STUDIES IN ENGLISH LITERATURES
Volume 9
Edited by Koray Melikoğlu

Shafquat Towheed (ed.)

New Readings in the Literature of British India, c. 1780-1947

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Introduction

Shafquat Towheed
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Emphasising the mutual interdependence of the exchanges, economic, cultural, and otherwise, between Britain and India over the last two centuries, Harish Trivedi has coined the term "colonial transactions" to suggest the "interactive, dialogic, two-way process" of this prolonged engagement (15). Sixty years after independence, the implications of this on-going process of colonial (and postcolonial) transaction are as evident as ever. The twelve contributions to this book amply demonstrate the richness, vitality and complexity of these colonial transactions, and they do so by approaching the topic from a specific perspective: by interpreting the rubric 'new readings' as broadly, creatively and productively as possible. They cover a wide range of literary responses and genres: eighteenth-century drama, the gothic novel, verse, autobiography, history, religious writing, journalism, women's memoirs, travel writing, popular fiction, and the modernist novel. All twelve chapters offer substantially "new" readings of their chosen (and often contested) transactions between Britain and India. Several contributors examine work previously neglected by academic scholarship, such as the reception and translation of Corelli into Indian languages (Bhattacharya), or the importance of Urdu women's magazines in shaping community and gender identity (Pande, Bindu, and Atiya), while others offer trenchant new interpretations of well-known works, such as Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (Mukherji) or Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (Bluemel). Throughout this collection, contributors have paid attention to the mutually interdependent relationship between texts and their consumers and between readers and their reading material, by remaining alert to the complexities of dissemination, reading and reception among disparate reading communities in a colonial society. By opening up a generically diverse range of texts for discussion from a variety of critical and theoretical standpoints, *New Readings in the Literature of British India* urges renewed attention and scrutiny from its readers, asking them to read afresh both the intertextual and the intratextual evidence of nearly two centuries of colonial and textual transactions between Britain and India.

The first two chapters demonstrate the limitations, as well as the possibilities, of attempts to represent and articulate India to a British readership in the Romantic period, through the interactions between seemingly incongruent genres. In the opening chapter, "Colonialism, Slavery, and Religion on Stage: Late Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists, the Hastings Trial, and the Making of British India," Marianna D'Ezio reads the popular plays and farces of a group of women dramatists – Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mariana Starke and Frances Burney – in the light of the protracted impeachment and trial of the overtly Orientalist first Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings. Sara Suleri has commented that the Hastings trial, while ostensibly offering to expose the excesses of the East India Company, effectively did the opposite: the trial protected "the colonial project from being indicted from the larger ill of which Hastings was simply a herald" (45). In her reading of these contemporary plays by women dramatists, D'Ezio finds evidence of the dramatic material to emerge from this, the most dramatic of trials. Instead of covering up the implications of colonial misrule, the Hastings trial heightened the political awareness of otherwise disparate women playwrights, both conservative and radical, on a number of issues, from the rights of women, to the abolition of slavery, and from miscegenation to the inexorable social mobility of the new *nabobs*, even while they claimed *not* to be writing about politics.

In a similar vein, in his chapter "India as Gothic Horror: Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Images of Juggernaut in Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Writing," Andrew Rudd teases out the symmetry between the exaggerated, often anti-Catholic modes of gothic fiction and the heated anti-Hindu rhetoric of Evangelical Protestant polemic.

Rudd closely reads two specific responses, one factual and the other fictional, to the *rath yatra* at the Jagannath Temple at Puri: Claudius Buchanan's first-hand, though extravagantly rhetorically intemperate account in *Colonial Ecclesiastical Establishment* (1813), and Charles Maturin's fictional rendering of the same event (derived, sometimes almost verbatim, from Buchanan), in his gothic masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Rudd's wonderfully insightful analysis demonstrates the extent to which gothic fiction and Evangelical polemic were mutually legitimising discourses, both limning the change in British attitudes towards Indian religions from the enlightened Orientalist benignity of the 1780s, to the crusading intolerance of Lord Teignmouth's sponsorship of the "pious clause" during the East India Company's charter renewal in 1813.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 all examine a literary genre that more than any other has come to typify the protracted colonial encounter between Britain and India: the British woman's Indian travel narrative. Temporarily emancipated from the physical constrictions of life in nineteenth-century England by the prospect of travelling to, from, and within India, she carried at the same time the almost suffocating cultural baggage of an interventionist (and often overtly supremacist) colonial order. And yet, many of these women refused to act simply as Ruskinian standard bearers for an entrenched colonial and domestic ideology. In "Intrepid Traveller, 'She-Merchant,' or Colonialist Historiographer: Reading Eliza Fay's *Original Letters*," Nira Gupta-Casale's new reading argues that Eliza Fay's correspondence, often seen as a casually sympathetic endorsement of the colonial project from within, offers a surprisingly disobedient, unladylike and unfeminine subtext. Gupta-Casale observes that Fay's writing repeatedly refuses to sit contentedly within inscribed codes of class and gender, a discomforting fact that *all* her British editors, from the Reverend Firminger in 1908, to E. M. Forster in 1925 and M. M. Kaye in 1986, have failed to either contain or adequately explain.

Nandini Sengupta develops the often latent ideological complexity of British women's travel narratives further in her chapter, "The British Woman Traveller in India: Cultural Intimacy and Interracial Kinship in Fanny Parks's *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*." Examining perhaps the most famous nineteenth-century woman's account of travelling in India, Sengupta's fresh interpretation highlights Parks's cross-cultural identification, as well as her determination to build lasting friendships (with both the culturally and religiously hybrid Gardner household, and the deposed Maratha Queen Baiza Bai of Gwalior) across the often fraught interstices of what Mary Louise Pratt has called the colonial "contact zone" (4). Sengupta draws attention to the cultural inclusiveness of Parks's text, which features both an Islamic blessing and an invocation to Ganesh, reminding us again of what William Dalrymple has celebrated as a world "far more hybrid" and with "far less clearly defined ethnic, national and religious borders, than we have been conditioned to expect" (xxiii).

The last of the three chapters of British women's Indian travel narratives focuses on the home rather than the world. In "Inconsequential Lives: *The Voyage Out* and Anglo-Indian fictions of Voyaging and Domesticity," Pia Mukherji examines the relationship between the explicitly imperative (but equally implicitly conflicted) ideological and linguistic register of Anglo-Indian domestic conduct works by Maud Diver, Sara Duncan, Flora Annie Steel and Constance Sitwell, and the complex negotiations of both public and private tyranny in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915). Woolf's first full-length exercise in Modernist subjectivity and consciousness, Mukherji argues, draws heavily upon the complicated gendered self-definition found in these Anglo-Indian narratives of the "voyage out." The explicit repudiation in *The Voyage Out* of the conduct books' overt aim (married colonial domesticity) is a determined refusal by Woolf to endorse either the public or the private ideological implications of both patriarchy *and* imperialism.

The new readings offered by chapters 6, 7, and 8 examine colonial transactions from a completely different perspective, that of the self-definition of specific Indian reading (and writing) communities through their engagement with the determining exigencies of mass print culture. Anindita Ghosh has persuasively argued that Indian print culture is typified by the "collisions and negotiations on the borders between orality and print," undermining previous interpretations of the arrival of print "clamping its vice-like grip on the colonized imagination" (14). These three chapters find further evidence of the unique (and often unpredictable) use of print culture to articulate, as well as shape, specific reading communities. In "Remade Womanhoods, Refashioned Modernities: The Construction of 'Good Womanhood' in *Annisa*, an Early Twentieth-Century Women's Magazine in Urdu," Rekha Pande, K. C. Bindu, and Viqar Atiya examine the construction of a specific Deccani Muslim female (and largely elite) identity through the pages of the Urdu language journal, *Annisa*. Edited by Begum Sughra Humayun Mirza, a leading member of Hyderabad's Nizami nobility, *Annisa*, Pande et al. note, was more than merely a conduct journal (although that was its explicit aim), for it engaged in the debate over the construction of a modern Muslim identity raging across the country in the first quarter of the twentieth century. *Annisa* did not uncritically absorb, translate, and disseminate progressive (or Western) ideas in Urdu, but actively engaged with such thinking and sometimes refuted it; its curious silence on the issue of equal rights for women is perhaps the most notable example of this autonomous and indigenous process of selection and self-definition.

Mass print opened up channels for united resistance to colonial rule, but at the same time it offered the possibility of shaping new, essentialist identities for reading communities defined by language, religion, or caste. In "Abu'l A'la Mawdudi: British India and the Politics of Popular Islamic Texts," Masood Ashraf Raja examines the counter-hegemonic writing of one of India's leading (and most popular) early twentieth-century Muslim religious writers. Access to popular print allowed Mawdudi to further his advocacy of a Muslim identity that was both modern (especially in its engagement with Western thought) and essential (he wanted to remove the dependence of Indian Islam on schools of interpretation). Raja's chapter provides a incisive reminder that Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" did not always see themselves as putative nation-states; the ambivalent nature of print gave expression to reading communities that were potentially supra-, non-, or even anti-national.

In "Memoirs of Maharanis: The Politics of Marriage, Companionship and Love in Late-Colonial Princely India," Angma Dey Jhala offers an impressive reading of the memoirs of five Hindu Maharanis, and provides a fascinating demonstration of the first engagements of these educated, princely, Indian women in the world of print, the genre of autobiography, and their own self-identification through their use of the English language. While publishing these autobiographies in English cemented these ladies' sense of autonomous selfhood (as progressive and educated upholders of a princely tradition), it also documented the active intervention of the British in supporting favourable alliances between princely states: another expression of the determining influence of Imperial hegemony. Jhala teases out the complexities of these acts of self-assertion, which had to negotiate both indigenous and imported social codes, nowhere more so than in the issue of marriage. In all three of these chapters, literary activity determines the self-selecting identity of a specific religious, caste, or gender group; in the case of last of the three, Jhala's reading of the memoirs of Maharanis, the literary activity itself serves as a validating (and valedictory) marker of a former royal status and esteem that has been increasingly marginalised in independent India.

Returning to the centrality of fiction in articulating the cultural transactions between Britain and India, chapters 9 and 10 provide detailed, culturally specific new readings of two particular and extremely divergent authors, Marie Corelli and J. R. Ackerley, by using interpretive approaches from book history and critical theory respectively. In

"The Reception of Marie Corelli in India," Prodosh Bhattacharya offers a comprehensive examination of the translation, publication, reading, reception, literary influence, and reprinting of the works of Marie Corelli in India. Productively melding book history with literary criticism, Bhattacharya's analysis maps the cultural footprint of Corelli in Bengal in the last century, and his close reading of successive translations astutely demonstrates the extent to which translated texts can become transformed through an implicit process of cultural assimilation. In Britain, Corelli had been lambasted for writing crassly intemperate and vitiated populist fiction; at the hands of their Bengali translators, many of those very novels became thinly veiled commentaries on issues as divergent as Hindu values, the role of women, the suitability of love matches for the urban middle-class, and so on. Both Corelli and her Bengali translators advocated often contradictory positions on a range of issues, from the rights of women to the importance of religious tradition; but as Bhattacharya demonstrates, it would be a mistake to assume that these were the *same* contradictory positions.

While chapter 9 maps reception and response to offer a new reading, my chapter productively superimposes two models from current critical theory onto a thinly veiled, generically indeterminate travel memoir by J. R. Ackerkley. In "'The Sahib try to kiss me': The Construction of the Queer Subaltern in J. R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday*," I offer a close reading of Ackerley's irrepressibly discursive and sensationally indiscrete book, by investigating the interstices and overlaps between the perspectives offered by queer theory and postcolonial theory. Queer theory has often remained silent about its complicity in discourses of colonial dominance, while postcolonial theory has frequently attempted to present a coherently heteronormative facade, despite clear evidence to the contrary. Ackerley's semi-public, semi-private book, neither wholly novel nor autobiography, a text shaped by both sexual difference and cultural relativism, glosses the totalising impulses of competing discourses, while registering indigenous resistance to it.

The last two chapters bring the colonial transaction full circle by examining the publication and reception of two Indian and one Anglo-Indian (or more precisely, Irish-Indian) novelists in the British marketplace. In "Cultural Contestations in the Literary Marketplace: Reading Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and Aubrey Menen's *The Prevalence of Witches* (1947)," Ruvani Ranasinha offers a detailed and entirely original assessment of the often contradictory tensions both these writers faced in the publication and reception of their novels in an increasingly commercial marketplace. Noting the shaping influence of British reviewers, Ranasinha observes that while Rao was accused of being too culturally specific and therefore too hard for his British readers to understand, Menen was viewed as a mediator between two divergent cultures, despite his own protestations to the contrary. Ranasinha's chapter brings another sense to the term 'new readings'; she demonstrates that the reading and presentation of these books by their British reviewers determined their reception for a generation of readers, and in uncovering the articulation of this cultural framing, she recasts the novels in a fresh, revivifying light.

In the final chapter, "Casualty of War, Casualty of Empire: Mulk Raj Anand in England," Kristin Bluemel delivers a new reading of Anand's celebrated First-World-War novel, *Across the Black Waters*. Published at the start of the Second World War, and resolutely deploying a hybrid, Indo-Anglian linguistic register, Bluemel sees Anand's novel, caught in a complex web of sometimes mutually incompatible transactions, as a prime example of both the institutional collaboration and the individual resistance that typified British rule in India. Bluemel opens up a new reading of Anand's novel by showing how the Janus-like text, looking in two directions at once, both memorialises the sacrifice of Indians for the perpetuation of British liberty, while also anticipating their own.

Brought together in one volume, these essays offer a small, but representative sample of the multifaceted literary and cultural traffic between Britain and India in the colonial period. In the richness and diversity of the various contributors' strategies and interpretations, these new readings urge us to return once again to texts that we think we know, as well as to explore those that we do not, with a freshly renewed sense of their complexity, immediacy, and relevance.

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1. Colonialism, Slavery, and Religion on Stage: Late Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists, the Hastings Trial, and the Making of British India

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Following the Hastings trial in London (1787-1795), both public opinion and the literary world in Britain were suspended somewhere between colonial anxiety and imperial guilt. What had previously been seen as the vast but remote Indian territory was now becoming more and more relevant to Britain's economic, political and international power, as well as to Britain's own (mis)perception of a new "Other," neither the servile black slave, nor the picturesque yet proud native American. Many travellers had already undertaken the long journey to India to gather information about the land and its inhabitants and had returned to England with the purpose of narrating their experience in works, which by the end of the century had become very popular.[1] As first governor of British India, Warren Hastings had contributed to the promotion, knowledge and appreciation of India in England by patronizing oriental scholarship and encouraging the translation of Sanskrit literature.[2] A large part of the literary market was thus already dominated by prose, verse, fiction, travel narratives and letters which tried to satisfy the curiosity of British readers regarding the manners and customs of those newly acquired subjects of the Empire.[3] The literary image of British India was inevitably shaped by a persistent ambivalence in the attitude towards exotic (and erotic) cultural practices, which finally induced British writers to a self-critical perspective. This approach also contributed towards creating and establishing clear distinctions between Western and Eastern cultures, and encouraged the political and public debate about the actual government in the colonies, especially in India.

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[1] See *Travel Literature and India*.

[2] In 1784 he established the Asiatic Society and wrote a memorable preface to Charles Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (1785); see Bernstein; Davies; Feiling; and Moon.

[3] See Raza; Singh.

A few writers, most prominently women writers and dramatists, seemed to have subtly opposed the diffusion of a canonical, one-sided and politically dominated image of the Empire. Despite their own uncertain status (that of women dramatists acting and writing for money) they chose to stage and explore ideas of despotism (Bolton 202). By challenging the censorship often imposed upon the so-called illegitimate theatres (Moody) as well as upon licensed theatres (Drury Lane and Covent Garden during the winter season and Haymarket in the summer) they made their own contribution towards spreading radical ideas about colonialism and abolition. My essay offers an analysis and a close reading of some of the plays, farces and afterpieces by women dramatists of the late eighteenth century, such as Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mariana Starke and Frances Burney. It aims to highlight the strategies they used in order to realize their objectives: firstly, that of undermining cultural beliefs and prejudices in order to either condemn or justify British colonization of India (Brown 4), and secondly, their clear intention to participate in the debate on Britain's responsibilities in colonial India, emerging from their interest in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and in contemporary political and colonial British affairs.[4]

As Governor of Bengal between 1772 and 1785, Warren Hastings contributed to the establishment of a British colonial settlement in India, transforming the East India Company from a mercantile enterprise into a political and military presence, with the power to rule over the area.[5] Hastings started his political career in 1757, when he was made British Resident of Murshidabad and then later appointed to the Calcutta council (1761). After governing Bengal, he became the first Governor General in the history of British India (1773-1784). Although he created a complicated system of alliances with Indian rulers through treaties and agreements, Hastings's policy was seen by many in Britain as a way to encourage local rivalries in order to increase British influence over their territories; his own methods were ethically and financially dubious. It was for this reason that he was charged with extortion by Edmund Burke, Sir Philip Francis (wounded by Hastings in a duel), the dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and the Whig politician Charles James Fox. As Burke and his followers pointed out during the trial, Hastings favoured a corrupted governance of British India, relying on violent means of subjugating the natives as well as the slaves who were brought there from Madagascar and from the Red Sea. Burke was not new to vehement and passionate parliamentary speeches on India. On 1 December 1783, he gave a speech on "Mr Fox's East India Bill," in which he underlined that

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[4] I am extremely indebted to the recent volume by O'Quinn (*Staging*).

> the total silence of [some] gentlemen [i.e. the ministers] concerning the interest and well-being of the people of India, and concerning the interest which this nation has in the commerce and revenues of that country, is a strong indication of the value which they set upon these objects. (2: 359)[6]

By examining the East India Bill, "a charter to establish monopoly and to create power" (362), Burke was already preparing the ground for his next speech, "on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts, 28 February 1785." As Green has pointed out, while pursuing the cause of Indian dignity, he was also issuing a brilliant "rehabilitation of British imperialism, which, he maintains, can still be a civilizing and beneficial force for colonizers and colonized alike" (395).[7] When Warren Hastings was formally impeached on 10 May 1787 and the trial was officially opened before the Lords in Westminster Hall on 13 February 1788, the audience had already been primed for the event. Burney's diary records that Queen Charlotte herself asked Frances (then working as second keeper of the Queen's robes) if she wished to be present at the beginning of the trial, and gave her "six tickets from Sir Peter Burrell, the great chamberlain, for every day; that three were for his box, and three for his gallery" (Burney 95). As if describing a theatre, Burney continues with a narration of the shape of the hall, the boxes and the galleries (96) and then turns to the character of Burke as a "cruel prosecutor [. . .] of an injured and innocent man" (97), finally introducing "the procession" (97-98) of lawyers, peers, bishops, officers, princes, followed by the chancellor and ultimately, by Warren Hastings, who, in fact, opened the public performance of his own trial.

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[5] See Keay; Lawson; and Sutherland. On the Hastings trial, see Carnall and Nicholson; Musselwhite; O'Toole, especially 224-34; and Marshall, *Impeachment*.

[6] On Burke's involvement in the Hastings trial, see De Bruyn; Franklin ("Accessing" and *Representing*); McCann; and Samet.

The political and public debate on the authority and the legitimacy of the East India Company was inevitably linked with the current tide of abolitionist thinking. Despite the charges against Hastings, the East India Company "did not prohibit the export of slaves until 1789 and allowed slavery legal status until 1843" (Banaji; qtd. in Moskal 123). William Pitt's India Act (1784) had already tried to reduce the supremacy of the East India Company by restoring military and ruling power back to the Crown and the Parliament:

> all political instructions and dispatches addressed to the Company's offices in India had to be submitted to a supervisory body called the Board of Control, which could amend or reject them as it saw fit. Henceforward (as Hastings had wished), the final voice in the affairs of India was not the Company's board of directors, but the British government,

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[7] See also Suleri.

> exercising its responsibility through an appointed agency of its own making. (Graham 85)

The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade had been founded in London in 1787; as Jeanne Moskal reminds us, "in May 1788 Pitt had persuaded the House of Commons to agree that the slave-trade would be debated in the next session," which led to "the largest petitioning campaign on public matters ever to have been organized in Britain up to this point" (122).

Through hinting at the controversial issue of slavery in their representation of colonial subjects and slaves and the advocacy of their freedom, British women writers' imaginations displaced *their own* anxiety about their place in the literary canon and the marketplace, as well as in society. Their position and status seemed to frequently mirror that of the colonial subjects and even that of the slaves, and it is surely for this reason that much of their writing explores and challenges not only the power relations between *self* and *other*, but, more importantly, between *master* and *slave* (Choudhury 113).

Despite the fact that some of these writers took part in the antislavery campaign and the abolitionist movement, their power to give voice to such radical ideas on a theatre stage was limited. The Licensing Act of 1737, which demanded pre-production government censorship of plays, strictly prevented explicit references to controversial social and political matters. Increasingly, dramatists tried to make the audience guess the unsaid, sometimes by indirectly questioning and criticizing slavery itself from a gendered perspective. In light of their potential contribution to antislavery discourse and their involvement in the public debate on the Hastings impeachment, the plays I am going to examine employ a range of differing strategies.[8] Playwrights as disparate as Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mariana Starke and Frances Burney, although concerned with the Hastings trial and the debate on slavery, also showed their apprehension about the consequences of British colonial expansion in India.

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[8] The plays I have chosen are: Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves. A Comedy, as Acted at the Theatre Royal, in Covent Garden*, first performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 3 December 1791; Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale; or, The Descent of a Balloon. A Farce, as it is*

The fear of an eventual loss of British identity when in contact with Indian culture is expressed through a fervent patriotism and a "nationalist myth-making" (Moskal 112), as evident in Starke and Burney, or by portraying the Indian (the "Other"), through a "set of representative figures, or tropes," and through "style, figures of speech, setting, narrating devices" (Said 21), as in Cowley and Inchbald. In both cases, the playwrights drew upon a developed and accepted cultural code that they implicitly shared with their audience. Rather ironically, the closer they came to 1807, the year of the abolition of the slave trade, the more that nationalism emerged. Burney's *A Busy Day*, datable around 1800, ends with a celebration of London as the "foster-mother of Benevolence and Charity, and the pride of the British Empire" (79), while Starke's *The Sword of Peace*, staging what Jeanne Moskal describes as the "final vision of colonial acclamation" (118), ends with the rejoicing of the British settlement in India over the arrival of a new governor:

Acted at the Theatre-Royal, Smoke-Alley, first performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, 6 July 1784; Elizabeth Inchbald, *Such Things Are; A Play, in Five Acts. As Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Smoke-Alley*, first performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 10 February 1787; Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace, or, A Voyage of Love; A Comedy, in Five Acts*, first performed at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, 9 August 1788; and Frances Burney's *A Busy Day; or, An Arrival from India* (1800-1801), first performed in 1993 at the Hen and Chicken Pub Theatre in Bristol (see Doody 293-300). All quotations from these plays are from the first editions. I have excluded Starke's *The Widow of Malabar* (1791), a true "Indian" play dealing with the issue of the *sati* as seen from a British viewpoint, as it is actually a translation of Antoine Marin Le Mierre's *La Veuve du Malabar, ou, L'Empire des Coutumes* (1780). On *sati*, see Mani.

> JEFFREYS. Mr. Northcote made Resident! – the whole place is run wild for joy, Sir – blacks and whites, masters and slaves, half casts and blue casts, Gentoos and Mussulmen, Hindoos and Bramins, officers and soldiers, sailors and captains [. . .]. They do nothing but call him father – they keep blessing him and his *children*; and King George and his children; and their great prophet and his children. (59)

The binary oppositions seen above become even clearer when we look at the settings of some of the plays I mentioned. In Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* and Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* the setting of the play and its events in a harem or seraglio, a closed and limited space within the colonial area, highlights the necessity to remain separate from a dangerous immersion into the Other's culture, but it also suggests ways in which to enter the Other's world to dominate it. Significantly, the space where the colonizer and the colonized meet is one dominated by women. Male power in the seraglio (except for the Sultan) is in the hands of the eunuchs, whose authority is threatened by the virility of the European men. Furthermore, entering *the harem* did not equate to entering Indians' private spaces in general. India, during the eighteenth century, was a kaleidoscope of religions, languages and customs, but for the British colonial government, it was the Muslim Mughal rulers who caused the greatest inconvenience and, it was this power that the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century narratives and travel logs questioned and criticized the most. Once Mughal power had been contained and a new wave of evangelical thinking had reached India, Hinduism and its practises became the new target of scrutiny and criticism.[9]

The second issue, to which all these plays referred, was the anxiety of aristocrats and middle-class society in Britain over the emergence of a new class of people. This new social group was being formed by those (often from the lower classes) who had returned to England from the colonies with their new imperial wealth, thus destabilizing class hierarchy. The "nabobs," an Anglicization of a Mughal honorific,[10] represented a concrete threat to the domestic balance of power, exacerbating the tensions already existing between aristocrats and an emerging industrious middle class.[11] For this reason, they began to be satirized on stage, becoming a recurrent character in the comedy of the late century, like Samuel Foote's *The Nabob* (1778).

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[9] On British encounters with Hinduism, see Oddie.

If, as Mita Choudhury observes, "laughter veils the colonialist implications of Orientalism" (111), what strategies did these women dramatists use? They wrote comedies, comic operas and even farces, genres that allowed them to present their political concerns to audiences with a levity and ambiguity that escaped government censorship. Cowley and Starke explicitly underline that they were *not* discussing British politics in their plays: "Not a breath of politics, I vow!" exclaims Mr Palmer in the Prologue of Starke's *The Sword of Peace*; and "I know nothing about politics; [. . .] politics are *unfeminine*, I never in my life could attend to their discussion," Hannah Cowley declares in the advertisement of *A Day in Turkey*. Describing herself as a "comic poet," she cleverly averted any connection with political satire (Choudhury 124). More obviously, as Daniel O'Quinn has pointed out, is the fact that the 1799-printed version of Mariana Starke's play carries a note indicating that "[t]he Lines in inverted Commas, are omitted in Representation." O'Quinn observes "how significant the omitted passages are to the play's politics" ("Long Minuet" 2). Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* is a comic opera, whose first version was written in 1779 and premiered at Covent Garden in 1792. The whole action takes place within the Other's dominions, which visibly shrink as the play progresses. The scene moves from "a Turkish camp" to the "the Gardens of the Bassa," then "the Palace," "the Court," "a Quadrangle," "the Building," "the Prison," to finally “the Harem” and “the Bassa’s apartment.” The strict organization of space (even the trees in the garden are geometrically organized) suggests that in the Bassa’s dominions strict social, sexual and political laws are enforced. This is destabilized by the arrival of the foreigners, who on their part reject and subvert these laws and establish their own. This can be read as Cowley’s indirect condemnation of British colonialism in India, which was often justified (as Hastings had done) by the appeal to native despotism.

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[10] On Anglicisation of Indian words, see Lewis.

[11] On the nabobs, see Juneja; Lawson and Phillips; Marshall, *East*; Raven; and Spear.

The action of the play centres on the experiences of four prisoners of war taken to the seraglio of the Turkish Bassa, Ibrahim. They are Orloff, a Russian army officer, and his new bride Alexina, who was captured immediately after the ceremony and before their marriage was consummated. The other prisoners are Paulina, the daughter of Alexina’s father’s vassal and A La Grecque, a French emigrant who is Orloff’s valet. Forced to wear Turkish national dress, Paulina is mistaken by the Bassa for Alexina, whom he is eager to enjoy as a new love. In her anger, Paulina showers contempt on this stranger’s claim to love her, but her scorn only increases the Bassa’s raptures. Meanwhile Alexina, who has succeeded in avoiding being brought before the Bassa, is put in solitary confinement by the malicious slave Azim. Orloff demands that his bride be restored to him “in the same condition” as when he led her to the altar. On discovering that she is married, the Bassa tries to stop seeing Paulina (still mistaking her for Alexina), who by now has fallen in love with him. A happy ending ensues when Orloff learns that it was Paulina in the Bassa’s arms and that Alexina has remained chaste; similarly, the Bassa learns that Paulina is not Orloff’s wife and may now love her freely.[12]

Despite her public declaration of disinterest in politics, Cowley cleverly achieves a subtle political criticism through the character of A La Grecque, whose name visibly alludes to Catherine the Great of

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[12] For a more detailed summary, see Gagen (82-105).

Russia's "Greek Plan."[13] When his master Orloff is imprisoned, A La Grecque talks to him as his "brother slave," subverting the master/slave relationship throughout the play. A La Grecque comments that in Russia "they still continue to believe that a prince is more than a porter, and that a lord is a better gentleman than his slave," adding that "had they but been with me at Versailles, when I help'd to turn those things topsey turvey there!"(18) they would know that this was not true. A La Grecque's political speech is developed by the Turks:

> AZIM. Such a wailing about freedom and liberty! Why the Christians in one of the northern islands have established a slave-trade, and proved by act of parliament that freedom is no blessing at all.
> MUSTAPHA. No, no, they have only proved that it does not suit dark complexions. (10)

Cowley seems to go even further in her condemnation of slavery as an institution; again, a Turk (Mustapha) says that "every country has its fancies, and we are so fond of liberty that we always *buy it* up as a rarity" (35). Even though interest in the Hastings trial had cooled by the time Cowley's play premiered at Covent Garden, much of the action in the comedy hinges on the impeachment. The fact that Cowley intentionally set the play in Turkey and that the foreigners were Russians also links the comedy to the contemporary crisis of the Whigs (especially to Pitt's unpopular attempt to enter a war with Russia), an event which eventually split Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox and condemned the party to dissolution.[14] Cowley's comedy was certainly political, commenting on domestic political issues and characters that the audience could easily recognize.

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[13] Having annexed Crimea to Russia, Catherine the Great's secret plan was that of allying with Austria (and France) to drive Turkey back from Europe. This was a plan that obviously excluded Britain from sharing power and influence over the area. See O'Quinn and Bolton for further details.

[14] See O'Quinn's essay on Cowley's *A Day in Turkey*; and Bolton. Both O'Quinn and Bolton deal with the Oczakow affair and Britain's expedient support of the Ottoman Empire against Russia.

There is one point that links this play to other "Indian" or "Oriental" comedies (such as Inchbald's) that has not been debated enough, namely, the marked presence of contrasting religious beliefs and attitudes. Such a contrast is explicit from the very beginning in Cowley's comedy, in the opening cues between an "Old Man" and his "Son," Paulina's father and her brother, who says:

> SON. Come father, lean on me, and let us walk faster, or we shall be pick'd up by some of the *turban'd gentry*. They are out a foraging; and they always consider *christians* as useful cattle. (1-2)

The distance is also created by the two servants, A La Grecque and Azim, who respectively represent an "enlightened West" and a "wicked East," and repeatedly address each other by stressing their religious faiths – "good Mr Mussulman," says A La Grecque; "good Mr Christian," replies Azim. The happy ending is a celebration of Western magnanimity; a pitiful Alexina petitions for Azim's forgiveness, and the Sultan expresses a sudden interest in Western values, especially religion:

> IBRAHIM. [*To Alexina.*] Pronounce, Madam, the fate of the profligate slave, whose villainy had nearly brought about such disastrous events --- shall he perish?
> ALEXINA. Ah, in this hour of felicity, let nothing perish but *misfortune*! Be the benevolent Mustapha rewarded, and let Azim have frank forgiveness.
> IBRAHIM. Charming magnanimity! if it flows from your CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES, such doctrines must be RIGHT, and I will closely study them. (83-84)

In Cowley's play, the foreigners who arrive and upset the balance of power and question the religious creed in the idealized colony are Russians who have been taken captive in Turkey. In Elizabeth Inchbald's farce *The Mogul Tale*, written in 1788 and performed in the same year at Haymarket, however, it is an odd trio of English people who descend in their hot-air balloon directly into the Mughal Sultan's seraglio, an unidentified oriental place in India. Again, as many critics have pointed out, the harem was an ideal dramatic setting because of its association with gender oppression. More importantly, the characters coming from the outside, Western world, grant themselves the freedom to inviolately penetrate spaces and to invade foreign territories. It is true that "images of despotic sultans and desperate slave girls became a central part of an emerging liberal feminist discourse about the condition of women not in the East, but in the West" (Zonana 594). However, the domestic enslavement of women in the seraglio is also a metaphor for the political enslavement of men in the colonies. Inchbald's farce takes a greater step forward in comparison to Cowley's comedy, because it is openly subversive and political. Personally linked to William Godwin and his entourage of radical and revolutionary thinkers and writers, Inchbald provides a more direct approach to political issues.

A Wapping cobbler, Johnny, and his wife Fanny, take off from Hyde Park Corner in a hot-air balloon with an untrained guide and land in the garden of the Great Mogul. They are immediately taken captive by the Great Mogul, who pretends he wants to torture them and put them to death merely to see their reactions. Their outrageous assumed identities (the Pope of Rome and the Ambassador of the King of England) lead to a hilarious trial scene, where the Great Mogul sets them free. The hierarchical order of power relations is completely subverted and the Mughal Sultan turns from being a tyrant and a torturer to an enlightened sovereign, essentially "indistinguishable from contemporary European philosophers" (Bolton 8). By contrast, Christianity and British imperialism become the targets of a witty satire, as tyrannical expressions of political power. To avoid any possible risk of impeachment or sedition, Inchbald's religious satire turns to Roman Catholicism and culminates in an extremely funny scene that may well have shaken the theatre with the audience's laughter,[15] while retaining that powerful opposition between religions already observed in Cowley's *A Day In Turkey*:

> MOGUL. Then who art thou, slave, that dare come into our presence?
> FIRST EUNUCH. He is no slave; know, my most royal master, this is his highness the Pope of Rome.
> JOHNNY. [*Aside* – The Devil I am!] Yes, and please your highness, I am the Pope, at your service.
> MOGUL. A great Pontiff, indeed --- Is that the fashion of his robe?
> FIRST EUNUCH. His travelling dress only.
> JOHNNY. My Air-Balloon jacket, please your honour.
> MOGUL. I want no enumeration of his dignity, I have heard it all.
> JOHNNY. Yes, yes, all the world have heard of the Devil and the Pope.
> MOGUL. Cruel and rapacious. The actions of his predecessors will never be forgotten by the descendant of Mahomet. I rejoice I have him in my power --- his life will but ill repay those crimes with which this monster formerly pestered the plains of Palestina. Who is that female?
> JOHNNY. She does not belong to me, she is a nun, and please your highness, taken from a convent in Italy, and was guilty of some crime, not to be forgiven, but by severe penance, enjoined to accompany us.

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[15] Donkin has argued that Inchbald's success as a playwright depended on her previous career as an actress (110-19).

> MOGUL. In our country dress she would have charms! --- [. . .] Give her another dress, and take her into the Seraglio --- [. . .].
> FANNY. Oh Johnny --- [. . .]
> MOGUL. Johnny!
> JOHNNY. Yes, and please your holiness --- I am Pope Johnny the twelfth. Please your Mogulship I will talk to her in private --- perhaps I may persuade her to comply with your princely desires, for we Popes have never any conversation with women, except in private. (12-13)

The Sultan in *The Mogul Tale* is not only enlightened and magnanimous, but he also admits to having learnt, from an inferior "other," how to rule, punish and forgive. He is comically redeemed by the effects of an Oriental interpretation of European and Christian "enlightened" thought:

> THE MOGUL. Keep silence while I pronounce judgement – Tremble for your approaching doom. You are now before the tribunal of a European, a man of your own colour. I am an Indian, a Mahometan, my laws are cruel and my nature savage – You have imposed upon me, and attempted to defraud me, but know that I have been taught mercy and compassion for the sufferings of human nature; however differing in laws, temper and colour from myself. Yes from you Christians whose laws teach charity to all the world, have I learn'd these virtues? For your countrymen's cruelty to the poor Gentoos has shewn me tyranny in so foul a light, that I was determined henceforth to be only mild, just and merciful. (21-22)

Through the Mughal's denunciation of the injustices perpetrated upon his people, Inchbald was also staging the debate on the East India Company's governance on India, and contributing to preparing the ground for Burke's speeches during the Hastings trial. Furthermore, as

O'Quinn noted, the spectacular descending balloon also links the farce with "a series of satirical prints published throughout December 1783 that figured the fate of both the East India Company and Fox's East India Bill as similarly troubled balloons" (*Staging* 20).

The Mogul Tale was Inchbald's debut as a playwright. On 10 February 1787, her five-act comedy *Such Things Are* opened to astounding success.[16] The combination of popular features (an exotic Eastern setting, recognizable characters, and the serious and comic discussions of contemporary issues such as tyranny and the state of prisons) made the comedy extremely enjoyable at a time when the Hastings impeachment was about to begin. Set in the dominions of a tyrannical Sultan – this time in Sumatra – Inchbald borrowed heavily from William Marsden's *The History of Sumatra*, published in 1783.[17] The central character Haswell, described during his visits to the Sultan's prison, is a tribute to the philanthropist John Howard, whose work as a prison reformer was universally praised. The dungeon scenes where Haswell meets, and succeeds in reforming, the would-be thief Zedan, and where he also encounters the Sultan's wife Arabella (who is presumed dead) are regularly contrasted with the lazy English inhabitants of the island. Sir Luke Tremor and his wife, Lord Flint and a prospective nabob, Mr Twineall, are accurate representations of British colonial life (a trope which would be developed further by Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace*). These characters embody some of Inchbald's peculiar comic subjects: "the pretence of society, the pretence of dress, the pretence of language" (Jenkins 197). The plot consists of a love story in the Sultan's prison, dependent upon mistaken identity. One such example is the story of a would-be prisoner, Elvirus, who having petitioned the Sultan in vain to take his father's place, asks for Haswell's help. Haswell becomes then the mediator between the two cultures, one of "probability" (the colonizer's) and the other one of "uncertainty" (the colonized); this is supported by a rhetorical religious opposition. When Haswell is presented to the Sultan and is asked which reward he would like for restoring the Sultan's troops to health, he launches into a brave and idealistic defence of justice that mirrors Burke's own righteous indignation:

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[16] For the reception of Inchbald's plays, see Boaden.

[17] For Inchbald's borrowings from Marsden, see Green (397-98).

> HASWELL. The prisoner is your subject --- there misery --- more contagious than disease, preys on the lives of hundreds --- sentenced but to confinement, their doom is death. --- Immured in damp and dreary vaults, they daily perish --- and who can tell but that amongst the many hapless sufferers, there may be hearts, bent down with penitence to Heaven and you, for every slight offence --- there may be some amongst the wretched multitude, even innocent victims. --- Let me seek them out --- let me save them, and you.
> SULTAN. Amazement! retract your application --- curb this weak pity; and receive our thanks.
> HASWELL. Curb my pity? --- and what can I receive in recompense for that soft bond, which links me to the wretched? --- and while it sooths their sorrows repay me more, than all the gifts or homage of an empire. --- But if repugnant to your plan of government --- not in the name of pity --- but of justice.
> SULTAN. Justice! ---
> HASWELL. The justice which forbids all but the worst of criminals to be denied that wholesome air the very brute creation freely takes; at least allow them *that*. (33)

Although his eloquence certainly wins the Sultan's curiosity, it does not succeed in changing his mind; Haswell shrewdly turns to a more successful strategy:

> SULTAN. Sir, your sentiments, but much more your character, excite my curiosity. They tell me, in our camps, you vis-

> ited each sick man's bed, --- administered yourself the healing draught, --- encouraged our savages with the hope of life, or pointed out their *better* hope in death. --- The widow speaks your charities --- the orphan lisps your bounties --- and the rough Indian melts in tears to bless you. --- I wish to ask *why* you have done all this? --- What is it prompts you thus to befriend the wretched and forlorn?
> HASWELL. In vain for me to explain --- the time it wou'd take to tell you why I act thus ---
> SULTAN. Send it in writing then.
> HASWELL. Nay, if you will *read*, I'll send a book, in which is *already* written why I act thus.
> SULTAN. What books? --- What is it called?
> HASWELL. "The Christian Doctrine." [*Haswell bows here with the utmost reverence.*] There you will find all I have done was but my duty. (34)

To this, the Sultan is compelled, not without relief, to reveal his painful secret – that he is no Sultan at all, as he converted to Christianity after meeting his (European) wife, and pushed by his thirst of power, secretly became an apostate:

> SULTAN. Your words recall reflections that distract me; nor can I bear the pressure on my mind without confessing --- I am a Christian. (34)

This event seems to be much more interesting than Inchbald's recognition (and condemnation) of Britain's imperial politics (Green 411) that emerges in the last few famous cues of the play between Haswell and Zedan:

> HASWELL. My Indian friend, have you received your freedom?