

EMPIRE

READING PACK 4



'India' is a good place to start to explore the rise of imperial aspirations in England. It might be accompanied by other words that are well-entrenched in our understanding of commerce and colonialism: trade, plantation, factory. 'India' in the English imagination was a place, or rather multiple spaces all at once: 'the Indias of spice and mine' evoked both eastern plants and Mesoamerican gold. 'Indian' originated from the Greek name for the river Indus, which flows through modern-day Pakistan. After Columbus' voyages, however, Europeans also used 'Indian' to label the indigenous peoples of the Americas, from the Iroquois of present-day Canada to the Incas of Peru. 'India' as a term therefore evokes the interconnectedness of global spaces: the eastern empires the English sought to emulate and learn from, and their own fledgling empire beginning with westward plantation. To read and think about 'India' in Tudor and Stuart politics, travel writing, and literature is to confront the powerful desire for, and fascination with, wealth and power that captured the imagination of this small island nation. But the many, many ways of writing about 'India' in this period also exposes fissures and cracks in the rhetoric of imperial might, where uncertainties and anxieties about the effects of possession and domination also come through, sometimes in unexpected places.

TIDE: Keyword(s): **Indian**

Additional Keywords: **Agent/Broker, Cannibal, Civil, Interpreter, Savage**

Please read the associated essays at <http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>

Historical documents:

Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *His Discourse of Voyages into the East and West Indies* (1598)

Early seventeenth-century English knowledge of India and South Asia was largely based on the translation of the Dutch merchant and traveller Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's Itinerario. During his days in Portuguese-held Goa, Linschoten had access to confidential maps and reports which he translated into Dutch and later used as the basis of his work. His account is considered to have encouraged early Dutch and English expansion in South Asia.

I stayed with my master in India certain years, to see and learn the manners and customs of the said lands, people, fruits, wares, and merchandises, with other things, which when time served, I will in truth set down, as I myself for the most part have seen it with mine eyes, and of credible persons, both Indians, and other inhabitants in those Countries learned and required to know, as also the report and fame thereof is now sufficiently spread abroad throughout the world by divers of our neighbour countries and lands which traffic and deal with them, namely our country [Holland], the East Countries, England, France, etc., which likewise are found and known by the Portuguese themselves, which daily traffick thither...

The land of Cambaia is the fruitfulest country in all India, and from thence provision of necessaries is made for all places round about it: whereby there is a great traffick in the Town, as well of the inhabitants, as other Indians and neighbors, as also of Portuguese, Persians, Arabians, Armenians, etc. The King observes the law of Mahomet [Islam], but most part of the people that are dwellers and natural born Countrymen, called *Gusarates* [sic] and *Baneanem* [sic], are the most subtle and political merchants of all India, whose counterfeits and shapes are placed in this booke by those of India, with a description of their living, ceremonies & customs, as in time and place shall be shewed. This land of Cambaia aboundeth in all kind of victuals, as corne, rice and such like grain, also of butter and oil, wherewith they furnish all the Countries round about them.

John Brereton, *A brief and true relation of the discovery of the north parts of Virginia* (1602)

This excerpt shows a brief moment of friendly diplomacy and cross-cultural exchange between Algonquian Indians on the North East coast of America, and early English travellers to the region before the founding of the Jamestown colony in 1607. Tellingly, rather than using the widely-used and deeply-loaded term 'savage' to describe Native Americans, Brereton refers to indigenous peoples as 'Indians', and describes their bearing, customs, and good-natured hospitality. At the same time, the detailed inclusion of commodities, from plump strawberries to tobacco to beaver skins, highlight the ultimate aim of Brereton's travels: to establish trading links and develop a more stable English colonial presence in America.

We spied an Indian, a young man, of proper stature, and of pleasing countenance. After some familiarity with him, we left him at the seaside, and returned to our ships. The land is full of goodly woods and fair islands, the trees beeches and cedars. Strawberries, red and white, as sweet and much bigger than in England; raspberries, gooseberries, and an incredible store of vines. Although we saw many Indians, which are tall men, naked saving they cover their privy parts with a black skin, much like a blacksmith's apron, tied around their middle. They gave us fish and use of their tobacco, which they drink green, but dried into a powder, very strong and pleasant, much better than any I have tasted in England. The necks of their pipes are made of clay hard dried.

The Indians are exceedingly courteous and gentle of disposition. I think they excel all the people of America. Of stature much higher than we, of complexion or colour, much like a dark olive. Their eyebrows and hair black, which they wear long, tied up behind in knots, whereon they prick feather or fowls, in fashion of a coronet. They are quick-eyed, and steadfast in their looks, fearless of others harms, as intending none themselves. They pronounce our language with great facility; for one of them one day sitting by me, I spoke smiling to him these words: *How now (sirrha) are you so saucy with my tobacco?* Which words, without any further repetition, he suddenly spoke so plainly and distinctly, as if he had long been a scholar in the language ... One day we espied 11 canoes or boats, with fifty Indians in them, coming towards us. But they remembered me and smiling upon me, rose up and took a large beaver skin and pointed at our captain Gosnold...after many signs we became very great friends, and sent for meat among our shallop, and have them such meats as we had dressed, whereof they misliked nothing but our mustard, whereat they made a sour face.

Literary documents:

William Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), Act II, scene 1

This excerpt from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream illustrates both the fluid use of the terms 'India' and 'Indian' as a place of fantasy that is nonetheless connected to the people and commodities that instigated English commercial expansion. Titania, queen of the fairies, uses the lush language of fertility and the senses to evoke a dreamlike world saturated with precious commodities, but also the possibility of grief, loss, and bonds that defy discourses of difference.

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order:
And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands, Marking
the embarked traders on the flood,
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
Following, her womb then rich with my young squire,
Would imitate, and sail upon the land, To
fetch me trifles, and return again,
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston, *Eastward Ho!* (1605), Act III, scene 3

The tavern setting of this scene brings to life the world of ports and waterways around London, where merchants, sailors, and other travellers told their stories of adventure and discovery. Captain Seagull's rhetoric of abundance is in fact quite similar to Brereton's travel narrative above, and the excerpt ends with a utopian vision of America as a place of social advancement and prosperity. However, the authors of this play poke fun at the adventurers who are swept away by the propaganda about America as a lush and fertile land, raising attention to the discrepancies between colonial fantasy and the realities of exploitation. Beyond the humour, the idea of America as a 'maiden' waiting to be possessed or conquered was a repeated trope, linking political expansion with fantasies of rape and domination that would haunt the colonial imagination for centuries after.

SEAGULL

Come, pierce your neatest hogshead [barrels], and let's have cheer...
Come, boys, Virginia longs till we share the rest of her maidenhead.

SPENDALL

Why, is she inhabited already with any English?

SEAGULL

A whole country of English is there, man, bred of those that were left there in '79. They have married with the Indians, and make them bring forth as beautiful faces as any we have in

England; and therefore the Indians are so in love with them that all the treasure they have, they have lay at their feet.

SCAPETHRIFT

But is there much treasure there, Captain, as I have heard?

SEAGULL.

I tell thee, gold is more plentiful there than copper is with us; and for as much red copper as I can bring, I'll have thrice the weight in gold. Why, man, all their pans and their chamber pots are pure gold; all the prisoners they take are fetter'd in gold; and, for rubies and diamonds, they go forth on holidays and gather them by the seashore, to hang on their children's coats, and stick in their caps, as commonly as our children wear saffron brooches.

SCAPETHRIFT

And is it a pleasant country?

SEAGULL

As ever the sun shin'd on; temperate, and full of excellent meats; wild boar is as common there as our tamest bacon here. And there you shall live freely, without sergeants, or courtiers, or lawyers, or intelligencers, only a few industrious Scots... You may be an alderman there, and never be a scavenger; you may be a nobleman, and never be a slave. You may come to preferment, and never pander; to riches and fortunes, and never more villainy.

Beyond text:

These images illuminate the asymmetrical power relations between the English and East and West Indians. The first image, a Mughal Indian miniature painting, depicts a rather disappointed James I, dressed in pink, who is ignored by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. The latter is shown preferring the wisdom of a Sufi philosopher to the company and gifts of other rulers such as the English king and the Ottoman Sultan.

While the message of this miniature painting evokes the spiritual and political superiority of the Mughal emperor over his Ottoman and English counterparts, the portrait of Pocahontas evokes the aims of English colonialism: namely, to deny the validity of indigenous societies. Dressed in English fashions and assuming the pose of an English aristocrat, Pocahontas is depicted as someone who had abandoned her traditional culture and fully embraced English/European 'civility'.



Bichtir, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings (c. 1610s)



Portrait of Pocahontas in John Smith, The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles (1632 edition)

Research for this publication was supported by the ERC TIDE Project (www.tideproject.uk). This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 681884).

