COLONEL BRANDON IS A PERPLEXING HERO. We see him little and hear him less. He wins the heroine in the end it
seems by simply being there, endlessly being there. Jane Austen does not even bother to give him a first name. What
kind of hero is it who doesn't have a name to be whispered in loving conversation?

But then we come across the oddest thing of all about Brandon. He and Marianne Dashwood have no
conversation, no polite social intercourse. It’s an amazing omission and one turns the pages in disbelief, hunting for what
must have been missed. What other novel exists where a couple meets, courts, and marries throughout the span of 380
pages, without speaking to each other? But for one sentence. When Brandon tells those assembled for the excursion to
Whitwell that he must call it off, Marianne, dismayed that she will not travel there alone with John Willoughby, calls out to
him, “But if you write a note to the housekeeper, Mr. Brandon, . . . will it not be sufficient?” (64). In so addressing him,
she strips Brandon of his rank. Nobody else in the novel calls him “Mister.”

Perhaps Austen is being ironic, showing us the double standard between the expectations for men and women, but
in a book called Sense and Sensibility, whose ostensible moral is that one must control the expression of one’s bleaker
emotions in order to spare loved ones and to find relief in useful activities, Brandon is allowed to mope.

Elinor Dashwood, Marianne’s nineteen-year-old sister, who often seems to be walking behind her sister
apologizing and compensating for Marianne’s public sulks, is attracted to Brandon for that very behavior. “She liked him
—in spite of his gravity and reserve, she beheld in him an object of interest. . . . Sir John [Middleton] had dropt hints of
past injuries and disappointments, which justified her belief of his being an unfortunate man, and she regarded him with
respect and compassion.” Elinor makes the absolving distinction that his manners are “the result of some oppression of
spirits, [rather] than of any natural gloominess of temper” (50).

Austen allows the miseries that Brandon endured a decade and a half earlier to be seen in his deportment and
actions. He doesn’t refrain from speaking of them. In conversation with Elinor, he begins, “I once knew a lady . . . but
. . . from a series of unfortunate circumstances”——. He stops in time lest he give “rise to conjectures” (57), which of
course he has just done although Elinor nobly refuses to speculate. We learn from his later disclosures to Elinor (204-11)
that it has been almost a decade and a half since he sat at the bedside of his first love, Eliza Brandon, as she died, and
learned of the agonies she had endured and the cruelty of his brother. Eliza’s story is the most miserable in all of
Austen’s novels. No degradation is more complete, no suffering more intense, no death—of which Austen allows few—
more poignant.

Brandon is also under the pressure of worry for his ward/daughter Eliza, who disappeared with a man almost nine
months earlier, whom he has not heard from and has been unable to find. But nobody in the circle at Barton knows of
that. Neither Elinor nor Sir John Middleton—who seems to have taken in Brandon as one of his waifs, just as he has
given a home to the Dashwoods and welcomes the Steeles—chivvies him about getting on with his life.

Marianne is only seventeen when she first meets the thirty-five-year-old Brandon (37). She sees only “an absolute
old bachelor” (34), and is indifferent to him, but not so much that she cannot appreciate his “compliment of attention” to
her playing and singing, and feel “respect” for him (35). But upon Mrs. Jennings’s teasing that he may be interested in
her, he becomes a pitiable old man who requires a nurse (38). To Marianne, the flannel waistcoats he speaks of are
“invariably connected with aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the
feeble” (38).

Brandon is marked, as his name suggests. The flannel waistcoat is the outward sign of the wounds that mark him.
We see the blazing joy and sensuality of Marianne’s response to Willoughby and his “manly beauty” (43), but Brandon,
Brandon is unable to recover from his wounds because the pain inflicted on him by the two Elizas is not the wound that concerns Austen and us. His wound is one that time will not erase. From the events of Austen’s day and from hints and markers she placed in her book, I believe that in Colonel Brandon she created a character who was involved in one of the grimiest episodes that befell the British colonial enterprise during her lifetime. Austen places Brandon in India for the five years that encompassed the Second Anglo-Mysore War and the imprisonment, release, and return of the captured British soldiers. She meant her readers to figure out that Brandon was one of the soldiers so bloodily defeated at Pollilur and held captive by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in Seringapatam from 1780 to 1784—and that he was among those forcibly circumcised.

When Brandon was in India

Austen could have sent Brandon anywhere. He is initially “banished to the house of a relation far distant” (206), who may have been the sister in Avignon (63), or the aunt and uncle whose daughter, Fanny, is getting married (64), or the brother-in-law at Whitwell. Austen could have allowed him to remain safe, if bereft of Eliza, with any one of them. He could have been sent to North America, where the War of Independence was raging closer to home. Instead Austen packs Brandon off to India, according to Ellen Moody’s timetable, for the years 1779-84 (Moody), encompassing the battle of Pollilur and the long imprisonment and eventual release of the prisoners.

Brandon seems to confirm the five-year period in India when he tells Elinor that he heard “about two years” after he left of Eliza’s divorce and returned to England “nearly three years after” that (206-07, my italics). He does hedge and has two possible motives for doing so. The first might be to obscure with “nearly” his possible paternity of Eliza’s baby, “the offspring of her first guilty connection” (208), a connection that may well have been himself. His judgment of Eliza Williams’s being three years old could have been compromised by what must have been her small size, having been raised in poverty with a home and food conditional on prostitution, and it’s possible the child was a year or so older. Mrs. Jennings gives support to this possibility when she remarks that Miss Williams “is always rather sickly” (70). The second motive for vagueness as to the chronology might have been to conceal his incarceration in Seringapatam.

When she presents India to us through the eyes of Marianne and Willoughby, Austen lays a red herring across our path. Brandon’s experience in India is trivialized and dismissed by these characters. Elinor defends Brandon, saying, he has “been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind.” Marianne “contemptuously” answers Elinor that Brandon “has told you that in the East Indies the climate is hot, and the mosquitoes are troublesome.” Willoughby joins in, “Perhaps . . . his observations may have extended to the existence of nabobs, gold mohrs, and palanquins?” (51). The subject of India is not raised again, leaving the reader to wonder: what did Brandon do in India?

The Second Anglo-Mysore War

By 1780 the English had been waging war against American independence for four years, and France had joined the American side. To further weaken Britain and promote its own commercial interests in India, France formed an alliance with Hyder Ali, arming officers and troops and providing naval support. In concert with the French officers under Lieutenant Colonel Lallé, Hyder Ali’s troops attacked the British in a series of skirmishes culminating in the decisive battle in the village Pollilur, near Conjeeveram, on 10 September 1780.\(^1\)

The numbers were unequal. The East India Company had its own army, augmented by the Royal Army, both made up of English and Scots who, with Indian sepoys, defended the Company’s personnel, settlements, and goods. According to an eyewitness account by a European travelling with Hyder’s army and published in the London Chronicle of 11/13 October 1781, the British force consisted of about 2000 men from the Company’s forces led by Colonel William Baillie and another 1000 royal troops sent to Baillie by General Hector Munro (“East India” 357). Munro was supposed to have met up with Baillie with his full force but was blocked by Tipu (Keay 412). The troops of Mysore, on the other hand, included “not less than 25,000 Horse and 30 Battalions of Sepoys besides Hyder’s European [French] Corps” (“East India” 357).

The British “stood firm,” the correspondent recounts, despite being “Raked by the Fire of an immense Artillery, the greatest Part of the Action within Grape-shot Distance” (357). Despite their disadvantage in numbers, the English nearly brought off a victory, but for a catastrophe. The English marched in rigid formation, their ammunition wagons secure in their midst. Just as the Mysore forces began a retreat, “in that Instant two Explosions were perceived in the English Line, which laid open one entire Face of their Column, destroyed their Artillery, and threw the Whole into irreparable Confusion”
A wounded Baillie “once more formed them in Square [and] with this Handful of men . . . [and] without Ammunition, and most of his Men grievously wounded, he resisted and repulsed thirteen separate Attacks; but . . . [his troops] were borne down by Numbers without giving Way, and trod under Foot by the Elephants and Horse” (357). The Chronicle’s correspondent praised the “Prodigies of Valour” (357) of the British troops, who were “the Flower of the Madras army, a Title which they have dearly purchased, for I suspect few of them, from Wounds and Hardships, will survive their Captivity” (358).

The British suffered devastating casualties although the figures are inexact. Colley reports that 3000 British and Indian troops were killed there (276), and Keay, that 60 out of 86 British officers and 2000 British and Indian troops perished. “It is not an exaggeration to say that Pollilur meant the virtual annihilation of the [British] Madras army” (Keay 412). The battle was only the first ordeal for the survivors who faced nearly four years of harsh imprisonment in Tipu’s prisons.

Imprisonment at Seringapatam

Given the themes and action of the novel, it seems clear that Austen deliberately placed Brandon in the thick of the battle at Pollilur and in the prison at Seringapatam with all its attendant brutalities. Two books give us a harrowing picture of the prisoners’ sufferings. William Thomson published a two-volume account of survivor’s narratives in 1788, and Linda Colley offers a modern appraisal in Captives. Thomson took part in the battle and describes its aftermath: the remnants of the troops, having been left on the battlefield to endure predatory animals, insects, and thirst, their wounds untended (1-2), were made to walk or, if unable, to ride on bullocks, handcuffed to their comrades (38) more than 200 miles (42) to prisons within Mysore territory.

Most were incarcerated in the largest prisons, the dungeons at Hyder’s capital at Seringapatam, located on an island in the Cauvery River; others were held at Bangalore and smaller prisons. Many died of untreated wounds—bones or organs protruding from their bodies (Colley 283) and from burns from the exploding ammunition. Those who survived were forced to wear nine-pound irons, “which deformed some of them for life” (Colley 283) and which were “fixed in such a manner, with a straight bar between their legs, that they could neither contract nor expand them” (Robson 223). An officer, Captain David Baird, was forced to wear irons over an open wound, and one of his men, Captain Lucas, volunteered to wear two sets himself instead (Wilkin 14). His captors refused; Lucas died in prison, but Baird, imprisoned for almost four years (74), led the successful attack on Seringapatam in 1792 (77).

Over the long months, Colley notes, “There was the year-long exposure to southern India’s tropical climate, the chill nights followed by burning sunshine, the devastating monsoons, the millions of biting insects, and the persistent disease, made worse in the case of non-commissioned soldiers by their being forced to labour outdoors digging trenches or repairing fortifications, . . . and the lack of proper medical attention” (283). She also reminds us that the death rate for Europeans in India was high from dysentery, cholera, and malaria and that they were “six times less likely to recover than [was] a sepoy” (259).

Occasionally Hyder would dispense money to the officers for their troops, the amounts diminishing with rank. For the officers it was sometimes sufficient money to hire Indian boys to buy food at the bazaar to supplement their rice diet (Thomson 126, 264). But the money was intermittent. The constants were sleeping on an earthen floor (57), no regular baths or changes of clothes (141), and fear. Some of the soldiers had been beheaded immediately following the battle (3-4); others were poisoned in prison (141). But among the humiliations and tortures of the living, none was as capable of inducing terror and mortification as forced circumcision.

Circumcision

Circumcision was not practiced by Christians in Austen’s time; it was a rite of Moslems and Jews. Colley argues that in circumcising the British soldiers, the Mysore Moslems were not converting them, but rather humiliating them, conferring a mark of ownership (289), what she calls “othering” them (288). As one man wrote, “I lost with the foreskin of my yard all those benefits of a Christian and an Englishman which were and ever shall be my greatest glory” (Colley 288).

This loss of identity is reflected in the testimonies of victims quoted in Thomson’s book. A prisoner named Clarke was “informed it was Hyder’s desire that I should embrace Mahomedanism. I refused” (62). He was starved and circumcision forced on him (63). Although he had been coerced, Clarke felt a traitor to his “dear brother officers” and worried that he had “forfeited my right to call you by so dear a name” (65). A man named Dempster wrote, “You, sir, who have delicate feelings, will conceive what our situation was, dragged to what every Christian in the Universe utterly abhors” (54).

Colley quotes from the unpublished Seringapatam memoirs of Cromwell Massey, in which he describes how the operation was performed on fifteen “healthy looking young men” who refused to join Mysore’s armies: “They were taken one-by-one to an apartment and there, body-shaved, stretched naked on their backs over a large bowl with their legs and arms firmly held down by guards,” and circumcised by force (Colley 287). Dempster recounted how “we were obliged at
last to sit down and be shaved” and given a dose of majum (a sedative). He continued: “Some were insensible: others were not. A little after sunset, a black surgeon with thirty or forty caffres, seized and held us down while the operation was performed” (Thomson 54). Young men were particularly vulnerable, especially young Hindus from the Carnatic (Thomson 79). Of the British troops, more than “300 were circumcised and given Muslim names and clothes. . . . Several British regimental drummer boys were made to wear ghagra cholis and entertain the court as nautch [dancing] girls” (Dalrymple). Another contemporary account, by William Drake, confirms this story: “Most of the European boys were taught dancing in the country stile, and forced to dance in female dress before Tippoo” (308).

There is no way of knowing exactly how many prisoners were taken, and of those how many remained to be freed. The estimates are varied. Colley calculates that about 200 were imprisoned after Pollilur and that another 400 taken from ships were added in 1782 (Drake puts that number at 500). When the peace treaty was signed, 1700 British prisoners were handed over. Of those, 400 chose to stay in Mysore. She points out that there were only 10,000 British men in India and that “at least one in five of all Britons in arms in the subcontinent” was imprisoned in Mysore after 1779 (276). Dalrymple contends that Pollilur led to the slaughter of an entire army and the capture of one in five of all the British soldiers in India. No fewer than 7,000 British men, he estimates, along with an unknown number of women, were held captive by Tipu in his sophisticated fortress of Seringapatam. According to Keay, 1000 British troops and sepoys were taken prisoner to Seringapatam following the battle of Pollilur (412). In his 1786 account, Robson recorded that 108 officers, 900 European soldiers and sailors, and 1600 sepoys were imprisoned (223). As to estimates of how many were circumcised, Dalrymple puts the figure at 300 while my rough count of those reported only by Thomson is 190.

On 11 March 1784, the Company and Tipu Sultan, now ruler following Hyder Ali’s death, signed the Treaty of Mangalore. Among its provisions was the freeing of the captives who had been imprisoned for almost four years. The British then learned what they had endured.

**British reaction to the circumcisions**

The shock of what had happened to the prisoners in Seringapatam and other Mysore prisons when they were released in 1784 came on the heels of the news of England’s defeat at Yorktown in September 1783, and the loss of the American colonies. The prisoners became “embarrassing emblems of defeat and disgrace” (Colley 287). An ensign wrote that he was “unwelcome among his own people, who seemed only to want to forget about former captives,” and even the government “received us with every mark of inattention and incivility” (288). Forced circumcision of British troops, the symbols of the country’s strength and masculinity (293), was psychically akin to castration and was as if the country itself had been emasculated (289). The humiliation was compounded by the fact that so many were officers, “some of whom were of senior rank and considerable social status” (289).

But a country couldn’t function with a disparaged military, especially as the government viewed the stirrings of the French Revolution across the Channel. Engineered by the government, a campaign was launched to redefine the Mysore captives as models of “courage, discipline, endurance, self-sacrifice, [and] comradeship” (Colley 304). To restore its prestige and make the army “a valuable component of the British imperial argument,” the Company “began orchestrating the writing and publication of captivity narratives about India” (Colley 297).

There were not many. The existence of any memoirs by men who had been forcibly circumcised gives the false impression that those who suffered it could easily acknowledge it. Of the hundreds who endured circumcision, only a handful wrote of it. Imprisonment itself by “non-whites and non-Christians exercising absolute power” over Richard Runwa Boyer, for instance, so unnerved him that his prison notebooks, never published, are, Colley writes, “an almost unmitigated howl of pain and confusion” (292).

Those that were published were widely reported and reprinted. William Drake, a midshipman, was interviewed by the Company and his narrative published in the London Gazette in August 1792. He had been aboard the Hannibal when it was taken by the French, who turned the crew over to Hyder (Colley 287). He wrote that 51 of the youngest aboard “were sent to Seringapatam, where . . . their Heads were shaved; and . . . all their Things were taken away, and they circumcised. Soon after Mussulmen’s Names and Dresses were given to them. . . . [F]or a trifling Misdemeanor of some of them, . . . some were beat, and all were bound on the Parade, and Rings (Roly) the Badge of Slavery, were put into their Ears.” Drake was one of five who managed to escape from Seringapatam (308). The London Times and newspapers around the country took up Drake’s tale and wrote outraged editorials about the “Tyrant Tippoo” (297), who became a cultural boogieman.

Francis Robson’s The Life of Hayder Ally . . . to which is annexed a genuine narrative of the sufferings of the British prisoners of war taken by his son Tipoo Saib in 1780 had been published earlier. Robson was not been circumcised but cites those who were. William Thomson set about interviewing former captives and in 1788 published the two-volume Memoirs of the Late War and A Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of the Officers, Soldiers, Sepoys, who fell into the hands of Hyder Ally after the Battle of Conjeeveram [i.e., Pollilur]. (Both Robson and Thomson have been quoted above.)

James Bristow’s Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow, belonging to the Bengal Artillery, during ten years captivity with Hyder Ally and Tippoo Saheb was published in Calcutta, financed by the Company. It was so popular that
at least two London editions were published in 1793, a third appeared in 1794, and it continued to be reissued until the 1820s. "Bristow's story was that of a humble company private soldier captured, forcibly circumcised, and driven into one of Mysore's slave regiments" (Colley 302).

The accounts of Drake, Robson, Thomson, and Bristow had all been published before Austen began writing *Elinor and Marianne* (the original title of *Sense and Sensibility*) in 1795. In 1799, between the revision of her novel in 1797 and its publication in 1811, Tipu was killed and Mysore defeated. This resurgence of British power led to a flood of victorious and gleeful works of art and drama. Among the portraits and memorials was a vast panoramic painting of 2500 square feet, "The Storming of Seringapatam" by Robert Ker Porter, displayed in the Exhibition Room of London’s Lyceum Theater in the Strand (Worral 175).

This enthusiasm was also reflected on the stage and in fiction. A popular comic opera by James Cobb, *Ramah Droog, or Wine Does Wonders*, ran at Covent Garden from November 1798 into the spring of 1800. It opens with a chorus of Indians: "Now loudly raise victorious strains,/ Fallen the vanquish’d foe remains,/ Never to break his galling chains." A chorus of Britons responds: "Tho’ from each hope, each comfort torn,/ Britons, the sons of freedom born, / Ever your taunts, your threats shall scorn" (Cobb). Tipu captured the imagination of nineteenth-century writers as diverse as Maria Edgeworth ("Lame Jervas" from *Popular Tales* [1804]), Walter Scott (*The Surgeon's Daughter* [1827]), and Thomas de Quincey ("Joan of Arc" [1847]). In their works, according to Goswami, "predictably he is characterized by all of them as a tyrannical oppressor who needs to be brought to heel" (54).

The Austens and India

For the overlap between Brandon’s time in India and the horrors of the Second Anglo-Mysore War to have been coincidence is unlikely. Austen’s ties to Indian affairs were long and deep. Jane Austen has too often been perceived as living a sheltered existence in the insular world of "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" (9 September 1814); David Nokes opens his biography of Austen in India precisely to counter that perception (11). Austen had two direct connections to India. The first was her family’s long association with Warren Hastings, who became the first Governor-General of India in 1774; the second was the eventful time her brother Frank (Francis) spent in the East Indies from 1788 until his return to England in 1794.

Warren Hastings and the Austens

The first child to be raised by George and Cassandra Austen after their marriage in the spring of 1764 was George Hastings, the six-year-old son of Warren Hastings, who reimbursed their expenses and paid them a salary (Byrne 36). The boy had been sent to England to be educated, and the Austens were chosen either because the Leis (Cassandra Austen’s family) had enjoyed a long relationship with the Hastings family, or because George Austen’s sister, Philadelphia Hancock, recommended them (Le Faye 15), or because George Austen and Hastings had been friends in childhood (Spence 13). George Hastings caught diphtheria and died that autumn.5

Philadelphia Austen, Jane’s paternal aunt, had gone to India at twenty-two in 1752 (Le Faye 5), where she met, perhaps by prearrangement, and married a twenty-nine-year-old surgeon, Tysoe Saul Hancock (Spence 12). After moving to Calcutta they became friends with Hastings and his wife, Mary, who died about a year after giving birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. Hastings acted as godfather to the Hancocks’ daughter, Eliza, and created a £10,000 fund for her, naming George Austen as one of the two trustees (Le Faye 33). Both Hastings and Hancock made fortunes and returned to England in 1765, settling in nearby homes in London (Nokes 29). The Hancocks—primarily Philadelphia—ran through their fortunes. Hastings made them a loan to tide them over, and Hancock returned to India to recoup his losses in 1768 (Le Faye 28). Hastings stayed on in London, as did Philadelphia, until he was rehired by the Company. He set sail for India in 1769 (Le Faye 28) and onboard met Marian Imhoff, the woman who, after her divorce, would become his second wife (de Almeida 135).

Where Hastings thrived, becoming the first Governor General of India, Hancock fell further and further into poverty, resorting to carpentry and blacksmithing; he died in 1775 (Nokes 47, 51). Soon afterwards a deposit of about £8000 was made to Philadelphia’s account—money that Spence suggests might have come from Hastings (22).

Philadelphia took Eliza to France in 1777, and in 1781 Eliza married Jean Capot de Feullide and bore a son, Hastings; Jean was guillotined in 1794. During the time Jane Austen was writing *Elinor and Marianne*, the widowed Eliza was courted by Jane’s smitten brothers James and Henry, the latter who seemed always to have had a *lendre* for Eliza (Spence 39, 45). According to Spence, Jane did not want Henry to marry Eliza, partly because she hoped he would resign from the militia and take orders, following their father into the church. Eliza preferred the militia, where he remained (Spence 71), and Henry and Eliza married on 31 December 1797, while Austen was rewriting the novel (Le Faye 95).

In marrying Eliza, Henry became the stepfather of Hastings, Eliza’s son, and a *de facto* son-in-law to Warren Hastings. He sent Warren Hastings a fawning letter when the latter was acquitted by Parliament of charges of misconduct in India (Honan 100), tried more than once to touch him up for money (Honan 137, Tomalin 105), and visited him after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*, dropping off a copy and revealing the secret Austen wished to keep, her
One of the conundrums of *Sense and Sensibility* is Austen's giving the name "Eliza" to the two “fallen” women, one of whom, (Eliza Williams) was illegitimate herself. Mrs. Jennings concludes upon meeting her that she is Brandon’s child, for she was “as like him as she can stare” (66). On his announcement that he must go to London immediately, Mrs. Jennings asks if “she” is well; Brandon colors slightly (64), which could reflect his knowledge of her suspicions.

Eliza Hancock was rumored to have been the illegitimate daughter of Hastings (Le Faye 27). For Austen to have used Eliza's name in the context of illegitimacy could have jeopardized her relationship with Henry and Eliza but seems not to have. They visited each other often following the book’s publication, and Austen attended Eliza in the last days before her death in 1813. On the other hand, Eliza might have delighted in her rumored relationship with a powerful man and welcomed Austen's hints in the novel. When Hastings died, “he had retrieved the fallen fortunes of his line. Not only had he repurchased the old lands, and rebuilt the old dwelling. He had preserved and extended an empire” (Macaulay 307).

**Hastings, the public man**

Throughout Austen’s teenage years, Warren Hastings was on trial. Charges of high crimes and misdemeanors were brought against Hastings before the House of Commons, and he was impeached on November 28, 1787:

That, not regarding the sacred obligation of his oath, nor the important duties of the high offices to which he was appointed, but entertaining base and corrupt views of procuring for himself and his dependents exorbitant wealth, &c., he did, by many unjustifiable acts, by him done and committed, faithlessly, illegally, and tyrannically, violate the duties of his station: by each and all of which practices, the welfare of the East India Company has materially suffered, the happiness of the native inhabitants of India has been deeply affected, their confidence in English faith and lenity shaken and impaired, and the honor of the crown and character of this nation, as far as in him lay, wantonly and wickedly degraded. (Logan 6-7)

The trial began on 13 February 1788, meeting fitfully—a total of five days in 1791, for instance (Nokes 150)—and ended on 23 April 1795 (Debrett, *History*). Although Hastings was acquitted of all sixteen charges against him, “he was a ruined man. The legal expenses of his defense had been enormous” (Macaulay 299).

It is hard for us to understand the spectacle and impact of the trial—the “most notable in the eighteenth century” and the “longest in British history” (Great Britain). It opened with crowds pressing in to witness the procession to Westminster Hall of members of both the House of Lords and Commons, dignitaries, brothers and sons of the King, and finally, the Prince of Wales, “conspicuous by his fine person and noble bearing” (Macaulay). Sarah Siddons and Fanny Burney attended, Burney having received two tickets from the queen (Macaulay). Burney was a sympathetic friend of Hastings. William Cowper, who had been at school with Hastings at Westminster, wrote a poem praising him:

**Hastings, I knew thee young, and of a mind,**
  While young, humane, conversable, and kind,
  Nor can I well believe thee, gentle then,
  Now grown a villain, and the worst of men.
  But rather some suspect, who have oppress’d
  And worried thee, as not themselves the best.

The crimes for which Hastings was being tried were set forth by Whigs Edmund Burke and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. In his essay on the impeachment, Macaulay described the scene as, over four days, Burke introduced the charges:

The ladies in the galleries, unaccustomed to such displays of eloquence, excited by the solemnity of the occasion, and perhaps not unwilling to display their taste and sensibility, were in a state of uncontrollable emotion. Handkerchiefs were pulled out; smelling bottles were handed round; hysterical sobs and screams were heard: and Mrs. Sheridan was carried out in a fit. (138)

Then Sheridan took over:

The curiosity of the public to hear him was unbounded. His sparkling and highly finished declamation lasted two days; but the Hall was crowded to suffocation during the whole time. It was said that fifty guineas had been paid for a single ticket. . . .

When Sheridan concluded, he “contrived, with a knowledge of stage-effect which his father might have envied, to sink back, as if exhausted, into the arms of Burke, who hugged him with the energy of generous admiration” (139).

Hastings’s trial ended the year Austen began writing *Elinor and Marianne*. Her new title may well have been taken from a speech Sheridan made against Hastings on Friday, 13 June 1788: “Filial piety! It is the primal bond of society. It
is that instinctive principle, which, panting for its proper good, soothes, unbidden, each sense and sensibility of man” (157). The obligations of filial piety provide an interesting context for considering the situations of Brandon and Edward, both of whom have been bullied into misery by a parent.

Warren Hastings haunts *Sense and Sensibility* in the character of Colonel Brandon. Austen indicates the comparison between Hastings and Brandon in small ways and large. Both Hastings and Brandon left for India at seventeen to make their ways in the world after having been banished from home: Hastings from Daylesford and Brandon from Delaford. Both recovered their homes and fortunes. Hastings married two women, one named Mary (Le Faye 26), the other Marian (de Almeida 135); Brandon married Marianne. Both may have had illegitimate daughters named Eliza (66). Both participated in a duel: Hastings called out by Francis Jenkins, whom Hastings wounded (Busteed 113); Brandon called out Willoughby though neither was injured (211). It is striking how many of the names from Hastings's trial—including Middleton, Palmer, Jennings, Dashwood—are to be found in the novel. Furthermore, Hastings was Governor General during the entire period Brandon was in India. He presided over the Second Anglo-Mysore War, during the imprisonment of troops in the prisons of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, and on their release and the revelation of the prisoners' sufferings. Hastings left India for good at the end of 1794, the same year as Brandon. One of the functions of the parallels between Brandon and Hastings is to turn our attention to India. But the main parallel Austen created between Hastings and Brandon is that both were profoundly wounded as a result of their service in India.

**Frank Austen**

It should come as no surprise that the young girl who wrote a “History of England” would, as an adult, read such serious works of history and politics as Clarkson's *History of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* Pasley’s *Essay on the Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire*, Bigland’s *Letters on the Modern History and Political Aspect of Europe*, Buchanan’s *An Apology for Promoting Christianity in India*, and Henry's six-volume *History of England* (UK Red). Newspapers figure in her letters, and in *Sense and Sensibility* John Middleton regularly sends his paper to the Dashwoods.

In addition to a general interest in India, based on her interest current affairs, and a specific interest in family friend Warren Hastings, Jane Austen would have had another reason for paying attention. When Frank Austen completed his studies at the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth in December 1788, at the age of fourteen, he sailed for India with secret dispatches from Warren Hastings “beyond naval orders” (Honan 68). In 1791, Frank joined the frigate *Minerva* engaged in blocking French ships carrying men and materiel to Mangalore on the Malabar coast for Tipu Sultan. The *Minerva* and two other ships attacked and took the French frigate *Résoulé* in the roads at Tellicherry (James 118). On 6 July 1793, the *Minerva* captured the French brig, *Concorde*, which, as the *Madras Courier* reported, was “refitted, re-armed and crewed” for England (Houghton 3 Aug. 1793). A month later, the *Minerva* helped blockade the port of Pondicherry, which was under siege by the British and relying on supplies brought in by ship. Frank's ship chased off the *Sibylle*, and Charles Cornwallis (of Yorktown fame, now Governor General of India) sent a dispatch saying that the*Sibylle* was to have landed “further supplies, and an officer of the artillery, with about 150 men,” noting that “the preventing this was a service of great importance” (Debrett, *Collection* 579).

The first draft of *Elinor and Marianne* was begun in 1794 not only just after the close of Hastings's trial but also following Frank’s return from his service in India, bringing with him tales and treasure. Before the book was published in 1811, Austen had further opportunities to talk to Frank about India whenever he was on leave from duty during the Napoleonic Wars as she, Cassandra, and their mother lived with him in Southampton from 1807 to 1809 (Le Faye xxii).

**Austen's pointed hints**

No other Austen novel bristles with as many references to cutting and the instruments used to do so. *Sense and Sensibility* is full of needles, scissors, and pins. Austen’s own scissors are felt in the omission of Brandon’s first name and of any conversation between him and Marianne, and Marianne in turn excises his rank in the one comment she directly addresses to him. In a game of Casino, Elinor is cut in and cut out of a rubber (145). Marianne says goodbye to the trees at Norland but declares that “you will continue the same” (27)—until, that is, John Dashwood, the sisters’ half-brother, cuts down all the walnut trees (226). Children are cut off from their homes and parents with great cruelty and consequences. Brandon is sent away, apparently with no support, forcing him to join the army; Edward’s mother cuts him off as a son and an heir when his engagement to Lucy is revealed; Mrs. Smith temporarily cuts off the wayward Willoughby (323). In the only funny passage in the book, whose humor dims as its fateful consequences become apparent, John Dashwood's proposed gift of £3000 to his half-sisters, which, he predicts, “would [have been] enough to make them completely easy,” and even if reduced to £1500 would have ensured that “If they marry, they will be sure of doing well,” is cut to annual gifts of fish and game (5, 10, 12).

Nobody is as aptly named as Lucy Steele with her “sharp quick eye” (120), “little sharp eyes” (146), “sharp reprimand” (219), and a name synonymous with a dueling blade (OED). And of course, there is her sister’s friend, Martha Sharpe (274). Thaler, who also has taken note of the “sharps” and Lucy’s dueling with Elinor, points out that duels at the time of Austen’s writing were usually conducted with pistols (Thaler, Shoemaker 528). She reminds us, however, that
Andrew Davies used swords in his staging of the duel in the 2008 BBC dramatization with Brandon and Willoughby. Perhaps by making no reference to the way the duel was conducted, Austen invites us to imagine the drama of flashing steel. There is even a dagger: every word Marianne wrote Willoughby was a “dagger to my heart” (325).

In Sense and Sensibility, pins and scissors are associated with physical pain or illicit behavior. A pin in Lady Middleton’s headdress scratches her three-year-old daughter, who sobbs until soothed by apricot marmalade (121). The Steeles have their “knives and scissors stolen away” by the Middleton children (120). Willoughby and Marianne defy convention when he cuts a lock of her hair: “[T]hey were whispering and talking together as fast as could be,” Margaret, the youngest Dashwood sister, tells Elinor, “and he seemed to be begging something of her, and presently he took up her scissors and cut off a long lock of her hair; for it was all tumbled down her back; and he kissed it, and folded it up in a piece of white paper, and put it into his pocket-book” (60).

If there were no references to sharp things or acts of cutting, there would still be one of the most contrived and unnatural scenes, so explicit in its construction that it would seem to establish Austen’s intention to bring circumcision to mind. Edward Ferrars tells the Dashwoods that his brother, Robert, has married, with the attendant implication that he is now free to marry Elinor. Insecure and agitated, he uses his hands restlessly and destructively and, in so doing, mimics circumcision:

He rose from his seat and walked to the window, apparently from not knowing what to do; took up a pair of scissors that lay there, and while spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to pieces as he spoke. . . . (360)

Had this action been attributed to a woman, it would have been less contrived, less noticeable. A scene of a man “cutting” a “sheath”—synonymous then as now for “foreskin”—is about as explicit a reference to circumcision as Austen could incorporate without a literal description.

The circumcised Brandon

The character of Colonel Brandon seems to be a tabula rasa on which readers project their own interpretations. To Joan Klingel Ray, who sees Brandon as a positive figure, he is “a good and forceful man, a true hero who in an active and energetic life has been a dueler and an eloper, and is romantic and generous” (qtd. in Birchall). But to William Galperin, Brandon is a “manipulative scourge” (158), and to Daragh Downes, the novel’s “true center of malignity” and “a very raptor.” All three agree, however, that the reading of Brandon is difficult because he has been “undermined by other characters and the narrator, herself” (Ray) and because Brandon defines himself in stories told exclusively to Elinor that “have not been soundly authenticated,” requiring the reader to “lower her usual standards of verification” (Downes).

Unlike all other Austen heroes, Brandon has nobody to vouch for him. George Knightley and Edmund Bertram are known to their families and neighbors; Fitzwilliam Darcy is close to his sister and friends Charles Bingley and Colonel Fitzwilliam; Frederick Wentworth has a sister and brother-in-law to validate him, and Henry Tilney’s character is persuasively attested to by his sister. And so the issue becomes, can we believe what Brandon says?

Brandon does not make himself known because he does not want to be known. He is an outsider, unable to be himself in the world because the world might draw back in horror and disgust if they knew of his circumcision. The men from Seringapatam who were quoted above felt that they had lost their identity (“as a Christian and an Englishman”), sacrificed the respect and acceptance of their peers (“if I haven’t forfeited my right to call you [my dear brother officers]”), and become loathsome (“dragged to what every Christian in the Universe utterly abhors”).

Nobody in the novel seems to see beneath the surface to Brandon’s experiences in India. The person closest to him, but whom we nevertheless never hear in speech with Brandon, is Middleton, who is neither a perspicacious nor a loyal friend. In the speculation following Brandon’s abrupt departure, Middleton says, “I do not want to pry into other men’s concerns. I suppose it is something he is ashamed of” (65). Such a statement would seem to mean he is unaware of the disappearance of Eliza Williams, Brandon’s ward. Mrs. Jennings’s unflagging curiosity centers on Eliza Williams and on Brandon’s wealth; she expresses no underlying sympathy toward him and, in fact, bristles at the condition of a rectory that cannot absorb a wife. Nor is there anything in the comments or behaviors of any of the other characters to suggest that any of them is aware of his brother’s scandalous divorce or his own grim struggles in India. In the Whitwell scene, Brandon responds to those who ask him questions, and it is the only occasion on which he speaks directly to men. Austen reports no direct conversation with Middleton, or with John Dashwood (223), or even Edward Ferrars when they meet as friends at the Dashwood cottage (370).

So Austen leaves us with many questions. These are some that struck Downes: “Did Willoughby really seduce” Eliza Williams, and “was there really a baby?” Was there a duel? How would he know Marianne’s illness at Cleveland would take a serious turn unless he were feeding her dangerous “cordials” to make her sicker so as to insinuate himself more deeply into her life? Is the story of Eliza Brandon true? Did Brandon kill his brother?

To read Brandon as an evil figure without having a thesis, explanation, or context for his behavior is to make him a caricature out of the Saturday serials—the caped villain leeringly twirling his mustachios. But if we propose a reason for
Austen entrusts the first questioning of Brandon’s motives to Willoughby, who dislikes Brandon and has mocked him, forcing us to ambivalence when he says to Marianne, “I would lay fifty guineas the letter [calling Brandon away] was of his own writing” (SS 65, Downes). Perhaps Willoughby is right, and Brandon wishes to keep Marianne and her family away from his family, who might tell his experiences in India. To Downes’ question—did Brandon kill his brother—we have no answer. Mrs. Jennings seems to know only that the brother left the estate “sadly involved” (70). But one can’t help wondering: would a man duel with a young wastrel who seduced his ward but not with the man who married his childhood love, abused her, drove her from his home, divorced her, knew she had taken up a life of prostitution with a baby dependent on her, and left her to die in abject poverty? The brother, who seems to have died his mid-thirties, acted so to a woman who was at once his cousin, childhood companion, the source of a fortune, and wife.

Galperin notes that Willoughby, at Cleveland, in his plea to Elinor for forgiveness, raises two more questions about what Brandon has told her. There in Willoughby’s apology he mentions neither the baby he fathered with Eliza, nor the duel. As Downes asks, did they exist? Galperin suggests that Brandon also sabotaged Willoughby by telling Willoughby’s aunt, Mrs. Smith, about Eliza (115) and by telling Sophia Grey about Marianne (112). To Galperin, Brandon’s tale of Eliza Williams is part of Brandon’s “insistent, if sinister, pursuit of Marianne” (114) in order to ruin not the Willoughby who seduced his ward but the Willoughby who is his rival for Marianne.

Another question: when did Brandon know of Willoughby’s seduction of Eliza Williams? One of the more jarring admissions Brandon makes to Elinor is his inability to persuade the young woman who accompanied her to Bath and “certainly knew all!” (209), or her father, to tell him the name of Eliza’s seducer. This man of the army, who has fought a duel—this man of wealth cannot bribe, threaten, cajole, or beg the truth that will save his ward/daughter Eliza from having to turn to prostitution, for how else could she have supported herself, isolated from all friends and family? It is not credible that he did not learn of Willoughby from Eliza’s friend.12 Had he in fact identified Willoughby, and so timed his visit to Barton to coincide with Willoughby’s annual visit to his aunt, arriving first to deter suspicion? Had he been planning to trap him? Did he do nothing to protect Marianne in order to ruin her and thus increase Willoughby’s enemies? Which came first, the lover or the avenger?

The one act of which Brandon is guilty, which few readers could condone, is his failing to tell anybody who could have protected Marianne about Willoughby’s seduction of his ward, Eliza Williams. He “says nothing when saying something might have made a difference,” Galperin points out, “and compounds his default in monitoring the deleterious result of his inaction (along with his more covert actions) during his numerous visits to the Dashwoods in London” (116). Elinor is a handmaiden to Brandon’s pursuit of Marianne, despite being aware, “on an impartial consideration of their age, characters, or feelings” (336), that they do not suit. She welcomes him to Mrs. Jennings’s house over and over again—eight or nine times—(161, 168, 172) despite Marianne’s repugnance: “It is Colonel Brandon!” said she, with vexation. ‘We are never safe from him’” (203).

It is Jane Austen herself who stirs up all these questions by the lacunae in her accounts of Brandon, and by stripping Marianne of all agency and autonomy. At the novel’s conclusion, her family “each felt [Brandon’s] sorrows, and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all” (378, my italics). The word “reward” is telling.

Having placed Brandon in the midst of the sufferings that grew out of the meeting of Tipu’s and Baillie’s troops at Pollilur, Austen may have indeed meant to show the path a traumatized man might take to seek a reward Austen ambiguously allows him to obtain. It is appropriate to remind ourselves that Brandon’s disease with society does not stem from inherent evil of character. He endured hardships before he was twenty that no character in Austen’s books even approached. The enormity of his suffering in a foreign land, with little to sustain him but his own mental strength, is unimaginable. He was rendered powerless, cast out, and deformed. Yearning for the love of a woman, he seeks out a virtually unprotected young woman and acts as he thought he must or is entitled to, using every stratagem, honorable or not, to get his due.

And so they married

What was marriage like for Brandon and Marianne? We are assured by an author who leads us by the nose sometimes for her own amusement that Brandon is as “happy, as all those who best loved him, believed he deserved to be” and is “consoled for every past affliction” (379) although he continues to wear the flannel waistcoat (378). Marianne, we are assured, comes to love him, but only after Austen inflicts on her a dangerous illness and suicidal depression (345), three years of virtual isolation from other men, and the pressure of everybody she loves. And even then that love is nothing like the joy she felt for Willoughby in the scant weeks of her “season of happiness” (54).

There is little delight for the reader in their romance, or for them. Brandon and Marianne never chatter or laugh, never dance, flirt, have tiffs, reconcile. Theirs is a dreary courtship. Marianne closes her piano (342): does she ever...
open it again? Austen invites us to witness Edward’s awkward proposal to Elinor and gives us a glimpse of their first efforts at building a life together. But in a meager one-and-a-half pages we are simply told that after an astonishing two-year wait after the close of the action, Marianne, nineteen, finally marries Brandon (379).

And their sexual lives? By not allowing her lovers to speak, Austen invites us to consider that damage to Brandon’s penis prevents him physically or emotionally from either fathering a child or having conversation or intercourse with Marianne (synonyms for sexual congress), which Austen illustrates by their never having a conversation of the verbal variety. Galperin, too, notes Brandon’s shaky sexuality when he says that “while Brandon is assuredly possessed of erotic feeling, . . . he recognizes from the very first that compromised eroticism that would characterize their attachment” (114). Galperin, however, suggests that the compromised eroticism stems from their marriage being a second attachment for both of them.

Brandon’s pursuit of Marianne emphasizes women’s inequality: while he has the freedom and mobility to plot his course, Marianne can only sit and wait. Galperin beautifully describes “sensibility” as “a wish for a different, more equitable world” (115). The power men had deformed them, he writes: “Austen and her peers were manifestly second-class citizens, . . . [and the men were] deformed or flattened not despite—but more often by virtue of—the privilege they appear to enjoy” (158). Is Austen telling us, then, that Brandon’s own deformed body was a result of the “privilege” that Englishmen exercised not only over women, but also over colonial peoples?

Austen places Brandon in extraordinary circumstances and suggests that a dreadful violation of his person and sense of self was visited on him. There is no question in my mind that she would have followed the narratives about Seringapatam avidly, coming as they did concurrently with the trial of the family’s friend, Warren Hastings, who was Governor-General throughout all of Brandon’s time in India. I suspect that both concern and a novelist’s curiosity led her to imagine and write about what happened to the circumcised men when they returned home.

Would Austen have known of circumcision and put such a thing into a novel? As a girl of fifteen she wrote about James I’s homosexuality, employing the double entendres of “penetration” and “carpet” (Byrne 63). Her crudest male character, Northanger Abbey’s John Thorpe, regales the heroine about his horse’s “loins” and how “well hung” his gig is (46). She had many brothers both younger and older to have observed, and she would have understood the different traditions of religions other than hers. She would have not only have known what circumcision was but wouldn’t have quailed at writing about it, employing the allusiveness with which she always protected herself. In Emma, after all, Austen took on the Price Regent either despite or because of having more or less been ordered to dedicate it to him, composing a charade (71) that could be solved, as Sheehan has so cleverly shown, not only as “Courtship” but also “Prince of Whales,” taken from a satirical poem on the fat, unfaithful spendthrift by Charles Lamb. Anybody who missed the source of the insult might have been tipped off by the anagrams Austen devised with the first letters of two sets of four lines that twice, rearranged, spell “Lamb.”

Jane Austen was fearless: willing to address issues of sexuality, politics, the military, and family secrets. In the guise of a conventional romance, the small yet resonant relationship between Brandon and Marianne, she links the dreadful events of the Second Anglo-Mysore War to the lives of ordinary Britons, conjuring a tragic portrait of a man whose sufferings spiraled out into the lives of others. In Sense and Sensibility, Austen dared imagine what became of the men who had been caught up in one of the most traumatic events in British history during her lifetime.

NOTES

I would like to thank Susan Allen Ford for her remarkable, creative, and helpful editing. She found lost citations and evasive sites and corrected my errors with gracious forbearance.

1. The spelling of Indian names and places has changed since Austen’s day: Tippoo Saib or Saheb is now Tipu Sultan; Hayder Ally is Hyder Ali; Conjeeveram is Kanchipuram; Seringapatam is Srirangapatna; and the Cauvery River is the Kaveri.

2. The troops were so depleted that King George III, who was also the Prince Elector of Hanover, sent two regiments of Hanoverian soldiers and officers, totaling about 2,000 to Mysore in 1782 (Tzoref-Ashkenazi).

3. I am not the first to place Brandon in Seringapatam. In Joan Aiken’s Eliza’s Daughter, Brandon has rejoined his regiment and is unavailable to the narrator: “he and Mrs. Brandon also were now in Seringapatam” (49).

4. Victorian writers fascinated by Tipu and Seringapatam include Wilkie Collins (The Moonstone [1869]), Charles Dickens (The Uncommercial Traveller [1859]), and Jules Verne (Mysterious Island [1874], in which Nemo is Tipu’s nephew).

5. Another family connection: at Rev. George Austen’s request, Hastings helped Frank get assigned to a larger ship in
late 1794 (Le Faye 82).

6. For the specific charges, see Logan. It is not the purpose of this article to review the policies of the East India Company, England, or Warren Hastings, nor to surmise what Austen’s views were. None of the charges against Hastings touched on his conduct as Governor General during the Second Anglo-Mysore war or the imprisonment or treatment of British soldiers.

7. Fanny Burney wrote in her diary, “What an awful moment for such a man! . . . Could even his prosecutors at that moment look on—and not shudder, at least if they did not blush?” (61).

8. Others have also noted parallels between Hastings and Brandon. I am indebted to Arnold Perlstein, who pointed out the similarities between Delaford and Daylesford and posted a discussion about Sheridan’s speech, and who also beat me to the Sheehan solution to the charade in Emma published in Persuasions On-Line.

9. Peter Burrell, the Deputy Lord Great Chamberlain, who presided over the trial, achieved the post by marrying the Baroness Willoughby de Eresby. “Dog” Jennings invited a famous Hastings response to whether or not he was a blackguard, by saying that what he did he did for India, not himself. A Dashwood is famous for catching a cold at the trial and dying; Dashwoods were also members of the elite of Calcutta which included the Impey, Auriol and Hastings families, all of whom were painted by Zoffany. A search of Debrett’s account of the trial reveals additional names: Ferrers—one of the lords who died during its course—Williams, Smith, Steele, Grey, Taylor, Morton, Elliot, and Harris.

10. To see a model of the Minerva, see Darch. A charming and chilling account of the life of a common seaman aboard the Minerva, overlapping the period when Frank Austen was aboard, was written by William Richardson (below).

11. Would readers in Austen’s time have recognized what happened to Brandon in India? It’s doubtful. Although the book was set in 1796-97, it was not published until 1811. A reader discovering that seventeen years had lapsed since Brandon had been in India would have assumed, then, that he had been there until 1794, rather than from 1779 to 1784. The events of 1794 were sandwiched between two British victories (1792 and 1799), a relatively quiescent time for the armies there.

12. Brandon might have also learned Willoughby’s name from the Pump Room Registry, which included addresses—where Catherine learned that of the Tilneys in Northanger Abbey (35, 43, 91)—or from the master of ceremonies in the Lower Rooms (25). True, February was the height of the season in Bath, but it would have allowed him to discover who attended at the same time as Eliza and her friend.

13. As early as 1645, according to the OED, this meaning exists: “They cut off his genitories [genitals], (and they say he was hung like an ass)” (“hung,” 2-b). N. Bailey’s An Universal Etymological English Dictionary (1759) uses the word in explaining the etymology of cully: “of Coglione, Ital. a Testicle, because fools are generally said to be well hung.”

WORKS CITED

http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/nov/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview5
Debrett, John, ed. A Collection of State Papers, Related to the War against France Vol. 1. 2nd ed. London: Stockdale,
After Mr. Austen passed away, the Austen ladies moved to Southampton to share the home of Jane’s brother Frank and his wife.
Mary. Jane made occasional visits to London where she stayed with her favorite brother Henry. In July 1809 her brother Edward offered a home at his Chawton estate and the Austen ladies moved back to the Hampshire countryside. Topics for Discussion. Themes of Sense and Sensibility. Truth vs. truth and Romanticism vs. Realism Romanticism was a reaction to Neoclassicism, and focused on the spiritual and the power of emotion. Marianne realizes that Colonel Brandon is a perfect match for herself and they marry. His marriage to Marianne is what is referred to as a companionate marriage.