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**Clive of India; A Reception History 1767-1940**

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## Introduction

During the eighteenth century, Robert Clive (1725-1774), was one of the most important and controversial figures in the formation of British India. In 1743 he started his career as a clerk for the East India Company, before switching to the military division of the Company four years later. Subsequently, he distinguished himself through his role in the defence of Arcot in 1751 during the Anglo-French struggle for supremacy over Southern India. Clive then returned to England in 1753, where he mounted an unsuccessful campaign to enter parliament, before returning to India again in 1755 as second-in-command of a new military expedition against the French and as deputy to the governor of Madras.<sup>1</sup> In 1757 under Clive's command, the British triumphed at the Battle of Plassey, a crucial moment for both him and the East India Company, as it resulted in the Company being 'indisputably the major power in India... with Clive himself in a position of unparalleled power and a kingdom of forty million people at his feet.'<sup>2</sup> After overseeing the consolidation of the British position against French and Dutch attacks, Clive left India for the second time in 1760, having accrued a vast fortune from his conquest and administration of Bengal. This time his entry into politics was a success and he became MP for Shrewsbury in April 1761. However, this period was dominated by a struggle between him and the Company over his jagir – 'a grant of land revenue worth £27,000 a year' bestowed upon him by Mir Jafar, who Clive had installed as Nawab of Bengal.<sup>3</sup> The dispute was settled when Clive agreed to return to India in 1764 as Governor of Bengal and commander-in-chief of the army in return for the security of his jagir. He served as Governor of Bengal until 1767 with his self-imposed mandate of cleansing the 'Augean Stable' of corrupt company officials that were engaged in illegal private trading activity.<sup>4</sup> On his return to England, he was attacked by the enemies he had made throughout his career with the climax being his trial before parliament in 1773, on the charge of financial impropriety while he was Governor of Bengal. Clive successfully defended himself against these charges, although plagued by campaigns against him and ill health; he died at his own hand in November 1774.

As one of the great figures of the British Empire, Clive of India has attracted significant attention from historians, who have frequently re-evaluated and analysed his life. Consequently, this study does not seek to tread the well-worn path of his biographers and scholars of empire; instead it seeks to discover how Clive has been received and represented

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<sup>1</sup> H.Bowen, 'Clive, Robert, first Baron Clive of Plassey (1725-1774)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> R.Harvey, *Clive: The Life and Death of a British Emperor* (London, 1998), 222.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, 'Clive'.

<sup>4</sup> M.Bence Jones, *Clive of India* (London, 1974), 211.

in Britain from the later stages of his life, up until the start of The Second World War, whilst analysing why his reception has dramatically changed throughout this period. The brief overview of his life in the previous paragraph highlights why he is such a fascinating figure to consider, given that he operated on 'four levels: as a private individual; as a British politician; as a military leader; and as ruler and effective emperor of much of India.'<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, no historian has undertaken this investigation, although Percival Spear in his biography of Clive did devote the final four pages of it to a brief explanation of how Clive's major biographers have received him. However, given the scant attention Spear gave to this matter, his conclusion did not extend beyond the unsubstantiated inference that 'post-contemporary opinions of Clive were widely influenced by changes in the ideological climate in Britain.'<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Spear confined his short analysis solely to histories, whereas this study will evaluate a variety of different visual and textual sources, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the reception of Clive. Beyond Spear's work, biographers of Clive have not investigated his reception into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While some British Empire historians have very briefly mentioned the reception of Clive in these periods, they have been little more than cursory insights that have mentioned him alongside other imperial figures, rather than focusing exclusively on him. Crucially, both these groups of academics have isolated their assessments to particular eras, with no attempt to assess the change of Clive's reception over a broad sweep of time. Of course there have been historians like Huw Bowen, who have theorised that his reception has 'changed as the tides of British imperial fortunes have ebbed and flowed, and as attitudes towards the empire have altered.'<sup>7</sup> However, similarly to Spear's conjecture, Bowen's theory was posited in a biography of Clive and has not been substantiated by evidence in a study exclusively dedicated to this subject; thereby creating a historical lacuna this dissertation seeks to fill.

Accordingly, there are three objectives this thesis seeks to achieve. Firstly, from drawing upon both elite and popular sources, it aims to chart the changing reception of Clive. Max Jones, an expert in studying British national heroes, has pinpointed a variety of sources that are perfect for this type of study including: 'biographies, media representations, references in personal testimonies, commercial exploitations, memorial funds and public monuments', which are some of the sources that will be used for this project.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, given it is a reception study; the figure of Clive will be used as means of analysing British society from

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey, *Clive*, 282.

<sup>6</sup> P.Spear, *Master of Bengal: Clive and His India* (London, 1975), 202.

<sup>7</sup> Bowen, 'Clive'.

<sup>8</sup> M.Jones, 'What Should Historians Do With Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain', *History Compass*, Vol. 5, No.2, 441.

1767-1940. Of particular interest will be investigating Bowen's unsubstantiated claim that Clive's reputation moved in line with Britain's imperial fortunes and attitudes to empire. Another central focus will be identifying the changes in the ideological climate, which Spear did not directly identify, and evaluating their influence on Clive's changing reception. Essentially, this dissertation seeks to follow in the tradition of reception studies like that of Claudia Bushman's on Christopher Columbus, which traced his reputation in America from the eighteenth to nineteenth century in order to gain an alternative insight into the cultural history of America.<sup>9</sup>

The third and final purpose of this work is to contribute to the debate between Bernard Porter and the new imperial historians. The central thesis of Porter's *The Absent Minded Imperialists* was that there needed to be 'an awareness of the limits of the Empire's impact on British society' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which was a challenge to the orthodoxy that the British Empire 'in one way or another permeated every aspect of Victorian life.'<sup>10</sup> However, new imperial historians such as Antoinette Burton and John Mackenzie remain convinced that 'there was an imperial culture in Britain' throughout this period.<sup>11</sup> Given that this investigation is focused solely on the figure Clive, it would be too unrealistic to argue that it can convincingly endorse the argument of either side. Nevertheless, there is one aspect of Porter's thesis that it can potentially support or refute - his claim that the year 1880 was a take-off moment in popular interest and imperial sentiment for empire. Burton has conceded that historians have 'tended to assume that the broad and deep imperial influences of the fin de siècle are typical, and unproblematically so, for the whole Victorian century.'<sup>12</sup> As a result, this dissertation adopts a structure that separates the Victorian century in order to ascertain the validity of this tenet of Porter's thesis. Prior to this, the first chapter assesses the period from 1767-1800, which incorporates the reception both in Clive's lifetime and the short-term reaction after his death, after which, the second and third chapters, focused on 1800-1880 and 1880-1940 respectively, provide the necessary framework to test Porter's '1880 thesis.' Finally, the reason for adopting the timeframe 1767-1940 is to examine Clive's reception during the time of the British Empire. Therefore 1940 is an appropriate place to stop, before the decolonisation process started after The Second World War.

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<sup>9</sup> C.Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer Became an American Hero* (New England, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> B.Porter, "Empire, What Empire?" Or, Why 80% of Early and Mid – Victorians Were Deliberately Kept in Ignorance of It', *Victorian Studies*, Vol 46, No.2 (2004), 256.

<sup>11</sup> J.M.Mackenzie, "Comfort" and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.36., No. 4, (2008), 666.

<sup>12</sup> A.Burton, 'The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought About Empire (Review)', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.47, No.4 (2005), 628.



## Chapter 1: 1767-1800

As stated in the introduction, Clive returned to England from his final trip to India in 1767. It is an appropriate moment at which to start this investigation, as it marked the emergence of the dominant-negative reception of Clive that pervaded 1767-1800. After Clive's first return in 1753, he had received a positive reception and had been lauded in parliament in December 1757 as a "heaven-born general" by the future Prime Minister, William Pitt the Elder.<sup>13</sup> Likewise on his return the second time, he was invested as a Knight of the Bath and given an Irish peerage in 1761. However, these events marked the peak of his reception and the subsequent decline instigated in 1767, endured beyond his lifetime. It is worth noting that this does not mean his reception was one single homogenous entity. Throughout this particular period and for the time span of the whole study, a multitude of mixed responses emerge, although in each epoch, it is possible to label in general terms, the nature of the reception.

The decline of Clive's reputation in this era was undoubtedly due to his reception as a 'nabob.' The term was an insult applied to East India Company employees who had returned to Britain, having acquired significant wealth in order to enter the political and social elite. According to Phillips and Lawson they created a 'widespread revulsion and fear that an empire of conquest would wreak profound change in Britain.'<sup>14</sup> Consequently, they were vilified and satirised for both the way they acquired and used their ill-gotten gains.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, James Holzman's study of nabobs noted how it became the 'fashion to impute the East India Company and their servants with every species of crime,' and characterise them as 'plunderers of the East' and 'execrable banditti.'<sup>16</sup> The figure of the nabob presented through a variety of mediums was depicted as a 'political, financial and social antagonist.'<sup>17</sup> Since Clive was the most high profile nabob, because of his infamous wealth and the parliamentary faction

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<sup>13</sup> B.Lenman & P.Lawson, 'Robert Clive, the "Black Jagir", and British Politics', *Historical Journal*, Vol.26, No.4 (1983), 809.

<sup>14</sup> P.Lawson & J.Phillips, "Our Execrable Banditti": Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain', *Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol.16, No.3 (1984), 226.

<sup>15</sup> R.Juneja, 'The Native and the Nabob: Representations of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth Century English Literature', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol.27, No.1 (1992), 189.

<sup>16</sup> J.Holzman, *The Nabobs in England: A Study of the Returned Anglo-Indian, 1760-1785* (New York, 1926), 17.

<sup>17</sup> C.Smylitopoulos, 'Rewritten and Reused: Imaging the Nabob through "Upstart Iconography"', *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol.32, No.2 (2008), 40.

he controlled, he assumed ‘the symbolic face for the many in the eyes of the broader British public.’<sup>18</sup>

The fear of the political threat nabobs posed had been expressed as early as 1761 by Horace Walpole, through his observation that ‘nabobs attack every parliamentary borough.’<sup>19</sup> This was almost certainly an indirect reference to Clive who had entered parliament that very year. Indeed, Walpole’s private correspondence was suffused with denigrations of Clive. For instance, in a letter to Sir Horace Mann during Clive’s trial in parliament, he sarcastically suggested that ‘he is as white as snow’ before adding: ‘Cortez and his captains were not more spotless heroes.’<sup>20</sup> By comparing Clive to the Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortes, Walpole highlighted the contempt elite society held him in. It is unsurprising given his family background that he was so incensed by nabobs. As the son of the former Prime Minister Robert Walpole, he articulated the concerns of the established order that felt threatened by this new class of wealthy social upstarts. However, it was not just a concern of traditional elites but also broader British society. All East India Company officials were in the view of *The Public Advertiser* newspaper, motivated by ‘a selfish thirst for gold.’ The article then went on to say ‘Dupleix<sup>21</sup> wished to conquer for his Country’ whereas Britain’s ‘heroes wished to conquer for themselves;’ a sentiment that echoed Walpole’s reception of Clive as a plunderer like the Conquistadors.<sup>22</sup> While this last extract did not specifically name Clive, the author would have almost certainly had him in mind. However, another article written in *The Public Advertiser* by an author using the name ‘Gun’ did reference Clive. It stated ‘I will not represent your lordship as the Conqueror of India; but as a buyer and seller of salt’ and expressed the desire to ‘hang your lordship up as a spectacle, in terrorem, to all future nabobs.’<sup>23</sup> This reflected the deep unease people had with the acquisition of the new territories in the East, coherently expressed in John Nicholls’ memoir. ‘This empire has been acquired by a Company of Merchants; and they retained the character of an exclusive trader after they had assumed that of sovereign... sovereign and trader, are characters incompatible.’<sup>24</sup> There was also disquiet about the inhumanity of the activity in India. Richard Clarke’s 1773 poem *The Nabob or Asiatic Plunderer* captured this aspect of popular sentiment: ‘My Country’s honour has received a blot, A mark

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<sup>18</sup> T.Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2010), 15.

<sup>19</sup> J.Holzman, *The Nabobs in England: A Study of the Returned Anglo-Indian, 1760-1785* (New York, 1926), 49.

<sup>20</sup> W.S. Lewis, *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence: Volume 23* (Oxford, 1980), 484-485.

<sup>21</sup> Dupleix was Clive’s counterpart in the French East India Company.

<sup>22</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 20 December, 1776.

<sup>23</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 3 March, 1772.

<sup>24</sup> Lawson & J.Phillips, “Our Execrable Banditti”, 232.

of odium never to be forgot.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Paine's article for the *Pennsylvania Magazine* shared this view by referring to India as 'thou loud proclaimer of European cruelties, thou bloody monument of unnecessary deaths.'<sup>26</sup> He attributed the downfall of Clive to the English tendency to 'applaud before they think... but once the truth arrives, the torrent stops and rushes back again with the same violence.'<sup>27</sup> Clearly nabobs, with Clive as the prominent figure, united Britons in dislike of them on moral grounds but mainly because of their socio-political threat.

Undoubtedly, all Britons in late eighteenth century were united by economically based fears of nabobs. Thus, the vilification of Clive was not just limited to demonising him as a morally corrupt character that threatened the political status quo; there were also numerous attacks on him because of his wealth. Walpole's letters made frequent references to Clive's riches and one recounted the following presumably fictitious tale: 'General Clive is arrived, all over estates and diamonds... if a beggar asks for charity he says "Friend, I have no small brilliants about me."<sup>28</sup> Diamonds were strongly associated with Clive as he gifted some to the Queen after his final return from India.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, when the parliamentary inquiry into Clive's behaviour in India started, *The Public Advertiser* joked that

'A flaw has been discovered in the diamond given by Lord Clive to a great lady. This accident may possibly produce a very different effect from what his lordship intended, instead of royal favour to spread a veil over his crimes, and to bury his Indian spoils in an English peerage. This unlucky flaw may apply a Bill of Pains and penalties to the wound of conscience if any faith can be given to the House of Commons, forgery and murder lay festering.'<sup>30</sup>

Similar accusations were levelled in a more serious manner in another newspaper article, which expressed outrage that 'A diamond offered by Lord Clive to Lady North washes innocent the ravenous Plunderer of the East.'<sup>31</sup> These extracts perfectly epitomised the reception of Clive in this period – an evil exploiter of India trying to use his newfound wealth to bribe his way into the English nobility. The image of Clive and his diamonds became so powerful that *The Salisbury Journal* reported a bizarre claim that Clive owned a ferret, which wore a

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<sup>25</sup> R. Clarke, *The Nabob or, Asiatic Plunderer* (London, 1773), 4.

<sup>26</sup> T. Paine, 'Reflections on the Life and Death of Lord Clive', *Pennsylvania Magazine*, (1775), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Paine, 'Lord Clive', 2.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, 221.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, *Clive*, 319.

<sup>30</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 20 May, 1773.

<sup>31</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 13 January, 1773.

diamond-studded collar.<sup>32</sup> The driving force for this outrage over the accumulation of Clive's Indian wealth was the view that nabobs had been inhumane abroad and ruined the domestic economy: 'they starved millions in India by monopolies and plunder' and 'almost raised a famine at home by the luxury occasioned by their opulence, and by that opulence raised the prices of everything, till the poor could not purchase bread.'<sup>33</sup> Nabob wealth essentially became a scapegoat for the economic downturn of the East India Company stock and the country's economy.<sup>34</sup> It was an agenda driven by the traditional elites as, until income taxes were introduced in the 1790's, government was largely funded by land taxes. Hence, nabobs had reheated the tension between holders of landed and commercial wealth.<sup>35</sup> It is almost certain that ordinary Britons would have felt the impact of Indian fortunes as economic historians have provided strong evidence to suggest that the prices of consumer goods increased from the 1760s-1780s.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, according to Tillman Nechtman their cause was further aided by the fact that Indian diamonds provided 'readily visible evidence' of nabob wealth.<sup>37</sup> Again, because of his notoriety and vast fortune, Clive became 'the metonymic symbol of these concerns.'<sup>38</sup> Effectively, his individual identity was hijacked by collective economic paranoia about nabobs to the extent that he 'caused a greater sensation as a Croesus than as the hero of Plassey.'<sup>39</sup>

Undoubtedly, the bulk of Clive's reception in the last seven years of his life was extremely negative. Due to being the symbolic nabob, he was branded with a variety of unfavourable titles ranging from: 'the ravenous plunderer of the East,' 'the bold robber,' 'the bloody slaughterer of millions of defenceless people'<sup>40</sup> to a 'destroyer of public credit.'<sup>41</sup> Certainly, the figure of the nabob was a target of this genuine resentment, but it was also one for satirical attacks. A famous example of this was Samuel Foote's play *The Nabob*, which was written and first performed in 1772. Its central character was a nabob called Sir Matthew Mite, which Renu Juneja speculated 'may have been a reference to Clive.'<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, there

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<sup>32</sup> *The Salisbury Journal*, 12 April, 1772.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *Walpole Correspondence*, 400.

<sup>34</sup> J.Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford, 1992), 223.

<sup>35</sup> Lawson & J.Phillips, "Our Execrable Banditti", 236.

<sup>36</sup> T.S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century* (London, 1961), 198.

<sup>37</sup> T.Nechtman, 'A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol.41, No.1 2007, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Nechtman, *Nabobs*, 188.

<sup>39</sup> Bence Jones, *Clive*, 188.

<sup>40</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 3 March, 1772.

<sup>41</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 13 January, 1773.

<sup>42</sup> Juneja, 'Native and the Nabob', 184.

are aspects that suggest this may have been the case such as the mention of Mite's jaghir and his diamonds. However, William Wimsatt has disputed this and argued it was not a parody of one single person, given its allusions to other nabobs like Matthew White and Richard Smith.<sup>43</sup> The evidence overwhelmingly supports this latter interpretation and it was probably Foote's intention to make the audience try and guess which real life person the character was based on. However, another satire of nabobs featured in the *Town and Country Magazine*, did explicitly mention Clive. The story followed an unnamed hero rising up the East India Company who 'soon recommended himself to the Lord Clive who put him into the road of making a rapid fortune.'<sup>44</sup> However, the character was a reprobate who toured the 'watering places' and 'the ladies engrossed the greatest part of his attention.'<sup>45</sup> The appearance of Clive in these salacious stories demonstrated that his reception was not solely dominated by characterisations of him as an evil plunderer. Indeed, this literary stereotype created around Clive and other nabobs suggests the political establishment were superficially upset by the means nabobs acquired their wealth. They were actually more concerned with their threat to the political and social fabric of British society. Otherwise there would have been no need to satirise Clive as a gauche social arriviste.

The different reactions to his death captured the dual nature of this reception. He was regarded as an economic and political threat but also as a comic figure to be mocked. One newspaper report of his death represented both these elements by referring to Clive as the 'leader of the nabobs' who was the 'cement that kept them together' before injecting some humour through the statement 'they are now left to wander like sheep without a shepherd.'<sup>46</sup> Other accounts like the one in *The London Chronicle* fall into a similar category.

'Life's a surface, slippery glassy,  
Whereon tumbled Clive of Plassey.  
All the wealth the East could give,  
Brib'd not death to let him live.  
No distinction in the grave,  
Tween the nabob and the slave.'<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, both of these reports underline the fact that Clive's identity was inextricably linked to that of the nabob, a matter validated by the first terming him as their 'leader' and the second also labelling him as one. A crucial influence on the reaction to Clive's death was the

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<sup>43</sup> W. Wimsatt, 'Foote and a Friend of Boswell's: A Note on the Nabob', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.57, No.5 (1942), 326.

<sup>44</sup> *The Town and Country Magazine*, 1776, 289.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 25 November, 1774.

<sup>47</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 31 December, 1774.

mystery surrounding the circumstances. It was widely and correctly believed that he committed suicide, though the means by which he did it are today still unconfirmed. Thomas Paine's account used this information to depict Clive as a tortured individual who could not live with what he had done in India and therefore killed himself. His article is suffused with allusions to this idea: 'Guilt and melancholy are poisons of quick despatch... A conqueror more fatal than himself beset him, and revenged the injuries done to India.'<sup>48</sup> In addition, Paine envisaged a conversation between a beggar and Clive; the latter concludes the discussion by saying: "Could I unlearn what I've already learned – unact what I've already acted, But since this cannot be, I'll haste to quit the scene; for what is life, when every passion of the soul's at strife?"<sup>49</sup> The reception of Clive as a tortured villain is similarly expressed by the famous literary critic Samuel Johnson. However, he was far more direct about the matter, 'Clive is a man who acquired his fortune by such crimes, that his consciousness of them impelled him to cut his own throat.'<sup>50</sup> It is apparent from all these sources that his wealth was the key determinant for his reception; whether they were satirical or serious attacks on him, all of them mentioned his vast fortune. Undoubtedly, this was due to the characterisation of nabobs as financial antagonists, as explored earlier in this chapter.

There was also a fear that nabobs had been corrupted by India and wanted to 'naturalise this Indian-ness within Britain itself.'<sup>51</sup> The most compelling evidence of the influence of anti-India sentiment on Clive's reception is illuminated by the contrast between the reaction to his and James Wolfe's deaths. Wolfe of Quebec had been mourned as a national hero in 1759, 'for Freedom fought, and conquered as they bled; England shall claim her Wolfe, and mourn his fate. In life as virtuous and in death as great.'<sup>52</sup> Given his early praise as a 'heaven born general,' if Clive had died at Plassey, he would almost certainly have got the same reception as Wolfe did after dying on the battlefield. Of course he did not and he was therefore held responsible for the perceived negative effects an empire of conquest in the East had on British society. Moreover, the fact his military achievements did not at least ameliorate the worst of his reception, underlined the extent to which he represented a collective identity of nabobs rather than his own. It is unsurprising though when his reception was so strongly influenced by his detractors. For instance, after his death, the first biography of his life published in 1775 by an author using the name 'Charles Caraccioli' is assumed to

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<sup>48</sup> Paine, 'Lord Clive', 1-4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> J. Boswell, *The Life of Johnson, Volume 2* (Oxford, 1934) cited in Nechtman, *Nabobs*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Nechtman, 'Jewel in the Crown', 82.

<sup>52</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 18-20 October, 1759.

be an enemy of Clive's in the East India Company writing under a pseudonym.<sup>53</sup> It received him just like his critics in his lifetime by representing him as man whose actions were 'subservient to his private ambition, and inconsistent with public faith and credit.' It also provided yet another critique of 'the use he made of his immense riches.'<sup>54</sup> East India Company employees like the political elite had an agenda against Clive. Their vendetta against him was motivated by irritation with his campaign to stamp out corruption during his final stint in India. They resented Clive's attempt to reform the company as it was deemed deeply unfair given that he had exploited the system to enrich himself in his first two visits to India.

Both these agendas and the persistent unease with expansion in the East ensured that his legacy was tainted with nabobery until 1790. Indeed, the 'Charles Caraccioli' biography was popular enough to go into a second edition in 1786.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, another comparison of his reception with Wolfe further validates this, as the Anglo-American artist Benjamin West had painted both Clive of India and Wolfe of Quebec. *The Death of General Wolfe* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1771 and 'hundreds flocked to see it.'<sup>56</sup> In contrast, *Lord Clive Receiving from the Mogul the Grant of the Diwani*, that West completed in 1775 was not shown until 1795. Although West never went on record to explain why he did not unveil the picture until then, the timing certainly implied that he was waiting for the demonisation of Clive as a nabob to subside. This interpretation is certainly valid if credence is given to Renu Juneja's argument that outlined 1760-1785 as the heyday period of nabobery, after which it gradually subsided.<sup>57</sup> It is a convincing interpretation given that Foote's play the Nabob was staged in London for the last time in 1786.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the term nabob was being increasingly challenged as evidenced by works such as Joseph Price's *Saddle Put on the Right Horse* in 1783. In this text, he argued that the term was unfair to Clive, by pointing out that if the Duke of Marlborough was treated in the same way, he would have been regarded as 'a nabob of Germany' since he was made a prince of the Holy Roman Empire and given a jaghir.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Edmund Burke who instigated and led the impeachment of Warren Hastings (1788-1795) also came to Clive's defence in this decade by praising his 'daring and commanding genius.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Spear, *Master of Bengal*, 200.

<sup>54</sup> C.Caraccioli, *Life of Robert, Lord Clive* (London, 1775), 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> S.Caffey. 'An Heroics of Empire: Benjamin West and Anglophone History Painting 1764-1774' (unpublished doctoral thesis), 346.

<sup>56</sup> K.Wilson, *A New Imperial History* (Cambridge, 2004), 239.

<sup>57</sup> Juneja, 'Native and the Nabob', 184.

<sup>58</sup> Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 233.

<sup>59</sup> J.Price, *Saddle put on the Right Horse* (London, 1783), 25.

<sup>60</sup> P.J. Marshall, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: Volume VI* (Oxford, 1991), 316.

The Hastings trial marked a turning point in attitudes to India and consequently to Clive. A key reason for this was because the East India Company was now run by one of the traditional elites, Lord Cornwallis who was a Whig aristocrat. Moreover in the 1790s he enacted reforms, which stopped abuses by members of the company that had to led private profiteering and the creation of nabobs.<sup>61</sup> Effectively, the 1790s marked 'the emergence of a new sense of imperial responsibility that Britain could rule India to the advantage of both countries.'<sup>62</sup> Edmund Burke was considered the 'prophet of a reconstructed imperial sovereignty' that aligned the newly found empire with the interests of the British nation.<sup>63</sup> The expectation was that Burke would condemn Clive; instead he lauded him because he 'had laid down the best principles of government for the British possessions in India.'<sup>64</sup> It is therefore no coincidence that the painting of Clive by Benjamin West appeared the year of Hasting's acquittal in 1795. Though, Clive's reception was still predominately negative, this decade initiated the start of a transformation in his reception that would take hold in the next century. Burke's support ameliorated some of the negativity that dominated Clive's reception. It also set the precedent for later generations to adopt the same view that Clive should be exonerated for the contribution that he made to his country.

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<sup>61</sup> R.Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India* (Cambridge, 2007), 212.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 221.

<sup>64</sup> Marshall, *Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 54.



## Chapter 2: 1800-1880

This next chapter examines the change in Clive's reception from the eighteenth to nineteenth century. As already discussed, it is clear that in the 1790's, as the nature of British involvement in India changed and the Hastings trial ran its course, enmity towards nabobs subsided. As a result of this shift in attitudes to India, Clive began to be received on an individual basis rather than on a collective one. Moreover, given that 'popular literary interest in the nabob falls almost completely after 1800,' Clive is no longer received as one.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, he does not feature in the literary sphere at all in this period. This is revealing in itself and therefore his reception in this period is almost entirely determined by histories. It is important to note though that these would not have been read solely by academics, as 'history was immensely popular in the mid-nineteenth century.'<sup>66</sup> The key texts with a central focus on Clive are James Mill's *History of India* as well as John Malcolm's *Lord Clive* and Thomas Macaulay's review essay of it. These three works amongst others, capture the dialectical nature of Clive's reception in this period. His reception was caught between the twin forces of support and condemnation of Britain's empire in the East.

Mill's *History of India* first released in 1817, continued from where Clive's eighteenth century detractors had left off. He remarked that the company had 'never before had a man of such high pretensions' and that he was 'never inattentive to his own interests.'<sup>67</sup> These disparaging comments received him as a selfish plunderer and upstart just like those of the pre-1800 period. Furthermore, Mill undermined his military credentials by asserting that 'he had no genius.'<sup>68</sup> Mill's critique was driven by his irritation that the East India Company had been transformed from a group of merchants, into a governing power. His work attributed this to the selfish opportunism of people like Clive. Accordingly, he regarded Clive as the 'arch-corruptor of the Company's original mandate to trade.'<sup>69</sup> John Malcolm completely disagreed with this, as he believed that this transition was inevitable, seeing as the Mughal successors had sought alliances with European trading companies in their territorial struggles. It is this belief that partly accounts for why his biography of Clive is so effusive in its praise of him. For instance, the final chapter extolled Clive's virtues in every aspect of his life. Malcolm lauded

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<sup>65</sup> Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 233.

<sup>66</sup> C.Hall, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), 32

<sup>67</sup> J.Mill, *The History of British India Volume 3*(London, 1817), 454.

<sup>68</sup> Mill, *History of British India Volume 4*, 454.

<sup>69</sup> J.Harrington, "No Longer Merchants but Sovereigns of a vast Empire": The writings of Sir John Malcolm and British India, 1810 to 1833' (unpublished doctoral thesis), 232.

'the extraordinary extent of the power of his mind' and believed his 'qualities as a statesman almost surpassed those he displayed as a military commander.'<sup>70</sup> Most importantly of all, Clive is imputed as the 'founder of an empire.'<sup>71</sup> Indeed, this highlights the main reason why these accounts differed so much; Mill was writing in 1817 when an imperial vision had yet to fully emerge. Whereas Malcolm, writing twenty years later, had witnessed significant changes in Britain including The Great Reform Act in 1832 and the East India Company Charter Act of 1833. The latter was particularly significant as it extended the government's power over India that had been first initiated in 1813. The 1833 act marked the end of the East India Company as a commercial body and henceforth it became a purely administrative organisation.

The renowned historian Thomas Macaulay's review essay of Malcolm's Lord Clive certainly suggested that an imperial vision was beginning to emerge in Britain. Published in 1840 in the *Edinburgh Review*, it sought to find a middle ground between the diametrically opposed views of Mill and Malcolm. The latter's hagiography of Clive could see 'nothing but wisdom and justice in the actions of his idol' while Macaulay was 'at least equally far from concurring in the severe judgement of Mr Mill.'<sup>72</sup> Undoubtedly Malcolm had been too favourable to Clive, which was unsurprising since he was a friend of his son, who had given him the family papers in order to write the biography.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Macaulay's judgement aligned far more with Malcolm's than Mill's. His judgement on Clive was that

'Every person who takes a fair and enlightened view of his whole career must admit that our island, so fertile in heroes and statesman, has scarcely ever produced a man more truly great either in arms or in council.'<sup>74</sup>

Certainly Macaulay built up a heroic image of Clive but that did not mean he exonerated him for everything. Indeed Macaulay conceded when it came to money he was not free of 'those weaknesses which the satirists of that age represented as characteristic of his whole class.'<sup>75</sup> So even the negativity surrounding Clive's wealth formed a part of his reception in this period. Macaulay though, recognised that Clive had become the 'personification of all the vices and weaknesses which the public ascribed to the English adventurers in Asia.'<sup>76</sup> He sought to change this through subtly using Clive's life as a symbol to depict the evolution of British

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<sup>70</sup> J.Malcolm, *Life of Robert, First Lord Clive: Volume 3* (London, 1836), 382.

<sup>71</sup> J.Malcolm, *Life of Robert, First Lord Clive: Volume 2*, (London, 1836), 201.

<sup>72</sup> T.B.Macaulay, *Macaulay's Essay on Lord Clive* (Boston, 1891), 3.

<sup>73</sup> J.Malcolm, *Life of Robert, First Lord Clive: Volume 1* (London, 1836), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 76.

involvement in India. As a pioneer of the 1833 Act, Macaulay wanted to initiate a process of 'modernising as well as evangelising India.'<sup>77</sup> In order to adapt Clive to this narrative, he depicted him initially as a selfish plunderer, then as a military hero ending with his final transition to that of a statesman.<sup>78</sup> Essentially, these three stages reflected the change in the nature of British imperialism in India. The final depiction of Clive as a reformer was critical as Macaulay was casting him as the forerunner of 'Lord Bentinck' who was the Governor-General of India (1833-5), a position that had been created by the 1833 act.<sup>79</sup> Bentinck outlawed Indian practices like sati and thagi so was a product of Macaulay's new vision in the East.<sup>80</sup> In short, Macaulay wanted to reorient Clive's reputation so that it aligned with this new imperial tradition he was creating. This is perfectly illustrated by one of his concluding statements that Clive's 'name stands high on the roll of conquerors. But it is found in a better list, of those who have done and suffered much for the happiness of mankind.'<sup>81</sup> Moreover, it is clear that restoring Clive's reputation was part of a wider agenda as he also wrote a similar work coming out in favour of Warren Hastings. So just in the way that Clive had stood for a larger agenda in the previous century as a nabob, he also did in this period but as a founding figure of a newly conceptualised empire. It is important to note though that this reception of Clive was not universally accepted.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Clive does not even feature in the literary sphere at all. Indeed, Macaulay lamented that 'while the history of the Spanish empire in America is familiarly known to all the nations of Europe, the great actions of our countrymen in the East should, even among ourselves, excite little interest.'<sup>82</sup> Essentially this period was still one of indifference and mixed attitudes to India and consequently to Clive. For those who did not share the imperial vision of Macaulay, having an empire was intellectually problematic, as the main theme of a number of historical works in this period was charting 'the growth of peace and freedom in Britain from feudal times to the present.'<sup>83</sup> Accordingly it was an impossible task for these historians to include a favourable reception of Clive within this whiggish narrative. As a result, many did not mention Clive or they offered assessments such as 'the triumphs of Clive were stained by those acts of cruelty, avarice, and breach of faith,

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<sup>77</sup> N.Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2003), 189.

<sup>78</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 65.

<sup>79</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 89.

<sup>80</sup> L.James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1998), 221.

<sup>81</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> B.Porter, *The Absent Minded Imperialists* (Oxford, 2004), 70.

which unhappily mark the whole history of our Anglo-Indian conquests.<sup>84</sup> Others such as the Liberal MP Henry Brougham could not fathom why Macaulay was praising Clive as he was a 'robber and a cruel and bloodthirsty man.'<sup>85</sup> Even so, in this period there was a widespread willingness to balance the good and bad of Clive, before forming a judgement, that had generally been absent pre-1800. In fact, Brougham acknowledged that he was both 'a very great and bad man.'<sup>86</sup> Brougham was not alone in this endeavour to weigh Clive's 'faults against his merits.'<sup>87</sup> William Taylor also conceded he 'committed many faults' but argued along the lines of Macaulay that the reforms he introduced into India 'may well atone for his errors.'<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, he also regarded Clive as the 'founder of the British Empire in India,' which demonstrated that the idea was steadily growing.<sup>89</sup>

The India Mutiny aided this shift in attitudes to Clive and imperialism in 1857. It had a 'profound impact on British thinking about the empire' as it led to the creation of the British Raj and provided evidence that India needed to be civilised.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, only a few months after it happened *The Glasgow Herald* reported a meeting involving a number of British politicians, about erecting a memorial to Lord Clive in Shrewsbury. In the meeting, the mutiny was blamed on the 'departure from the principles laid down by Lord Clive' who was praised as 'the founder of the British Empire in the East.'<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the motivation behind building the statue was not only to provide 'a redemption of the duty which had long been owing to that great man' but also to 'stimulate and excite the moral principles of the rising generation.'<sup>92</sup> Three years later a ten foot bronze statue of Clive had been erected in the market square of Shrewsbury. The newspaper reports on the inauguration of this statue yield a number of interesting insights. They provide further evidence that Clive still evoked mixed feelings as one used the oft repeated justification of praising him on the basis his 'faults were overpowered by his virtue';<sup>93</sup> while the other also acknowledged that 'Clive was a man of imperfections.'<sup>94</sup> However, the latter also recounted a speech made by one of the attendees of the event, who dismissed

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<sup>84</sup> A. Drane, *A History of England for Family Use* (London, 1864), 682.

<sup>85</sup> J. Harrington, 'Macaulay, "Lord Clive" and the Imperial Tradition', *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2006), 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Macaulay, *Lord Clive*, 87.

<sup>88</sup> W. C. Taylor, *The Modern British Plutarch* (New York, 1846), 88.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> James, *Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 192.

<sup>91</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 26 June, 1857.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 21 January, 1860.

<sup>94</sup> *The Times*, 19 January, 1860.

those who 'doubt if it be right to honour such a man,' by arguing that 'we should honour what is good and great in our fellows, while we sorrow for their faults.'<sup>95</sup> Another pertinent observation is that although his statue figure is adorned in military uniform<sup>96</sup> and he is praised as 'a military hero', there is equal importance attached to his role as a 'civil reformer' as he had 'cleansed the corrupt administration of the state.'<sup>97</sup> Evidently, Macaulay's 1840 piece on Clive had set the agenda for his reception as a symbol of reform. The influence on his reception however cannot be solely attributed to the ideological forces that drove Macaulay. All three newspaper articles highlighted the impact that Thomas Carlyle's 'Great Men Theory' must have had on his reception, given each article referred to him as 'the great' and one attributed the foundation of the Indian Empire all 'to the genius and greatness of Clive.'<sup>98</sup>

Ultimately this period from 1800-1880 represented contrasting fortunes for the reception of Clive, depending on the imperial attitude of those receiving him. Furthermore, the lack of attention Clive received in this period vindicates Porter's '1880 thesis.' The lack of any material in the literary sphere demonstrated that imperial enthusiasm had yet to materialise. Certainly though, the statue campaign showed that the tide was beginning to turn for those who supported the British colonisation of India, though it was by no means the majority position yet.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Clive of India Statue. 1860. [http://www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk/gallery3/index.php/towns/shrewsbury/4s1\\_Pict0034](http://www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk/gallery3/index.php/towns/shrewsbury/4s1_Pict0034)

<sup>97</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 21 January, 1860.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



### Chapter 3: 1880-1940

The reception of Clive dramatically changed in this period. In the previous chapter it is made clear that Clive was still a controversial and divisive figure. Therefore there had been a divide between those who praised and condemned him. However, from 1880 onwards, there emerged a reception of him that was almost entirely favourable. It was positive to the same extent that his eighteenth century reception had been negative. Moreover, unlike in the first eighty years of the Victorian Century, there are literary and other popular sources that can be analysed. As a result of the different textual material relating to him, his reception is multifaceted, just as it had been for different reasons in the eighteenth century.

Unsurprisingly the ability of later historians to take a long-term perspective on British history fundamentally altered their reception of Empire and Clive. It accounts for why numerous histories started to appear that received Clive and Hastings as 'the respective founder and builder up of the British Empire in the East.'<sup>99</sup> As a result, his reception as founder of the Empire was firmly established in this era. Of course, this idea originated from earlier in the century, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, it nearly always came with an apology for his bad actions. In this period, historians toned down their criticisms of him. For instance, Bruce Malleson did not accept any slight on Clive's reputation and dismissed all criticisms of him as the product of a 'vile persecution.'<sup>100</sup> Although there were differences in this respect from pre-1880 views, there was continuity in Clive being received both as a 'great statesman and a great soldier.'<sup>101</sup> Anyway, if Malleson's work had been written pre-1880 it would have been dismissed as hagiography like Malcolm's one had. Instead it represented the prevailing view of Clive as 'the daring genius' that had founded an empire in India just as one had been lost in America.<sup>102</sup> James Holzman also totally exonerated Clive and argued had he 'lived a century later, the poets of Imperialism would have woven round them a legend, quite different, and in truth less far removed from reality than that which his contemporaries manufactured.'<sup>103</sup> In the eighteenth century, there had been a few supporters of Clive like Charles Saunders, who argued that Clive was being misjudged and mistreated just like Sir Walter Raleigh had been.<sup>104</sup> In this era, this attitude became the dominant one. Indeed, Clive was praised in this fashion as one 'of the last who still possessed the secret of patriotism and piracy after the

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<sup>99</sup> B.Savile, *How India was won by England under Clive and Hastings* (London, 1923), 4.

<sup>100</sup> B.Malleson, *Lord Clive* (Oxford, 1893), 192.

<sup>101</sup> Malleson, *Clive*, 211.

<sup>102</sup> J.Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London, 1883), 288.

<sup>103</sup> Holzman, *Nabobs*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> Bence Jones, *Clive of India*, 353.

Elizabethan grand style.<sup>105</sup> The extensive research of histories written post 1880 undertaken by Andrew Porter also led him to conclude, that ‘nothing could be said against Clive now.’<sup>106</sup>

The explanation for the rise in Clive’s popularity undoubtedly lies in the development of Britain’s relationship with Empire. A landmark moment was when Queen Victoria was awarded the title of ‘Empress of India’ by the government in 1876.<sup>107</sup> It symbolised that Britain was an imperial nation, a matter elucidated upon by John Seeley’s best-selling *The Expansion of England* in 1882. In it he stressed the importance of Empire for the retention of Britain’s status as a major power. Also by this time, the idea that ‘governing India was the fulfilment of a mandate from God’ had been firmly planted in public consciousness.<sup>108</sup> The most famous exponent of this attitude was Kipling’s *White Man’s Burden* that was perceived at the time as an endorsement of the civilising mission of imperialism. These sentiments are also expressed perfectly by Lord Curzon: ‘I do not see how Englishmen, contrasting India as it is with what it was or might have been, can fail to see that we came here in obedience to what I call a decree of Providence, for the lasting benefit of millions of the human race.’<sup>109</sup> Essentially, Clive’s reception was improving in line with this upsurge in imperial enthusiasm. The imperial pride in controlling India was especially important as the view ‘as long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world’<sup>110</sup> was widely accepted. Since Clive was deemed the founder of the British Raj, the dramatic change in his reception is unsurprising.

There was a fundamental change not only in the way Clive was received by historians but also by the political elite. Chapter One revealed the extent to which he was vilified by politicians in his later years. In this era though, important political figures like Lord Curzon revered Clive as the man who ‘planted the foundations of an Empire more enduring than Alexander’s, more splendid than Caesar’s.’<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Curzon launched a successful campaign for a statue to be erected in London of Clive. By putting one in the capital, it symbolised that Clive was no longer a marginalised figure. It was unveiled in 1912 and once again it depicted him in military uniform.<sup>112</sup> There were also depictions of three events on each

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<sup>105</sup> Holzman, *Nabobs*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists*, 182.

<sup>107</sup> J.M.Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984), 4.

<sup>108</sup> James, *Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 219.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>110</sup> James, *Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 203.

<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 8 April, 1907, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Clive of India Statue. 1912.

[http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/images/FarEast/India/British\\_EEC\\_Clive01\\_full.jpg](http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/images/FarEast/India/British_EEC_Clive01_full.jpg)

of the sides: The Siege of Arcot, The Battle of Plassey and the Treaty of Allahabad. The inclusion of the treaty reiterated the significance of Clive being a statesman and a soldier. This dual representation served as a rebuttal to those who had characterised him solely as a plunderer in previous eras. Deconstructing these representations was essential for policy makers in this period. Otherwise the British Empire would have lost the moral superiority it professed to have, if private profiteers were seen to be the founders of Empire. By representing him as a statesman with an imperial vision, it proved he was 'no self seeker' and 'he always had something bigger, larger and nobler behind.'<sup>113</sup> Though Clive's image had been almost entirely restored, the wealth he had acquired still tainted his reception. All Curzon did to defend this was state it was 'easy in those days in India' and 'he might easily have been a hundred times richer than he was.'<sup>114</sup> Although it was an irremovable stain on his reputation, the willingness of Curzon to defend it underlined the significant change in his reception from the political elite.

The reception of Clive in the literary sphere also provided a stark contrast to those of his lifetime. Children's literature such as George Henty's *With Clive in India* and Grace Stebbing's *Winning An Empire or The Story of Clive* are testament to this. These books reflected and reinforced the new imperial attitudes of this age and attempted to inspire an imperial generation.<sup>115</sup> Henty's work characterised Clive as a man who just wanted to attain glory for his country. His book emphasised that Clive was a soldier, not a merchant. Indeed Clive's character repeatedly expressed his happiness at 'exchanging my pen for a sword.'<sup>116</sup> The main character of the story 'Charlie Marryat' is invited by Clive to do the same. The story then follows his career in India with the heroic and legendary figure of Clive. Robert Browning's 1880 poem *Clive* also received him as a heroic figure worthy of being idolised. Though there have been academics such as Evgenia Sifaki who have read it as a critique of Clive, this was certainly not the case at the time.<sup>117</sup> When Lord Curzon went to officially open a mural tablet commemorating Clive at his alma mater Merchant Taylor's School, he recommended that

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<sup>113</sup> *The Times*, 14 December, 1907, 14.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> P.A. Dunae, 'Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914', *Victorian Studies*, Vol.24, No.1 (1980), 109.

<sup>116</sup> G.A.Henty, *With Clive in India* (London, 1884), 37.

<sup>117</sup> E.Sifaki, 'Masculinity, Heroism, and the Empire: Robert Browning's "Clive" and Other Victorian Re-Constructions of the Story of Robert Clive', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 37 (2009), 146.

everyone should read the Browning poem.<sup>118</sup> Like Henty's book it celebrated him as the one who 'gave England India' and 'Conquered and annexed and Englished!'<sup>119</sup>

Clive was not just received as an imperial icon. There was a strong interest in trying to interrogate not 'only what Clive did but his psychological motivations, namely, how do great men become great men?'<sup>120</sup> The 1934 play *Clive of India* attempted to portray Clive as a 'great and very likeable person.'<sup>121</sup> It became a West End hit and ran for just under a year. Indeed it was such a success that it was turned into a film a year later.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, the BBC made a television adaptation as well in 1938.<sup>123</sup> In Steven Fielding's view, the 1935 film depicted Clive as 'an enlightened figure who drew India within a benevolent empire.'<sup>124</sup> Certainly it played up to the imperial stereotype of him as an empire builder, as before the Battle of Plassey he shouted 'we play for an empire.'<sup>125</sup> Significant time is also given to the relationship between him and his wife. His character is constantly exposed as being torn between his imperial and family duty. There is no doubt that the intended effect is for the audience to sympathise with Clive. This becomes overwhelmingly obvious when, contrary to historical accuracy, in the closing scene he loses his trial before parliament.<sup>126</sup> These representations of Clive demonstrate the complete reversal of his reception since his lifetime. Moreover the sudden production of material about Clive after 1880, irrefutably confirms Porter's '1880 thesis.'

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<sup>118</sup> *The Times*, 14 December, 1907, 14.

<sup>119</sup> R.Browning, *Clive (1880)* <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Clive>

<sup>120</sup> J.Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Dramas* (Oxford, 2000), 49.

<sup>121</sup> W.Liscombe and R.Minney, *Clive of India (Play)* (London, 1934), 5.

<sup>122</sup> S.Morley, *Tales from the Hollywood Raj* (London, 1983), 126.

<sup>123</sup> Jacobs, *Intimate Screen*, 49.

<sup>124</sup> S.Fielding, 'British Politics and Cinema's Historical Dramas, 1929-1938', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.46, No.2 (2013), 497.

<sup>125</sup> 'Clive of India', *20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Cinema Archives*, 1935.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*



## Conclusion

Over the course of 1767-1940, Clive of India's reception underwent significant change. Indeed, the contrast between the reception of him as a nabob and as the founder of Empire could not be greater. This difference in his reception between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries is perfectly illustrated both in the political and literary spheres. From a political perspective, Clive went from being likened to 'Kublai Khan'<sup>127</sup> by Horace Walpole to 'Julius Caesar' by Lord Curzon.<sup>128</sup> A similar dichotomy presented itself in popular sources too. In the 1773 *Town and Country Magazine*, Clive featured in a story where he helped a youth join the East India Company. The unnamed character is inspired by Clive to visit brothels and drinking houses. In an almost identical situation in Henty's *With Clive in India*, he transferred a boy into the military division of the company.<sup>129</sup> In this case though, the boy idolised Clive as a hero and later in his life defended Clive in parliament. Juxtaposing these two examples testifies to the remarkable shift in attitudes towards him.

Though all these representations of Clive differed, they are all united by their use of him as an imperial symbol. In the eighteenth century he was used as a means to express imperial anxiety through being cast as a nabob. Moving into the next century, Macaulay's 1840 work on Clive used him as a symbol to represent the change in the nature of the British Empire. He also laid the foundations for his eventual status as the founder of the Empire in India, which took off after 1880. He was revered from then on as a symbol of imperial pride. Clearly these transitions validate Huw Bowen's theory that his reputation moved in line with imperial attitudes. Although a more nuanced assessment would be his reception evolved as attitudes to India changed. The increase in the positivity of his reception directly correlated with the way India changed from being viewed as a threat to the British nation to a source of national pride. This becomes apparent by comparing his reception with Wolfe of Quebec's. In the eighteenth century, Wolfe was received far more positively than Clive. However, in the twentieth century Clive was received equally, if not more favourably than Wolfe. One reason for this was because Clive was viewed as more than just a soldier, but as an imperial figure like Julius Caesar. So while dying on the battlefield had been to the advantage of Wolfe's immediate reception, it denied him the opportunity to achieve the same status as a founder of Empire that Clive did in the late Victorian period. Furthermore, India was the crown jewel of the British Empire, which also increased Clive's prestige. It is unsurprising that Clive was received in so

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<sup>127</sup> Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, 60.

<sup>128</sup> *The Times*, 14 December, 1907.

<sup>129</sup> Henty, *With Clive in India*, 194.

many different ways. The contradictory actions in his life enabled a complex reception of him to emerge. Moreover, those receiving him could subjectively interpret what his motives were. It explains why he could be viewed as a conquistador or as the benevolent founder of Empire. In short, his reception was always hostage to the ideological climate of Britain.

In the three separate periods analysed, it has not been possible to use a consistent range of sources, as the same material has not existed throughout the timeframe of this investigation. The absence of popular sources on Clive from 1800-1880 is a notable example. However, the lack of this type of evidence has confirmed that Porter's '1880 thesis' is supported by the reception of Clive. Finally, it is important to reiterate that Clive always provoked a mixed response. Controversy surrounding his wealth and death meant he would constantly have his detractors. Even so, this investigation has been able to identify the attitude of the majority, in all three periods.

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