard for colonial projects more generally. Elizabeth had been close to her militantly Protestant and pro-colonial brother, Prince Henry, until his death in 1612. During that time, she amassed global goods including parrots and plants for her own collection of rarities.⁷¹ In the same letter in which she dismissed 'Ruperts Romance of Madagascar', she explained to Thomas Roe that she had dissuaded her son from the scheme out of practical considerations. Given the strong Portuguese presence in 'Afrik neare to it', Elizabeth shrewdly commented, 'I though[t] if Madagascar were a place either worth the taking or possible to be kept, that the Portugalls by this time would have had it'.⁷²

⁶⁵ Peter Martyr, *The history of travayle in the West and East Indies* [tr. Richard Eden] (1577; STC 649), 'The Epistle'; Robert Stafford, *A geographical and anthological description of all the empires and kingdoms* (1618; STC 23136).

⁶⁶ Walter Raleigh to Queen Anne, [1610?], in *The Genesis of the United States: A Narrative of the Movement in England, 1605–1615: Vol. I*, ed. Alexander Brown (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1890); Walter Raleigh to the Queen, [1611], The National Archives, SP 14/67, fol. 196.

⁶⁷ William Payne to Katherine, Lady Conway, 2 Nov 1627, in *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial: America and West Indies, Vol. I, 1574–1640*, ed. W. Noel Sainsbury (London: Longman, 1860), 86.

⁶⁸ Dr James Meddus to Katherine, Lady Conway, 27 June 1628, in *ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁹ Ewen, 'Women Investors and the Virginia Company', 873.

⁷⁰ W. Foster, 'An English Settlement in Madagascar in 1645–6', *The English Historical Review*, 27 (1912), 239–50, at 243.

⁷¹ Discussed in Peter Davidson, 'Spatial Texts: Women as Devisers of Environments and Iconographies', in *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Patricia Phillippy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 186–202, at 200.

⁷² Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, to Sir Thomas Roe, 6 April/16 April 1637, The National Archives, SP 16/352, fol. 86.

Writing about race and empire in Stuart drama, Hei Hutner points out that the ‘explorer, the colonist or travel writer is almost always male, and the land that he surveys and conquers’ is almost always female.⁷³ Focusing on how English men attempted to define or assert themselves over the body of female ‘others’ should not, however, distract from a consideration of how elite white women also expressed imperial ideologies by framing themselves as surveyors and ‘civilizers’. This is evident in the visual art of the early Stuart court, including Van Dyck’s ‘Madagascar portrait’ of Lord and Lady Arundel, painted to promote the project.⁷⁴ Lady Arundel frequently commissioned portraits of herself without her husband, and her presence alongside the earl in this portrait should not be assumed to be mere convention. Graham Parry has interpreted the astrolabe and compass in Lady Arundel’s hands as an indication of her active participation in the enterprise.⁷⁵ The countess had long demonstrated an interest in collecting, assisting her husband in accruing the first English collection of classical marbles.⁷⁶ In the dedication to *Honour and vertue* (1640), Anthony Stafford praised the Earl of Arundel for not only refining our ‘more Polisht Parts of the World, but to civilize also the more Barbarous, and to make an *Athens of Madagascar*’.⁷⁷ Stafford included a second dedication to Lady Arundel. ‘You, Madam, are none of those *Romance* Ladyes, who make Fiction and Folly their Study and Discourse’, he wrote.⁷⁸ Lady Arundel’s serious study gave her a share in the honour and refinement that Stafford praised in her husband.

The additional poems in *Madagascar* reflected the aesthetics of Henrietta Maria’s court, including the beauty-as-virtue trope that she and her ladies propounded.⁷⁹ They also perpetuated the associations between purity and fairness that are present in Davenant’s longer poem, and which were equally visible in masques and portraits of the time. By the 1630s, Africans, who had long been present in England, were becoming regular features in elite portraiture.⁸⁰ While portraits of male sitters overtly linked ‘colonial practice

⁷³ Heidi Hutner, *Colonial Women: Race and Culture in Stuart Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3. On gender and colonization see also Working, *The Making of an Imperial Polity*, 190–97; Montrose, ‘The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery’.

⁷⁴ Ernest B. Gilman, ‘Madagascar on the Mind: The Earl of Arundel and the Arts of Colonization’, in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, eds. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 284–314.

⁷⁵ Graham Parry, *The Golden Age Restor’d: The Culture of the Stuart Court* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 129.

⁷⁶ Lord Arundel to Lady Arundel, 29 September 1629, in *The Life Correspondence and Collections of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel*, ed. Mary F. S. Hervey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 163.

⁷⁷ Anthony Stafford, *Honour and vertue* (1640; STC 23125), sig. A2v.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. [A]r.

⁷⁹ Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁸⁰ Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

and masculinity', Kim Hall argues, the 'more numerous female portraits realise the already existing ideologies of fairness and femininity found in lyric poetry within a context of consumerism'.⁸¹ Black individuals in portraits of Henrietta Maria, including a painting of the queen with Charles and a Black groom from the early 1630s, and a chalk drawing attributed to Van Dyck, demonstrate how fashionable female self-fashioning might be enhanced through overt associations with global networks of trafficking (Fig. 3).

Tracing female patronage to networks of colonial interest might also help connect ideas of fairness and consumption more concretely to the geopolitics of labour and enslavement. Discussing portraits and Prince Rupert's voyages to Guinea in the mid-seventeenth century, Hall relates representation and race to how 'the exercise of military force is used to create the fantasy of loving recognition'.⁸² What she detects in these sources – this relationship between colonial conquest and a civility that expunges violence and seeks only to leave the fantasy of gratitude and willing submission – is evident in the earlier example of Davenant's poem. The threat of martial violence used to engender 'loving recognition' is precisely what Davenant envisages in 'Madagascar', when the Malagasy 'with jealous Opticks trace/Lines of thy Mothers beauty in thy face'.

Researching the Iberian context, Carmen Fracchia has convincingly demonstrated the extent to which the presence and voices of Africans in Spain and Portugal shaped even the more seemingly conventional depictions of Black servants in portraiture. Examining paintings, devotional objects and jewellery alongside archival records and Afro-Hispanic songs, Fracchia established that the 'invisibilisation and marginalisation of Africans' existed alongside a vibrant presence of Africans in public and private spaces in Spain, from marketplaces and kitchens to workshops, leading to their active contribution 'in the visual field' despite 'serious personal and social restrictions'.⁸³ More research remains to be done on the precise links between the English elite and the Black individuals who lived among them in London in the early seventeenth century, particularly when English references to 'blackamoors' incorporated a diverse range of peoples, communities and societies. Nonetheless, Fracchia's study – including her observations on the attachment that elite white women had towards their Black servants – cautions against assuming that such individuals in early Stuart portraits operated solely as signifiers of taste, unrelated to female interests in colonial projects.

⁸¹ Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 222, 226.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 230.

⁸³ Carmen Fracchia, *Black but Human: Slavery and Visual Art in Hapsburg Spain, 1480–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 189.



Fig. 3 Anthony van Dyck [attributed], *Henrietta Maria and an unnamed Black attendant*, c. 1610–1641, chalk on paper, 39 × 25 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Public domain/CC0)

The economy of Black and Indigenous labour, after all, underpinned *Madagascar* and the aims of the scheme more broadly. Promoters of Caribbean models of plantation in Madagascar recognized that enslaved labour would facilitate the production of raw goods and access to trade routes and commodities, though they remained unsure whether the inhabitants of Madagascar were 'black, or rather tauney'.⁸⁴ Davenant's 'For the Lady, *Olivia Porter*' referenced the human labour involved in searching for gems. For a 'swelling Pearle', one must 'Goe! dive into the Southern Sea' (67). The poet becomes frustrated at how the 'lazy, sallow-*Indian*' and 'dull *Negro* dive', 'how slowly they obey' (67). Such verses reinforce that women were hardly shielded from a knowledge of the human labour that lay behind the production of commodities including pearls and coral. Davenant's verses to Olivia Porter evoked colonially-sourced opulence, neatly mirroring the verses in 'Madagascar' about pearls 'whose pond'rous size/Sinks weaker Divors', and silk, 'the rusling Courtiers spoyles' (18–19). In condemning 'the lazy, sallow-*Indian*' while elevating the qualities of the 'whiter Ermine' in the poem to Olivia Porter, *Madagascar* partly pandered to the courtly sociability of women who expressed their be and refinement in relation to global exploitation.⁸⁵

By offering a glimpse into the social connections between men and women at the Caroline court, the collected poems in *Madagascar* place women within a courtly sociability stimulated by the 'imaginative agency' that fancy might spark.⁸⁶ Elizabethan and Jacobean romances, from Sidney's *Arcadia* (1593) to Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621), acknowledged women's capacity to be influenced by the desire and eroticism that fancy engendered ('her travelling fancies so attentive').⁸⁷ Margaret Cavendish, who became one of Henrietta Maria's maids of honour in 1643, described fancy as lush visualizations created 'to please me'.⁸⁸ The head and heart of men and women, Cavendish wrote, were as the '*East and West Indies*'.⁸⁹ The head, seat of one's mental faculties, was the East Indies where '*spicy Fancie growes*', while the heart was 'the *West*...[where] *bloud is gold*, and *silver heart the mines*'.⁹⁰ In Cavendish's human microcosm, '*spicy Fancie*' originated in the place of imagination *and* reason, while the body internalised, indeed relied on, the offerings of colonially-sourced goods to thrive. Cavendish's poems

⁸⁴ Boothby, *A briefe discovery*, 12; Sujata Iyengar, *Mythologies of Skin Colour in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁸⁵ 'For the Lady, Olivia Porter', in Davenant, *Madagascar*, 67.

⁸⁶ Smyth, *Women Writing Fancy*, 9.

⁸⁷ Philip Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593; STC 22540), 179, 188; Das, *Renaissance Romance*, 183.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 164.

⁸⁹ 'Of Animal Spirits', in Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies* (1653; Wing N869), 164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

captured what Davenant's writing also conveyed: that the 'fancy' used to visualise overseas intervention and consumption brought real and imagined worlds together, enabling women and men to apply the 'cartographic imagination' of romance to colonized spaces and to their own courtly sociability.

GOLD SAND & A MALAGASY KNIFE: POETRY AND THINGS

Fancy's freewheeling mobility, the water poet John Taylor wrote in 1630, barely masked 'the greedy maw of appetite'.⁹¹ This final section analyses the descriptions of things in 'Madagascar' alongside printed promotional material by Walter Hamond and Richard Boothby, to consider how real and imagined objects shaped the courtly colonial gaze. Hamond and Boothby were connected to Porter, Arundel and other courtiers through a series of information and trade networks. At the start of his book, printed in 1646 but composed at an earlier date and dedicated to the king, Boothby praised 'Prince *Ruperts* intent to plant at Madagascar' and the usefulness of 'Master *Walter Hamonds* book in praise of this Island', placing the scheme within the court projects of the 1630s.⁹² Court fancy provided a lens through which project promoters viewed and interpreted Madagascan goods such as gold sand and weapons, contributing to an aesthetics of imperial projection that erased the violent exploitation of Malagasy peoples (Fig. 4).

As Rachel Eisendrath argues in *Poetry in a World of Things*, English poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wrote about objects to probe the moral complexities of empire. The rising fashion for empirical observation is evident in *ekphrasis*, which she loosely defines as 'an elaborate literary description of a thing' in poetry; yet poetry also resists the commodification of the material world through a poet's ability to imagine other possibilities and create new domains.⁹³ More so than any other rhetorical device, Claire Preston writes, *ekphrasis* is concerned with 'yielding a particular kind of interpretive result...vivid description for the imaginary demonstration of the consequences of action, and by extension as a prompt for action'.⁹⁴ There is little *ekphrasis* in Davenant's poem in the stricter sense of a lengthy description of visual art in verse, but Eisendrath's interest in the relationship between things and verses, and Preston's connections between *ekphrasis* and romance especially, are useful for raising attention to the tangible quality of objects in poetry, and for examining the poetic intent behind

⁹¹ Quoted in Smyth, *Women Writing Fancy*, 8.

⁹² Boothby, *A briefe description*, preface, 6.

⁹³ Rachel Eisendrath, *Poetry in a World of Things: Aesthetics and Empiricism in Renaissance Ekphrasis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 4.

⁹⁴ Claire Preston, 'Ekphrasis: Painting in Words', in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, eds. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115–29, at 116.



Fig. 4 Antsiva conch shell instrument from Madagascar, c. nineteenth century, 8 × 6 in, New York, Met Museum (Public domain/CC0). This highly-valued shell, used in a variety of social and political contexts, comprised part of Madagascan customs and ceremonies that merchant texts only briefly alluded to

their evocation. Eisendrath is particularly concerned with the distinctiveness of the aesthetic experience – that a poem is a thing that exists in of itself.⁹⁵ This does not diminish Davenant’s imperial aesthetics, but rather invites a more careful consideration of the kind of world that Davenant created in his work.

An attention to material gain suffuses ‘Madagascar’. Like other dream vision poems of the 1630s, the narrator’s eye falls upon a paradise of things, from the island itself to the goods that yield to the lovers. Upon landing, the first thing the dreaming poet sees is the ‘long-lost, scatter’d-parcell of mankind’ holding bows and arrows (3). Disinterested in lingering on its people, the poet turns to the island as a physical entity to be claimed. The battle with the rival European power must be fought for ‘what possess’d by both, is neithers Land’ (7). Rupert is hailed as the ‘first true Monarch of the *Golden Isle*’ (17).

After the English take control of the land, commodities emerge in grotesque abundance. Goods swell carracks to bursting point. There is ‘shining gold’ and diamonds (18). The sea produces oysters, pearls, ‘Corall Trees’ and ‘Black Suds of *Ambar-Greece*’, used in Europe to make perfume (19). Commodities are ‘greedily explor’d’ (18–19). Watching ‘*Pioners* now dig from ev’ry Mine’, the poet fears succumbing to greed and becoming ‘a Usurer’, but this fear is counteracted by inviting ‘[h]eroique’ Rupert to bring peace and order (20–1). Davenant’s use of *energeia* to conjure desirable objects might seem to undercut any real dissuasion to colonize. Quite the opposite: *energeia* (vividness), was a primary instrument in persuasion, described in Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a strategy used to persuade an audience to

⁹⁵ Ibid; Lorna Hutson, ‘Review: Rachel Eisendrath, *Poetry in a World of Things*’, *Review of English Studies*, 71 (2020), 576–8.

act.⁹⁶ The litany of goods brought to the reader's attention – coral, pearls, gold, diamonds, fruit – echoed the ostensibly more objective accounts penned by merchants to their patrons. The description of these objects, though offering little detail on any single commodity, might be read as an ekphrastic description of the island itself as a tableau, its opulence spilling before the reader as if on a banquet table or in a still life painting. The most effective ekphraseis '[compel] the reader to believe in the truth of such objects'; they are 'not necessarily those whose descriptive vividness is most intense or thick, but rather those in which the ekphrastic impulse expands upon our sense of what is imaginable' – in this case, colonial possession.⁹⁷

The interests of court patrons were unapologetically acquisitive. 'In thy next Voyage', Suckling jests to Davenant, 'bring the Gold too with thee'.⁹⁸ Courtiers were interested in seeing and handling material evidence of Madagascar's lucrative possibilities. The Earl of Denbigh stopped in Madagascar on his way back from India and Persia between 1631 and 1633, where he 'brought from this Island of Madagascar Gould sand, which he presented to the Kings Majesty and the Councel board'.⁹⁹ 'I was at the Councell board', Richard Boothby later recalled, 'where this Gold sand was in question and approved of'.¹⁰⁰ Boothby appealed to court projectors when he discussed the tantalizing promise of gold sand alongside 'divers rich Drugs' and 'slaves of both sexes', who 'will put you to litle charges, for they doe live upon rice and water'.¹⁰¹ He also seemed to appeal to the court in his description of Malagasy hairstyles. The hair of the 'men and women is decent cut', Boothby observed, 'formed not much unlike our Cavalero fashion present in England, short before, long on the sides and longest of all behind'.¹⁰²

Like Denbigh's gold sand, commodities and artefacts brought to the court played a part in how gentlemen experienced and formed opinions about colonial projects. Hamond conveyed the 'most excellent perfume' of a 'kind of Red gum' by bringing it back to London: '[w]e brought from thence a good quantity, whereof I have some to shew'.¹⁰³ 'I also gave Master [Endymion] Porter some of the salvages weapons as darts', Boothby reported, 'and a long knife about two foot long the blade and [s]haft together, much of an equall length'.¹⁰⁴ Porter and fellow supporters of the scheme were sufficiently

⁹⁶ Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Object to the Excessive Object* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2015), 31.

⁹⁷ Preston, 'Ekphrasis: Painting in Words', 120.

⁹⁸ 'To My worthy Friend M[aste]r *William Davenant*', in Davenant, *Madagascar*.

⁹⁹ Boothby, *A briefe discovery*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Hamond, *Madagascar*, sig. Cr.

¹⁰⁴ Boothby, *A briefe description*, 2.

pleased with Boothby's objects to offer to introduce him to the king, though Boothby declined.¹⁰⁵

The presence of 'the salvages weapons' raises attention to the Malagasy material culture that gentlemen encountered at court and in texts. Hamond insisted that understanding Malagasy value systems were important for establishing a presence on the island. The Malagasy esteemed gold, 'the Soule of the World', less than the 'Red Beads' they wore as jewels.¹⁰⁶ Boothby also discussed carnelian. These red-orange beads were 'of most precious esteem with them, sleighting Gold, Silver, Brasse, Iron or other metall, or glasse beads'.¹⁰⁷ Boothby clearly articulated that Malagasy displays of wealth and status depended on particular objects and colour associations. Silver and coral beads, even at 'forty times the value of cornelions', would not buy the English the victuals they needed.¹⁰⁸ Red signified authority and prestige, worn by high-ranking members of Malagasy society as a marker of political power.¹⁰⁹ Knowing 'their Curiosity and skilfullnesse, to make choice of the right Cornelions', Boothby asserted 'and their difference in esteem of their Colour, Beauty and Splendor', mattered to the success of the enterprise.¹¹⁰ Boothby also recorded Malagasy textiles. A 'piece of striped Calico cloath...tacked about the loynes', joining with their '*haranga* or Cornelion beads', were status objects for the nobility (Fig. 5).¹¹¹

Despite encountering Malagasy ways of life through reading, travel and material goods, courtiers were dismissive of Malagasy sovereignty and martial ability. Wits focused on the fictions of benign submission to English rule ('Quivers empty...Arrows...unplum'd...Bowes unstrung', 3). 'Each then thou conquerst, must a Lover be', the narrator-dreamer tells Rupert, 'The worst estate of their captivitie' (4). In his invective against Hamond and Boothby's more favourable portrayals of the Malagasy, Powle Waldegrave described Madagascan 'Launces and Darts' as 'extreme [*sic*] offensive and dangerous, the judgement of any man that hath seen them in *England*, will soon adjudge it so'.¹¹² Yet 'because he hath seen them dart fish swimming in the water', Waldegrave scoffed, 'he thinks per chance they are for no other purpose'.¹¹³ Waldegrave's critique of the project supported by '*Arundel, Endimion Porter, &c*' was precisely this disjuncture between reality and fancy – a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hamond, *A paradox*, sig. Er-v.

¹⁰⁷ Boothby, *A briefe description*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Karin Pallaver, 'From Venice to East Africa: History, Uses, and Meanings of Glass Beads', in *Luxury in Global Perspective: Objects and Practices, 1600–2000*, eds. Karin Hofmeester and Bernd-Stefan Grewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 192–217.

¹¹⁰ Boothby, *A briefe description*, 66.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹¹² Powle Waldegrave, *An answer to Mr Boothbies book, of the description of the Island of Madagascar* (1649; Wing W286), 11.

¹¹³ Ibid.

kind of wilful disregard of the evidence at hand.¹¹⁴ The ‘fantastick imaginations’ of courtiers did not come from a lack of available information, but from their deliberate obfuscation of Malagasy craft and resistance to European invasion.

In short, matters of trade did not interest court wits or seem to inform the aesthetics of empire they sought to create. Proving absence or erasure is difficult, but the information in Hamond and Boothby’s tracts suggest that gentlemen involved in the scheme would have known about the raw goods the island produced, and encountered Malagasy practices and value systems.¹¹⁵ Courtiers had handled the spears brought to Whitehall and consulted the experiences of merchants and noblemen such as Herbert, who had ‘touch’d there for a little refreshment’.¹¹⁶ Yet Davenant’s list of goods mirrored only the richest commodities Boothby included at the start of his treatise, including ‘great store of Gold, Elephants teeth, Wax, Amber-greece and divers sorts of rich Gums and comodities’.¹¹⁷ Bring me gold, Suckling teasingly implored Davenant; he had not asked for a textile.

Might such fancies have, in turn, shaped some of the alterations made in printed texts? Scholars have discussed Hamond’s *A Paradox* (1640) and *Madagascar* (1643), but less so the differences between the two. *Madagascar* was not just an updated version of *A Paradox*, but a kind of reprise, written in the wake of Charles and parliament’s joint approval of John Bond’s colonizing venture. In *A Paradox*, Hamond merged anthropological observation with a critique of courtly luxury. He expressed admiration for the elegance of Malagasy adornment, contrasting it to the deceptive appearances of those ‘spruce gallant[s]’ in ‘Damask Purpoint, or his embroidered Camise’.¹¹⁸ The humanity of the Malagasy and an appreciation for their ways of life disappeared from the 1643 version. Hamond dropped his more critical angle towards court luxury, supplanting it with a greater attention to fancy and conquest. Like Davenant, Porter and Suckling’s poems, Hamond framed colonization as a project in which beauty and virtue overcame savagery. There was no trace of his earlier critique that ‘our owne Luxurious Effeminacy’ has made ‘the Taylor... the best surveyour’.¹¹⁹ He presented Madagascar as a virgin territory, ripe for exploitation. The island ‘under the Tropick’ was ‘a Virgin never yet deflowred either by the plow or spade...what other rich minerals and precious Stones they have are unknown to us, neither what rich gums and drugs those parts afford’.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁵ H el ene B. Ducros, ‘Reclaiming Islandness Through Cloth Circulation in Madagascar’, *Island Studies Journal*, 13 (2018), 25–38.

¹¹⁶ Waldegrave, *An answer*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Boothby, *A briefe description*, 6.

¹¹⁸ Hamond, *A Paradox*, sigs. D3r, D2v.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., sig. D4r.

¹²⁰ Hamond, *Madagascar*, sig. Cr.

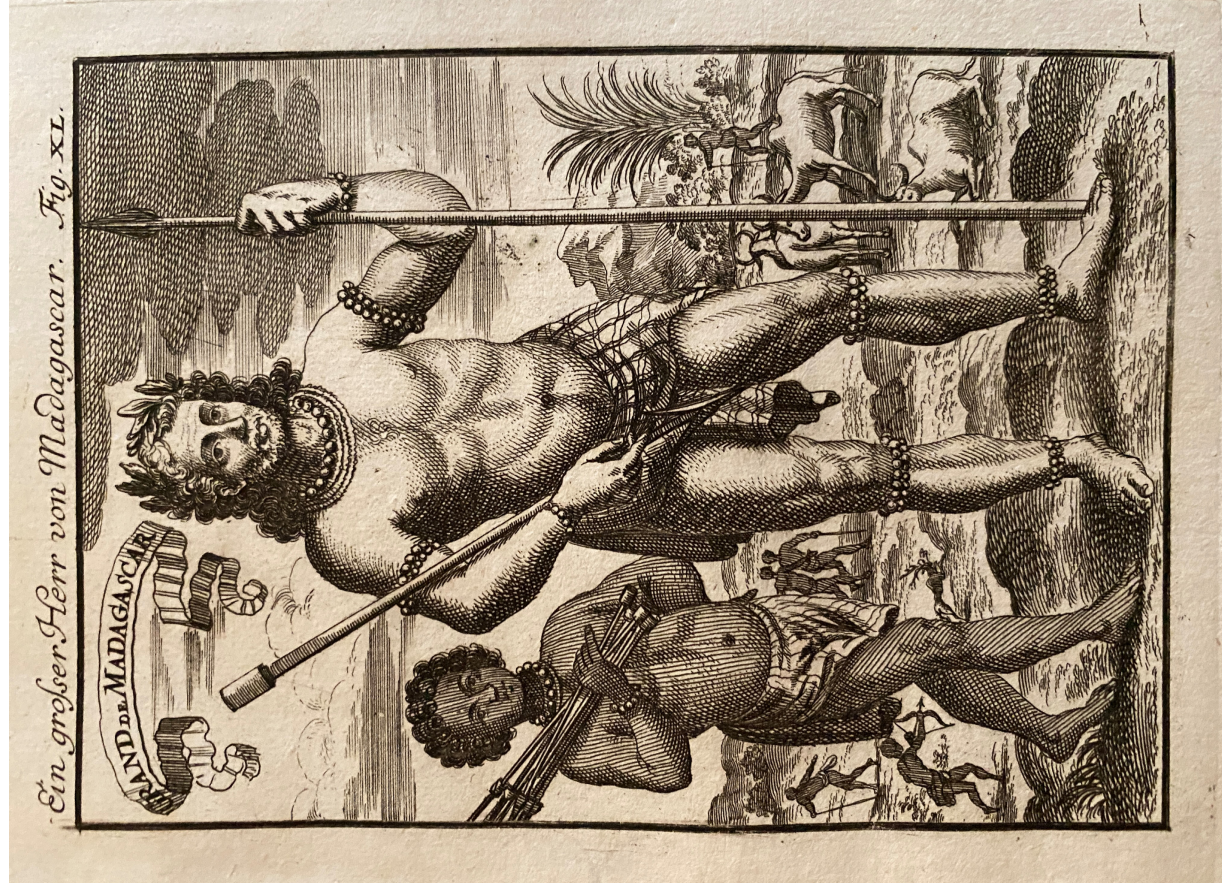


Fig. 5 Engraving of 'Un grand de Madagascar' ('A noble of Madagascar'), showing some of the material culture, such as comelian bead jewellery and woven cloths, described in earlier merchant texts. Printed in Allain Manesson Mallet, *Description de l'Unives*, 1685, 8 × 6 in. Image and print are author's

The 'Virgin Island of *Madagascar*', he concluded, 'friendly and lovingly invite our Nation to take some compassion of her Nakednesse...beg of us to Redeeme her'.¹²¹

Hamond's later text, celebrating Bond's court-backed project, seems far more aligned with the ideals of civility, beauty and luxury evident in Davenant's poem and broader court aesthetics. 'Ladies', Hamond wrote, perhaps appealing to female patrons, 'may and have often gone on those Voyages'.¹²² How 'easily might there be a Plantation made upon this Island by our Nation', if the inhabitants, 'how ever not civiliz'd into our manners', submitted to the English.¹²³ The island seemed glutted with the overabundance described in Davenant's dream: 'to speake of nothing of Sugar and Ginger, which naturally grow there in abundance, and for the Silke wormes, I can testifie upon my oath and produce witnesses, than in walking through the woods we have bin entangled so fast with raw silke, that we have had some trouble to cleare our selves'.¹²⁴ The description of a fertile virgin territory, of sugar and silk spilling onto the path of colonists carrying out an imperial project modelled on those of Roman emperors, focused on the commodities that courtiers most desired while downplaying attempts to humanize those they sought to subjugate. This vision of benign conquest was not particularly useful in achieving colonization, as Waldegrave noted. The practical means of effecting colonial expansion, however, were not a priority for Davenant. His celebration of civility and refined consumption – where English lovers were venerated, Malagasy ways of life omitted, and superabundant commodities spilled in one's path – was fuelled by the vividness of fancy.

CONCLUSION

With its witty formality, ironic displays of honour, and self-awareness, fancy suffused the writings of cavalier poets, reflecting a 'dominant ideal in Caroline aesthetic vocabulary' – but to what end?¹²⁵ All too often, fancy and the early modern imagination have been used more to 'parse Renaissance literature... than the other way around', severing it from the 'world of social relations'.¹²⁶ This article has situated Davenant's *Madagascar* within the literary milieu of metropolitan sociability to explore three interrelated facets of the colonial gaze at court: romance and dream visions, female colonial interests, and the Madagascan objects that brought merchant projecting and courtly

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, sig. C2v.

¹²² *Ibid.*, sigs. Cv, A3r.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, sig. A3r.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. Cv.

¹²⁵ Raylor, *Cavalier, Clubs, and Literary Culture*, 106.

¹²⁶ Suparna Roychoudhury, *Phantasmatic Shakespeare: Imagination in the Age of Early Modern Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 9, 62.

self-fashioning together. The aim has not been to reduce Davenant's text to a straightforwardly imperial agenda, but to examine how fancy might operate in early Stuart literature about colonialism.

Fancy's elevated place in cavalier verse becomes an important component to understanding the development of an imperial aesthetics in early Stuart London, including the process through which some tropes and ideas became favoured or included over others. As Simon Gikandi wrote of eighteenth-century taste, cosmopolitanism is inherently artificial in its structure, conveying a fantasy that existed beyond the political economy of enslavement and commerce: 'the desire for cultural purity was continuously haunted by what it excluded or repressed'.¹²⁷ Elements of this seem present in the way Davenant fashioned his dream-world, one populated by dashing lovers whose romp on an island in the Indian Ocean remained free of the 'slaves of both sexes' that merchants openly reported. Yet Davenant's own references to enslaved pearl divers and the island's inhabitants cut through the fiction of natural abundance.

In 1668, the Royal Society denounced 'wanton Phansie' for obstructing scientific knowledge with flamboyant deviations that strayed far beyond rigorous observation.¹²⁸ But these imaginative explorations, and their relationship to romance and courtly self-fashioning, were important to how the 'truths' and 'fictions' of empire were examined and articulated. Fancy enabled poets to imagine possibilities that had not yet come to be, using the imagination to 'pioneer' newly-charted territories. *Madagascar* placed erotic desire and fictions of romance in the service of empire and political self-fashioning. Fancy also created a convenient illusion of unreality, seemingly freeing the dreamer from any responsibility for his or her desires. But as Margaret Cavendish would admit: '*Fancy* goeth not so much by *Rule*, & *Method*, as by *Choice*'.¹²⁹

University of York

¹²⁷ Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 100.

¹²⁸ Smyth, *Women Writing Fancy*, 21–2.

¹²⁹ Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, 'To all Noble, and Worthy Ladies'.