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Translated Orientalisms: The eighteenth-century Oriental tale, Colonial
Pedagogies, and Muslim Reform

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy in Comparative Literature

by

Maryam Wasif Khan

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Translated Orientalisms: The eighteenth-century Oriental tale, Colonial Pedagogies, and Muslim Reform

by

Maryam Wasif Khan

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Aamir R. Mufti, Chair

This dissertation positions itself within the disciplines of English and Comparative Literature, its specific intervention in the areas of translation studies, eighteenth-century fiction in English, colonial culture and pedagogy in nineteenth-century India, Urdu prose fiction, and world literature. I argue that the Oriental tale, a popular form in metropolitan England, produced tropes of despotism, homelessness, and itinerancy around the figure of the Muslim over the course of the eighteenth century that eventually travel from the metropolis to the Oriental space itself. The European idea of what I call an Islamicate Orient, therefore, is premised on the notion of a roving and transient empire best exemplified in a series of works that include Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (~1707), Frances Sheridan's *The History of Nourjahad* (1762), and William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786). These tropes are then replicated and reinforced in the late eighteenth-century scholarly Orientalism around the Indian colony, most noticeably and influentially, in the work of Nathaniel Halhed and William Jones. The Muslim, in texts such as Jones' *Discourses* (1784-9) presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, emerges as alien and invader to the original civilization that the British Orientalists claim to discover in

India. The second part of the dissertation shows how a system of colonial pedagogy that begins with the establishment of Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800 becomes a conduit through which the arguments of the metropolitan Oriental tale travel from the European republic of letters into the Oriental space itself. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Fort William curriculum, designed largely for the linguistic instruction of Company officers in India, is disseminated through a colonial nexus of native schools. The critical contradiction produced here lies between the English desire to cultivate a “vernacular” language through which to govern, and the loosely, yet purposefully arranged local language complex the Orientalists encounter in north-India of which Urdu is hardly suited for universal utility. Texts commissioned at the College, including *Bāḡ-o Bahār* (1804), modeled as an Oriental tale in a native Indian language, are mistakenly categorized under the names “Urdu” or “Hindi,” causing, in the case of the former, a cleft tradition of prose writing. In the years following the Mutiny of 1857 and the fall of the titular Mughal throne, the association of the idea of a “literature” with native pedagogy becomes increasingly directed towards an infant, but emerging class of Muslim bourgeoisie. Just how deeply tropes of the metropolitan Oriental tale come to inhabit writing in the colonially sponsored vernaculars is best illustrated in Nazir Ahmad’s reformist fictions, *Mirāt al-‘Arūs* (1868), *Taubat al-Naṣūh* (1872), and *Ibn ul Vaqt* (1888). In the first two of these novel-like works, bourgeois Muslims struggle to define themselves against both the plebian and the aristocratic, but also seem to mark themselves as essentially displaced in India, their true center located in the abstract notions of an Islamic center. I read the final text as a somber depiction of the inability of the Muslim to thrive in an empire that is not his own. The Oriental tale, then, finds a home in these reformist fictions, but with transformative effects on the way Muslim culture comes to define itself in colonial and independent India.

The dissertation of Maryam Wasif Khan is approved.

Ali Behdad

Felicity A. Nussbaum

Jennifer A. Sharpe

Aamir R. Mufti, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

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TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

For all transliterations from Urdu, I have followed the *Annual of Urdu Studies* revised guide (2007) with some variations that are listed below.

Vowels

a, ā, e, ē, i, ī, o, ō, u, ū, ai, au

Consonants

<i>bē</i> b	<i>dāl</i> d	<i>zūād</i> ź	<i>lām</i> l
<i>pē</i> p	<i>ḏāl</i> ḏ	<i>ṭō`ē</i> ṭ	<i>mīm</i> m
<i>tē</i> t	<i>zāl</i> z	<i>zō`ē</i> ź	<i>nūn</i> n/ñ
<i>tē</i> t	<i>rē</i> r	<i>'ain</i> ‘	<i>vā`ō</i> v
<i>śē</i> ś	<i>ṛē</i> ṛ	<i>ġain</i> ġ	<i>hē</i> h
<i>jīm</i> j	<i>zē</i> z	<i>fē</i> f	<i>dō</i>
<i>čē</i> č	<i>sīn</i> s	<i>qāf</i> q	<i>čāshmī</i>
<i>ḥē</i> ḥ	<i>shīn</i> sh	<i>kāf</i> k	<i>ḥē</i> ḥ
<i>ķē</i> ķ	<i>ṣuād</i> ṣ	<i>gāf</i> g	<i>yē</i> y
			<i>hamzā</i>

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If this dissertation were a ship, it would have had two sets of guiding lights directing its course from start to finish. I was told when I was first admitted to the program at UCLA that Professor Aamir Mufti was a “brilliant reader”— to me he has been a patient teacher, a tough critic, a mentor, and a friend. The most precious intellectual lesson I have learnt under his utterly transformative instruction is to treat a text, and by extension, any aesthetic expression with respect and empathy while remaining uncompromising of my own ethical position. I can only hope to keep this and other lessons with me as I begin my academic career. Three years ago, my other beacon, Professor Felicity Nussbaum generously took me on for my general exams, but she has taught me so much more than how to approach the complex realm of eighteenth-century English studies. It would be an understatement to describe her as just a tireless and invested advisor, and yet I find myself at a loss to properly express the relentless passion with which she helped me shape and reshape this project.

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difficult year at graduate school. Ben Conisbee Baer has always sent support and encouragement from Princeton.

I wrote mostly in Lahore where the incredible generosity of familial friends, often in professional capacities, made the process seem so painless. Dr. Muhammad Ramzan, the chief librarian of the Lahore University of Management Sciences, permitted me seamless access to the library and its resources when I most needed it. Dr. Arif Nazir Butt, the dean of the Suleman Dawood School of Business at LUMS and a member of the MBA Class of '89, gave me an office of my own in the frantic last few months of finishing. During this time of tired eyes and ten-hour workdays, Tariq and Zahid, office assistants who have seen me grow up at the university, took care to keep me caffeinated and fed. Mian Shehzad Saleem, also of the Class of '89, with characteristic kindness handed over his lovely apartment in central London to me while I researched the education archives at the British Library. More than the privilege of these spaces, it is the privilege of having these people in my life that I am so very grateful for.

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quiet magnanimity, her somehow unselfish ambition, her warmth, her strength, and her spirit that I hope as her daughter I can live up to even a little.

VITA

Education

- 2010 M. A., Comparative Literature
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2008 A. B., Comparative Literature
Certificates: European Cultural Studies,
Creative Writing
Princeton University, Princeton

Awards and Grants

- 2012-13 UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship
2011 UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship
2008 “Robert Fagles Thesis Prize,” Department of Comparative Literature, Princeton University
Asher Hinds Thesis Prize,” Program in European Cultural Studies, Princeton University

Teaching Experience

University of California, Los Angeles

- Teaching Associate for Comparative Literature 2AW: “Literature from Antiquity to the Middle Ages” with Katherine King (Fall 2011)
Teaching Associate for Comparative Literature 2DW: “World Literature,” with Aamir Mufti (Spring 2011)
Comparative Literature 2DW: “World Literature,” with Marian Gabra (Winter 2011)
Comparative Literature 2AW: “Literature from Antiquity to the Middle Ages,” with Katherine King (Fall 2010)
Teaching Assistant for Comparative Literature 2DW: “Great Books from the World,” with Aamir Mufti (Spring 2010)
Comparative Literature 2CW: “Age of Enlightenment to the 20th Century,” with Talar Chahinian (Winter 2010)
Teaching Assistant and guest lecturer for Italian 110: “Dante in English,” with Efrain Kristal (Fall 2010)
Teaching Assistant for Hindi-Urdu 3: Intermediate with Gyanam Mahajan (Spring 2009)

Conference Presentations

- “Orientalism’s Tale: Nation and Empire in eighteenth-century England,” *Modern Language Association*, Annual Convention in Boston, MA January 2013
“The Possibilities of Secular criticism in contemporary Pakistani film and pop music,” *American Institute of Pakistan Studies*, Is there a Pakistani Public,” Lahore, December 2012
“British Orientalism, the *dāstān* and the inscription of identity on modern Urdu,” *South Asian Literary Association*, Los Angeles, CA 2011

INTRODUCTION

“Word for word, Galland’s version is the most poorly written of them all, the least faithful, and the weakest, but it was the most widely read. Those who grew intimate with it experienced happiness and astonishment. Its Orientalism, which seems frugal to us now, was bedazzling to men who took snuff and composed tragedies in five acts... We, their mere anachronistic readers of the twentieth century, perceive only the cloying flavor of the eighteenth century in them and not the evaporated aroma of the Orient which two hundred years ago was their novelty and their glory.”

--Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*.”

...Since the middle of the eighteenth century there had been two principal elements in the relation between East and West. One was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the Orient, knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter as well as by the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology, and history; furthermore, to this systematic knowledge was added a sizable body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers. The other feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength not to say domination. There is no way of putting this euphemistically.

--Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

I.

Oft-mentioned by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), but always as one of the several implements in the possession of the European Orientalist, translation practices in eighteenth-century Europe have received attention even in contemporary translation studies mainly for their mediation between Western languages. In the case that translations from “Eastern” or “Oriental” languages do garner some attention, one example the text known as *A Thousand and One*, or *Arabian Nights*, the focus of the literary critic remains on the veracity of the translation, its fluency, or what Lawrence Venuti has alternatively called the “invisibility” of its translator, and its utility and popularity among the relevant audiences.¹ In the three or so decades old sub-field of translation studies, “postcolonial translation studies,” the focus of many scholars has been on the “violence” of translations undertaken to facilitate and further enable the process of colonization. Postcolonial translation studies has deemed eighteenth and nineteenth-century translation practices a “one way process with texts being translated into European languages for

¹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York:

European consumption.”² Translations by the various figures involved in the imperial process, the scholars in this field maintain, were intended solely for purposes of containment.³ The even more recent association of translation studies with “World Literature” has been roundly critiqued by Emily Apter for failing to “rework literary history through planetary cartographies and temporalities,” and for the disregard within this field for the “untranslatable.”⁴

“Untranslatibility,” a term Apter borrows from Barbara Cassin, refers to words that have gone untranslated, or suffer from “non-translation, mistranslation,” and “incomparability.” For Apter, untranslatibility can be used as a “theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems and literary history, the politics of periodization... the bounds of non-secular proscription and cultural sanction.”⁵ Though Apter’s interest is mostly in the alliance between translation studies and World Literature, she provides in this incredibly innovative project a direction for what is being left out or omitted in contemporary scholarship of literatures, and aesthetic forms outside of what she still sees as a Eurocentric academy.

Incomparability and mistranslation, I think, are larger ideas than they may initially seem, particularly with respect to Orientalism, a phenomenon noticeably absent from most recent developments in translation studies, one that Apter herself addresses in its more contemporary effects, Eurochronology being one. That is to say, despite the increasing awareness of the purpose and ambition behind colonial translation practices in translation studies, there is little

² Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, introduction to *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 1999), 5.

³ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 33.

⁴ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatibility* (New York: Verso 2013), 8.

⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

interrogation of Orientalism, the discourse that precedes and authorizes the imperial project. Orientalism, the totalizing discourse through which the West came to exercise authority, mainly, but not exclusively, cultural and political, over the East, then, can also be understood as having allowed or enabled the existence of incomparabilities and mistranslations within the textual and aesthetic forms that constituted and perpetuated this hegemony.

My intervention in this project is an attempt to broaden our understanding of the ways in which mistranslation and incomparability affected the expansion of the Orientalist discourse. How did the claims, assumptions, and practices surrounding translation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shape the Orientalist discourse around the Muslim East, and eventually, around India? More specifically, given that the locus of this project is in the disciplines of English and Comparative Literature, it examines the directly productive relationship that both translation, and the ideas or associations of translation from Eastern languages carve with literary Orientalism from this period. Departing from conventional translation studies' arguments focusing on the losses or gains from the source to the target language, equivalences, and now cultural inequalities, this project repositions translation in its Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment contexts in order to trace the imperative presence the practice holds in the Orientalist discourse.

What this project seeks to make apparent is that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century translations from languages such as Arabic, Persian, and eventually, Sanskrit, into French, and English, to name two major recipients, cannot simply be evaluated in terms of cultural losses, or even imperial gains. Rather it will show that "Orientalist translations," as we can quite simply term the broad range of texts that included the *Arabian Nights*, the Sanskrit play *Śakuntalā* (1789), religious tracts such as *The Laws of Manu* (1794) and the *Bhagvat Gita* (1785), begin

what is a much longer and extended effect of Orientalism both in the West and in the oriental spaces themselves. My point here quite simply is this: Orientalist translations, though not always produced for direct purposes of colonial governance, are part of a Western discourse, in fact, *are* a Western literary type from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many cases, these Oriental artifacts, as they are considered by their Western audiences, are made to return, or are forcibly grafted onto the loosely defined orients from whence they are believed to have originated.

The literary form this project is most closely concerned with is the Oriental tale that itself came to cultural prominence in England and France after the astounding popularity enjoyed by Antoine Galland's *Mille et une nuits*, and the subsequent Grub Street translation *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁶ In my engagement with this form, as well as associated Orientalist scholarly writings, I want to make the argument that the translation, adaptation, or even fictitious linking of a text with the Orient is first step in the entry of this text, fiction or scholarly tract, into the Orientalist discourse. Its assimilation into Western culture as a relic, or signifier of a culture acquired by way of linguistic prowess, relying on a distant authenticity, produces and perpetuates the tropes and narratives that are so constitutive of Orientalism. The full effect of the Orientalist translation, what seems to have remained latent for contemporary scholars of the Oriental tale, is the reintroduction, or often, just the introduction of what has now clearly become a part of the Western discourse around the East, into colonized territories.

⁶ I consciously avoid the use of the more rigid term, "genre." I am also aware throughout the course of this project of Apter's argument: "Clearly, the nations that name the critical lexicon are the nations that dominate the classification of genres in literary history and the critical paradigms that prevail in literary world-systems." See Apter, *Against World Literature*, 58.

The process I am describing is not necessarily a literal one, but rather unfolds in stages, and over the course of a century or more.⁷ Though my argument in this project does not adopt or conform to the terms that have become so rampant in contemporary translation studies, it nevertheless thinks about Orientalist translation as a prolonged process that though acquires the status of a discipline over the course of the eighteenth century, exercises its cultural effects over the Orientalized or colonized spaces till well into the twentieth century. I begin with the eighteenth-century Oriental tale in the metropolis, a form that though often but not always was ascribed by its authors to an original source in Persia or Arabia. Either way, works such as *Vathek* (1787) or *The History of Nourjahad* (1767) almost always derive their themes, characters, and descriptions of the East from translated, or adapted texts, offering information on the Islamicate Orient learned from Barthélemy d'Herbelot's encyclopedic *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697). But my interest is not exclusively in Oriental tales, or scholarly tracts that arrived from the Orient into the West, but also in later texts produced specifically for purposes of colonial pedagogy. This second set of texts is consequently made to realize the tropes and narrative functions that its colonial audiences associate with identities such as Muslim, or Indian. These texts too are translated into English, and exported to the metropolis, but also inserted into extant native literary traditions through colonial educational institutions. Translation, as these works demonstrate, is an expansive and varied term that functions, if not always as a direct source, then always as a driving force for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary Orientalisms.

⁷ Mary Helen McCurran in her recent book *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) has argued for a similarly broad understanding of translation, expanding the scope of the concept through the use of the words transmission (“to designate the historical and cultural dimensions of translation”) and transnationalism (“to signify modernized literary exchange between nations”).

The scope of this project ranges from the English metropolis to the Islamicate and Indic Orients. These latter categories, or imaginary territories, I will maintain, are formed, and acquire particular characteristics within the eighteenth-century Oriental tale and Oriental scholarship that eventually redistribute themselves towards various ends within the colonially-sponsored literary works composed in languages such as Urdu/Hindi, Arabic, and Persian. The distinction between the two Orients as Raymond Schwab, the French Orientalist, philologist, and poet, captured it some decades ago was as following: The Islamicate Orient was “for us, a companion almost as ancient and familiar as the biblical... It is Orient most acclimated in our literary traditions, which have... abandoned other orients whenever there has been a massive return of the picturesque Mussulman whose charm recaptures poets and storytellers through the glamor of the *Thousand and One Nights*.”⁸ Learned and contained as a fiction, the Muslim East is dormant and harmless, its attraction for Europe resting solely in the possibility of the vicarious experiences it offers. India, the Indic Orient, “posed, in its totality, the great question of the Different.” Its magnetism for the Orientalists who “discovered” it was contained in “its power to embrace simultaneously several ages of humanity and to engage so many interests concurrently: metaphysics and great poetry, theology, and linguistics.”⁹ In the words of this twentieth-century French Orientalist, the Islamicate Orient, or the Muslim world, was encountered by the West through encyclopedic works such as d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque orientale*, and *The Arabian Nights*, whereas the Indic, “poured forth,” once the “wall” that concealed it fell to the Orientalists.

My use of the terms Islamicate and Indic Orients is with a heightened consciousness of the constructed, imaginary attributes ascribed to these spaces. The first denotes what British

⁸ Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-King (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 5.

⁹ *Ibid.* 6-7.

Orientalism viewed broadly and homogenously as the Muslim world: the not always coeval Ottoman, Persian, and Mughal Empires, as well as the Arabian Peninsula. Really a series of geographically separated, distinct social and governing structures, these “empires,” though they enjoyed a certain amount of cultural cross-pollination, could hardly be clumped under the header of religion. The second, the Indic Orient, is roughly what we know to be the Indian subcontinent today, but in the Orientalist imagination it is also the mythical cradle of human civilization, its ancient religions, language, and culture holding recuperative possibilities for Europe. For this second Orient, this ascription comes largely, but not exclusively by way of the copious translations of religious, legal, and assumed literary works from Sanskrit undertaken by Orientalists such as William Jones and Nathaniel Halhed.

I am also interposing by way of this project on a recent trend in literary criticism, most highlighted in the admirable works of Srivinas Aravamudan, but also visible in Ros Ballaster, and Siraj Ahmad’s recent works. I can best explain this wave against “ethical criticism” as Aravamudan terms it by turning to the introduction of his rich and vibrant study, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency 1688-1804*.¹⁰ In his opening remarks, Aravamudan suggests that “postcolonial criticism derives its ethical sustenance from proposing an engaged scholarship—such as Said’s or Spivak’s—that reflects on global inequities and interconnectedness, thereby suggesting progressive alternatives to the continuing elaboration of Western political and cultural hegemony.”¹¹ The alternative to what I think is a hasty delineation of the differing positions of Said and Gayatri Spivak, Aravamudan offers is “to find resistance through acts of reading, transculturation, and hybridity, as well as from those of separation,

¹⁰ Srivinas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 13.

¹¹ Ibid.

opposition, and rejection.” “The messy legacies of empire,” Aravamudan states, do not necessarily permit the choice between “hybridity and authenticity, or collaboration and opposition.”¹² Following Aravamudan, Ahmad in *The Stillbirth of Capital*, an examination of works on the rise of the British Empire in India from the seventeenth century onward, argues, “far from justifying colonialism, this literature articulates a historical vision so deeply critical that it calls our own theoretical paradigms into question.”¹³ In a larger and later project, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel*, Aravamudan makes an argument not dissimilar to Ahmad’s: during the Enlightenment, “the self was under critique as much as any other,” and because the Europe’s interest in the East was “influenced by the utopian aspirations of Enlightenment,” Orientalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was often a positive function.¹⁴

Escaping what seems to be a manifesto on Aravamudan’s part is the urgent and deeply embedded question of where exactly the “ethical criticism” of Said—and here I name the *particular* figure relevant to my argument—seeks to lead us. Quite recently, Aamir Mufti in a redoubtable argument on the origins of the “institution of world literature,” reminds us that Said’s argument in *Orientalism* does not, and could not end in the Western world.¹⁵ Any study of that discourse we now undertake, Said directs us, must, in the very least, lead to a renewed understanding of the resultant subject Oriental spaces, peoples, cultures.¹⁶ The matter, of course, is not as simple as it may seem in Aravamudan’s cavalier description that implicitly accuses Said

¹² Ibid. 14.

¹³ Siraj Ahmad, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Location 93 (Kindle Edition).

¹⁴ Srivinas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 15.

¹⁵ Aamir Mufti, “Orientalism and the Institution of World Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 458-493.

¹⁶ See the introduction to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

of ignoring the possibilities that lie between the designations of “colonialist villains or anticolonial heroes.”¹⁷

A misreading of Said’s compelling opus, perhaps, Aravamudan’s argument ignores the fact that Said, at no point, not in *Orientalism*, or *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), to name just two relevant works, derides or dismisses a literary text in its totality. In other words, Said does not, and faced with the readings of Aravamudan and Ahmad, would not, discount the possibility that metropolitan authors such as Aphra Behn or William Beckford indeed painted “sympathetic portraits of Britain’s others.”¹⁸ Despite these sympathies, or even possibly anticolonial positions, these texts fail to effectively resist or break from the Orientalist discourse. Orientalism, Aravamudan forgets, can be sympathetic, conciliatory, or even critical of the self, but it is always exercised from a distant position of comparative strength or authority. Said described this as a “flexible positional authority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”¹⁹ It would be facetious to expect that each and every work Said thought of, mentioned, or ignored in his argument could only be a blatant, monochromatic disparagement of the Orient.

While I will be illustrating precisely this futility in the first part of this project, it is imperative that I articulate that these texts even as they critique Orientalism itself do so through the liberties permitted to them by precisely this discourse. For example, if Frances Sheridan’s *History of Nourjahad* can be read as critical of mainstream bourgeois sexuality as Ballaster argues, or even of the colonizing project itself, as I myself will show, the actors or characters performing these acts of resistances are ultimately swathed in Orientalist tropes. And this is at

¹⁷ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin 2003), 7.

the very least. Even as she deploys the Oriental tale in an unfavorable representation of metropolitan practices around gender, Sheridan does so through the unlimited opulence and fantastical possibilities that the Orientalist discourse associated with the Islamicate Orient. It is more important, however, that we examine the effect Oriental tales such as this, or Beckford's *Vathek* have on the transformative power of the tropes that become attached with their subjects. That is to say, rather than reading these works as isolated or limited to the metropolis, we must read them as implicitly contributing to and fortifying a particular type—I will focus on the figure of the despot—that then does the same for the greater discourse.

The effects of Orientalism in the colony are rarely ever examined in terms of the literary or cultural forms they spawn in the native, or in some cases, vernacular languages. Recently Rashmi Bhatnagar, Kavita Datla, and to a lesser extent Parna Sengupta have worked from various angles on colonial pedagogy and the texts that were produced or recruited in its service. Unlike Gauri Viswanathan whose major contribution to the history of education in the colony, *Masks of Conquest* (1989), was limited to the development of English literature as a discipline in India, Bhatnagar, Datla, and Sengupta take on the question of vernacular and religious education. Absent in these studies is any attempt to establish the direct relationship between the curriculum for imperial officers, and the subsequent programs for native education. My contribution to this still very understudied historical field posits that native instruction in the colony, in fact, begins with body of works composed for the linguistic instruction of colonial officers, the most popular and lasting of which conform closely to the Oriental types I have described earlier.

I do use the term “vernacular” here with some reluctance, keeping in mind that the language-complex in pre-colonial north-India functioned very differently from Europe's conception of how this seemingly universal linguistic category ought. Though in eighteenth-

century England, Gaelic and Celtic, “vernaculars” for the Irish and Scottish were progressively substituted by the national language, English, particularly by poets such as Robert Burns, and even playwrights such as Frances and Richard Sheridan, the process of linguistic ascension was hardly the same in colonial India.²⁰ What the Orientalists would encounter in north-India was an intricate spread of interconnected, overlapping linguistic registers none of which could quite properly be called a “vernacular.” Attempts to create a universal language for the purpose of governance, then, would result in a tortured and artificial vernacular for much of the nineteenth century in India. In other words, what that the colonial administration in the early nineteenth century would interchangeably call “Hindustani” or “Urdu,” implied, for their purposes, a leveled, standard language, orally comprehensible across India that would not translate equally in orthography. Vernacularization in the colony, we must understand, cannot be compared to the same process in the European world. Rather, in India, the example at hand, the emergent “vernaculars,” Urdu and Hindi, from the nineteenth century on remained largely written functions, owned by a native elite.

It seems as if the natural progression in English departments for the past few years has been to abruptly jump from twentieth-century works from the United Kingdom and the United States to postcolonial Anglophone literatures. What is often missed in this leap is the question of literary works or cultural movements that evolved in the imperially patronized, misnamed “vernaculars” during the colonial period. That is to say, a certain literary moment, both preceding and informing that of the postcolonial world, remains largely unread and unreferenced for the ways in which it might possibly have shaped, or in some cases, escaped contemporary Anglophone writings. At the same time, these nineteenth-century literary works in languages

²⁰ See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

such as Urdu and Hindi are in many ways continuous and referential with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English novels and moral tracts. Part of my goal in this project is to show the significance that texts composed for native audiences, produced during the colonial period, acquire in the cultural transformation that the imperial project forces in the colony. While the study and instruction of these texts in the original is, of course, a limited possibility, what is a viable option is their inclusion in debates about Orientalism, literatures of the colonies and ex-colonies, and in the lasting legacy of imperial pedagogy. I am suggesting here that rather than relegating this corpus to the historical archive of the colony, we must treat it as vital, relevant, and *connected* to both an English past and present.

II.

More than half a century ago, Schwab astutely spoke of Galland as having “inaugurated the true orientalism,” (il inaugure l’orientalisme véritable) by way of his 1704 “translation” of what is believed to be a fourteenth-century Arabic manuscript into *Les mille et une nuits: contes Arabes*.²¹ Within the decade, this simultaneously “homeless masterpiece,” (un chef d’oeuvre sans domicile) and “French classic,” as Schwab refers to it, became the anonymously translated and serially published *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* in London, inspiring a new, century-long vogue for a genre that became known as “the Oriental tale,” described by one chronicler as inclusive of all the “oriental and pseudo-oriental fiction” that appeared in the England and France

²¹ Raymond Schwab, *L’auteur des Mille et une nuits: La vie d’Antoine Galland*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1964), 17. Schwab’s book-length essay on Antoine Galland speaks of its subject as a creative translator of an original Arabic text, thus engaging deeply with its own use of “*auteur*.” Galland is an “*auteur*,” for Schwab, because of the literary movement he brings about, defined by the particularity of its style, its content, and its emphasis on “*savoir*” or learning with regards to its subjects.

over the course of the eighteenth century.²² “Pseudo-oriental,” Martha Pike Conant’s term for fiction works about, but not originating from, the adaptable “Orient,” (Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1722) and William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) being two examples) then, though serving its literal descriptive purpose, points directly at the replication and purposeful manufacture through which the genre comes into forceful existence.

The cultural tradition of “true orientalism,” introduced by Galland, “scholar and author,” as it unfolds over the course of the eighteenth century, becomes in England, quite precisely, a dynamic mediation between linguistic knowledge and its “application,” or rather, its “interpretation,” within a burgeoning body of fictional forms—plays, stories, novellas, and even poetry.²³ Schwab’s obsession with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century orientalism dominated several of his later and larger works, *La vie d’Anquetil Duperron* (1934), *La renaissance orientale* (1950), and finally the biography of Galland. Schwab’s understanding of what “orientalism” signified would itself undergo serious revisions and uncertainties over time, but what remained constant throughout was the insistence that the study of the “Orient” in and by the West “undermine[d] the wall raised between the two cultures...transforming the exile into companion.”²⁴ It would be the nature of this companionship, then, that Schwab would attempt to decode over the course of three decades: the Islamicate Orient existed in a comfortable accord with Europe, and its introduction to the latter by way of Galland’s masterpiece had only positive effects on literary cultures in England and France; he was the “creator of a literary genre, a climate of imagination that enriched European thinking.”²⁵ “Oriental,” far from deserving the

²² Martha Pike Connant, *The Oriental tale in England in the eighteenth century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), xv.

²³ Schwab, *L’auteur des Mille et une Nuits*, 17.

²⁴ Schwab. *The Oriental Renaissance*, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 27.

“pejorative” nature it had come to acquire by the late nineteenth century, was, in fact, by Schwab’s estimation, beneficial and valuable for Western civilization.²⁶

Said has spoken of Schwab as “a man whose interests observed no national boundaries, and whose capacities were deeply transnational,” his description in many ways equally applicable to the scholars Schwab wrote about, Galland, Anquetil Duperron, and William Jones. Schwab’s “profound and beneficent” views of the East, and the transformation of the West by its engagement with the Orient, Said so delicately explicates, are concerned with the lasting and indispensable influence of the other on European civilization as we know it.²⁷ My project, if not the anti-thesis of Schwab’s, can perhaps be described as its inversion, its reorientation, and redirection once again towards the Orient, its journey beginning in the English metropolis, and concluding in the modern colony where culture is constructed atop foundations laid by eighteenth- and nineteenth century orientalisms.

Schwab in his meandering, seemingly inconsistent stance, nevertheless, provides us with the premises through which to understand the two Orientalisms that I have earlier marked as surrounding two Orients, the Islamicate and the Indic. If the first was always literary, fiction-centered and exotic, yet in its moment “true,” it was followed by a tradition of scholarship that overrode the “novelty” of its predecessor through an imposition of “orthodoxy.”²⁸ The critical question to ask then, is how can we understand the translated, exoticized, largely fiction- and travel narrative-based, Orientalism as both a precursor and partner of the scholarly, philological, “discovery” based discourse that arose in the later part of the eighteenth century? How does one

²⁶ Ibid. 12.

²⁷ Edward Said, “Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas,” *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 248.

²⁸ Said, *Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas*, 253.

moment in the extended tradition of British orientalism, specially, alter and refigure the loosely imbricated Anglo-French Orientalism that precedes it?²⁹

The issue at hand, as the first part of this project will demonstrate, is not how the “dependence on fables, traditions, and classics” was replaced or overcome by a seemingly secular “orthodoxy” of “texts, sources, and sciences,” but rather how the former entered into a relationship of mutual influence, intelligence, and regeneration with the latter over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁰ In the first chapter, I will read the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* as setting into motion certain tropes around the figure of the Muslim despot or sultan that are then reinforced and expanded in subsequent oriental tales. Keeping in mind Aravamudan and Ahmad’s defense of certain oriental tales, I will show that Sheridan’s *History of Nourjahad* though critical of the Orientalizing and imperializing project, ultimately reinforces the stereotype of the Islamic ruler. In the English adaptation of Voltaire’s *Mahomet* (1741), and Elizabeth Inchbald’s farce, *A Mogul Tale* (1784), the Islamic despot is presented in stark contrast. Yet, despite the sympathetic stance of the second, the Mogul is unable to emerge from the reductive trope of thespianism that dictates his actions in the play.

I begin the second chapter by reading William Beckford’s *Vathek* as reflective of certain metropolitan fears around the excesses of Orientalism and the growing empire in India. *Vathek* is a critique of the ungoverned urge for the accumulation of territory and the accompanying spiritual and moral ruin that must naturally follow. Its protagonist, the historical Caliph Vathek,

²⁹ In referring to the literary orientalism of first half of the eighteenth-century as “loosely imbricated Anglo-French,” I am pointing to a culture of dynamic exchange within the literary circles of London and Paris. That is to say, from La Fontaine’s seventeenth-century *Fables*, to Galland’s *Mille et une nuits*, Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, and *Vathek*, the oriental tale is hardly an exclusively French or English phenomena, rather it relies on the possibilities of access, translation, and popular readership in both languages.

³⁰ Said, “Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas,” 253.

falls to his ruin as he chases after the limitless wealth promised to him by the figure of Eblis, or Satan. *Vathek* signals the beginning of a new direction in British Orientalism, and in this story, the clash of the two Orients, Islamic and Indic, is represented as the decline of the former. I then turn to the emerging scholarly Orientalism of Nathaniel Halhed, and William Jones, rendered initially through translations such as *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776). Religion, law, language, and literature are recruited in these translations, as well as in Jones' scholarly *Discourses* to argue the indigeneity of the Hindus to India, as well as the alien nature of the Muslim population in India to this territory. Jones' translation of the Sanskrit play *Śakuntalā* begins what I see as a circular movement of the Oriental tale as it is made to once again reenter the Oriental space.

The third chapter is devoted to an understanding of colonial pedagogy from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward, and its relationship to the literary Orientalism of both the previous century, and as it develops in the colony itself. Fort William College established at the turn of the century for the linguistic instruction of young East India Company recruits also becomes a site for the literary generation of a new corpus of writings in "Hindustani," or what John Gilchrist, a self-styled Orientalist, believed to be the Indian vernacular. The idea of an organized body of literature in this assumed "vernacular" begins at Fort William College, but continues to beset the colonial administration in the latter's efforts to mold an efficient but obeisant body of subjects.

I will read Mir Amman's *Bāg-o Bahār* (1804), composed by a member of the native literati in the employ of the College, as simultaneously fulfilling the Orientalist desire for a native "Oriental tale," and styling itself as belonging within extant aesthetic practices in the elite register, Urdu. Tropes around the figure of the Muslim despot that originated in the metropolitan Oriental tale are reestablished and introduced into this text by its Orientalist readers and

translators. The affixation of this text to the term “Urdu literature,” then, is facilitated both by these readers and translators, but also through pedagogy, and its repeated use as a text for the establishment of the “vernacular” it represents. This chapter studies, really, the evolution of the educational institution in the Indian colony, but through the journey of a single text that negotiates between its Orientalist history and its innovative place in extant literary practices in the register.

The fourth and final chapter studies the “arrival,” to flex Partha Chatterjee’s term, of the Oriental tale in the Orient itself; or to be more specific, the rewriting of this literary type for the purposes of Muslim reform in the second half of the nineteenth century. I study three novel-like works in Urdu by Nazir Ahmad, a Muslim author who was educated at the exclusive Delhi College, an institution whose history and legacy I discuss at some length in the previous chapter, and who later went into service with the colonial administration. Nazir Ahmad’s initial works, *Mir`āt al-‘Arūs* (1868), and *Taubat al-Naṣūh* (1872), I will argue, employ the tropes of the Oriental tale as they develop from the metropolis to produce a narrative of Muslim itinerancy in India, locating the “home” of the infant Muslim bourgeoisie in an abstract Islamic center. *Ibn ul-Vaqt* (1888), a later work, tinged with melancholy, rewrites the problematic nature of the Islamic empire and Muslim belonging through the figure of Ibn ul-Vaqt, a subject whose blind devotion to the British leaves him culturally homeless.

The journey of the Oriental tale, this project demonstrates, is in many ways itself a rather blurred concept. Going against the eighteenth-century Western narrative, however, my position maintains that the very concept of an “Oriental tale” is monolithically European. That is to say, the Oriental tale does not travel to the West, and then back again, but rather is a cultural formation that attains maturity in eighteenth-century England and France, admittedly inspired to

some extent by the discovery and import of manuscripts from modern day Iran and Syria. This form travels from the metropolis to the colony, in the case of India through the Orientalist cloak of pedagogy, the latter category intimately tied to the idea of “literature.” Once in the Oriental space, the Oriental tale is utilized in the development of the earlier mentioned “vernaculars,” as well as exhibited as a problematic example of Oriental morality. Given that my interest is in the presence of this form in the north-Indian register, Urdu, which becomes almost indelibly associated with a Muslim presence, works such as *Bāg-o Bahār* are then considered reflective of a Muslim morality. What ensues following historical events of the magnitude of the 1857 Mutiny in India is a reevaluation from within the Muslim bourgeoisie of the literary tradition Orientalism affixed to it.

III.

In an opening scene from Nadeem Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), one of several protagonists, Shamas, stares at the perfection of the first snowfall of the year, his daydreaming mind consciously mistaking a shadowy figure for Queen Elizabeth II:

Or it could be Queen Elizabeth II. Shamas smiles, in spite of himself. Once, marveling at the prosperity of England, a visitor from Pakistan had remarked that it was almost as though the Queen disguised herself every night and went into the streets of her country to find out personally what her subjects most needed and desired in life, so she could arrange for their wishes to come true the next day; it was what the caliph Haroun al-Rashid was said to have done according to the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*,

with the result that his perfumed Baghdad became the most easeful
and prosperous place imaginable.³¹

Here, in this single paragraph, the thoughts of a Pakistani immigrant, living in twentieth-century England, as he watches the first snowfall of the year, are much more than just the ironies of a postcolonial world. The incongruous shadow of the current monarch of Britain is inspired by Haroun al-Rashid, the storied caliph from the *Arabian Nights*, only the setting has changed from a sultan's opulent bedchamber to a village in the twentieth-century England, where a group of Pakistani immigrants grapple with the intense pain of their exile from their homeland. The person invoking the figure of the Queen is a visitor from the doubly liberated Pakistan, whose naïve utterance can almost deliberately be mistaken as nostalgic for a monarch, for imperial rule, if not for the colony itself.

In a profile of this British-Pakistani author, Marianne Brace, a journalist for *The Independent*, described certain tropes within the novel as evocative of an "Islamic literature," though there are "other Islamic literary references too, from the *Thousand and One Nights* to Wamaq Saleem's poetry."³² The latter, interestingly, is the pen name of Aslam's Marxist-leaning father, a poet and factory worker. Though as academics we may dismiss the journalist's language as untutored, what we are encountering in this piece is a general tendency in the Western world today that conveniently groups or clumps together certain literary and aesthetic traditions as "Islamic." A kind of carelessness around Islam, Muslims, immigrants, Indians, and Pakistanis, and literary works written by them, or in their part of the world seems excusable, and even permissible. Aslam himself is depicted as "culturally Muslim," attempting to save the Muslim

³¹ Nadeem Aslam, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 5.

³² Marianne Brace, "Nadeem Aslam: A Question of Honour," *The Independent*, June 11, 2004.

world from itself.³³ Hardly unfamiliar or new, this language recalls quite simply why Said's argument in *Orientalism* remains critical not just for humanists, but for a broader reading audience, students, consumers of trade fiction, journalists etc.³⁴

These two twenty-first century narratives, however, are also reminders of the continued significance of the Orientalist discourse in contemporary global literary culture. Compared to the journalist's rather blatant sketch, Aslam's prose is in some way a contemporary renewal of a literary act that has been performed almost three centuries ago, but that also at the same time attempts to grapple with the cultural consequences of its predecessor. The presence of the Oriental tale in the novel serves as a guiding fiction for a Western audience in order that they might benignly comprehend the figure of the Muslim immigrant. For the characters, the *Nights* seems to be a point of reference, a constant point of return, a means for them to explain themselves, a way into their consciousness. The newspaper profile, in return, sees all of this as Islamic, and literary; by simply combining the two terms we get "Islamic literature." In eighteenth-century London, the arrival of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* and the hundreds of Oriental tales that followed was also the arrival of a convenient fictional representation of the Persian and Ottoman Empires. The figure of the Muslim who in the European imagination ravaged and conquered could now be understood from the intimacy of his bedchamber. (In Aslam's novel, interestingly, the ritual of honor killing is narrated entirely from the safety of the English village). Though "Islamic literature" is not the choice eighteenth-century term, it should suffice to say that the most popular oriental tales of the time were also considered authoritative sources of information on "Mohamedanism."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Apter also brings up this problem as a function of the Eurochronistic tendencies of World Literature. See *Against World Literature*, p. 59.

This dissertation, arguing that the eighteenth-century Oriental tale in England and its associated tropes had a lasting impact the development of literary fictions in nineteenth-century Urdu, then, preempts the postcolonial novel. Literary tropes that persistently associate Islam with the transient structure of empire, and the Muslim ruler or caliph with a despotism exercised through fictions and performance first arise in the eighteenth-century English Oriental tale. Their journey to the colony is enabled through the presence of a complex network of educational institutions and colonially patronized programs for native reform through a change in the literary traditions in native languages. The rise of a native bourgeoisie, educated in the colonial discourse around India and the Islamic world, enables the replication of Western knowledge about the East to take place in languages such as Urdu and Hindi, in the case of north-India. In other words, before we approach the desolation of homeless Muslims grappling with an honor killing in the postcolonial novel, we must ask the question as to how and where the tropes available for the expression of this condition came into cohesion.

CHAPTER I

ORIENTAL(ISM'S) TALE: THE ISLAMIC DESPOT, EMPIRE, AND NATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH IMAGINATION

VIZIER: “Our war-like Prince of Mohamet’s blest lineage!
Vicar of the most High! Supreme! and Eminent!
I yield to your Lord of the Terrestrial Globe,
Larger than Alexander’s is your Empire.”
—Delariviere Manley, *Almyna, or An Arabian Vow* (1707)³⁵

Coinciding neatly with the serial publication of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, the ubiquitous Grub Street translation of Antoine Galland’s *Mille et une nuits* (1704), Mrs. Manley’s *Almyna* was one of many hundreds of tales, novellas, plays, and poems in eighteenth-century Britain revolving around the magnificent and malevolent figure of the eastern despot. This particular description of the ruler of a vast, and expanding Islamic Empire, however, is striking because it contains the essential tropes that will define the sultan, or the caliph over the course of the eighteenth century—Muslim, martial, and despotic. Almanzor, the despot in question, is hardly the first or last such example to appear in the imperially fixated Oriental tales, and plays that gripped metropolitan readers and audiences. Preceding Almanzor, Osman from Voltaire’s *Zaïre* (1732), and William Beckford’s *Vathek*, to name just a few, is Schahriar, the infamous king from the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, who avenges his wife’s infidelities by bedding a new virgin every night, and murdering her in the morning.

Schahriar, unlike the grand majority of sultans and despots who appeared in Oriental tales and plays contemporary to the *Arabian Nights*, however, came by way of Antoine Galland, the French Orientalist whom Schwab had described as both “scholar” (savant), and “author”

³⁵ Delariviere Manley, *Almyna; or The Arabian Vow* (London: William Turner, 1707), 4.

(écrivain) of the Orient.³⁶ My interest in this chapter, thus, is not merely in Schahriar, the murderous and eventually reformed despot, but rather in what Galland's *Mille et une nuits* came to represent within West's broader discourse around the "Orient." What has frequently been thought of as a "vogue" or "the eighteenth-century European craze for literary Orientalism," brought on by the instant popularity of the *Arabian Nights* in England was really a series of fictional works inspired, in many ways, by the possibilities offered by, and to, the proliferating stories of Schahriar and Scheherazade.³⁷ Galland was not the first modern author to write fiction, or even a scholarly work about the Ottoman or Persian Empires. He was preceded, of course, by English travellers such as Mary Wortley Montagu, playwrights and poets like Dryden and Milton, and scholars, including his own contemporary and friend, Barthélmy d'Herbelot, the author of the grand *Bibliothèque orientale* (c. 1697). Yet, the *Arabian Nights*, possibly because of its journey, and its grand vision of the Persian Empire, acquired an authoritativeness and aura of authenticity that no Oriental fiction preceding it, and possibly none following it would achieve.

I want to begin this chapter by suggesting we think about the *Arabian Nights*' *Entertainments* as a tropic text—that is to say, we read the *Nights* as unleashing certain tropes and ways of thinking about the figure of the Oriental despot that are replicated in some form or the other in Oriental tales and plays that follow. These far-reaching and transformative tropes affiliate the ruler of the Islamic world with the absolute structure of empire, and fashion him as a ruler who is not merely oppositional, but in fact, threatening to the population under his rule. Both ruled by and ruling through fictions, the despot of the Islamicate Orient is excluded from the history of the West, child-like and naïve when compliant to fictions, deceptive and thespian

³⁶ Schwab, *L'auteur de mille et une nuits*, 17.

³⁷ Alan Richardson, introduction to *Three Oriental Tales* ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 3-4.

when playing or narrating them. Scheherazade, the story-teller whose narrative reforms the despot into a democratic and just king, then, embodies the ideal of a masculine West that must civilize and tame the barbaric, cruel Orient.

The second part of this chapter examines Frances Sheridan's Oriental tale, *The History of Nourjahad* (1762), a work that is clearly influenced by the seemingly limitless fictions of the *Arabian Nights*. Read by contemporary scholars as a critique of eighteenth-century metropolitan culture surrounding women, and of hegemonic, realist forms such as the novel, *Nourjahad* is one of the seminal "new era" fictional offspring of the *Nights*.³⁸ Like its predecessor, this Oriental tale shifts between an Islamic, in this case Persian, empire, and Islam, the religion, utilizing this alternation to serve its broader concern with historicity, or reality, and fiction. *Nourjahad*, the intemperate protagonist of the story, is tested by way of a fiction, or masquerade assembled by Schemzeddin, his master and the sultan of Persian. Yet, as I will show, Schemzeddin's elaborate plot for the reform, or conversion of his vizier is contained within the encompassing narrative of the historian-narrator, leaving both the Muslim, and his imperial space as no more than fictional extensions in the history of the West.

While *Nourjahad* staged the tensions between Western conceptions of history and story, there existed also a more complex, but still nascent interaction between literary Orientalism and scholarship around the *Orient*. Pioneered by Galland, this "true Orientalism," as Schwab described it, found another patron in the philosopher-author Voltaire, who came to the Islamicate Orient by way of India. Though I will return to Voltaire's interest in India at length in the following chapter, here I want to examine his play, staged in London as *Mahomet, the imposter*

³⁸ Srivinas Aravamudan, "The Adventure Chronotope and the Oriental Xenotrope: Galland, Sheridan, and Joyce Domesticate *The Arabian Nights*," in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 264

(1741), its original French title, *Mahomet, ou la fanatisme* (1736). I want to argue that very much in progression with the *Arabian Nights*, and *Almyna*, though preceding Elizabeth Inchbald's satire, *A Mogul Tale* (1784), *Mahomet the Imposter* is an overt gesture towards the taming or mastering of dark fantasy that is the Oriental despot. On the one hand the English adaptation of the play is seemingly anachronistic for a London stage that had by the eighteenth century largely come to terms with the Prophet Muhammad as political rather than religious figure. Yet, David Garrick and Benjamin Hoadley's loose translation of Voltaire's play portrays a despot associated with Islam as essentially disruptive to the nation and to a people whose origin is prior to that of Islam. That is to say, Mahomet, here in the capacity of the ruler of an empire, is incompatible, or at permanent odds with older and original structures of community and domesticity.

A partial departure from the morally and politically inclined types, Inchbald's farcical *A Mogul Tale* also explores the theme of the absolute monarch to incite debate around both the veracity and singularity of governance in a territory that is now obviously Mughal India. In this play the Great Mogul, a fictional ruler of India, deliberately "perform[s] tyranny" to quote Daniel O'Quinn, but is ultimately merciful to his ridiculous, bourgeois victims from the metropolis in the prescribed Christian way.³⁹ Though explored in greater detail in the following chapter, the Oriental tale's movement towards India is concerned with a declining Islamic empire that comes into contradiction with a unifying argument on ancient civilization's relationship to modern nationhood. *A Mogul Tale* forces to the forefront a range of social and cultural issues in the metropolis, as well as the inconsistencies present in the relationship England carves with the now orientalized, colonized space that is India. Though the play overturns several crucial tenets of Orientalism, including Europe's sexualization of the Orient, and the latter's forcing of the former

³⁹ Daniel O'Quinn, "Inchbald's Indies: Domestic and Dramatic Reorientations," *European Romantic Review*, 9 no. 2 (1998): 222.

to exist as a perpetual performance for the West, I will suggest that the farce ultimately gives way to the narratives of emerging British Orientalism around India and the colonization effort.

To phrase the matter more succinctly, my attempt in this chapter is to establish what is really a progressively unfolding representation of the ruler of the Muslim world as indelibly attached to empire, and conquered territories. Moreover, as Britain's own interests move from the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world in general towards India, this figure increasingly comes into contradiction with the post-enlightenment structures of nation, civilization, as well as notions of origin as produced by late-eighteenth century Orientalist thought. Despite several of the texts I work with being redeemed in the contemporary scholarship of Srivinas Aravamudan and Siraj Ahmad as productive, and critical of metropolitan culture, their effects extend to both the Orientalist discourse and the actual Oriental space.

Aravamudan, particularly, in recent years has engaged with the Oriental tale as a form that is "best approached as an artifact written to the specifications of the folktale but with the aims of modernity in mind." Recovering the Oriental tale, in part, from "the entirely necessary attack on Orientalism as a discourse of hegemony and domination," he argues that this form, far from "reifying" "the national stereotype," often goes "beyond nationalist peripheries and sexual conventions."⁴⁰ Though Aravamudan makes a convincing argument for the Oriental tale by reading works such as *Nourjahad*, *Vathek*, and Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* as "virtualizations," and "levantinizations," what he essentially overlooks is the problematic treatment of a distant reality by these fictions.⁴¹ That is to say, he is unable to come to terms with, or follow to its meaningful conclusion the way the figure of the Muslim, and particularly the sultan or caliph, is

⁴⁰ Srivinas Aravamudan, "In the Wake of the Novel: the Oriental Tale as National Allegory," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 33, no. 1, (1999): 10.

⁴¹ See Srivinas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

eventually forced into a literary homelessness in these fictions as they evolve and travel to the colony over the course of the nineteenth century.

The urgent question to ask, then, is this: When we attempt to read the Oriental tale, both as a reinforcer and an employer of the discourse that so powerfully shaped both national and imperial culture, what is the particular place of Islam and the Islamicate Orient in this discourse? I want to suggest that Islam in the narrative discourse of the Oriental tale is the contradictory means through which late eighteenth-century England begins to understand and define for itself concepts of “nationhood,” that are developed against the structure of empire, a formation that Said does not quite substantially explore in the context of Islam. Distinct within British and French orientalisms and subsequent imperial expansions would be the assumption of the “authority” to “represent,” Said repeatedly reminds us in the introduction to *Orientalism*. The Islamicate Orient “represented” by these orientalisms develops in the text as the model or the object of English “admiration and envy” during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet is one that by the eighteenth century is made dissonant with English conceptions of nationhood, an incomplete, unsatisfying entity on account of its absent origin.⁴²

Gerald Maclean and Nabil Matar have attempted with various success to write a history of Islam and West that “complicates our understanding of both Orientalism and the emergent culture of British imperialism,” by examining travel writers such as Henry Blount, Montagu, and the liberal John Locke. Though their focus has remained on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their argument essentially remains only as an addendum to that of Said. The Ottoman Empire, Said argues, “lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole Christian civilization a constant danger” and “its peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices” are

⁴² Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 22.

“incorporated” into much more than just the textual tradition in question.⁴³ Said’s description is an intriguing one, however, because it predicts, or possibly assumes, the European vision of the Ottoman Empire in exclusively religious terms. What Said perhaps omits in this argument is a recognition that the Ottoman, Persian, or Mughal Empires were often painted not just as direct antagonists to the West, but rather as conquerors and ravagers of the populations that came under their dominion. Islam’s empires come to define the need, the necessity, almost, for a Western imperial interest in eastern, particularly Asian territories that it could subsequently liberate from the yoke of Muslim despotism. The Oriental tale, whose plot has in recent scholarly trends begun to be read as critical of English nationalism, remains one of the primary literary forms from the eighteenth century that stages the dissonance of Muslim rule with an indigenous, or conquered people.

Over the course of this chapter, I will attempt to address the stages by which Islam, and the Muslim world are imbricated with imperial structures, serving simultaneously, Europe’s own growing colonial interests. I will begin with *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* in England to show how this particular text unleashes certain tropes around the figure of the despot into a literary milieu already noticeably fascinated with the Ottoman world. The absorption of these tropes into Oriental tales and plays such as Sheridan’s *Nourjahad*, Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, and even Inchbald’s resistant *A Mogul Tale*, far from a beginning, is a continuing process. That is to say, what begins as a series of tropes around empire and domicile unfolds within the Orientalist discourse, over the course of the eighteenth century, as an uneasy discordance between the Muslim Orient, and designated original civilizations such as India, and even Arabia.

⁴³ Said, *Orientalism*, 59-60.

I. Despotic Tropes: The Sultan and Scheherazade from *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*

One of the most contested issues, almost three hundred years after the publication of Galland's translation of the *Nights* in French, and then in English, remains the authenticity of his sources. In contemporary scholarship, and even in the deliberately revivalist, adaptations by nineteenth-century successors such as Richard Burton, there has been significant speculation on the true "origins" of Galland's *Mille et une nuits*. Did Galland transform a tattered manuscript into an eighteenth-century French classic, or did he, in fact, painstakingly translate the many hundreds of stories included in an original Scheherazade's repertoire? The debate is a long and tortuous one, the earliest and most decisive statements on which have been made by Muhsin Mahdi in his history of these fluid fictions, *The Thousand and One Nights*. Mahdi clearly asserts that "Galland contrived a French version of his own," whilst waiting for the "myth of an Arabic original" to "materialize." While Mahdi believes that Galland did indeed acquire a three-volume Syrian manuscript of the *Nights* that has been labeled "A," he also labels Galland's twelve-volume translation which he argues the latter "pretended was a translation of "the Arabic original," as a "literary fiction."⁴⁴

Hussain Haddawy, working from Mahdi's edition, is largely in agreement with his predecessor and in fact, believes that though Galland did indeed make use of the "fourteenth-century Syrian text as well as other sources," he "deleted, added, and altered drastically to produce not a translation, but a French adaptation or rather a work of his own creation."⁴⁵ The "original" *Nights*—and here I deliberately refrain from prefacing with "Thousand and One" or "Arabian"—if we can pin it down at all, is a loose text, oral and fluid, its origins various, and

⁴⁴ Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 23.

⁴⁵ Hussein Haddaway, introduction to *The Arabian Nights* (New York: W. Norton and Company, 1990), xix-xx.

purportedly extending from India to the Arabian Peninsula. Though Aravamudan works with Mahdi's theory to a large extent, explaining that though the "magical narratives" Galland translated "are likely the product of eleventh- and twelfth-century Egypt, with some seventeenth-century additions...we have to be wary of treating this moment as a singular event." Individual stories from Galland's collection "circulated in Europe since the medieval times of al-Andalus, though the frame tale came much later."⁴⁶ The French *Mille et une nuits*, Aravamudan argues despite being a "familiarizing translation" was undone by "the context in which it was read."⁴⁷

Madeleine Dobie in her article "Translation in the Contact Zone," argues that Galland in his translation "unquestionably often departs from the principle of knowing the other through the other, notably by substituting French ideas and aesthetic conventions for those of the Arabic original."⁴⁸ Dobie, however, remains convinced that Galland's project of translation, if not strictly from a single manuscript, remains a powerful influence for "the manner in which we approach the *Nights* in centuries prior to the French translation."⁴⁹ Treating Galland's translation as one that is aware of its being "the privileged site of intercultural contact," Dobie reminds us "the quest for untainted Arabic sources... negates the significance of intercultural translation that occurs."⁵⁰ And finally, Marina Warner in her recent study *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* recapitulates these circling arguments: "Some scholars feel cheated by Galland's innovations—and apparent deception... However much he interpolated and altered his sources, brought in his own values and his society's norms of decorum, and in the interest of

⁴⁶ Srivinas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 64-65.

⁴⁷ Aravamudan, "The Adventure Chronotope and the Oriental Xenotrope: Galland, Sheridan, and Joyce Domesticate *The Arabian Nights*," 247.

⁴⁸ Madeleine Dobie, "Translation in the Contact Zone: Antoine Galland's *Mille et une nuits: contes arabs*," in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 64.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 32.

local colour, customs and sighs, Antoine Galland wrought a magnificent fiction *for the West*” (italics mine).⁵¹

Nagging and persistent and all admissible to some extent, these arguments about the singularity or multiplicity of sources, their Syrian, Egyptian, or Iraqi origins, and the anthropological sympathies of the translation, ignore the reality of the French and English compositions. In other words, despite Aravamudan, Dobie, and Warner’s speculations on Galland’s approach to translation, and the significance of his invention and interpretation, it is absolutely critical that we understand the *Nights* as entering into the broader, hegemonic Western discourse Said called “Orientalism.” Though each one of these critics does to some extent acknowledge the *Nights*’ “central role in genesis of Oriental exoticism,” what they seem to miss is the urgency, immediacy, and self-sufficiency that the translation acquires for European readers.⁵² *The Arabian Nights*, a prominent catalyst in the rise of eighteenth-century literary Orientalism, is also part of a broader and continuous network that Said referred to as a “strategic formation,” defined by the “mass density” and “referential power” acquired by texts that then permit them to shape “culture at large.” To put it another way, “each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself.”⁵³

While Dobie has pointed out that “Galland’s translation is surprisingly absent from *Orientalism*,” my position on the *Nights* is substantiated by Said’s argument.⁵⁴ It is undeniable that there was an original source text, possibly several, that may or may not have contained the frame tale as well. But the urgent concern of contemporary scholars of *The Arabian Nights*—and

⁵¹ Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), 40.

⁵² Dobie, “Translation in the Contact Zone,” 57.

⁵³ Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

⁵⁴ Dobie, “Translation in the Contact Zone,” 57.

here I am referring to the Galland and Grub Street translations—must be the way these texts participated in, and perpetuated the Orientalist discourse. To further clarify my position in this project, I am in no way denying or rejecting the presence of an original Arabic, Persian, or possibly even Sanskrit source for these stories. Instead, I am suggesting that our reading of this text once it *enters the West as a translation* must treat the *Nights* as, if not a “Western” text, then most certainly a Western representation of the Orient. Translation as exemplified by Galland, scholar and author, as I have argued in my introduction to this project, is one of the vital implements in the transformation of Orientalism into a modern, rational discourse over the course of the eighteenth century.

To further explicate my point I want to turn briefly to Galland’s preface to the *Nights* in which he establishes the purpose of the “diverting” and “pleasant” tales that follow. The stories, more importantly, are also an “account” of the “customs and manners of the eastern nations, and of the ceremonies of their religion.”⁵⁵ Three “nations” or “territories” are named here, the Persians, the Tartars, and the Indians, in addition, of course, to the “Arabians” from whom these tales ostensibly originated. Towards the completion or later volumes of the *Nights*, most noticeably in the story of Aladdin, Galland takes up “China” as a separate Oriental space, though a fuller exploration of the “Chinese” as a distinct nation of Asia would be carried out by William Jones as part of the Asiatic Researches. At this point in the greater Orientalist discourse, Galland’s three nations belong under the larger entity that is the Islamicate Orient, even though the *Nights* opens with the territory that belongs to the “Saussanians, the ancient kings of Persia.” The purpose of the *Nights*, Galland goes on to state in the Preface, is for the reader to be able to see the people of these nations, “the sovereign to the meanest subject” “act” and “speak” while

⁵⁵ Antoine Galland, “Translator’s Preface” in *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, translated by anon. (London: Harris and Co. 1785), v.

sitting in Europe.⁵⁶ Clear in this assertion, of course, is the accepted fact that the Orient and all of its peoples can be represented in their real “sense” within these “pleasant stories.”

Two important notions about the Oriental tale emerge here: the first that what to western Europe is fantastic, occupies a universal reality in the East, and second that the fiction genre is a not just an acceptable but comprehensive vehicle for the representation of the Oriental nations named earlier in the Preface. The final item of interest in Galland’s prefatory comments is that the *Arabian Nights* gives the best “account... of the customs and manners, and of the ceremonies of their religion, as well Pagan as Mohametan,” to date, displacing the “relations of travellers” or any other “author.”⁵⁷ While it has already been noted that the *Arabian Nights* was almost immediately considered an authority on the subject of Islam (much less so on “Pagans”) in eighteenth-century England, what is significant here is Galland’s conscious admission that this fiction is, in fact, a more authentic and truthful version than travel narratives, or essays on the subject. On the one hand, this moment in the Preface can be thought of as the secularized reorientation of what Said calls the “staging” of Islam, particularly in Britain and France, in which the religion, by the eighteenth century, no longer openly abused as a perverse or degraded form of Christianity, is contained by the West by reducing Islam to the level of the text. On the other hand, I would narrow Said’s argument and suggest that Galland by locating the *Arabian Nights* as a superlative source on Islam affixes the latter to the empire formation. That is to say, Islam, in this author’s estimation, is continuous only with artificial or acquired territories, ruled by a despot, and unable to represent itself through a fixed origin or civilizational structure. What the Preface to the tales contains, then, is an instruction of sorts to the reader on *how* to read

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

them—to put it another way, Galland frames the fiction with a historical statement, specifying the distinct place the Oriental tale would have in eighteenth-century England and France.⁵⁸

In England, the *Arabian Nights*' arrived in a literary milieu that had already experimented with both metaphorical and literal representations of the Eastern despot. Milton's Satan, the "great Sultan" who waves "his spear," is illustrative of excess, of the abuse of his freedom, among other interpretations. Hobbes' Leviathan, the "Supreme Authority" that would govern the citizens of the state, is, of course derived from the biblical monster. The famous image by Abraham Bosse depicts this ruler as emerging from beyond the European landscape, dark in complexion, and ornately decorated in the supposed manner of Ottoman kings. Dryden's Aureng-zebe from his eponymous play, completed just a couple of decades before the *Nights*, though painted as sympathetic, worldly, and tolerant, nevertheless, is a despot who is aware that his is an alien rule in India. The sultan, or the Mughal king in seventeenth-century fictions and essays, then, appears as an object of distant fascination, often channeled in an attempt to stage the control, or restraint over England's own turbulent politics during the Interregnum and Restoration periods.

As the villainous, but redeemable character in a wildly popular work, Schahriar is introduced to the reading public at a moment when England's gaze towards the East had begun to include India as a trading post and as a colony. A substantial explication of the changed tenor of Western representations of the despot is best found in Alain Grosrichard's *Structure du sérail*

⁵⁸ In Muhsin Mahdi's more generous estimation, "the overall subject matter of the *Nights* is the history of the relation between heathen royalty and the revealed religions." Mahdi suggests that we treat Galland's anachronistic frame story literally, rather than as contained within the broader precincts of Islamicate Orientalism. Mahdi's reading is a creative one, in which he suggests that "Dinarazade," by virtue of her name, "of noble religion," is an enabler for Scheherazade, "of noble race," in her quest to cure Schahriar of his barbarism. See Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights*, 127.

or *The Sultan's Court* (1979), published only a year after *Orientalism*. While Said concentrated on the overwhelming domination of the Eastern world engineered by Orientalism in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries, Grosrichard's Lacanian project focused on "the despotic fantasy... historically precisely situated in the period of Enlightenment."⁵⁹ Its careful reconstruction of the Asian despot as he appears in European travel narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries becomes an important auxiliary to Said's larger argument on Western Europe's simultaneous dismissal, suspicion, fascination, and apprehension of the Islamicate Orient.

Despite his often incisive readings of travel narratives and plays, Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721), Jean Chardin's *Voyages* (1711), and Voltaire's *Mohamet* (1736), to name just a few, Grosrichard limits his argument to some extent when exploring the forced imbrication of the despotic system with the European perception of Islam as it evolved over the course of some four centuries. The "spectre of despotism"⁶⁰ that haunts Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I want to suggest, is hardly just political, it emerges, in part, out of Europe's "lasting trauma" and fear of Ottoman invasion, that continue till at least the end of the seventeenth century. Grosrichard's Asian despot, then, hardly pure of this taint, becomes an involuntary symbol for the totality of the Islamic empire. Though Grosrichard begins with Aristotle's 4th century BC description of despotism as an obviously pre-Islamic, Asian structure, "the Asia of Aristotle will by now be recognizable as the one which Europe was to reinvent with the Classical age and the onset of colonization."⁶¹ The despotic empire in Asia "makes its home in deserts, but it unceasingly creates them and expands them around itself... it maintains itself only by

⁵⁹ Mladen Dolar, introduction to *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*, by Alain Grosrichard, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1998), xi.

⁶⁰ Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 17.

depopulating its confines, by creating around itself a void in which nothing could survive.”⁶² If despotism is a travelling threat, then, the figure of the despot though “not always of godly origin—usually the descendant of a conqueror—comes from elsewhere...”⁶³ That is to say, the despot is always foreign or alien to the people, population, and domains he rules, non-native to the land, originless, and nomadic.

The despot in the Oriental tales and plays I will examine in this chapter, and the next, beginning with Schahriar, Nourjahad in his assumed role, Beckford’s *Vathek*, and Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, is always Muslim, often a caliph or the prophet himself. Either disconnected from his people already, like *Vathek*, or the victim of an event that has made him so, Schahriar, the despot makes for a selfish ruler. Like *Vathek*, he moves from point to point to conquer new territories, and he is homeless despite a multitude of palaces. Like Nourjahad and *Mahomet*, he is dependent, yet dangerous to the existence of his favorite consort. Like Schahriar and Almanzor from *Almyna*, he is anti-domestic, even as he spends much of his time in his seraglio. This frequent protagonist of the eighteenth-century Oriental tale, I will suggest, becomes, in the very least, synecdochal for the broader, mutual entity of Islamic despotism. In more potent, overt texts, for example *Mahomet*, the ruler or king becomes the very essence of the Islamic Orient. Yet, in the narrative space of the Oriental tale Islamic despotism is created, censured, converted, and even conquered by Western Europe to yield a literary form whose claims to authenticity must be considered one of Orientalism’s most transformative implements.

The critical tropes that emerge from *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, however, are those of a barbaric, cruel sultan being tamed or reformed through fictions that, interestingly enough, often reflect a European morality. But if the frame tale is that of the sultan’s reform,

⁶² Ibid. 67.

⁶³ Ibid. 127.

subsequent stories, I will show, often depict the caliph or king as a thespian, or actor, immersing himself in fictions in an attempt to rule his people. Schahzenan and Schahriar's discovery of what they see as the chronic infidelity of women, and the subsequent introduction of Scheherazade, constitute significant narrative moments, illustrating from the very beginning the particular perspective through which the figure of the Oriental despot is viewed in the narrative. Even though Schahzenan immediately slays his wife and her lover, he deems Schahriar's trouble as "greater than ever mine was," for the latter's queen is seen participating in an orgy not with "the meanest officer," but with "blacks" or *noirs*, who possessed the status of slaves in many of the tales in the *Nights*.⁶⁴ Dishonor[ed]" and "mortified," the two brothers set off on a journey to find reprieve, during which they encounter a beautiful lady, carried by a monstrous black genie, "malignant" and a "mortal enemy" of mankind.⁶⁵ While the genie sleeps, the lady forces the brothers into sexual submission, after which they discover they are her ninety-ninth and hundredth adulterous conquests. The moral of the story, as the brothers understand it, is that not only is the monster "more unfortunate" than the both of them (thus keeping the racial hierarchy present in the *Nights* in tact), but more importantly, that "there is no wickedness equal to that of women."⁶⁶

Schahzenan returns to Tartary, and Schahriar initiates his "cruel law" of marrying a new virgin each day, only to have her strangled the next morning. This "unparalleled barbarity" leaves the citizens "filled with imprecations against" the king. The city, in this case, disintegrates into "nothing but crying and lamentations; here a father in tears, and inconsolable for the loss of

⁶⁴ Antoine Galland, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, ed. Robert Mack (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 7-9.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 9.

his daughters; and there tender mothers dreading lest theirs should share the same fate...”⁶⁷ Here, then, is the Oriental despot who seeks revenge for his wife’s infidelity from all of the people under his rule. Rather than practicing moral or religious proselytization or allowing trial, he punishes Oriental woman’s debilitating “wickedness” through his absolute edict. Any alternate moralities, including those of the vizier, were rendered useless for everyone owed the Sultan “blind obedience.”⁶⁸ Schahriar is the king whose personal hurt subsumes the entire population of the empire, or the city-state, whose will overrides all others, and who if allowed to go unreformed, is a continued threat to his own subjects and beyond.

Scheherazade, as I read her, then, appears as a savior of the state, exercising a Western masculinity that effectively controls, and eventually redeems the effeminate Oriental despot. She has justifiably been studied as an Oriental woman whose narrative “gave voice to European women writers and feminist themes.”⁶⁹ In a deeply affecting article on contemporary feminist studies, Felicity Nussbaum writes that Scheherazade “stood outside her own narrative spell in order to accomplish her goals,” using satire to “obliquely critique” and correct her husband’s cruel actions, the result of his “misjudgments about women.”⁷⁰ Though I am in utter agreement about Scheherazade’s iconic feminine heroism in the various versions of the frame tale, whether the Arabic, Indian, or Persian, I would nevertheless argue that as a figure in Galland’s French translation, and subsequent European renditions, she appears as transfigured to reflect Orientalism’s gaze upon the Islamicate structure.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid. 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Makdisi and Nussbaum, “Introduction,” to *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 34.

⁷⁰ Felicity Nussbaum, “Risky Business: Feminism Now and Then,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 1, no. 1 (2007): 84.

⁷¹ I wholeheartedly agree that Scheherazade’s heroic actions are hardly restricted to herself in the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*. Her narrative is replete with the wit, perseverance, and daring

Unlike the Oriental women encountered earlier, Scheherazade had

courage, wit, and penetration, *infinitely above her sex*; she has read abundance and had such a prodigious memory she never forgot anything. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physick, history, and the liberal arts, and as for verse, she exceeded the best poets of her time; besides this she was a perfect beauty; and all her qualifications were crowned by solid virtue (italics mine).⁷²

Though her predecessors were promiscuous, or even weak, then Scheherazade's virtue is hardly her most definitive or lucrative quality. Her course of learning is reminiscent of the long debate on what must form the literary canon for European men in the late seventeenth century, in which authors such as Defoe and Pope were passionate participants.⁷³ She is skilled as a poet, very much in the way lauded by Milton in his 1644 essay, "On Education" and John Locke expounded upon to various ends in his treatise, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education."⁷⁴ And finally, she is the possessor of three qualities that not till much later into the eighteenth century would be valued in the European woman as well, "courage, wit, and penetration."⁷⁵ Wit, of

of characters such as Morgiana in the story of Ali Baba, the Princess Parizade in the "Story of the two sisters who envied their younger sister," and the unnamed young magician in the "Story of Cogia Hassan," to name just a few. At the same time, however, it cannot be forgotten that Scheherazade speaks also of evil sorceresses, unfaithful and jealous wives, and murderous mistresses who are variably vanquished by masculine or feminine protagonists.

⁷² Ibid. 10.

⁷³ James Von Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 115.

⁷⁴ John Milton, "On Education," in *Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton* (London: A. Millar), 136-141.

⁷⁵ This combination of qualities or attributes is hardly unique to the *Thousand and One Nights* during the eighteenth century. The same phrase is found in *The British Mercury* to describe the

course, was also Joseph Addison's chosen means for inducting his subject audience with morality. What I'm proposing, therefore, is that we understand the figure of Scheherazade in Galland's translation as touting a bourgeois *Western* masculinity, a challenge to Schahriar, the absolute despot of an *effeminate Orient*. To put it another way, Scheherazade reflects the image of a masculine Europe attempting to civilize or tame an effeminate, irrational Orient.

The careful construction of her figure to reflect the contrast with the sultan is far from simple—where Schahriar, once matured, is totalitarian and brutal, speaking and acting only for himself, Scheherazade is portrayed as belonging to the city-state, her actions for the benefit of the people. Should her mission to end the daily deaths of the city's virgins fail, Scheherazade believes her own "death would be glorious," whereas in success she would do her "country an important piece of service."⁷⁶ Scheherazade's vision for her fictions is in the service of her people, or to put it another way, for a public, rather than personal consumption.

The heroine of Schahriar's empire, then, is a figure that is affiliated with nationalist, rather than despotic structures—Scheherazade's fictions work, to some extent, towards the same end as Aravamudan and Ballaster see the domestic realist novel as achieving: the "consolidation" or building of a national type. Her nocturnal narration, though ostensibly is entertaining or distracting her audience of two, in a larger way hopes to shift the moral and ideological compass of Schahriar in order to release or "deliver" the city from its "consternation." Scheherazade, as I see it, can hardly be considered within the Oriental stereotypes that the *Arabian Nights* offers of well-born and worthy men or women. Instead, I have been suggesting that she is *exceptional* to

Count de Mellardede (1798), in Samuel Johnson's essays in *The Rambler*, and to describe the character of the Abbot in *The Military History of the Prince of Savoy* (1736).

⁷⁶ Galland, *The Arabian Nights*, 11.

the picture of the Islamicate Orient that is offered in both the frame story, and in many of her own stories.

The double-trope of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* that persists throughout the Oriental tales of the eighteenth century is precisely that of a savage, unrestrained, Muslim ruler, who is brought to an enlightened end as prescribed by a European ethic. In England, the *Nights*, bolstered by the mushrooming of the Oriental tale as a popular fiction form, involuntarily contributes to the development of an English national: non-despotic, morally upright, public, but nevertheless, latently powerful and infinitely resourceful. But if Schahriar's brutality is ended, he and other Muslim rulers in Scheherazade's stories remain ineffective, non-threatening figures who are unable to rule through their own person.

Like Schahriar, Haroun al-Raschid, a frequent protagonist, also becomes a part of many of the tales that are told to him—often through his own indiscretions—masquerade being a favorite amongst them. This second trope emerging from the *Nights* is startlingly reminiscent of Said's careful understanding of Muhammad as an “imposter” in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque*, a text Galland was intimately involved with.⁷⁷ In “The Adventures of the Caliph Haroun al-Raschid,” the latter dons the “garb of a foreign merchant,” on the days that he decides to “inform [himself] of the exact government of [his] capital city and the little places about it.”⁷⁸ While the masquerade, usually in the guise of a travelling merchant, often works in the favor of all concerned, it also illustrates a more important point: the ruler of the Islamicate Orient administrated his kingdom by engaging in the fantasy of disguise, while listening to a series of stories whose moral wrongs he would eventually correct.

⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 72.

⁷⁸ Galland, *Arabian Nights*, 727.

In several cases, the caliph becomes a character in the story itself, thus rendering his status as ruler vulnerable to the spiral of fictions that the *Nights* often turns into. Similarly, in the story of the Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess of China, the Prince and Princess are brought together by the machinations of a fairy and her rival genie, yet their adventures lead them to acquire another kingdom, this time gained by the Princess masquerading as her husband. The King of Ebene “charmed” by the Prince, who is actually a woman, arranges a marriage between the disguised Princess Baldoura and his own daughter, thus bequeathing his entire kingdom to this new couple. Only once the Prince Camaralzaman and his wife are reunited is the sham marriage dissolved, and the other princess made a second wife to the Prince. So far as in the story of Aladdin, believed by most scholars of the *Arabian Nights* to be tacked on by Galland, the element of masquerade and trickery remains a necessary trait in order for the protagonist to not only reach the throne, but also to maintain power over a volatile empire, open to attack from ill wishers. The evil magician from Africa and his brother experiment with a variety of disguises; Aladdin courts the Princess with bounties from the genie of the lamp, and the Princess herself, uses costumes and wiles as a means through which to escape from her captor, the magician.

What the *Nights* tells repeatedly about the Islamic domain is of its centeredness around the figure of the caliph or ruler, a figure who governs his empire through disguise and fictions, desirous, more than anything else, of playing the plebian and the subaltern only to later reward or punish the real members according to his interpretations. In other words, when Bridget Orr writes that the “fantastic qualities” of Galland’s text were used in the production of a new “popular Orientalism,” made up of “fables of political oppression, corruption reformed, and compensatory myths of plebeian accession to wealth and power,” she refers essentially to the

instrumentality of the sultan or caliph, be it Schahriar or Haroun al-Raschid.⁷⁹ My brief reading of this Oriental tale, then, marks the beginning of what is really a snowballing series of tropes around the ruler of the Muslim world—from the stories that tame Schahriar, we move towards the technologies of masquerade in *Nourjahad*, and *A Mogul Tale*, until we reach *Vathek*, in which the earth is no longer enough for the insatiable emperor.

II. The “Mohametan” masquerade in Sheridan’s *History of Nourjahad*

The “popular Orientalism” that took eighteenth-century England by storm following the publication of the *Nights* became central to a burgeoning English public sphere. Constantly reproducing and replicating itself in coffee house journals such as the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, the Oriental tale became a medium through which to reform and improve the moral and social lives of the English public. Less noticeable, however, was the paradox of this imaginative Orientalism and its burden to act as a factual medium, as a means of constituting the Islamicate Orient as an object of knowledge. Translation, or the claim of translation, and the myth of the manuscript, then, legitimizes the Oriental tale as an authoritative account. Yet, the distance of the supposed manuscript, the Arabic or Persian original also enabled Oriental tales such as Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759), and Sheridan’s *History of Nourjahad*, to use the Orient as allegory, their “Oriental tales” acting as a political and social commentary on an English cultural domain. My particular interest here is in *The History of Nourjahad*, published posthumously in 1767, detailing the religious and moral molding of Nourjahad by his friend and master, Schemzeddin, the ruler of Persia. Unlike the *Arabian Nights*, and *Vathek*, *Nourjahad* was authored by an Anglo-Irish woman who was nevertheless, well ensconced in the contemporary English milieu as

⁷⁹ Bridget Orr, “Galland, Georgian Theater, and the Creation of Popular Orientalism,” in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 122.

the wife of Thomas Sheridan, a well-known actor and director at Drury Lane, and the mother of Richard Sheridan, the Irish playwright. Frances Sheridan's Oriental tale or novella, as its length suggests, was initially written as part of an instructive collection dedicated to the Prince of Wales, but enjoyed an independent popularity for its seemingly genuine Oriental themes.

The History of Nourjahad, named for the eponymous protagonist, is the story of the Sultan Schemzeddin's willful companion and friend, his fall from his master's favor as a result of his materialistic desires, and finally, his carefully orchestrated reformation as conceived and carried out by the Sultan himself. Nourjahad, both "hero" and "anti-hero" as Aravamudan sees him, wishes for "inexhaustible riches" and an eternal existence in the world over "hopes of Paradise" in the Muslim afterlife.⁸⁰ In order to punish and test his "favorite," who I read as the Oriental subject, Schemzeddin, brimming with a European rationality, concocts an elaborate masquerade in which Nourjahad becomes an unknowing protagonist, deceived into believing that his wishes have been granted, and he is both limitlessly wealthy and immortal.⁸¹ The only condition for all this, Nourjahad is told in a staged vision, is that a long and overwhelming sleep would overtake him each time his passions became excessive. Banished from the court, he is left to revel in his meaningless magnificence, watched over by his concubine Mandana, and a servant Hasem, and after their deaths, by Cadiga, and Corzo, the last being the Sultan himself disguised as a servant, a European guardian watching over the hapless Oriental. Bored almost immediately with his newfound wealth, Nourjahad decides to dedicate it towards buying women, food, and music so fine that they "exceed" those of the Sultan's palace. Sometime after his first deep sleep, brought

⁸⁰ Srivinas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 236.

⁸¹ Frances Sheridan, *The History of Nourjahad*, in *Three Oriental Tales*, ed. Alan Richardson, 27.

on incidentally, by a fit of drunkenness, Nourjahad embarks on “one of the most extravagant projects...that ever entered the imagination of man.”⁸²

Masquerading within masquerade, Nourjahad decides to stage an Islamic paradise in his own gardens, his concubines would play the “beautiful virgins that are given to all true believers,” his most beautiful mistress would be Cadiga, the favorite wife of the prophet, and he himself would fulfill the part of “Mohamet.”⁸³ But even as the fountains of his gardens begin spouting milk instead of water, Nourjahad falls asleep again only to wake many years later to find his women aged and hag-like, his servant Hasem dead, and his only son gone after having robbed his father of his wealth. Still Nourjahad does not repent, despite feelings of loneliness and ennui; his satiety had lead him to become “peevisish, morose, tyrannical; cruelty took possession of his breast.”⁸⁴ Finally, after a fit of temper in which he kills his last faithful servant Cadiga, Nourjahad falls into yet another deep slumber.

When he awakens, he finds a man by the name of Cozro by his bedside, the brother of the dead Cadiga, who promised his dying sister that he would care for her depraved master. Having guarded Nourjahad while he slept, Cozro is ready to leave the latter “condemned to wander in an unknown land,” but is convinced to stay after Nourjahad, now reformed by a higher authority, at last realizes the extent of his folly, and is now willing to dedicate all his wealth to the amelioration and betterment of the poor. Cozro becomes an agent for Nourjahad’s charity, going nightly to the city that from which Nourjahad was earlier banished. After he is caught distributing food during curfew hours and sentenced to death, Nourjahad is forced to leave his palace prison to help his aide, finding himself in the Sultan Schemzeddin’s palace where he

⁸² Ibid. 46.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 55.

shows true repentance by offering to die in Cozro's place, only to discover that his servant was the Sultan himself and he, Nourjahad has been an unknowing actor in Schemzeddin's elaborate theater. With the success of this grand deception, the reformed and repentant Nourjahad is taken back into the Sultan's fold, a wiser and temperate man.

Nourjahad has been read variably for both its Irish and feminist criticisms of eighteenth-century English culture: Nussbaum has famously argued that Nourjahad's opulent confinement is, in fact, a reference to the situation of the eighteenth-century bourgeois Englishwoman, who after producing children was restricted to consumerism by her male owners. Ballaster reads the "eastern tales" as "metamorphosing" into "conduct fiction," in which a set of feminine or feminized protagonists drives the "agency of fiction."⁸⁵ Mita Choudhury, on the other hand, reading into the title of the story, argues that through her use of the concept of a "history," Sheridan "appropriates the authority of contemporary male writers, many of whom were philosophers and historians," and "finds fulfillment in devising a tale that celebrates freedom: Nourjahad's emancipation from the tyrannies of passion (fiction) coincides delightfully with the authorial emancipation from the constraints of gender (autobiography)."⁸⁶ That is to say, in telling the story of Nourjahad as part of a narrative in which the boundaries between fact and fiction remain blurred, Sheridan is able to negotiate her own place in the gender/genre divide, forcing her audiences to rethink the role of the female author in eighteenth-century Britain.

Pushing this point a little further, Ballaster has argued that "the heart of the story is a homosocial (if not homoerotic)" one, mirroring Sheridan's marriage of "two traditions of fiction associated with female voice and the regulation of transgressivity: domestic fiction and the

⁸⁵ Ballaster, *Fabulous Orientals*, 143.

⁸⁶ Mita Choudhury, "Fact, Fantasy, or Mimesis? Narratives of Freedom/Imperial Masquerades," in *Monstrous Dreams: Body, Self, and Other in the Enlightenment*, eds. Mita Choudhury and Laura J. Rosenthal (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 257.

Oriental tale.” Social reform, Ballaster concludes, becomes a function of a “moral rather than arbitrary authority” that tends to associate itself with femininity.⁸⁷ It is precisely these feminist critiques that lead to the broader question of genre addressed by Aravamudan both in his essay “The adventure chronotope and Oriental xenotrope,” and his recent book, *Enlightenment Orientalism*. In the latter work particularly, Aravamudan evokes Bakhtin’s definition of the chronotope, the inseparability of time and space in literary language, in order to show that the narrative of *Nourjahad* challenges conventional genre boundaries, conforming with the “national realist novelistic form” even as the Oriental fantasy is used to critique and challenge this conventional construct. The story provides a contrast to the “conventional myth of Oriental despotism in which sultan is replaced by vizier so that the absolute master can be left to enjoy his dissolute excesses.” In this particular inversion of the Oriental plot, it is the vizier who is rescued and brought to task by the sultan, revealing the “reversibility and substitutability of Oriental despotism and domestic realism as narrative apparatus.”⁸⁸

The common concern in Choudhury, Ballaster, and Aravamudan’s readings is the question of genre as it emerges through terms provided within the narrative itself, history versus story, fact versus fiction, truth versus masquerade. In my reading of *Nourjahad*, I too will take up what it meant for Sheridan to title her Oriental tale in a contradiction with the precincts of fiction. I will suggest, first, that the figure of the Sultan, also an inventor of stories and fabrication, comes into direct conflict with the self-proclaimed narrator, or “historian” of *Nourjahad*’s life. It is precisely through the idea of a “history” and not a fiction, however, that Sheridan is able to premise her narrative in the Islamicate Orient—Islam is permitted to remain a moral center for

⁸⁷ Ros Ballaster, “Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain” in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, edited by Paula Backsieder and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 86.

⁸⁸ Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 238.

the characters without posing a threat to European morality. History, like translation, is both representative and authoritative, yet given its location, unable to command or compel its Western audiences. Nourjahad, the protagonist of the Sultan's fiction, then, traverses beyond this masquerade, the strength of his malleability spilling into the history itself.

To put it simply, I am suggesting that even though the *History of Nourjahad* poses a critique of the imperializing project, it does so with the assumption that the objects of its censure are “historical” or belonging to past that is no longer “real” to the Western world. That is to say, even as the historian-narrator conflicts with the storyteller Sultan, the former retains ultimate control over the facticity of the narrative—Islam, in the history of the West, is often an extension of the fictional.⁸⁹ It is through the dominance of the history-teller over the storyteller that *Nourjahad*, despite its critique of imperial ambition, reinforces tropes around the Islamicate Orient that over the next few decades are refashioned to serve Calcutta or Indic Orientalism in its quest to locate the Muslim in the territory it comes to define as India.

The History of Nourjahad, as is already implied in the title, is conveyed to the reader by an omniscient but selective narrator who refers to him or herself as “the historian who writes” Nourjahad's life.⁹⁰ Within this historical or past fact narrative is the elaborate masquerade arranged by Schemzeddin, acted out not only by an unsuspecting Nourjahad, but also the Sultan himself who plays the roles of Cozro and his own non-existent heir. Ostensibly, the purpose of this Oriental tale is clear: to demonstrate the dangers of excess, and the limits of human existence through Nourjahad, who despite asking for immortality and infinite wealth, ultimately wishes to return to his past life as a courtier in the Sultan's court. Yet, throughout the story, interrupting the

⁸⁹ In the following chapter, I will show how in the scholarship of the Orientalist William Jones, Islam, as a moment in the history of the Arabian peninsula, is designated as a poetic movement, rather than a religious or political one.

⁹⁰ Sheridan, *The History of Nourjahad*, 37.

masquerade set up by Schemzeddin, is the voice of the historian-narrator, “affirm[ing]” all that takes place within the gradually unfolding, yet predictable diegesis.⁹¹ This tension between the metadiagnosis and the diagnosis is a strange one, evading what Gerard Genette has listed as the explanatory, thematic, or exclusive relationships present in the *mise en abyme* structure.⁹² Instead, the metadiagnosis flows in and out of the diagnosis, forcing its direction—Nourjahad’s drunkenness causes the Sultan to alter the course of his experiment, as does his abuse of Cadiga. Schemzeddin determines the conclusion of the process once Nourjahad is repentant and reformed, and only then declares the masquerade as over.

If at the beginning of the story, Nourjahad possesses a “sweetness of temper, a liveliness of fancy,” with his only weakness in the eyes of Schemzeddin being his “youth and inexperience,” then the “avarice,” “love of pleasure,” and “irreligion” that we encounter in his character over the course of the fourteen months, must be located in the circumstances through which they rise to the surface.⁹³ That is to say, the emergence of these vices is hardly a natural incident; rather they are produced or manufactured in the vast laboratory in which Nourjahad has been placed. If in the metadiegetic historical narrative, Nourjahad is a worthy courtier, it is only in the fabricated diegesis, the “fraud,” “dupe,” “dream of existence,” that his baser qualities emerge.⁹⁴ In other words, the relationship between the metadiagnosis and diegesis of *Nourjahad* is one of doubt, raising the Oriental tale as a genre or fictional formation that questions both its origin and nature, very much in contrast to the domestic realist novel that asserted the idea of a homogenous national culture. Yet, this relationship that I have just described is hardly an equal one—the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gerard Genette. *Narrative Discourse: An essay in method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 230-3.

⁹³ Sheridan, *The History of Nourjahad*, 23-24.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 37, 76-77.

historian's narrative dominates and controls the fiction within, closely paralleling the imperial process itself. What I am suggesting, then, is that *Nourjahad* puts forth a series of complexities through the tension between history and story: the reformist Schemzeddin and the masquerade of morality colonize their object, even as they correct it; Nourjahad's reformation is not one where he is agent, but rather one where he is reduced to conversion.

The function of "history" in *Nourjahad* entails further complexities: the plot of this Oriental tale, taking place as it does in Muslim Persia, relies heavily on a moral code derived from contemporary accounts of Islamic practice that are repeatedly confirmed as truth by the overarching title of the work, and frequently asserted over the course of the story. In the contemporary edition I have used, Nourjahad's first experience with alcohol is neatly footnoted as "forbidden to the followers of Islam," just the "female companions reserved" for faithful Muslims in Heaven are "perpetual virgins."⁹⁵ Though Alan Richardson's footnotes themselves demonstrate an ease with casual references to Islam, Sheridan's leading narrative at such instances hardly requires such explications. Hardly unique in the Orientalist tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this consistency of reference to Islam as an "image" in the service, usually, of a higher (and true) Christian ethic acquires more potency in Sheridan's Oriental tale.⁹⁶ If earlier references to Islamic practices in *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* led to that work acquiring the status of a kind of layman's guide on the religion, then in *Nourjahad* where part of the protagonist's undoing results from his direct flouting of Islamic

⁹⁵ Ibid. 37.

⁹⁶ Here Srivinas Aravamudan has read *Nourjahad* as a "hedonist," and "escapist," who is "entirely manipulated according to Schemzeddin's moral reform agenda." The Sultan "is a Christian moralist in disguise," Aravamudan argues, and indeed I would agree, Islam here a close substitute for an almost Protestant ethic. See p. 267 of *Enlightenment Orientalism*. It is worth remembering, of course, that the Anglo-Irish Sheridan though born to an Anglican minister's family, married the Irish Thomas Sheridan, who in Alice LeFanu's biography of wife is represented as Protestant.

teachings, and disregard for supposedly Islamic values, Islam becomes both a stand-in for a secularized Western bourgeois morality, as well as a controlled, and convenient version of itself.

The base premise of the “history,” or the circumstances surrounding the masquerade, is the problematic nature of Nourjahad’s “irreligion,” and though Schemzeddin believes his favorite to be “as good as Mussulman” as his old and sage advisors, closer inquiry reveals Nourjahad as willing to “forego...hopes of paradise” for an eternal existence on earth. Deliberate references to Islam as the “true religion,” replacing that of the “Gentiles,” “our holy prophet,” and “the Temple of Mecca,” are underwhelmed in the struggle for history to reign over story.⁹⁷ Nourjahad’s “profanation of our holy religion,” or what can be thought of as the third, possible plot within the metadiegesis, never actually takes place because Schemzeddin forces its conclusion before it even begins. More importantly, Nourjahad receives his punishment for this brazen act within the narrative itself—the judgment for his crime is delivered not by the entities he supposedly sins against but by the scientific implements, and “machinery,” of the colonizing figure, the “Orientalist,” who Said asserts, “makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else; he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental.”⁹⁸

Like Scheherazade in the *Nights*, Schemzeddin too is associated with certain Enlightenment ideals, only his case these ideals are reflective of the falseness of his position. “The many faces of charlatanism,” Barbara Stafford has suggested in her book on Enlightenment entertainment, “comprised an advertisement for precisely those goods of which society did not approve.” In other words, Schemzeddin’s use of soporifics, light-maneuvers, counterfeit jewels and ingots, and disguises compromises his parallel role of “converting” or improving

⁹⁷ Sheridan, *The History of Nourjahad*, 25.

⁹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 67.

Nourjahad's corrupted form. "Popular shows, experimental science... the industrial and fine arts...and the rites of politics all reeked of mercenary imposture and fraudulent replication," Stafford continues, confirming that masquerade exists at all levels of the story.⁹⁹

Despite Schemzeddin's inauthenticity as a reformer of Eastern excess, he remains representative of middle-class English domestic values such as moderation and rationality in the face of excess and passions. Nourjahad, on the other hand, is forced to inadvertently play the role of the despot from the very beginning of his immersion into the masquerade—and then, not only does he decide to outdo Schemzeddin in the quality of his victuals, women, and music, but he "assum[es] the pomp of an Eastern monarch," donning the robes that "kings of Persia were used to wear."¹⁰⁰ His last serious misdemeanor is his failed assault on Cadiga when she reprimands his disrespect for "God and our prophet," hardly a subtle reminder of the brutal despot, Schahriar from *The Arabian Nights*. Notwithstanding Schemzeddin's *partial* aberrance from the Orientalist cast of the conventional Eastern ruler, the story is not literally lacking for such a figure—Nourjahad's excessive behavior conforms closely and is frequently likened to that of a despot. I call attention to this figure, both in the form of his reflection in Nourjahad, but also in Schemzeddin because it is precisely through the despot, the sultan, or the caliph of the Islamicate Orient that eighteenth-century Orientalist fictions were able to place the Muslim, and Islamic culture as proper only to the empire formation.

Central to these fictions, the *Nights*, *Rasselas*, *Nourjahad*, and later Beckford's *Vathek*, will be the figure of the explicitly Muslim sultan or caliph whose reformation or undoing though often harking back to particular English nationalist concerns, simultaneously raises the issue of

⁹⁹ Barbara Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 88.

¹⁰⁰ Sheridan, *The History of Nourjahad*, 36.

the Oriental despot as somehow illegitimate, and alien to the territory he rules. While *Nourjahad* contains open references to a Persia prior to this Islamic sultanate, this problematic is further illustrated in all its complexity through the relationship between the curiously entwined Schemzeddin and Nourjahad—the imperial virtue of the former and the licentious passions of the latter as he plays the role Schemzeddin is meant to inhabit, are mediated simultaneously by the “precepts of our holy prophet,” and the “lifestyle befitting an Eastern monarch.”¹⁰¹ It is precisely this mediation that forms the dominant chronotope of the Oriental tale, the “interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” that forces “space [to] become charged and responsive to movements of time, plot, and history.” *Nourjahad* is not so much about the dualities at play within the narrative as Aravamudan has suggested, as much as it is about the *singularity* or the *homogeneity* that we can arrive at as the multiplicity of masquerades, and personas finally come to conclusion. Schemzeddin and Nourjahad, the supposed reformer and his object of his moral experiment, far from presenting a contrast, in fact, are made to inhabit the same type. Schemzeddin is a knowing actor, while Nourjahad performs the role of the “mistaken man” that he is in the masquerade.

We can liken *Nourjahad* to Bakhtin’s “adventure novel of everyday life,” where the hero undergoes purification, and a rebirth, but at the same time, the story offers neither a fully private, nor a completely private sense of its protagonist’s everyday.¹⁰² Whether evasive or adaptive of conventional literary genres, the dominant chronotope that defines *Nourjahad* must be read in terms of the time-space relationship built into this Western narrative of the East. In other words, the false sense of time that pervades over a sultanate of fantastic possibilities where both a spatial

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 77.

¹⁰² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

and chronological finality is the perceived Muslim paradise, forces us to examine the chronotope of the Oriental tale as distinct, and more importantly, as deeply suggestive for the direction in which the Oriental tale develops over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. What is more important, however, is that we see this fiction as containing not one but two performers, both of whose roles meld into one another for the European historian.

III. Voltaire's *Mahomet, The Imposter*: The prophet as despot

In a moment startlingly similar to that encountered in the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, we see a city state where “many infants from their parents torn/ E'er conscious whose they are, attend that tyrant/ Drink in his dictates...”¹⁰³ Set in the city of Mecca after the founding of Islam, Voltaire's French play found an avid audience in eighteenth-century England as well where it was loosely translated and mostly adapted by John Hoadley, and David Garrick in 1741, and performed on the London and Dublin stages till well into the nineteenth century. *Mahomet the Imposter*, as the English play is titled, opens not with accusations and ire aimed at the founding figure of Islam, but instead with jibes on the rigidity of its source text. To the calls of Christianity, more precisely, Protestantism, “France was deaf—all her priests were sore/ On English ground she makes a firmer stand/And hopes to suffer no hostile hand.”¹⁰⁴ Unlike on the Continent, “Religious here bids persecution cease,” and though hardly a defense of the eponymous protagonist of the play, this line from the prologue reiterates England's superior position as a defender of rights and personal freedoms.

In the play, Mahomet, the “tyrant” prophet, desirous of including the captive Palmira in his harem, silences all opposition to his plan, even if it means destroying critics such as Alcanor, the

¹⁰³ Benjamin Hoadley and David Miller, *Mahomet the Imposter: A tragedy* (London: C. Bathurst, 1777), 37.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 3.

head of the Mecca senate, through a Machiavellian deal with the other captive, Zaphna. Fooled into thinking he could be reunited with his sister, Palmira, Zaphna is manipulated by Mahomet into killing Alcanor, the statesman. Of course, Zaphna himself is deviously arrested, clearing the path for Mahomet to take Palmira.¹⁰⁵ But the slave girl kills herself instead, leaving Mahomet chastened and ashamed, pleading with a higher power to remove him from this world. On an elementary level, we can read the play through its own prologue: as an English debate on religious absolutism and imposition, and the rise of Protestantism against a still largely Catholic Continent. Mahomet, an obvious representative of religious and political despotism, is challenged by his own friends and officers not so much for the choices he makes, but rather for his use of religion in the achievement of his desired ends.

One version of Voltaire's position on Islam in the French version of the play is that of Michael Curtis:

Using impassioned language Voltaire wrote that no one could excuse the behavior of Muhammad, "the merchant of camels." Voltaire declared that Muhammad had excited a revolt in his town; persuaded people he had held conversations with the angel Gabriel... put his own country to fire and the sword to make his book respected; and only given the vanquished the choice between conversion to Islam or death.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ This adaptation bears a striking resemblance to Gilbert Swinhoe's *The Tragedy of the Unhappy, Fair Irene* (1658), in which the Christian Irene becomes victim to Mahomet's cruelty. Bridget Orr speaks of this play as staging a "tragedy for Christendom," rather than a lesson on the ruthlessness required for the maintenance of an empire, as the Ottoman empire frequently served to illustrate for the English. See Orr, *Empire and the English Stage*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.

Siraj Ahmad, on the other hand, argues in a discussion on the earlier *Lettres d'Amabed*: Islam is possibly corrupt because for Voltaire “corruption occurs whenever a ruling power expropriates a cultural practice from its own world, turns it towards other ends, and obscures its different history.”¹⁰⁷ Voltaire’s views, it seems, are largely overshadowed by the demands of the English adaptation, but they resurface to some extent in the scholarly work of William Jones a few decades later. What does need clarifying in the moment, however, is Ahmad’s almost secularizing understanding of Voltaire’s position on religion, whether Catholicism or Islam. To confuse the latter’s discontent with Catholicism with his position on Muhammad and the East is a misleading gesture. In composing a play around Muhammad, not a “citizen,” (citoyen) but an “obscure inventor,” (novateur obscur) and a rebel, an illegitimate “Prince,” an imposter in Mecca and a prophet in Medina, Voltaire remains fully immersed in the discourse of Orientalism.¹⁰⁸ The more pertinent text for the purposes of my argument is the Garrick and Hoadley adaptation in which Mahomet is a direct antagonist to the ancient city of Mecca. Humberto Garcia in his study of Islam and the Enlightenment, too generally, reads the adaptation as “atypical of the eighteenth-century stance on Mahometanism. His despotic Prophet does not represent the multifaceted— and even sympathetic— accounts of Islam that were widely circulating during that period.”¹⁰⁹

Aravamudan writes briefly in *Enlightenment Orientalism* of Thomas Sheridan’s career as the theater manager of the Old Smock in Dublin being ruined after a riot blamed on political affiliations that demanded action against the establishment broke out following the production of

¹⁰⁷ Ahmad. *The Stillbirth of Capital*, (Kindle Locations 3472-3473).

¹⁰⁸ Voltaire, *Mahomet, ou la fanatisme* (Paris: Jacques Desbordes, 1750), 4.

¹⁰⁹ Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012) (Kindle Edition), 5.

Mahomet, the Imposter in 1741.¹¹⁰ Other details of this uprising have been explored by Chris Mounsey, including the fact that Irish “patriots in the audience took a liking to the first speech of Alcanor, senator of Mecca, who was angry at the imposition of the Mahometan religion and its politics upon his city.”¹¹¹ In Ireland, of course, this imposition was likened to the English imposition of Protestantism on Catholic nation.

The critical juxtaposition as it occurs over the course of the play is that of Alcanor, the statesman, the leader of Mecca prior to what is called Mahomet’s “revolution,” and Mahomet himself, who goes from “an obscure, seditious innovator,” to a tyrant, the “parent, prince, and prophet” of the entire state.¹¹² In other words, we must examine not just the play’s animosity to the idea of a religious state or dominion, but also its endorsement of the ideal leader, in this case, Alcanor. The leader of Mecca, speaking against Mahomet’s Islam to Mirvan, a general, expostulates:

“Religion, that’s the parent of this rapine,
This virulence and rage?—No, true Religion
Is always mild, propitious and humane
Plays not the tyrant, plants no faith in blood
Nor bears destruction on her chariot wheels
But stoops to polish, succour, and redress,
And builds her grandeur on the public good.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 272.

¹¹¹ For a detailed tracing of the circumstances of the riot, see Chris Mounsey, “Thomas Sheridan and the second Smock Alley Theatre Riot, 1754,” *New Hibernia Review*, University of St. Thomas Center of Irish Studies, v. 4 (Autumn, 2000): 65-77.

¹¹² Hoadley and Miller, *Mahomet the Imposter*, 4.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 13.

This rather secularized conception of the role religion must play in a community reflects, on the one hand, Voltaire's anti-deist leanings. On the other hand, while it is not entirely clear whether Islam is being dismissed entirely as a religion, what is relatively apparent is that Mahomet's individual authority cannot be likened or associated with religion anymore. But Alcanor, interestingly enough, flirts briefly with Christianity, for Miravan accuses him of having learnt "these tame lessons" from a "stragglng monk." Alcanor finally and significantly recalls "my country's gods, that for three thousand years," have defined the Arabs, evoking the idea of an original religion that will, in the next few decades, become a key principle in British Orientalism¹¹⁴.

In perfect symmetry with Alcanor's speech is that of Mahomet, the latter soon after declares, "my life's a combat," refuting Alcanor's model of religion through a description of his very person.¹¹⁵ Far from proselytizing, he demands that Mecca be "surrendered," and he be declared "their prophet and their King." Though unsavory depictions of the prophet of Islam were hardly a rarity in Europe, the rewriting of the religion as a necessarily imperializing movement forces it into contradiction with extant peoples and cultures it comes into contact with. Later on in the play when Alcanor is stabbed by Zaphna, he asks Pharon to "bare this wound," to the "rouz'd" citizens, in order that his death "speak the cause, the treacherous cause," so that "in death I can but serve my country."¹¹⁶ Earlier on, Alcanor has already established himself as a guardian of Arabia against "this traitor," who has launched himself against the ancient religion of Mecca that unlike Islam has its origins deep within the culture of the land. His own plea to Pharon to "support my spirit... To combat violence, fraud and usurpation/To pluck the spoil from

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 15.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 48.

my oppressor's jaws/ And keep my country as I found it, free,"¹¹⁷ though rings with late eighteenth-century Orientalism, for the time being, endears itself deeply to both an Irish public, as mentioned earlier, but also to an English national increasingly aware of its civil and economic rights.¹¹⁸ Alcanor, in contrast to the devious Mahomet who cheats the gullible Zaphna with arrest rather than freedom as originally promised for killing his critic, then, comes to stand for an older, pristine order that represents a *civilizational religion*, rather than a reorganized, revolutionary one such as that proselytized by Mahomet. This argument in particular can be seen in Jones' *Discourses on the Asiatic Nations*, some four decades later, where he begins the history of the Arabs prior to what he also describes as a "revolution."

Mahomet is overcome only after the deaths of Zaphna and Palmira, the latter, of course, the object of his lustful gaze throughout the course of the play. Palmira commits suicide with the same knife that her brother uses to kill himself, leaving Mahomet alone with his "boundless passions." Reduced to nothing but his self, Mahomet himself abjures his politics and his religion, "In vain are glory, worship, and dominion/ All conqueror as I am, I am a slave" and then finally, "I might deceive the world, my self I cannot."¹¹⁹ Though Mahomet's attempt at suicide is arrested by Ali and Omar, his living form is doomed to "face the host of terrors that invade my soul." In other words, the play concludes with the tyrant-prophet reduced, morally anguished, and prepared to judge himself worthy of hell, rather than the Muslim paradise so opulently described in Orientalist depictions. The tragic ending of this play is a partial departure from

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 15.

¹¹⁸ It is important to note here as Bridget Orr reminds us in *Empire and the English Stage 1660-1714* that, "the representations of Solymon and Mahomet in the plays written between 1658 and 1675 are broadly, if not exclusively, admiring. The depiction of the Ottomans that was inflected by local political agendas which sought to admonish various forms of monarchical weakness, but collectively the plays also produced—or reproduced—a remarkably consistent image of Ottoman rule, broadly consonant with the views of travel writers and historians." See p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Hoadley and Miller, *Mahomet the Imposter*, 56.

earlier trends in the Oriental tale—the sultans of the *Nights*, *Almyna*, and *Rasselas*, to name three, are permitted a happy conclusion, though most of the Oriental rulers in Voltaire’s plays would end in tragedy.

I am particularly interested, however, in Mahomet’s final line and the implications of self-deception—that is to say, is this a reference to his role as the prophet of Islam, or a more immediate reference to his fall from grace in the wake of the events that have just passed? Is the play attempting to dismiss Islam entirely from the history of Europe and East, or is it enacting an undoing of the single figure behind Islam and its empire? Alternatively, is Mahomet’s deception, followed by his urgent attempt to kill himself, constructed entirely in contrast to the living figure of Christ—Christianity already being evoked as rightful in the play—and through Christ, to the failure of authoritarian or empire-like forms in the face of a true religion? A parallel concluding passage in the French sees Mahomet disavow from the “God, that I used to bring about the misfortune of mankind/ The beloved instrument in my hateful designs/ You, that I blaspheme, I fear again,” (*Dieu, que j’ai fait servir au Malheur des humains/ Adorable instrument de mes affreux desseins/ Toi, que j’ai blasphémé, mais que je crains encore*),¹²⁰ leaving the existence of the very deity of Islam in question given the abuse at the hands of his apparent prophet.¹²¹ In the French text, however, we are also much closer to Voltaire’s anti-deistic stance, one that is mostly lost in the English interpretations, and obviously nation-centered uses for the play.

It is precisely the ambiguity of the English text, however, that allowed the play to be performed in London and Dublin alike, but that also in some way permits a continuity with

¹²⁰ Voltaire, *La fanatisme ou Mahomet, le prophète*, 104.

¹²¹ The reception of Voltaire’s play in France was also not entirely a warm one. Though the play was dedicated to Pope Benedict XIV, who according to Alain Grosrichard pronounced it to be “an admirable tragedy,” the play had to be pulled from theatres after demonstrations by the Kabal of Jansenists. See Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court*, p.108.

earlier, often appreciative representations of Islam and the Ottomans in other plays and Orientalist narratives. The living figure of Mahomet stands, very significantly, if not for political reprieve, then at least for a final coming to task for the various establishments that evoked the ire of the British middle classes in the eighteenth century. Ambiguity is important here, both on account of the economics of the genre that is the play, but also because it is definitive of the mood British Orientalism takes on towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Mahomet may not necessarily be the “diabolical miscreant” from Dante’s renditions, here in the play, because he is given life and barred from death. The option of redemption, or at least some kind of moral rehabilitation becomes possible because of an earthly or material instrument, rather than a religious or spiritual one.¹²² The prophet of Islam can be set to rights because he is made to see his errors in the earthly actions of Palmira. While the play in the original French is indeed somewhat anomalous to the mood of British Orientalism at the time, the English adaptation serves the national moods, by taking a politically rather religiously inclined stance towards the prophet of Islam.

IV. Inchbald’s *The Mogul Tale*: The despot at play

“Farce,” Samuel Foote, the dramatist, wrote in 1760, “is kind of theatrical, not dramatic entertainment... a sort of hodge-podge, dressed by a Gothic cook, where the mangled limbs of probability, common sense, and decency, are served up to gratify the voracious cravings of the most depraved appetites.”¹²³ Though Foote was not speaking in reference to Inchbald’s *The Mogul Tale; or the Descent of the Balloon*, a farcical play that takes India as its location, and the Mughal emperor as its “despot,” his rather droll opinion of this dramatic genre generally

¹²² Said, *Orientalism*, 120.

¹²³ Peter Thomson, *The Cambridge Introduction to English Theatre 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134.

expresses the level of tumult present in this play. Written at time when the East India Company was mired in economic scandals, and harboring accusations of moral depravity, the play portrays the Great Mogul of India as upright and enlightened whereas his three, accidental, English visitors, a Doctor, Johnny, and his wife, Fanny, appear capable only of buffoonery and worthless deception. From India where the clownish English visitors arrive in a hot-air balloon, Inchbald attempts to critique both the broader issue of Charles Fox's East India Bill, and the recent, public scandal of Isaac Bickerstaff's sodomy. The latter, of course, is referenced by the close resemblance of the cast of characters from Bickerstaff's *The Sultan, or a Peep into the Seraglio* (1775), and the sexually deviant, if not openly gay character, Johnny.

While these references remain essential for understanding Inchbald's nuance, the play is also rich in cultural critiques that begin with feminine sentimentality, and extend to technology, bourgeois ignorance, male sexuality, Orientalism and English imperialism in India. My interest is largely in the figure of the Great Mogul, and the nature of the Muslim ruler as it unfolds in the subversive space of the farce. Mita Choudhury has persuasively argued in her chapter on Inchbald and Hannah Cowley's plays that "laughter," as encouraged in the farce, "veils the colonialist implications of Orientalism, but does not eradicate it," and in fact goes on to examine precisely how Inchbald's choice of farce undoes or renders lightly many of the critiques that appear to be made in the play.¹²⁴ Focusing on the figure of the despot, I want to suggest that though Inchbald does indeed achieve a sharp commentary on the culture of using the Orient as the site for the representation of sexual, and domestic deviance, the play ultimately fails to depart from the tropes that have become definitive of this figure. Even as it attempts to critique the Company's scandals in India, the play seems to embrace the Orientalist ideals surrounding the

¹²⁴ Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater: 1660-1800, performance, identity and empire* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 98.

figure of the Mughal king. The failure of the farce as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse, then, is precisely its inability to release the Mogul from the thespian and alien identity that Orientalist fictions have prescribed for him over the course of the eighteenth century.

The milieu of the London theater at the time, as described by Daniel O'Quinn, was such that "on any given night, events in the transformation of British imperial society were brought to the stage, often mediated by the sexual and commercial relations that accompanied all class interactions in the metropole at this time."¹²⁵ O'Quinn reminds us how much English theatre dealt with questions of virtue, in a manner somewhat recollective of that of the novel as argued by Michael McKeon: virtue, both individual and social, in London theatre, a "governmental mechanism," becomes the basis for a "new form of citizen," who is able to participate in "furthering the emergent form of empire inaugurated by the losses of the American colonies and by the East India Company's disturbing flirtation with insolvency and absolutism."¹²⁶ Inchbald's plays, in particular, O'Quinn maintains would "incorporate the news of the day as filtered through the print market."¹²⁷

The play opens in the seraglio of the Mogul where three ladies are engaged in a flirtatious discussion about which one of them is the ruler's favorite. I would disagree here with Choudhury's assertion that this early moment in play opens up "a marginalized feminine territoriality" with "its own shifting locations and dislocations of power;" rather I see this opening, despite its farcical tone, as dismissive of these Oriental women, and in sharp contrast to earlier feminine types of the Oriental tale, including Scheherazade, Cadiga, Almyrna and even

¹²⁵ Daniel O' Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 6.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 20.

Catharis from *Vathek*.¹²⁸ I say this because the three ladies of the seraglio are caricatures of themselves in a genre that Mita Choudhury reminds us “thrives by evoking the unexpected and the bizarre,” and operates by representing “deliberately.”¹²⁹ Betsy Bolton has also identified this inequity, her argument maintaining that though “Christianity and British imperialism are unveiled as tyranny,” sexual oppression does not make the cut.¹³⁰ In this space of double marginalization, racial and sexual—particularly once Fanny despite her own misappropriated sexual activity enters the scene—Inchbald gives us characters who have no alternative moment over the course of the play.

The Mogul is aware of his Oriental depictions, while the eunuchs are aware of their own power. Even the three English visitors are given the opportunity to further self-ridicule, but the ladies of the seraglio remain very much what they are, unnamed and anonymous, except for the order in which they speak. The ladies’ mistaking of the balloon as a “chariot of some of the gods of the Gentoos” or the “prophet Mahomet coming to earth again,” though would have garnered laughter from a ready London audience, at the same time does not redeem or elevate the subaltern character of the Oriental woman.¹³¹ Fanny herself is hardly an empowered figure, married to a man who prefers other men, and who fondly speaks of “thrashing” her, while she lives out her days in a one-room cottage, and not unlike the three ladies, her world seems restricted to the domain of sentimentality.¹³² She would “rather be a poor Cobler’s wife... rather

¹²⁸ Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater*, 102.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 98.

¹³⁰ Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale, or The Descent of the Balloon: A Farce* (London: F. Powell, 1796), 4.

¹³² *Ibid.* 13.

be doing penance with the Pope,” than enter the Mogul’s seraglio.¹³³ Inchbald’s critique of the feminine, then, does not appear to discriminate between the metropolitan and the colonized woman.

More evocative is Johnny, a cross-dressing cobbler from Wapping, whom O’Quinn has traced as being based on Bickerstaff himself, and who yet scarcely fits just one mode. Johnny, by virtue of his sexual deviance and class otherness, “opens the way” for “a colonial discourse which not only ascribes normative heterosexuality to the cultural other, but also ridicules the sexual practices of lower class British subjects who are attempting to rise through the class structure during their colonial careers.”¹³⁴ Though Johnny’s is indeed a hypersexualized subject, his colorful, lustful gaze amok in the seraglio, this very trait sets him for further lampooning. On his first meeting with the ruler, Johnny attempts to fool the omniscient Mogul by introducing himself as, what one would imagine is the celibate “Pope of Rome.” The Mogul’s response to this: “the actions of his predecessors will never be forgotten by the descendants of Mahomet. I rejoice I have him in my power—his life will ill but repay those crimes with which this monster pestered the plains of Palentina,” is a charged one.¹³⁵ Obviously facetious in the moment, this engagement evokes a much longer and broader history of Islamic empire than that which Johnny can comprehend. The Muslim despot suddenly assumes a historically and geographically foreign role in order to meet Johnny on his own terms. Islam itself here is a dynastic entity that is “descended” or born from Mahomet, and extends forth through a series of emperors.

I suggest we read this weak, but rather hilarious impersonation on Johnny’s part as a serious gesture towards Voltaire’s own earlier, ironic dedication of *Mahomet* to the Pope at the time. In

¹³³ Ibid. 17.

¹³⁴ O’Quinn, “Inchbald’s Indies,” 226.

¹³⁵ Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale*, 12.

making this gesture, Inchbald not only marks her own position on Islam within the greater Orientalist discourse, but also refutes the possibility of Christianity as a convenient fallback and alternative to Islam. This is, of course, reaffirmed later as well when the Mogul makes a sardonic reference to the “Christian” treatment of the Gentoos at the hands of the colonizers.¹³⁶ In spinning stories about the pasts and the origins of the three English visitors, Johnny seems to take on yet another Oriental stereotype, exploded and reduced by the utter ineffectivity of his caricature: the storyteller. Jumping from being the Pope to embracing the stereotype of a sultan in a harem, Johnny’s fictions are disorganized and unstrategic. No Scheherazade or Schemzeddin, his weak storytelling does more to endanger the lives of the Westerners, than it does to save them.

Presented in painstakingly patronizing contrast to the Doctor, Fanny, and Johnny, is the Great Mogul, a figure who must be read keeping in mind O’ Quinn’s observation that Inchbald’s stance on the “Indies,” far from anti-imperial, actually seems to suggest that “Britain’s imperial activities have to be carefully remodeled to ensure that the same kind of social disintegration which beset the Romans and the French does not also unfold in the British empire.”¹³⁷ The Great Mogul, in a an overt, though playful way —“I am resolved to have some diversion with them,”—is also highly contained in response to the colonization of India that seems to have entered his most protected space.¹³⁸ On the same plane of knowledge as the Europeans in terms of scientific discovery, the Mogul seems simultaneously to watch, direct and *act* in the events of the play, the movements and actions of the Europeans are managed at his instruction, including

¹³⁶ Inchbald was born in an English, but Catholic family. Her relationship to Catholicism over the course of her life was inconstant, and her discontent is particularly visible in *A Simple Story* (1791). Here, in *The Mogul Tale* too, Inchbald is happy to take liberties with reified Catholic objects. An excellent analysis of her religious and political views is available in the introduction to the recent Broadview Edition of *A Simple Story*, edited by Anna Lott.

¹³⁷ O’ Quinn, “Inchbald’s Indies,” 219.

¹³⁸ Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale*, 9.

Fanny's elaborate re-costuming, Johnny's drunkenness, and the Doctor's arrest, as well as their eventual release. Like the series of despots that have preceded him the Mogul also assumes a certain role, only in this case, he acts as the Western stereotype of himself.

Yet, and this is where, I would argue the farce fails to remain consistent with its initial position, the Mogul does not *resist* colonization. He is determined from the very start to let go of the intruders "in a manner worthy of the doctrines of our great Prophet, and not unsuitable to my own honor and dignity."¹³⁹ In the later, and famously quoted passage where the Mogul is "performing according to European preconceptions," and according to O' Quinn, issuing a "biting historical critique of both British imperialism and its self-consolidating cultural productions,"¹⁴⁰ he remains bounded, hostage through what is intended to be ironic:

"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 color from myself. Yes from you Christians whose laws teach charity to all the world have I learn'd these values? For your countrymen's cruelty to the poor Gentoos has shown my tyranny in so foul a light that I was determined henceforth to be only mild, just, and merciful."¹⁴¹

This passage has been read variously with Choudhury arguing that despite the "sardonic jab at the foreigners" made by the Mogul's implying that he had *not* learned charity from Christian

¹³⁹ Ibid. 15.

¹⁴⁰ O' Quinn, "Inchbald's Indies," 222.

¹⁴¹ Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale*, 21-22.

teachings, and that he was “averse to tyrannical rule because he refuses to mimic the torturous treatment of the Hindus by the Christians,” the “overall impact of the scene...relies upon the Mughal’s inconsistency.”¹⁴² Choudhury’s use of the word “inconsistency” is key here—though the Mogul mocks the hypocrisy of colonization and Christian values, his reference to the English “cruelty to the poor Gentoos” reads more literally than satirically. “You are not now before the tribunal of a European,” the Mogul reminds the Westerners, before he “pronounce(s) judgment,” in what appears to recall the efforts of the Calcutta Orientalists in India to translate Hindu laws in order that the Hindu population would no longer be subject to what they believed were purely Islamic tribunals under the Mughal empire.

I am in partial disagreement here with O’ Quinn who argues that this “critical turn figures British colonial activity as an instructive counterexample to just governance.” O’ Quinn’s assertion that the Mogul’s “performance not only enacts the way he has been culturally constructed, but also the way his people have been colonized,” rings somewhat simplified, given the complex Orientalist narrative surrounding India, and the Company’s governance of this territory.¹⁴³ My point here is that the Gentoos, the Hindus, from the very beginning of the play, have remained a silent entity, written out of a struggle between Islam and the West. Their mistreatment by the English, in this particular text, though is the foretelling of the events that would garishly color the accusations made against Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India, in 1788. Here, in the play, the idea of a trial, of a tribunal formed against the English visitors, for the moment, if anything, is a reference to England’s wars in India, the majority of which were fought against Muslim nawabs, and local rulers such as Hyder Ali.

¹⁴² Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance*, 97.

¹⁴³ O’ Quinn, “Inchbald’s Indies,” 222.

It is too easy, I would argue here, to read the Mogul as a one- or even two-dimensional criticism of England's handling of the new empire. Rather he fits neatly into the broader discourse of British Orientalism in which he is portrayed as largely passive, no matter how wise or knowledgeable. Even as Inchbald partially breaks with the stereotype of the martial Muslim ruler, she embraces that of the decadent ruler, whose mind is largely engaged by playthings and the women of his harem. Bolton makes the argument that "in his cultural curiosity, the Mogul mirrors French and British philosophes; in his plotting, he seems rather to mimic the English playwright, Elizabeth Inchbald."¹⁴⁴ In fact, the Mogul makes us recollect *Almyna*, who avoids a cruel death at the hands of Almanzor by asking the sultan if she could "argue with thy Vow."¹⁴⁵ Here, the posturing English visitors become associated with fiction and deceit, while the despot, though also an actor and writer of a masquerade, performs the higher functions of rhetoric and argument. Farce actually *breaks down* in the presence of the Mogul—that is to say, unlike the other characters in the play, his is a deliberate reversal of exaggeration and stereotypes. To understand the Mogul as a literal character, his words to be taken at their terms is to read the farce as a critique of the Company, and English sexual practices, but *not* as an attempt on Inchbald's part to rescue the Muslim despot from Western representations. If the Mogul critiques the wanton excesses of the English imperial project, he also freely admits to his own "tyranny" that in farcical comparison is benevolent. I cannot stress enough that Inchbald uses the Mogul in much the same way that the earlier texts I have mentioned tend to do. Of course, here, the despot is largely merciful and not needful of reform, but he is an unabashed conqueror of a foreign land, and the voracious consumer of the fictions that Europe provides.

¹⁴⁴ Betsy Bolton, "Farce, Romance, and Empire: Elizabeth Inchbald and Colonial Discourse," *The Eighteenth Century* v. 39, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 8.

¹⁴⁵ Manley, *Almyna*, 44.

When I spoke earlier of Inchbald escaping from the Orientalist discourse into another realm of the same, I can perhaps clarify this further by saying that though Inchbald most certainly satirizes the cruder, blatant, popular ideas about the Indic Orient, she does so at the expense of leading her own characters and text towards dead ends, from which she is unwilling to extricate them. The Mogul, then, though references the injustices of the colonizers, could just as well be gesturing to the efforts of Hastings and his officials towards the establishment of separate courts for Hindus. In the case that Inchbald is signaling an awareness of the scandals associated with these courts, many well-publicized in England, the Mogul's leniency appears as sign of defeat and concession to the fast-growing English empire. Either reading, the Mogul as aware of the colonial ravages, or the Mogul as ironically gesturing towards a system of colonial justice in the colony, nestles Inchbald's text further into the prescriptions of British Orientalism, rather than the farce becoming an instrument of disruption to the discourse.

Beginning with Schahriar, but hardly concluding with Schemzeddin or the Mogul, the despot is far from static, or one-dimensional, rather I would argue that his growing complexity is reflective of both England's national and imperial interests. If Schahriar is the largely silent, tropic king, then Schemzeddin and the Mogul are dynamic, their presence often larger than, or encompassing parts of the narrative itself. Yet, I would also maintain that the Muslim ruler is affixed to his role as an alien conqueror, and a shape-shifter precisely on account of his conflation with Islam. That is to say, because Islam is repeatedly viewed as either an imitation of Christianity, or revolution of sorts against a traditional, and ancient Arab religion, it is easily cast as an unfixed, or volatile construction. Its tenets, so rigorously classified by orientalists such as

d'Herbelot, are then recruited into the service of the Oriental tale, becoming illustrative of European excess and dissolution, as in the case of Nourjahad and Mahomet.

Though contemporary scholarship by Aravamudan, Ahmad, and Ballaster has done much to elucidate the multiplicities contained within the Oriental tale, it has failed to fully weigh the implications the staple figure of the despot begins to bear. Cruel and savage at the beginning like Schahriar, the ruler of the Muslim world acquires progressively more importance in the Oriental tale as England's imperial interests begin to color its relationship with the Ottoman and Mughal Empires. But while Schemzeddin, Mahomet, and the Mogul command the narrative in a way that Schahriar obviously does not, they are contained by narrative devices such as the omniscient narrator, fate, and in the case of the last, by subtle exclusion from the conditions of the genre. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, and with the rise of an English empire in India, the Oriental tale becomes increasingly affiliated, engrossed and influenced by Orientalist scholarship, carving an even deeper relationship with the practice of translation than before, as history and fiction enter into a concerted dialogue with each other.

CHAPTER II

THE TRANSLATED ORIENT: INDIAN INTERSECTIONS OF LITERARY AND SCHOLARLY ORIENTALISM IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Though the broader aim of this project is to trace the journey of the Oriental tale from the European republic of letters to the Orient itself, it remains equally important to note the eastward movement that takes place *within* this form. Towards the conclusion of the previous chapter, the English metropolis came into contact with the “Mogul,” or the Mughal ruler of India, arriving at this juncture only after traversing Ottoman, Arab, and Persian terrains. By the final decades of the eighteenth century, India, a growing colony under the East India Company, becomes an urgent concern in both the metropolitan imagination, and in a coalescing tradition of scholarly British Orientalism. In the years following the rise of British power in India, the Orientalist discourse too expanded into more just a series of tales and travellers’ accounts of the East. It would now consist of a set of texts, scholarly and fictional that though initially struggling to come to terms with the relationship between Orientalism and imperialism, ultimately form a cohesive, and interactive argument about the two major Oriental spaces, the Islamicate and the Indic. Representations and occasional reconciliations with the Muslim Orient enter into an overpowering dialogue with questions of civilization and nationhood that arise from England’s imperial policies in India under the governorship of Warren Hastings.

This moment in the English imagination, where Islamic empires come into contact with the idea of an ancient Indian civilization, is an extended one that results in the reorganization of the Orientalist tradition into a dynamic discourse in which Europe is both engaged and impacted. In India, of course, the empire structure is that of the Mughals who in English histories of India are

thought to be “Tartars.” Tartary itself since at least as far back as the *Arabian Nights*’ *Entertainments* is conflated with Muslim empires, though in William Jones’ discourse on the Tartars, it is initially described as containing, according to Pliny, an “innumerable number of nations.” The Mughals, as Jones sees them are Tartars whose religion and culture are “adopted” from the Arabs.¹⁴⁶ Over the course of this chapter, I wish to trace precisely the movement from the English interest in the figure of the Islamic despot to the expansion of this eighteenth-century Orientalism into a secularized knowledge system that is able to accommodate within its expansive form textual forms that range from the Oriental tale to the scholarly essay on aspects of a particular people or territory.

Utterly transformative in the history of the Oriental tale, William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) marks what I have earlier mentioned as a movement within this literary form that represents England’s own shifting imperial gaze. Staging the imaginary encounter of the Caliph of the Persian Empire with India, Beckford’s Oriental tale uses a truly dissolute despot to serve as a warning against excess and, quite literally, empire itself. Overpowering in its complexity, and teeming with characters that seem to represent various Orients, *Vathek*, the story and the caliph, subsume and transport their predecessors into the Indic realm. The relevance of this story at the moment in which it appears is striking for it stages what is really in that moment a comparatively declining British interest in the Islamic world that is overshadowed by a potentially more dangerous and consuming desire for India.

The predilection for the Islamicate Orient is absorbed in the rise of this new discourse that is centered on India and the idea of an Indic civilization, and founded on the basis of scholarly Orientalist texts such as Nathaniel Halhed’s *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1775), and William Jones’

¹⁴⁶ William Jones, “Discourse V,” from *Discourses delivered before the Asiatic Society and Miscellaneous Papers* (London: Charles Arnold, 1824), 60-62.

powerful “Third Discourse on the Asiatic Nations” (1786). Jones’ translation of the Sanskrit play *Śakuntalā* in 1789 becomes a cornerstone in both the development of this discourse and the emergence of the idea that an Indian literature, built on parallel lines to that of Europe could be restored through the effects of modern colonial culture. From metropolitan fictional forms debating the nature of Islamic governance to its role in establishing colonial rule in India, late eighteenth-century British Orientalism, in this evolved stage, is an accumulation of its own literary beginnings in the Oriental tale and populist Oriental plays. These literary types though concerned with how to rationally represent Islamicate Orient, nevertheless, are absorbed and redeployed by the reinvigorated Orientalist translations of “Indic” literary types, and scholarly works that are constitutive of philological Orientalism.

I want to argue in the first part of this chapter that Beckford’s *Vathek*, even as it incorporates and borrows from earlier Oriental tales, is a text that signals, quite literally, the decline of an Islamic empire through the figure of a voracious and self-interested caliph. But its confirmation of earlier tropes, and final condemnation of the ruler of the Muslim Orient stands also for an unequivocal statement on the intersections of British Orientalism and imperialism. In other words, I will show that this story illustrates precisely the tantamount natures of the Orientalist discourse and the imperial enterprise through the figure of the Muslim despot. Though Beckford’s story is an obvious critique at no point can we consider it as somehow contrary, or even resistant to the tradition of Orientalism within which it is so firmly entrenched. *Vathek*, then, prefigures the scholarly Orientalism of the colony as potentially dangerous to the metropolis, presenting, instead, a panoramic view of the Orient. Ultimately, the story acts as a warning, or a directive for empire rather than a verdict, or judgment.

The second part of this chapter will turn to the scholarly works and literary translations of Halhed and Jones, *A Code of Gentoo Laws*, and the *Discourses*, both events that travelled from the colony to the metropolis and back again. Despite the sympathetic, affiliative tenor that Raymond Schwab, Thomas Trautmann, and David Kopf have identified in Indic or Calcutta Orientalism, these scholars fail to read into the consequences that the “discovery” of an ancient “Indic” civilization on geographic, religious, linguistic, and racial lines held for cultural practices in the modern colony. The insertion, or revival of the tenets of what the Orientalists believe to be India’s original people, the Hindus, into the compilation, and interpretations of works considered symbolic of a history and culture proper to this population, then, signals the simultaneous theoretical exile of the Muslim from a now definitive Indian territory. In the final part of this chapter, I will turn to William Jones’ translation of the Sanskrit play, *Śakuntalā*, as an example of the utter transformation of the Oriental tale *within* the space that is the Indic Orient. Though the vogue for the Oriental tale would continue in England for much of the nineteenth century, distinguished by efforts as memorable as Richard Burton’s retranslation of the *Arabian Nights* (1885), literary production in the colony would take a somewhat different direction. If in the constructs of the metropolitan Oriental tale, the figure of the Muslim had been associated with the empire structure, and political despotism, the second phase of literary and scholarly Orientalism, located directly in the Oriental space, further displaces this figure by excluding the Muslim and Islam from the limits of civilization and nation.

I. Beckford’s *Vathek*: The unbroken caliph

Written by William Beckford, an author Donna Landry describes as “the kind of Englishman who wished he were something else,” *Vathek* was first composed in French, and then translated, initially against Beckford’s wishes into English by Samuel Henley in 1786. A

much grander endeavor than many of the Oriental tales that preceded it, *Vathek* seems to traverse one Oriental space after another, the objects of its narrative ranging from autobiography to the imperial project itself. Queer, feeling himself to be “tainted by a kind of creole status,” and “cultivating an Eastern estrangement from Englishness,” Beckford writes of a seemingly endless Orient whose only possible conclusion is in hell, or eternal condemnation.¹⁴⁷ The unusual note of hopelessness or inevitability that marks the story could, of course, be ascribed to its having been written during Beckford’s exile in France after accusations of sodomy. Though less of a specialist than Galland, Beckford too had good reading knowledge of Arabic and Persian, in addition to his skills as a musician and painter. *Vathek* would become the first example of the “Oriental gothic,” underscoring dangerous and insatiable sexualities, with a doubled threat of racial otherness, a technique next best embodied by Byron’s *The Giaour*, an extended poetic work that the poet claims was much “indebted” to Beckford’s “sublime tale.”¹⁴⁸

Landry provides one of the critical premises through which to formulate readings of *Vathek*, arguing that the story “dramatize(s) the tension between at least two sorts of English writing about the East: the ethnographically empirical, and the allegorically critical.”¹⁴⁹ She goes on to read the text as a parody of the influence of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* so apparent in Mary Wortley Montagu’s letters from the Ottoman court. At the same time, Landry argues that *Vathek* is deeply autobiographical, a reenactment of an Oriental masquerade of sorts that took place in Fonthill Manor, the Beckford property, during December of 1781. Aravamudan, not too far from Landry in his reading of the text, sees *Vathek* as an exemplary of “parodic Orientalism,”

¹⁴⁷ Donna Landry, “William Beckford’s *Vathek* and the Uses of Oriental Enactment,” in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 182.

¹⁴⁸ George Gordon Byron, *The Giaour: a fragment of a Turkish Tale in Three Oriental Tales*, ed. Alan Richardson, 226.

¹⁴⁹ Landry, William Beckford’s *Vathek*, 186.

as it “revels in favorite tropisms and unmasks them at the same time.”¹⁵⁰ Finally, James Watt has argued that the Oriental tale was a deliberate attempt on Beckford’s part “in defense of a particular understanding of the imaginative license afforded by, and ultimately the very “Easternness” of Oriental fiction.”¹⁵¹ Each of these three recent studies of this very complex and rather sprawling Oriental tale remark in some way or the other on its evasion and mockery of what they seem to see as a typical, or regular example of the form in question. What is not being said, of course, is that this elusion, or even inversion of earlier Oriental tropes is, in fact, a reorganization or resettling of these tropes for a new Oriental moment.

I want to read *Vathek* as moving between the earlier tropes that have by this time become definitive of the Islamicate Orient, and an emerging set concerns around India most visible in the rhetoric of public figures such as Edmund Burke. The caliph in *Vathek*, based on an entry on the ninth-century, dynastic Muslim ruler in d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque*, demands our critical attention not on account of fantastic qualities such as a “terrible eye,” but rather because of his itinerancy, his inescapable nomadism. The Islamicate Orient, in a tale that takes us from modern-day Iraq to an Oriental underworld, replete with a caliph and Mahomet at odds with one another, finally collapses. The cause of this collapse, or this destruction, the Giaour, an Indian, implies the rise of a rival Orientalist interest. This is the second level of reading, akin to Landry’s “allegorically critical”—India, or rather England’s unbridled desire for India, will lead to its moral, and economic destruction. Channeling Burke’s emphatic speeches from Fox’s East India Bill, and anticipating his crescendos from the Hastings trial, Beckford uses the Caliph Vathek to explicate the dangers of an obsessive Orientalism as it expands unbounded into empire.

¹⁵⁰ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 221.

¹⁵¹ James Watt, ““The peculiar character of the Arabian Tale:” William Beckford and the *Arabian Nights*,” in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, 211.

Vathek, properly titled an “Arabian Tale” (conte arabe) in the French by Beckford, and in Henley’s translation as the “History of the Caliph Vathek,” possibly in continuity with *Nourjahad*, ostensibly details the events in the life of the Caliph Vathek, and his final fall into the caverns of “Eblis,” or Satan. D’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque*, the historical version of the life events of this “Prince,” describes his particularly “terrible” and fatal eye, as well as the myths of his extravagant and excessive lifestyle. Vathek is the ninth caliph of the Abassid caliphs, the ruling dynasty that claimed to be the direct descendants of “Mohamet” (as narrated in the *Bibliothèque*), taking control from the “Omniades” by accusing them of “usurping” what was “heritage” to the former group.¹⁵² The name, of course, is a corruption of al-Vasiq, the ruling Abassid caliph from 842 to 847 A.D.

In Beckford’s narrative, the Caliph is the grandson of Haroun al-Raschid, a familiar character from the *Nights*. His role on earth as the ruler of the Islamic world, according to Samuel Henley’s extensive notes, “implies the three characters of Prophet, Priest, and King.”¹⁵³ Though his “figure was pleasing and majestic,” the Caliph would admonish and punish through his “terrible” eye, his glance so powerful that it could kill. “For fear, however, of depopulating his dominions,” Vathek remains the master of his anger, leaving his people intact in order that he could rule over them.¹⁵⁴ The Caliph, when we encounter him, has his abode in not one, but five palaces, each one dedicated to a different sensory pleasure. Aravamudan has read this initial description of Vathek as an ascent towards the “sublime” that he believes Beckford borrows from Burke.¹⁵⁵ I would argue, however, that what we encounter in both this introductory

¹⁵² Barthelemy d’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universale*, V. 3 (J. Neaulme & N. Van Daalen Librairies, 1777), 575

¹⁵³ William Beckford, *Vathek*, in *Three Oriental Tales*, ed. Alan Richardson, 159.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 80.

¹⁵⁵ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 214.

narrative, and in the character of the Caliph is almost a *pedesis* of sorts, an ungoverned, relentless movement that serves “the sensuality in which Vathek indulged.” From the triumvirate of his identity to his physical movements from palace to palace, and sense to sense, Vathek is roving, kinetic, and therefore, unfixeD.

His appetite for knowledge as voracious as his sensual cravings, Vathek “wished to know everything; even sciences that did not exist.” To that end, he decides to build a tower that literally seems to carry him beyond the earth, and into the “mysteries of astrology.” His desire to outdo his humanly limits, and his “irreligious conduct,” are “beheld with indignation” by the “great prophet Mahomet,” who decides that Vathek’s excess must become his undoing, going so far as to send his Genii to expedite the construction of the tower. The moral structure of Islam appears flimsy, exploitable at the whim of both prophet, and caliph. When Vathek finally climbs atop the tower, he beholds “men not larger than pismires; mountains, than shells; and cities, than beehives.” In his own estimation, “he was almost ready to behold himself,” interrupted only by the presence of the stars that shone above him.¹⁵⁶ Once more, the Caliph engages with a kind of physical and mental limitlessness that in earlier Oriental tales manifested itself in terms of endless fictions, or constant masquerade. More importantly, Vathek is *exterior* to all that he beholds; pismires, shells, beehives, all suggestive of defined, bounded communities *exclude* the caliph. Mahomet, on the other hand, is a largely passive figure, even though here he seems to play the roles of both deity and prophet. Inflicting judgment upon the Caliph, offering diversion rather than counsel, the prophet of Islam tempts and misleads.

Apparent from this foreboding beginning is a kind of rivalry or struggle between Mahomet and Vathek that will play out in the events of the story as the eventual, self-willed destruction of

¹⁵⁶ Beckford, *Vathek*, 82.

the Islamicate Orient. Though the Caliph, at this early point, is said to have a tendency towards excess, he is constantly willing himself towards control for fear of losing his empire and offending his subjects. I make this point to contend with earlier readings including Watt's that have argued for the Caliph's majesty to be read as bombast, or a playful response to the orientalizations of predecessor tales. Beckford's Caliph brings together the passions of Nourjahad, the insatiable appetite of Schahriar, and the potential for tyranny exercised by Voltaire's Mahomet. Mired in the idea of a history that differently from that of *Nourjahad* affiliates itself with actual personages from the *Bibliothèque*, *Vathek* behaves according to what Said has called an "affiliation" of one Orientalist work with others.¹⁵⁷ Aravamudan's argument that the "laughter, witticism, and irony" in Beckford's work are "oriented toward an outcome that is punitive and carceral," can point us in another direction: the simultaneous breakdown and restoration of despotic tropes in the Oriental tale.¹⁵⁸

The arrival of a visitor to the city of Samarah, "a man so abominably hideous," and of "so horrible a visage," that even the Caliph experiences a momentary "emotion of terror," is a test of Vathek's mettle, but also the introduction of a set of "curiosities," previously unknown in the Islamic Orient. Unspeaking at the time, the Giaour, literally implying "infidel" according to Henley, later identifies himself as "an Indian; but from a region of India, which is wholly unknown."¹⁵⁹ Among the goods brought to court by this strange figure are "sabres... enriched with gems that were hitherto unknown," that "emitted a dazzling radiance," but it was "the uncouth characters engraven on their sides" that arrested the Caliph's "attention" and imagination. Obsessed with this unknown language, Vathek "set himself in earnest to decipher

¹⁵⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 20

¹⁵⁸ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 222.

¹⁵⁹ Beckford, *Vathek*, 89.

the inscriptions,” but “not a letter of the whole was he able to ascertain.”¹⁶⁰ He calls upon the wisest of his subjects to solve the mystery, and though one old man is able to read the language, the changing nature of the meanings of the inscriptions angers Vathek. Returning to solitary study again, “constantly poring over them,” he was “overcome by a curiosity so ill” that he is forced to abandon all that he enjoys, “reduced” and weakened by his debilitating curiosity.¹⁶¹

This incident with the Giaour opens up the idea of India in the Oriental tale, no longer as just an extension of eastern Islamic empires as it seemed to be in the *Nights*, but as a distinct, and so far, undiscovered treasure trove of wealth and culture. More significantly, Vathek’s unsatisfied curiosity about the writing on the swords that changes daily, offering predictions about his future, signals the changed nature of British Orientalism itself. That is to say, what was previously an endeavor that was ultimately centered in the metropolis is now forced into unknown territories, and language is the first frontier. Published around the same year as Jones’ “Third Discourse” in which he announced his mastery of Sanskrit, *Vathek* shadows this changed tenor in British Orientalism itself, one that I too shall attempt to trace later on in this chapter. Vathek, struggling with this mysterious language, and its prophetic messages, then, *is* Jones, the Orientalist, as he struggles to overcome the devious pundits in his endeavor to decipher Sanskrit manuscripts. In reading the Caliph as signifying the Orientalist, I am suggesting that the systematic practice of acquiring knowledge about the other is interrogated for the boundaries it crosses, and for the limitless, but dangerous potential it contains. The clear distinction that must be made here, of course, is that Beckford does not seem to censure the Orientalist practice for its treatment of the other, but rather for the threat it poses to the self.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 85.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 88.

Vathek's "Orientalism" continues to spiral even after he has temporarily reconciled with the Giaour. Soon after the visitor has been wined and dined, Vathek becomes increasingly suspicious of him for he seems to outdo the Caliph through the enormity of his "performances."¹⁶² The Caliph and his attendants' attempts to eject this unwelcome guest from the court result in the famous kicking scene that eventually comes to involve the entire city, while the Indian, rolled in a ball, escapes them all. Thus begins Vathek's physical journey outward from his empire brought on, of course, by his pursuit of the Giaour. Camping at the hillside where he last saw the Indian, Vathek finally hears his voice, ordering him to "devote thyself to me...abjure Mahomet," in return for which he would "behold, in immense depositories, the treasures which the stars have promised" him. The disconnect of the Caliph to his dominions that I have mentioned earlier is emphasized through the absence, or the lack of interest both the Giaour and Vathek display in the city of Samarra itself as a possible entity that the latter would have to abandon. Vathek, "instigated by insatiable curiosity" does as the Giaour asks, but before he is allowed to access this wealth, he must appease the Indian's "thirst" by offering him the "blood of fifty children."¹⁶³ The Caliph's dominion resurfaces only in its commercial potential for a ruler who would trade its perpetuity in order to secure his own.

This "dreadful device was executed with so much dexterity," that of the boys Vathek decides to sacrifice, not one knows of the fate met by those who went before him.¹⁶⁴ One of the many instances of "blindness and omnivoyance," Aravamudan argues characterize the narrative, I want to suggest we read this first sacrifice of his people, in fact, the future generation of his empire, both as characteristic of the despot, but also as pointing to the excesses taking place in

¹⁶² Ibid. 90.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 94-5.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 98.

the Indian colony.¹⁶⁵ Though Aravamudan directs us to read Beckford in opposition to Burke, it would seem that on questions of Orientalism and imperialism, the former invokes both Burke's knowledge and his rhetoric on India. The most obvious borrowing, of course, is from Burke's lucid imagery of Company officers in India as "salesmen" of the Indian people, taken from his 1783 speech on Fox's Bill. Vathek, quite literally here, is also "selling" fifty sons from his empire in order to access the treasures and wealth promised to him by the Giaour. "The waste and havoc to the country" done by Company to India,¹⁶⁶ then, is akin to the "blood of the innocent" that Vathek uses to "gratify his accursed Giaour." "The louder lamentations" of the bereft parents recall Schahriar's bereaved city in the *Nights*.¹⁶⁷ Vathek's Orientalism has advanced unbeknownst into a different imperialism than what he previously practiced.

India also enters the narrative in moments of humorous relief. When Vathek, in his pursuit of the Giaour, finds himself in the domain of the Emir Fakreddin, he encounters "bramins, faquirs, and other enthusiasts, who had travelled from the heart of India," as he tries to distract himself one afternoon from "prayers and ablutions." Surrounded at the same time by a "multitude of calenders, santons, and derviches," who hoped that the Caliph would "convert them [the Indians] to the mussalman faith," Vathek is unable to quite understand the significance of these peculiar beings.¹⁶⁸ India sits adjacent to the Islamic world quite literally in this scene, but the ruler of the latter is now incapable of properly invading this elusive territory. Once again, the Caliph's conduct can be marked as the object of Burke's critique: "The multitude of men [in

¹⁶⁵ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 214.

¹⁶⁶ Edmund Burke, "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," 1st December, 1783 (London: J Dodsley, 1787), 18.

¹⁶⁷ Beckford, *Vathek*, 98.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 119-20.

India] does not consist of a barbarous and savage populace; much less of gangs of savages...”¹⁶⁹ But Vathek, far from making his interaction with the Indians a useful one, “treated them like buffoons.” Not heeding Bababalouk’s advice to be “cautious of this odd assembly,” Vathek continues his consorting, until the company becomes nothing more than “objects of pity... the blind, the purblind, smarts without noses, damsels without ears.”¹⁷⁰ As so often in the story, an event that provides comic relief breaks down into a crippling obsolescence, reflective, on the one hand, of the state of the Islamicate Orient, and prophetic, on the other, of the Burkean picture of Britain’s treatment of the Indian colony.

Of the two major female characters in the story, Vathek’s mother, Carathis, is a black-magic practicing Greek, whereas Nouronihar, the daughter of the Emir, is likened to “one of those beautiful butterflies of Cachemire.”¹⁷¹ Though Carathis is cast largely as a schemer with access to the dark arts that all “good Mussulmans hold in such thorough abhorrence,” her son considers her to be a “person of superior genius.”¹⁷² Her ultimate punishment in the underworld on account of her “knowledge” and her “crimes” is a distinct function from that meted out to Vathek and Nouronihar.¹⁷³ It is Nouronihar, in other words, who from this very early description is continuously associated with India, and who abandons her effeminate, poetic, fiancé, Gulchenrouz, to “follow” the Caliph to the Giaour, or Eblis’ domain in the underworld. Gulchenrouz, whose emasculated body Watt reminds us is yet another instance of Beckford’s propensity for the homoerotic, is child-like, yet “the verses he composed inspired that unresisting

¹⁶⁹ Burke, “Speech on Fox’s East India Bill,” 13.

¹⁷⁰ Beckford, *Vathek*, 120.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 122.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 85.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 157.

languor” that William Jones had earlier spoken of as so inherent to the Arab people.¹⁷⁴ Nouronihar, described by Carathis as “a girl, both of courage and science,” then, abandons this weak Oriental, “brought up too much on milk and sugar,” for the “amorous monarch.”¹⁷⁵

Nouronihar, more so than any other figure in the narrative, becomes Vathek’s ally in his quest for the Giaour and the treasures of the underworld. She joins him in his mockery of the santons in the valley of Rocnabad, who while “they were advancing in solemn procession” are injured by the Caliph’s entourages of horses, and guards. Vathek, “suspecting” that the “oratories” of the santons “might be deemed, by the Giaour, an habitation, commanded his pioneers to level them all.”¹⁷⁶ A little later, Vathek and Nouronihar are joined by the “sheiks, cadis, and imams of Shiraz,” some of whom “scrupled not to speak their opinion” to Vathek. Once again, the Caliph punishes them, this time by tying these dignitaries backwards on their horses, and watching them suffer as their vehicles are “plunging, kicking, and running foul of one another, in the most ludicrous manner imaginable.” Bereft of any human feeling it seems, “Nouronihar and the Caliph mutually contended who should most enjoy so degrading a sight.”¹⁷⁷ Burke would not for another two or three years wax sympathetic about the cruelties done to the Indian populace by the British—“they began by winding cords around the fingers of the unhappy freeholders...then they hammered wedges between them.”¹⁷⁸ Yet, there remains a close pattern of narrative perpetuation between Burke and Beckford, a mutual productivity around the question of India. Here, in *Vathek*, as the Caliph and Nouronihar inflict their cruel urges upon these fixtures of the Islamic world, they are almost at the brink of the underworld, the metaphoric India of the Giaour.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 123.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 141.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 146.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 147.

¹⁷⁸ Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, v. 10 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1871), 85.

Just as they are about to cross over from one physical and religious realm into the other, however, the Genii turn once again to Mahomet asking him to “stretch forth thy propitious arms, towards thy viceregent.” Mahomet, “with an air of indignation,” allows for the Genii to go forth, reminding him, however, that Vathek “hath too well deserved to be resigned to himself.” Disguised as a shepherd, clearly of a “superior nature,” a concerned Genius approaches Vathek, warning the “deluded Prince” to “abandon thy atrocious purpose: give back Nouronihar to her father... destroy thy tower... drive Carathis from thy councils... be just to thy subjects...”¹⁷⁹ But Vathek refuses this last opportunity for return, or for what is a limited, contained, and known empire, in order for the undiscovered promised to him by the Giaour. Mahomet, as I have suggested before, at the moment before the Islamicate Orient is about to collapse, is largely disengaged, cutting the figure of a weak prophet and even weaker deity since he seems to play the role of both in Beckford’s imagination. Though the possibility of return is offered by the Genius, there is no origin. That is to say, Vathek, already alien to his own empire, displaced in the moment, and travelling towards eternal damnation really has nowhere that he belongs—the unwelcoming, self-absorbed Mahomet hardly capable of offering haven.

The final scene of the story, of course, has been read over and over again for its infernal references, Dante’s circles of hell principal among them. Flanked by a “leopard,” near which “characters like those on the sabres of the Giaour” are visible, the entrance to the underworld eventually leads to a tabernacle “hung with the skins of leopards.”¹⁸⁰ Exaggerated in its exoticism that is replete with Judaic prophets, pre-Adamite kings, monsters from the *Bibliothèque*, the empire of Eblis, or India, as Europe imagines it, is pleasurable, but ultimately the “abode of vengeance and despair.” Once Vathek and Nouronihar “lost the most precious gift

¹⁷⁹ Beckford, *Vathek*, 147-8.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 150.

of Heaven: hope,” the narrative voice assumes control, reminding readers that this was the inevitable “punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds. “Blind curiosity,” and to “transgress those bounds... prescribed to human knowledge,” then, can only end in the worst of punishments.¹⁸¹ Vathek does become the master of the wealth and power he desired so badly, but only for a few moments, the price of which, of course, is his eternal punishment. In other words, unchecked curiosity, his Orientalism as I have been calling it, spirals into an imperialistic urge that goes beyond his capabilities, beyond the realm over which he is able to exercise control.

Before concluding this section on Beckford, I want to return to Burke, a figure whose rhetoric around India, and other English colonies seeps through much of the narrative in this Oriental tale. Burke’s most celebrated shocking speeches on conditions in India were, of course, part of his prosecutorial appearances in the trial of Warren Hastings and that I have earlier mentioned seem themselves to borrow from Beckford. Moving away from Aravamudan’s reading of this interaction, or at the very least, connection, between Burke and Beckford, I want to turn briefly to Sara Suleri’s pioneering reading of Burke’s Indian rhetoric. “Burke’s discourse is preternaturally aware of how many losses are enfolded within the British acquisition of India,” Suleri argues. “His obsession with loss,” she goes on to remark, “initiates a novel vocabulary” around India and the “anxieties of empire.”¹⁸² More recently, Sunil Agnani, in a brilliant reflection on Burke’s linked fears of Jacobinism and “Indianism,” clarifies that Burke uses the latter term to “describe the principle whereby men of talent, but no property, gain sudden wealth in the colonies and then return home to subvert parliamentary representation and processes.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 158.

¹⁸² Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 26.

¹⁸³ Sunil Agnani, “Jacobinism in India, Indianism in English Parliament: Fearing the Enlightenment and Colonial Modernity with Edmund Burke,” *Cultural Critique* 68, no. 1 (2008): 150.

Beckford too can be read through Suleri and Agnani: *Vathek*, on the one hand, exemplifies so literally, the losses of empire. On the other hand, the Oriental despot, exaggerated and flamboyant, is also a warning on the dangers of the nabobs and other newly made creoles slowly eroding the ethics of governance in England itself.

My reading of Beckford's comparatively late, eighteenth-century Oriental tale, then, separates it from earlier works precisely on account of the level of historical and political engagement undertaken over the course of its dense narrative. If predecessors such as the *Nights*, *Nourjahad*, and *A Mogul Tale*, engage with metropolitan culture through the Orientalist discourse and its types, *Vathek* is a dynamic narrative of a precise moment in the history of England's imperial expansion. What I have steadfastly emphasized throughout this and earlier readings is that we cannot rehabilitate or redeem Oriental tales such as these merely because we are able to detect their allegorical engagement with national culture. *Vathek*, despite illustrating the problematic intersections of British Orientalism and imperialism, ultimately does not just utilize Orientalist tropes, but in fact, actively produces them. Beckford's Oriental tale is the perfect segue between the fictional domain and the proliferating scholarship that accompanies the colonization of India. In the sections that follow, I will trace precisely this movement of the Orientalist discourse from these translated and pseudo Oriental fictions into the scholarly domain, from the Islamic world into the Indian Orient.

II. Nathaniel Halhed's *A Code of Gentoo Laws*: Between fact and fiction

In the two or so decades prior to the publication of *Vathek*, India, as the topic of histories and fictions, had become increasingly prominent in Georgian England. Unlike in the case of the Oriental tale, a good number of these narratives about India were spurred by an English presence

in the territory itself, the fortunes of the East India Company directly affecting economic, political, and social life in England. My interest in this section, specifically, is in the beginnings of what becomes an extended and comprehensive scholarly and fictional discourse around India, compelled by England's imperial interests. Calcutta Orientalism, as it comes to be known, is informed, nevertheless, by the longer Western fascination with the Islamicate Orient, the latter a set of references and tropes, both fictional and scholarly that would now be absorbed and redeployed in the production of a narrative around India. Covering in its sweeping tracts and essays the cultural and linguistic history of India since antiquity, this new discourse was dominated largely by philologist scholars such as William Jones, Henry Colebrooke, and Alexander Hamilton. Jones' work, in particular, would electrify Europe, spurring an interest in the idea of a classical Indian civilization as regenerative and vital for continued Western progress. Before I turn to the utter cultural transformation enacted by William Jones, I will examine Nathaniel Halhed's *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1775), one of the earliest official legal texts produced by the Calcutta Orientalists. Halhed's work as a "scholarly translator" of this Hindu lawbook must be seen as both a reference to the success of the Oriental tale, as well as a marker of the movement *in Calcutta Orientalism* away from metropolitan Orientalist patterns that would now *encompass*, rather than be constituted by literary genres such as the Oriental tale.

Prior to exploring the work of Halhed and Jones, it is essential, of course, to understand Calcutta, and Company rule under the governorship of Warren Hastings between the years 1772 and 1785, as a period of not just territorial gain, but also as one of the accumulation and organization of what can loosely be described as local knowledge systems into the beginnings of modern north Indian culture. The Clive years of British rule in India, the better known of which began in 1757 with the Company victory against the Nawab of Bengal, and waned around 1770,

were dominated by English East India Company's desire for an unchallenged monopoly in Bengal. This rivalry for colonies played out in the form of an extended series of small battles with the rival French trading company, as well as battles with local Indian princes and landlords. The best-known scholarly work to emerge during this period was Alexander Dow's *The History of Hindostan* (1768), a translation from a sixteenth-century Persian work by a historian of Ibrahim Shah's court, Ferishta. Dow introduced the work as deceptively titled, describing it as an account of "the Mohammedan empire in India." "We must not, therefore" he warns his readers, "with Ferishta, consider the Hindoos destitute of genuine domestic annals, or that those voluminous records they possess are mere legends framed by the Brahmins."¹⁸⁴ Continuing on this vein for much of his introduction, Dow positions his translation of the work as a tainted narrative that could only be corrected once the English became "better acquainted" with the "records" of the Brahmins.¹⁸⁵

It would be with the establishment of Hastings as the first Governor-General of the Company's Indian holdings that the first stirrings of a colonial culture would be felt. Wedded to the possibilities promised in the discipline of Orientalism, Hastings distinguished himself from Clive's hawkish stance by policies that advocated the British administering of an indigenous legal system, and by patronizing Orientalist scholarship in the "Indic" culture that he believed had been lost after years of Muslim rule. Though Hastings' could not stay in India long enough to witness the heights achieved by the philological researches of Orientalists such as William Jones, he did survive long enough to see the copious English renderings of Persian translations of Sanskrit legal texts become established legal sources in Company-run courts. In David Kopf's estimation, Hastings' "convictions became the credo of the Orientalist movement: to rule

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan*, v.1 (London: J. Walker, 1812), v.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* vi.

effectively, one must love India; to love India, one must communicate with her people; and to communicate with her people, one must learn her languages,” thus spurring the diverse, linguistic efforts of several prominent Company officials including Halhed, Jones, William Carey, and Henry Colebrooke, as well as inspiring Phebe Gibbes’ *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789).¹⁸⁶

Yet, what Kopf, Raymond Schwab and contemporary like-minded historians including Rosanne Rocher, and Thomas Trautmann repeatedly disregard is the simple core of this Orientalist maxim: language was now an acquisition:

“Useful [...] in forming the moral character and habits of the service... Every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity: in the specific instance which I have stated, it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence.”¹⁸⁷

Orientalism, as Hastings’ words make it appear here, is driven primarily by England’s needs as the ruling force in India, but also by Europe’s humanistic urge to learn, and through this learning, the potential to alter, or somehow dilute the cruelties of colonial conquest through the birth of a new philological culture. Though the Hastings’ years were deeply productive for this innovative phase of British Orientalism, the intellectual curiosity that seems to drive it is always secondary to the England’s mercantile and governing interests in India. Hasting’s own words are excerpted

¹⁸⁶ Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 21.

¹⁸⁷ Warren Hastings, “Letter to Nathaniel Smith,” 4th October, 1784 in *The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Arjun and Kreeshna* (Chicago: Religo-Philosophical Publishing House, 1871), 14.

from his prefatory remarks to Charles Wilkinson's 1784 translation of the *Bhagvat Gita*, one of several texts that witness Calcutta Orientalism's efforts at producing the Orientalist discourse from *within* the Oriental space, rather than at a distance from it. The relationship of this dynamic, deeply invasive Orientalist strain to translation becomes a critical, exacting one—no longer are the adaptive, interpretive translations that applied to the Oriental tale and other fictional forms sufficient. Calcutta Orientalism, within less than a decade of Halhed's *Code of Gentoo Laws*, transforms translation into a practice that is simultaneously literary and scientific, and the translator into a figure holding the rebirth of a lost culture in his work.

A poet and translator from the classics, during his time at Oxford, Nathaniel Halhed was sent to India to serve as a writer in the Company after a career in England began looking impossible. In Rosane Rocher's detailed, but somewhat romantic biography of Halhed, *Poetry, Orientalism and the Millenium: the Checkered Life of Nathaniel Halhed*, her subject is painted as a favorite of Warren Hastings, who entrusted him with the blind translation of the *Code of Gentoo Laws*. The first stage of the translation from Sanskrit into Persian would be undertaken by a group of trusted Brahmins, and the second phase, from Persian into English, would be completed by Halhed. Rocher situates her own work as examining "productions of an Orientalist which not of a scholarly nature," describing Halhed as a "man at once attracted and repelled, loving and lordly, and forever at odds with Britain as well as India."¹⁸⁸

The most consistent picture of Halhed, as can be understood from Rocher, and more recently, in Michael Franklin's work, is of a youthful Orientalist, overwhelmed as much by the idea of rediscovering a lost Indian culture as by Warren Hastings himself. Disenchanted with

¹⁸⁸ Rosane Rocher, "Alien and empathetic: the poems of N. B. Halhed," in *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia before dominion*, eds. Blair Kling, and M. N. Pearson (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 55.

European religion and society as a young man, Halhed would throughout his life remain fascinated with Hinduism, as it first emerged in the *Code* and as it developed in later Orientalist texts including Jones' essays, and Wilkins' translation of the *Geeta*. My interest in the "Translator's Preface" to *A Code of Gentoo Laws* is in the liminal place it occupies in the movement from literary translations of the Oriental tale in the metropolis, to the later scholarly, almost empirical method that Jones' forces Orientalist translation to adopt. Halhed's approach to the translated text, though obviously fettered by his own ignorance of Sanskrit, marks this collection of now imperially authorized Hindu laws as simultaneously "literary," bearing an affinity with certain European fictions, and classical, or bearing witness to an Indian antiquity that in recent years had been disrupted by Muslim conquest. I disagree strongly here with Michael Dodson, who has in his article "Translating Science, Translating Empire," passively spoken of the Calcutta Orientalists as having "from very early on, *recognized* that Indians believed Sanskrit to be *deva-bhasha*—the eternal and uncreated speech, or language of the gods" (italics mine).¹⁸⁹ I will show, beginning from Halhed's *Code of Gentoo Laws*, and moving on to Jones' *Discourses* that this "recognition," was in itself constructed within scholarly Orientalist translations of Sanskrit texts, rather than already vested within this revived language.

The motivations behind the translation that became the *Code* are, of course, couched in the administrative and commercial interests of the Company. While Rocher, Kopf, and Trautmann¹⁹⁰ have at several instances intimated the suggestion that Hastings and Company officers such as

¹⁸⁹ Michael Dodson, "Translating Science, Translating Empire: The Power of Language in Colonial North India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v.47 no. 4 (October 2005): 813.

¹⁹⁰ See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), and Thomas Trautman, *Language and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Halhed had “laudable intentions” in India, warding off both the “threat of Anglicization”¹⁹¹ from the British Parliament, and the irrecoverable decay of “Hindu” civilization in India, to treat forceful use of the sacred in the Orientalist networks of language and law as an instance of “ambiguities and changing perceptions” is to deny the imperial nature of the Bengal Presidency.¹⁹² Kapil Raj in a more balanced mode has argued that the religious inflection to Sanskrit is the work of both the Orientalists and intermediary types such as “the interpreter-translator, the merchant-banker, the comprador or procurer, the legal representative or attorney, and knowledge broker.”¹⁹³ It is, of course, undeniable that a document such as the *Code* could not have been compiled without the Company’s employing of the services of Brahmin “professors” who “still speak the original language” and are the recipients of “great endowments and benefactions” from the native population who “pay them... a degree of personal respect little short of idolatry.”¹⁹⁴ Yet, in this blind translation from the Persian, what we encounter on the part of the translator is a gaze that turns towards Sanskrit, and a means of comparison that bypasses the local, traversing directly to Europe and its cultural canons.

Prompted by Hastings’ belief that the “Hindoos, the original inhabitants of Hindostan... have been in possession of laws, which have continued unchanged from the remotest antiquity,” the *Code* was meant to finally provide the Hindus of India relief from the “bigotry of the

¹⁹¹ Rosane Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry and the Millenium: The Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed 1751-1830* (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 56.

¹⁹² Rosane Rocher, “British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialects of Knowledge and Government” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, eds. Carol Appudurai Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 216.

¹⁹³ Kapil Raj, “Mapping Knowledge Go-betweens in Calcutta, 1770-1820,” in *The Brokered World: Go Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* eds. Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009), 122.

¹⁹⁴ Nathaniel Halhed, “Translator’s Preface” to *A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordinations of the Pundits* (London, 1775), x.

Mohamedan government.”¹⁹⁵ Though meant to serve as a legal guide for the Company administration in Bengal, the *Code* was also circulated in England and received heavy criticism for Halhed’s alleged sympathies with the laws contained in the digest, many of which were deemed “fictions,” or questioned as to the authenticity of their ancient origins.¹⁹⁶ The “Translator’s Preface,” slated along with the “barbaric” laws presented in body of the *Code*, covers a range of topics, beginning with the need for a lawbook for the Hindoos, frequently delving into comparisons of the Brahmin doctrine with both Judeo-Christian histories and European literary texts, and concluding with a summation of the teachings that follow.

The first, Halhed’s frequent affiliative comparison of the Brahminical code with a Judeo-Christian past, despite its religious overtones, is illustrative of what Said has called a “reconstructed religious impulse,” not secular in nature, but perhaps *secularizing* when compared to the older Orientalist order.¹⁹⁷ The second point of interest in the “Preface” is Halhed’s reference to a European tradition of writing (I refrain from using the term “literature” here), as a means to understanding the Hindu culture encountered in the poetics and histories implicitly present in the *Code*. Overlooked, perhaps because it was overwritten by future Sanskrit translations, the “Preface” of the *Code of Gentoo Laws* lays the foundations for the rigid cultural formations codified by the Calcutta Orientalists over the course of the nineteenth century. Not properly rational, and not rigidly embedded in a Christian superiority either, Halhed’s extended

¹⁹⁵ Warren Hastings, “Letter to Lord Mansfield,” 21st March, 1774 in *The Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honorable Warren Hastings*, v.1, ed. G. R. Gleig (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), 400.

¹⁹⁶ George Costard, *A Letter to Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, containing some remarks to his Preface to the Code of Gentoo Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1778), 2. Other criticisms of Halhed’s translation can be found in “Remarks on the new Code of Gentoo Laws,” in the 86th volume of the *Gentlemen’s Magazine* (1777) by Sylvanus Urban. For a detailed account of Halhed’s opponents and critics, see Thomas Trautman’s *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 121.

essay explicating on the laws contained in the translation, affixes the Hindu religion to European culture, while placing the Islamicate Orient outside of this ordered affiliation.

Premised on the argument that the Christian West was not “justified in the grounding the standard and examination of the Hindoo religion upon the known and infallible truth of our own; because opposite party...would insist upon an equal right on their side to suppose the veracity of their own scriptures incontrovertible,” the “Preface” attracted the ire of various parties for its supposed sympathies with the “Gentooes.”¹⁹⁸ Halhed’s initial plea to take the “faith of a Gentoo” as “implicit” with that of a Christian spirals into a contentious religious chronology when he suggests that the Brahminic teachings lay “claim to an antiquity infinitely more remote than is authorised by the belief of the rest of mankind.”¹⁹⁹ Allowing for the Brahminic timelines to “tally very exactly with those mentioned by Moses,” Halhed weaves a common past for the Hindus and the Jews, thus giving this particular region of the larger Orient a place in pre-Christian history. Halhed would be the first, and possibly the last of the pioneering Calcutta Orientalists, to so publicly affiliate the Indic Orient with Europe’s own religious premise. Later a follower of the Anglo-Israelite Richard Brothers, and millenarianist himself, Halhed’s intervention can be understood as an Enlightenment tenet that subsequently issues Orientalism’s own release from a Judeo-Christian world.

The singular importance of these introductory remarks in the longer trajectory of British Orientalism is in the terms they set up for the interpretation and implementation of the translations and scholarly texts that emerge in the next two decades or so. India or “Hindustan,” is divided in terms of religious and chronological supremacies, Islam supposedly destroying the native Hinduism via the artificially established Mughal order. Overtly stained with the question

¹⁹⁸ Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws*, xiii.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* xxxvii.

of religion, Halhed's introduction simultaneously puts into a place a volatile set of markers for India that freed from Christian morality redefine the perception of religion for the Calcutta Orientalists. Siraj Ahmad speaks of the *Code* as one of the earliest efforts on Hastings' part to "avoid despotism" by turning to precisely the same narrative that Voltaire, and later Jones would use to resist European religious hegemonies.²⁰⁰ In other words, Halhed's conjoining of an Indic history with a European Judeo-Christian narrative, though labeled blasphemous by his detractors, is made possible because of a Western release from religion. Yet Ahmad omits to note that this results in a redeployment of these new narratives of religion within the colony both in the tradition of Calcutta Orientalism that follows, and in the cultural practices of the objects themselves. Islam—inorganic and obstructive—by this method, is excluded from the makeshift triad, and marked in terms of its foreignness to the territory in question. Sanskrit viewed by Halhed as a "copious and nervous" language,²⁰¹ had already, in the "Translator's Preface," become colored with sacred markings, the script used in "Upper Hindostan" described as "the same original letter that was first delivered to the people by Brihma."²⁰²

For the full extent of the Brahminic context, however, Halhed turns to what though not yet formally deemed "literature," collectively, nevertheless, represents a kind of progressive Western classicism. By evoking Cervantes, Milton, and Homer to illustrate the intricacies of the *Code*, Halhed implies that the religious affinity between Western Europe and India extends to the cultural sphere as well. But that is not all—in extending the connection between Occident and Orient, Halhed fuses the distinctions between European culture, and a newly minted Indian or generally Oriental religious system. "The madness so inimitably delineated in the hero of

²⁰⁰ Ahmad, *The Stillbirth of Capital* (Kindle Location 3340).

²⁰¹ Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws*, xxxvii.

²⁰² *Ibid.* xxiii.

Cervantes,” for example, is akin to the Brahminic concept of “folly,” while the canon of Milton’s Satan closely resembles the “Seth-Agnee” of the Puranas.²⁰³ The descriptions of battles that are included in the *Code* are “counterparts” to those found in the Homeric epics. Familiarized for his European readers, this work, nevertheless, is “less studious of elegance than of accuracy.” Not wanting to “mislead” the reader by a “vague and devious paraphrase,” Halhed insists his translation is “in every part the immediate product of the Bramins.”²⁰⁴ An Oriental facticity, or system of belief, in the very least, then, is informed by Western fictions.

Though Halhed’s remarks remain preliminary to those of Jones, Wilkins, and Hamilton at the heyday of Calcutta Orientalism in the decades to follow, they establish a foundation atop which future scholarly contemplations on Hinduism will be constructed. In other words, what we encounter in Halhed’s “Preface” is an understanding or an insight into what Orientalism assumes to be a religious structure that is achieved through the literary aestheticism of the hegemonizing culture. It is worth noting, of course, that both *Don Quixote* and *Paradise Lost*, make extensive use of the Orient—in the first, of course, Cervantes ascribes the story of Don Quixote to an Arab by the name of Cite Hamet Benegali who like his race is “unreliable,” while in the second, Satan is famously referred to as “the Great Sultan.” The Oriental types, or at least tropes that informed the eighteenth-century Oriental tale, reappear in Halhed’s argument, leaving *A Code of Gentoo Laws* straddling the realms of both fiction and scholarly enquiry.

By bringing up texts such as *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, and even the Homeric epics to elucidate the mysteries of the Brahminic doctrine, Halhed does not merely mark an affinity between the Hindu religion and classic European texts, but rather suggests that religion can, in fact, be synonymous, or in the very least, be represented within the literary text. My point here is

²⁰³ Ibid. l.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. xi.

rather different from those made by contemporary scholars of religion such as Brian Pennington who assert that the emergence of Hinduism as a “world religion, comparable to “great” traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam” was an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century development aided, not exclusively though, by the efforts of colonial agents such as “Orientalists, missionaries, and British administrators.”²⁰⁵ The unfolding of Hinduism as an organized religion, and Sanskrit as a religious language as a direct effect of Calcutta Orientalism first becomes apparent in Halhed’s translation where even though the Orientalist comes into direct contact with Brahmin pundits, interpretation and understanding are still outsourced to European culture. Hindu timelines are compared with Judeo-Christian histories, while mythologies, supposedly religious, can only be comprehended if likened to canonical texts from the Western canon.

III. Sanskrit and suspicion: William Jones and the translation of an Indian civilization

William Jones, one of the most prolific, and influential Orientalists of the modern period, for much of the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries has been described as the savior of Indian culture, and the “father of modern linguistics,” his best known achievements being the mastery of Sanskrit and the subsequent theorization of the “Indo-European” linguistic family. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes Jones’ desire as an Orientalist to “to rule, and to learn, then compare Orient with Occident.”²⁰⁶ His most recent biographer, Michael J. Franklin though unabashedly admiring does ironically speak of his subject as a “plunder[er]” of Indian knowledge, his strategies as an Orientalist doing much to soften the colonial crimes of the Clive

²⁰⁵ Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

²⁰⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 78.

era, and the mishaps of that of Hastings.²⁰⁷ Prior to his arrival in India, Jones studied the classics at Oxford, dabbling in poetic translations, even composing verses of his own that his other, particularly ardent biographer Garland Canon claims, were “on a par with Dryden and Pope.”²⁰⁸

Though skilled in Latin and Greek, Jones’ eventually turned towards Hebrew, and Arabic, and finally to Persian, each of these “Eastern” languages ostensibly offering a poetic wealth that he found lacking in their European counterparts. Nevertheless, Persian and Arabic, given the Company’s growing investments in India also made for a lucrative career in translation and instruction, and Jones, cultivated both, specially the former, even producing a Persian grammatical guide in 1771. In a little over a decade, he would arrive in India to serve as a junior judge, and himself, undergo a rebirth of sorts, his previous interests utterly overwhelmed by the challenges of law and language in the colony. In my study of this wide-ranging character, I will focus on his role as a translator and to a lesser extent, a linguist, and argue that Orientalist translation as a practice is transformed from a loose, adaptive form, largely popularized by its fictional and poetic works, into a masterful and exacting practice, whose apex, or “sublime” moment is marked by Jones’ 1789 translation of the Sanskrit play, *Śakuntalā*, into English. I will conclude my study of Jones with a reading of *Śakuntalā* in which I intend to argue that the play itself can be read as a metaphor for the altered relationship Europe is now seen as having with the rediscovered “Indic Orient.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Michael J. Franklin, “*Orientalist Jones:*” *Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746-1794*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) (Kindle Location 4088).

²⁰⁸ Garland Canon, “Sir William Jones’ Persian Linguistics” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 78, no. 4, (1958): 263.

²⁰⁹ I am not employing the term “Indic Orient,” in the same way as it has been employed by Raymond Schwab, and David Kopf, rather I use it to suggest the constructed nature of the Indian territory as the site of an ancient civilization that becomes the focus of an Orientalist revival.

If in the later part of his career, Jones was wrestling with Brahmins for a control of Sanskrit, in his early days as a translator from Persian and Arabic, he would position himself as a rival to what he suggests is an inauthentic tradition of French literary Orientalism. In the “Preface” to his *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from Asiatick Languages* (1772), Jones opens by clearing “this publication from the slightest suspicion of imposture,” and comparison with the “many productions, invented in France [that] have been offered to the publick as genuine translations from the languages of Asia.”²¹⁰ The poems themselves are hardly originals, Jones describing “Solimah: an Arabian eclogue,” that is “not a regular translation from the Arabick language,” but a composition in which “most of the figures, sentiments, and descriptions” are provided by the “poets of Arabia.” Likewise the “hint” of the next poem, “The Palace of Fortune,” was taken from “an Indian tale... but I have added several descriptions... have given a different moral to the whole piece, and have made some other alterations to it... to compare it with the story of Roshana in the second volume of the tales of Inatulla.”²¹¹ An exoticized Eastern geography—“camels bounded,” “swift ostrich,” “soft tents,”—shifts in and out of an English bucolic—“life-breathing glades,” “meadows ever green,” “lily, pink, and rose,” allowing these poems to perform the functions of “Oriental” genres at the time, transport the reader while being simultaneously familiar.²¹²

Two things are important to note here, the first, that these poems clearly are the products of an Orientalist as yet at a distance from the colony, uninvolved to a large extent with the imperial process, for whom the Orient remains a somewhat fantastic, pliable, and fluid geographical space, albeit with specific descriptive markers. Secondly, though it was not unusual for writers of

²¹⁰ William Jones, preface to *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from Asiatick Languages* (London: W. Bwyer and Nichols, 1772), i.

²¹¹ Jones, *Poems*, viii.

²¹² *Ibid.* 8-10.

Oriental fictions or related genres to assert the authenticity of the original, Jones' reference to George Psalmanazar, the French literary imposter, and "his pretended language of Formosa," in this preface, places great emphasis on the former's desire to be treated as a poet and scholar of an authenticated Orient, rather than as a mere writer of amusing, Oriental fictions.

Lasting and significantly received, compared to these early efforts, is what has become known as Jones' theory of the origins and language of poetry, expressed in stages in two essays that follow his poems. I find the first essay, "On the Poetry of Eastern Nations," significant for its treatment of Islam, and the Quran, as poetic movements, an argument that Jones' later, deeply influenced by Voltaire, would develop using a more political line of thought. "It is not sufficient that a nation have a genius for poetry, unless they have the advantage of a rich and beautiful language, that their expressions be worthy of their sentiments," Jones argues in this essay,²¹³ the "Arabians," possessing both, are thus, the exemplar, and Arabic poetry, as evidenced by "Solimah," a distinct reflection of their nature. In this essay, Islam, as a religion, is subsumed by the grander poetic tradition of the country for "the fondness of the Arabs for poetry and the respect which they show to the poets would scarcely be believed." "Mahomed" is a poet, Jones suggests, composing chapters of the "Alcoran" to win converts among this lyrical nation; the prophet's "divine" poem trumps the merely "sublime" poetry of his rivals, and thus founds a religion in Arabia.²¹⁴ Islam is localized here as a kind of native or uniquely Arab, poetic, almost literary, movement, rather than as a grander socio-political moment in the histories of both east and west. Restricting his argument largely to the "Islamicate" Orient, Jones is able to explain the spread of Islam as a poetic, rather than religious phenomenon.

²¹³ Jones, "On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations," in *Poems*, 172.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* 176.

This elaboration of Islam, and Mohammad, as I read it, is hardly continuous with the vitriol of poets such as Dante and John Donne, but in fact, summons what Said has called the “release” of “the Orient in general, and Islam in particular, from the narrow religious scrutiny from which it had hitherto been examined (and judged) by the Christian West.”²¹⁵ The effect of this rationalist release, however, is an extension of Europe itself, a reuniting of contemporary Europe with its primitive self. By emasculating Islam into little more than the exchange of verses amongst a people who are “extremely addicted to the softer passions,” Jones essentially relocates the religion, for the time being at least, in Arabic language and poetry, ascribing its spread into Asia, and North Africa to literary imitation, and omitting, curiously enough, much of the conventional Orientalist narrative on Islamic conquest.²¹⁶

Rather than reading the second of Jones’ essays as conceptually divorced from the first, I would argue that the implicit connection between the two *is*, in fact, Jones’ complete theory on poetry: lyric poetry, far from imitative as Aristotle had asserted, is an original expression that arrives from the “deepest recesses” of the human mind; the quality of the lyric relies on the nature of the language in which it is uttered, certain languages, particularly Arabic, being more poetic than others.²¹⁷ What I am trying to suggest briefly here is that for Jones, poetry had become an *inherently Oriental property*, the languages, peoples, and cultures of the Orient

²¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 120.

²¹⁶ Jones, “On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations,” 172.

²¹⁷ John Sitter contextualizes and explains Jones’ theory in the following way: “What Jones attempts more clearly than any of his predecessors is to establish a clear alternative to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, based primarily on drama and the weighty Aristotelian tradition... Jones [...] used the assumption of Dennis and others that poetry must have begun in religious awe to argue anthropologically that poetry praising gods is common to “all nations.” Even the admittedly mimetic Greek drama, developed from songs celebrating Bacchus, Jones argues, and this originate in the need to express a national emotion of the mind” rather than to imitate.” *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 149.

occupying the conditions he describes as optimal or, in the very least, advantageous for the primality of lyric poetry. While Jones describes in detail the variety of conditions that lead to the variety of poetic forms—grief to elegies, morality to epic, hate to satire, etc.—the idea of the lyric as the expression of the simplest of emotions forms the base of his argument, as M. H. Abrams reminds us.

In his book *Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams goes on to suggest that Jones, though not largely known for, was the first eighteenth-century critic and poet to argue against Aristotle, laying down in his argument, the basis for what would very soon turn into the Romantic poetry of Lord Byron, William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley.²¹⁸ One of the best-known poems from this set is, of course, Byron's "The Giaour" (1813), which broke from the by-then conventional prose form of the Oriental tale, and used the poetic fragment as the truly representative genre of the Orient. In "The Giaour," an Islamic system is permitted to come into contact with a Christian one, yet in the essay "On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations," and whereas in "Solimah," Islam is somehow appropriated or absorbed within the broader cultural structure of Oriental poetry. Likewise, in the case of "The Palace of Fortune," an "Indian" religious system is conflated with or broadly likened to a Greco-Roman mythology. "Mahomet," therefore, offers Islam, not as a religious change or release, but as a possibility already existing within classical Arab culture: poetry, the birthright of the Arab nation, *contains* Mohamet's *Alcoran*, and though transformed by its "sublimity," nevertheless is the greater structure within which Islam must remain. By placing Islam within the seemingly boundless bounds of Arab lyric, Jones effectively marks the religious system as a high moment of Arab culture, thus both localizing and rationalizing its

²¹⁸ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 87.

existence. Turkey, Persia, and India, then, “compose verses in imitation” of the Arabs, the explanation ensuring that Islam remains within the Orientalist limits prescribed for it.²¹⁹

Jones’ interests and even attitudes towards literary Orientalism would undergo a dramatic shift upon his arrival in India and the beginning of his employment as a junior-judge in the Company’s courts. He came with a “lofty plan” to drown himself in Asian disciplines of study as well as to “print and publish” various biblical chapters in Arabic and Persian, but strangely little interest in acquiring proficiency in local languages.²²⁰ His dramatic transformation from seeing languages as “mere instruments of real learning,” to seeing himself as a philologist is attributed by Kapil Raj to the very nature of the knowledge networks Jones had to turn to in order to access this “learning”—unstable and inconsistent.²²¹ The courts were still rattled by the infamous trial of the Maharaja Nandakumar where, to grossly summarize, a problematic intersection of English law, and a habit of reliance on the practice of pundits resulted in the disputed hanging of the native tax collector, a man influential with many pundits and Hindu traders.²²²

In addition to a slew of events such as this one was a declaration by one pundit that oath taking on the Ganges for Hindus was prohibited. For Jones, then, a text such as *A Code of Gentoo Laws* meant comparatively little and bore “no authority”, not so much due to the fact that it was inconsistent, but because this inconsistency was common and well-exploited knowledge amongst native jurists and lawyers themselves. By 1785, just two years after trying to manipulate the legal system, Jones took up the study of the Sanskrit, declaring “I can no longer bear to be at

²¹⁹ Jones, “On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations,” 188.

²²⁰ Michael J. Franklin has also narrated, with less precision than Kapil Raj, the events that led Jones to learn Sanskrit in *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist. 1746-1794*.

²²¹ Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, 119.

²²² A fuller account of this incident in terms of my reading of it can be found in J. D. M. Derret, “Nandukumar’s Forgery” in *The English Historical Review*, v.75, no. 295 (April 1960): 223-238.

the mercy of our pundits who deal out Hindu law as they please, and make it at reasonable rates when they cannot find it ready made.”²²³ At one instance, Jones makes a court pundit “read and correct a copy of Halhed’s in the original Sanskrit, and then [...] obliged him to attest it as good law so he can never again give corrupt opinions, without certain detection.”²²⁴ Where Halhed portrayed the pundits as sacrificial figures who were doing a service to the British and their own people, there Jones described them a crafty and evasive breed that must be conquered through British diligence. I reiterate here, Said’s analysis of Jones as an Orientalist for whom the acquisition of language and the imperial urge came hand in hand—Sanskrit becomes definitive for an Oriental space that is no longer plush and opulent, but rather one rife with conspiracy and mistrust.

If Jones was dealing and writing about the duplicity of the pundits in the administrative arena, he was also in his private time mastering the language, and heading the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the great Orientalist body in Calcutta that made it its work to diligently catalogue and study every conceivable arena of the Indian subcontinent, from its fauna to the origins of its languages. The society was formally inaugurated by Jones in 1783 with the hopes that Asian “works of art, and inventions of fancy” would be the source of “improvement and advantage” for Europe.²²⁵ I would argue that these late eighteenth-century “researches” on “Asiatic Art, Science, and History,” among other topics, retained a powerful, almost symbiotic relationship with the Orientalist visions of the literary. The Oriental tale now absorbed and read within the discourse

²²³ William Jones, “William Jones to Charles Chapman Esq. September 28, 1785” in *The Works of William Jones, with the Life of the Author by Lord Teignmouth*, (London: John Stockdale, Picadilly, 1807), 67

²²⁴ Jones, “William Jones to J. McPherson, Bart., May 6, 1786” in *The Works of Sir William Jones*, 87.

²²⁵ William Jones, “Discourse II,” from *Discourses delivered before the Asiatic Society and Miscellaneous Papers* (London: Charles Arnold, 1824), 11.

produced by these researches, would itself be transformed into a fictional form that often demanded scholarly explication.

In Discourse III, “On the Hindus,” we experience a frequent return, in fact, a reliance on poetry as the definitive source on the subject people. Oriental tales, dramas, and poetry in the early decades of the nineteenth century, then, exist in a constant and dynamically productive dialogue with the scholarly essay—the publication of Byron’s *Giaour* having reestablished the “East” as the coveted commodity in the European literary market. The formation of an “Indian” literary sphere in Calcutta, most noticeable in the poetry of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, that modeled itself on the Oriental type promulgated in English literature and scholarship, must be understood as an involuntary exercise in a constructed *re*-appropriation of the Oriental genre by the colonized Orient.

The finer point I wish to make in raising this formation is that as the definitive genre of both colonialism and an emergent nationalism in India, the Oriental poem, specially, almost invariably marks the Muslim as a figure who is not just alien to, but in fact, actively violates a pure India. In doing so, the Muslim emerges in the early nineteenth century as a figure without a national, or indigenous literature, unable to command an original linguistic and aesthetic tradition, while the Hindu occupies a cultural space that is simultaneously religious and national. The Muslim, as Orientalist scholarship of the period defines him, is not properly Arab or Persian or Saracen, but in fact, only *temporarily occupies* these national or civilizational constructions. To phrase the matter in broader terms, what late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British Orientalism, particularly literary and scholarly, assembles in and through India is a series of indicators that designate belonging or association with “Indic” culture, all of which are exclusive to that which cannot claim a civilizational descent from the territory in question. Likewise, the

novelization of this scholarship in texts such as Gibbes' *Hartly House*, and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) sympathizes with Hindu or deliberately Hindu-phile protagonists by permitting them to voice the concerns of both metropolis and colony, even as the figure of the Muslim embodies the crimes of colonialism and the problems of empire.²²⁶

Orientalist scholarship—the seemingly endless project to collect, acquire, describe, occasionally analyze, classify, and publish linguistic, historical, aesthetic, scientific, geographic knowledge on and about the “Orient” that obsessed European research during the nineteenth century—though an accepted practice prior to the British conquest in India, would be altered forever by the “discovery” of Sanskrit, even as the Oriental landscape would be reprioritized in terms of the relative closeness of the Indic Orient to Europe. Though in the years following and, even contemporaneous with Anquetil Duperron's research Calcutta became center to a range of British Orientalist-philologist scholars such as Charles Wilkins, Alexander Hamilton, and Henry Colebrooke, Jones' prolific legacy, particularly through his *Discourses* to the Asiatic Society, was the single most powerful influence on the development of colonial culture over the course of the nineteenth century, its argument even extending in twentieth-century nationalist tracts such as Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946). The topics of the *Discourses*, Jones' annual public lectures to the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the conditions of the “five principal nations” of Asia, delivered between the years 1784 and 1793, ranged from an exhortation to the

²²⁶ The complexity of these texts is quite striking: the figure of the Muslim flirts with being one and the same with British imperial ambitions and practices. On the one hand these novels are consumers of the imperial project, while on the other hand, the imperializing figure, often the Muslim, is criticized for subjugating the Hindu, the sympathizer of the eighteenth-century bourgeois English woman.

“Society” for the direction of researches in the region to a lecture on Asiatic philosophy and natural science.

One of the principal influences on Jones’ understanding of India was Voltaire; the latter, a figure whose role in “the genesis of modern Orientalism,” Urs App argues has largely been “misunderstood.”²²⁷ App’s argument is an important one: focusing largely on Voltaire’s work on the *Ezour-Veidam*, it suggests that his view of “India as the cradle of civilization... hammered into public consciousness through a ream of books and pamphlets, played a seminal role in turning the European gaze toward India and its religious literature.”²²⁸ Voltaire’s argument in the extensive “Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations” (*Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nations*, 1756) though revised in various editions, essentially understood India’s attraction for Europe in terms of both its commercial and spiritual viability for Europe: “As India supplies the wants of all the world but is herself beholden for nothing she must for that very reason have been the most early civilized of any country.”²²⁹

Though App explores Voltaire’s fascination with the *Veidam* at great length, furthering the idea that Voltaire’s interest was not “political and economic power,” but rather to “destabilize” “the power of Europe’s long established world view and religious ideology,” the latter obviously took note early on in his essay, of India’s potential as a site whose religious and cultural sufficiency was based on its economic independence.²³⁰ Ahmad, explicating on Voltaire’s lesser known novella, *Lettres d’Amabed* (1769), argues that by comparing the corruption of the Catholic clergy with the pristine spiritual practice of Hinduism, Voltaire was not necessarily

²²⁷ Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), xvi.

²²⁸ Ibid. 75.

²²⁹ François Marie Arouet, Voltaire, “Of the Brahmins, the Vedam, and the Ezour Vedam,” *The Works of M. de Voltaire*, trans. Tobias Smollet (London: 1763), 36.

²³⁰ App, *The Birth of Orientalism*, 64.

advocating one over the other; rather he was suggesting that “we learn ultimately from the material history of corruption, not the textual history of “natural religion.””²³¹ Recycling mostly his argument on Voltaire’s perspectives on Islam, Ahmad suggests that despite his upholding the Brahminic religious system to critique Europe, his objective was really only Europe’s self-assured Judeo-Christian narrative. My point here, then, does not necessarily contradict App’s more parallel one, only suggests that Voltaire’s participation in the Orientalist discourse was hardly divorced or alternative to the broader discourse, rather it was deeply aware and embedded within it.

In Jones’ work, these arguments would acquire further complexity, most visible in the “Third Discourse,” which I will largely focus on, while briefly examining the “Fourth,” and “Fifth,” in order to reconstruct, for the purposes of my greater argument, the *definition* and *structure* of India as envisioned by the Orientalist imagination. If India becomes the prototype for the cradle of a nation descended of an ancient civilization, then the Muslim, its most recent invader, is understood as incompatible or somehow *outside* of the nation formation, lacking both center and civilization. “That whole extent of country in which the primitive religion and languages of the Hindus prevail at this day with more or less of their ancient purity, and in which the Nagari letters are still used with more or less deviation from their original form,” is India, its borders and occupants defined in terms of a recreated classical past from two millennia ago.²³² The “history” of this region, according to Jones, must be written from “downwards to the Mohammedan conquests at the beginning of the eleventh century, but extend [...] upwards as high as possible, to the earliest authentic records of the human species.”²³³ “India’s golden period,” as

²³¹ Ahmad, *The Stillbirth of Capital*, (Kindle Location 3462).

²³² Jones, “Discourse III,” from *Discourses*, 24.

²³³ *Ibid.* 24.

David Kopf paraphrases Jones' theory, "lay in some remote, unchartered period in world history," during which the Hindus were "splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge."²³⁴

To search, and at least in part, reinstate, *this* golden period for the consumption and benefit of European society and culture is the Orientalist intent; the centuries of Muslim rule are deemed incompatible with the "cultural unity" between Europe and India that Kopf believes Jones was able to establish. But Kopf himself provides an insight into the Orientalist logic—"remote," and "unchartered," the Indian Golden Age was as much an invention of Orientalism's redemptive ambition as there was any possibility of its reality and relevance to colonial Bengal. The discovery of Sanskrit with its "wonderful structure" and unparalleled "perfection" equaled a kind of "philological sublime" to use Mufti's term, fulfilling the Orientalist dream of return by the opening of an "immense and mysterious body of literature" that was viewed as key to utter cultural transformation India would undergo.²³⁵

I have raised the "Third Discourse," not so much for its celebrated passages on the nature of Sanskrit and the origin of Asiatic nations, but for the system of cultural classification that unfolds within it. What is the particular framework, in other words, through which a nation or a native people are distinguished or privileged from that which is invasive, alien, foreign, homeless? Defined quite simply in the "Third Discourse," a nation has origin or source, language, and in most cases, religion. Muslims, who do not possess the first two, therefore, are a non-national people, likened by Jones to "the crow... who long having affected to walk like a pheasant, was unable after all to acquire the gracefulness of that elegant bird, and in the

²³⁴ Ibid. 27.

²³⁵ Aamir Mufti. "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Spring 2010), 471.

meantime forgot his natural gait.”²³⁶ Absolute in its scientific connotations here is the metaphorically reinforced use of the word “natural”—nations, Jones seems to be arguing, are almost *natural*, organic, and therefore, religious, formations as opposed to Islam which is characterized as a “revolution” in the “Fourth Discourse,” titled “On the Arabs.” The Muslim, a product of “revolt,” must recall a state and place prior to his itinerancy. It is in his *Discourses* finally, that Jones reiterates and conjoins Voltaire’s arguments on Indian civilization and Islam’s inability thereof from several decades ago, though unlike in the case of the latter, Brahminic texts are not a “potent weapon to undermine biblical authority and to attack divine partiality for Judeo-Christianity.”²³⁷ Instead India with its ancient religion and culture forms the perfect antidote to Islam, a structure that even though *appears* to reside within it, like the crow is now irrevocably in a state of unbelonging.

An important question at this juncture is what the relationship of Jones’ *Discourses*, as well as the work of disciples such as Colebrooke, is to the literary? I speak here of both a European literature, as well as of the body of texts deemed Sanskrit literature by the Orientalists in India, in an attempt to trace the extent of the influence the Calcutta Orientalists exercised over the production of texts suited to both popular and aesthetically discerning audiences in England over the next few decades. Even as a Sanskrit “literature” is canonized by the Calcutta Orientalists towards the conclusion of the eighteenth century, a new Indian elite of native Company agents and servants, largely centered in Bengal, comes to the fore of “the first properly colonial and thus first modern intellectual culture in India,” to assume ownership of the culture discovered and constructed by the Calcutta Orientalists.²³⁸ The answer to this question, I think, involves more

²³⁶ Jones, “Discourse V,” from *Discourses*, 68.

²³⁷ Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism*, 64.

²³⁸ Mufti, “Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures,” 473.

than literature, yet, is premised finally in the variability of meaning that is contained in that word. Jones' philological decade, the 1780s, during which he not only translated the widely celebrated *Śakuntalā*, a Sanskrit play or *natac*, he described as "one of the greatest curiosities the literature of Asia has yet brought to light" but also founded the Asiatic Society, one of the more remarkable lectures of which I have discussed above.²³⁹ It involves, in part, the rise of philology as a discipline which Dharwadker reminds us "conceives of the ancient world as the source, beginning, or origins of a civilization, race, people, or nation, and hence also as the explanatory frame of reference for its entire subsequent historical development."²⁴⁰

Evolved from the "discoveries" of eighteenth-century Orientalism, modern philological studies became a critical constituent of the imperializing discourse. "Literature" in the eighteenth century, then, whether the entire body of writing within a language, or, more specifically, as Rene Wellek postulated in "Literature and its Cognates" "a particular national possession, [...] an expression of the national mind [...], a means toward the nation's self-definition," was the philologist's single subject, purposefully written and read to conform with his theories on the origin of the language.²⁴¹ I want suggest here that the use of the word "literature" from the eighteenth-century on, particularly when used within the broad boundaries of Orientalism, is almost always *comparative* in some sense or the other. That is to say, the appellation "literature" or description "literary," when used to describe works "discovered" in Indian languages, at this time of high Orientalism, comes to imply *texts, or textual traditions that can be compared to those of Europe*. This may not immediately have acquired the sense of an aesthetically defined,

²³⁹ William Jones, "Translator's Preface" to *Sacotala, or The Fatal Ring*, by Kalidasa (London: Charlton Tucker, 1824), 9.

²⁴⁰ Dharwadker, "Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literatures," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, 175.

²⁴¹ Rene Wellek, "Literature and its Cognates," in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1968), 83.

or purely imaginative group of works, but what is clear from the first application of the term to Sanskrit texts is their similarity and the possibility of comparison to European texts that could range anywhere from the Old Testament to Shakespeare’s plays—*Śakuntalā*—or Milton’s poetry—*A Code of Gentoo Laws*. Later on, particularly with the advent of Fort William College, fictional works from Persian and Arabic would be compared with the *Arabian Nights*. For the Calcutta Orientalists “literature” almost invariably implied *the possibility of cultural comparison through texts that was enabled by shared, or similar formations of identity* such as nation, the modern descendant of an ancient civilization.

IV. *Śakuntalā*, and the beginning of an Indian literature

In his “Translator’s Preface” to the first edition of *Śakuntalā, or The Fatal Ring* in 1789, the Sanskrit drama, whose celebrated translation was so beloved by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, Jones speaks of Kalidasa, the supposed author of the work, as “our illustrious Poet, the Shakespeare of India.”²⁴² The play, described by Jones as “*Natac*,” a genre he explains is akin to “dramatic poetry,” transports its reader to what Michael Franklin calls “an enchanted world of pastoral romance where mortals and gods interacted,” that once made available to Europe garnered a “sensational reception” that “outstripped even that which had greeted Galland’s *Les Mille et une nuits*.”²⁴³ The story of the marriage of King Dushmanta, and the nymph *Śakuntalā*, the eponymous play is crowned by Jones as a prized relic from a lost “Indian empire,” telling of the “immemorial ancient[ness]” of its literary and aesthetic traditions that flourished at a “time when the Britons were as unlettered and unpolished as the army of Hanumat.”²⁴⁴

²⁴² Jones, *Sakontalā*, 10.

²⁴³ Franklin, “*Orientalist Jones*,” (Kindle Location 4815).

²⁴⁴ Jones, *Sakontala*, 10.

The play would become much bigger than Jones may have initially imagined, one notion of its importance summed up by Dorothy Figueroa in her book *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Śakuntalā in Nineteenth-century Europe*, where she suggests that “just as Ossian could be used in Britain to validate the rights of the depressed Scots, so the Śakuntalā be used to show how other nationalities had cultural values equal to those usually ascribed only to ancient Greece. Śakuntalā India could become the goal of those seeking a new Antiquity.”²⁴⁵ This was, of course, true for the empireless German Romantics, starting with Herder for whom the play was “the first link with the authentic India...and the basis on which Herder constructed an Indic fatherland for the human race in its infancy.”²⁴⁶ For Goethe, Śakuntalā “presented [him] something of an India that could remind him of Persian poetry.” Though not frequently performed, the play “provided the story for a number of minor operas and ballets” in the Continent.²⁴⁷ More recently, Mufti has argued that Śakuntalā, and the “fabrication” that accompanied it “marks perhaps the first assimilation of Sanskrit textual materials to the new category of literature,” that I have discussed in the earlier section.²⁴⁸ The events of the play are historically part of the longer narrative of the *Mahabharata* that were then retold with some variation by the poet figure Kalidasa. The latter version remains the best known, popular even in Mughal courts, according to Romilla Thapar in her meticulous history of Śakuntalā.²⁴⁹

Indeed, Śakuntalā, as Franklin reminds us, was more than just the most celebrated of the Oriental tales to be composed by a European, even as he compares Jones narrative to “teasing

²⁴⁵ Dorothy Matilda Figueroa, *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 22.

²⁴⁶ Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 59.

²⁴⁷ Romilla Thapar, *Śakuntalā: Texts, Readings, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 208.

²⁴⁸ Mufti, “Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures,” 468.

²⁴⁹ Thapar, *Śakuntalā*, 109.

Shahrazâd style.”²⁵⁰ It is the Oriental tale that though has popularly been considered has having captured the mood of Europe at the time, at once stands as synecdochal for the British Orientalism’s journey over the long eighteenth century, but also is of critical importance in the development of the meaning, the term “literature” will acquire within the modern colony. Perhaps more sensual than the *Arabian Nights*, and most certainly of a more “spiritual” or religious theme, the narrative follows the King Dushmanta as he chances upon the nymph Śakuntalā playing with her sisters in the forest one day. The King weds the nymph in a divine ceremony, “called Gandharva, as it is practiced by Indra’s band,” that is preceded by a heady courtship, and followed by wedding night after which Dushmanta departs leaving Śakuntalā with a “ring on which his own name is engraved,” in order that she may make her way to him.²⁵¹ But Śakuntalā loses her ring while bathing her son one day and when she travels to the court with her child, only to go unrecognized by Dushmanta, and ashamed and embarrassed, she returns to her country abode. A few years later, the king, now aware of the turn of events, returns to the grove with a companion, comes across his son by Śakuntalā, and instantly senses the filial bond the child has with him. The ring, containing the memory, has by this time been recovered, and the king is reunited with Śakuntalā and the royal family is made complete.

The play, with its rich text, and at the time, religiously elaborated themes, can be read at a number of levels, the figure of Śakuntalā herself, demanding feminist interpretations beyond just those of Mary Wollstonecraft who saw her as a figure who defied sentimentality, and “embodied delicacy, refinement, and a pure morality in Śakuntalā, the very qualities Jones desired to

²⁵⁰ Franklin, *Orientalist Jones* (Kindle Locations 4816-4818).

²⁵¹ Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Śakuntalā: A Play in Seven Acts*, trans. William Jones (London: Charlton Tucker, 1870), 143.

highlight when representing Hindu culture.”²⁵² *Śakuntalā* also serves as a romantic, literary representation of British Orientalism itself, as reflected in the narratives of Jones, Halhed, and Hastings that I have discussed earlier on in this chapter. One of the more remarkable passages of the play is, of course, Dushmanta’s initial recognition of his heir: well in accordance to the earlier prophecy of a priest, the child’s palm “bears the marks of empire...its lines of exquisite network,” genetically marking its owner as the ruler of this native empire.²⁵³ The boy, who “moves like a god” is nevertheless “born of a mere mortal.” The mother and the child, one taken by Dushmanta, and the other a product of this new ownership of her body, then, represent in many ways the vision Europe had come to have of India—the land of an ancient civilization whose rediscovery could in this day and age allow Europe a cultural, and even religious renaissance. Dushmanta’s period of forgetfulness is like a “mirror whose surface has been sullied, reflects no image; but exhibits perfect resemblances when its polish has been restored.”²⁵⁴ Here, Dushmanta, an earlier sterile and aging Europe, is now functional again, its reunion with this essential, lost part of itself giving it a purpose and direction, once more. *Śakuntalā* herself, “the model of excellent wives,” the productive space, reunited with her rightful husband, must be the source of a “constant unity for [her] lord,” or so the gods advise her.²⁵⁵

Steeped in manifestations of what appears to be ancient Hindu law, supported by Jones’ assurance that “the Brahmens, at least, do not think polite literature incompatible with jurisprudence,” *Śakuntalā* is cast as a work that cannot be divorced or read apart from its historic and cultural contexts.²⁵⁶ Jones, transported to the period when *Śakuntalā* was “first represented,”

²⁵² Franklin, *Orientalist Jones*, (Kindle Locations 4816-4818).

²⁵³ Kalidasa, *Śakuntalā*, 143.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 154.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 152.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 14.

during which “the national vanity must have been highly flattered by those kings and heroes in whom the Hindus gloried,” becomes a character in his own rhetorical narrative.²⁵⁷ What this part of the “Translator’s Preface” achieves, then, is more than a revival, or Orientalism’s gift to modern India, rather it makes the figure of the Orientalist translator-scholar indispensable, and accessory to the very notion of an Indian literature: Jones, in this case, becomes a member of the “court of Avanti,” one “equal in brilliancy... to that of any monarch of any country.” Though he does not offer interpretations or criticism of the characters in the play, he himself reads the “deities introduced in the Fatal Ring [as] clearly allegorical personages,” while Dushmanta already “appears in the chronological tables of the Brahmens among the children of the moon and in the twenty first generation after the flood.”²⁵⁸ In other words, the function of the “Translator’s Preface” to *Śakuntalā* is as scholarly as it is literary—in fact, here it is the inseparability of these two otherwise loosely connected Orientalist implements that has so often suggested the culmination of Jones’ Orientalist career. Jones releases *Śakuntalā* from the limits of the Oriental tale, from the bounds of fantasy, magic, deception, other worlds, moralities, and even satire, inserting it into European cultural space as an example of authentic Indian literature.

The critical question at this juncture, then, is what the consequences of an Indian literature founded on the principles that *Śakuntalā* rests upon, are for the emergence of a modern culture in the colonial space? To pose the same question with further specificity would be to ask what the

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 11-12.

²⁵⁸ Siraj Ahmad has shown Jones’ increasing involvement and empathy with the religion whose laws he believed himself to be translating. When translating the *Laws of Manu*, Jones “speculated” “Manu (“Menu or Menus in the nominative and Menos in an oblique case”) was linked to Minos of Crete... In that case, Jones’s publication of the original Hindu law reestablished not only the original Hindu law but one origin of non-Hebraic law as such: “If Minos, the son of Jupiter, . . . was really the same person as Menu, the son of Brahma, we have the good fortune to restore, by means of Indian literature, the most celebrated system of heathen jurisprudence, and this work might have been entitled The Laws of Minos,”” (Kindle Location 3518).

implications of a rigidly contextualized fiction such as this one are for both extant and future fictional and poetic forms in colonial India? In face of a rediscovered Indian literature that is flanked by religion, law, and a European enthrallment with the sensuality of the subject, earlier forms of the Oriental tale appear populist, and common. The figure of the Muslim either alienated or absent entirely from narratives about India now becomes an object displaced even in fiction and poetry originating from the Oriental space.²⁵⁹

An interesting parallel to *Śakuntalā* appears in Henry Louis Derozio's "The Fakeer of Jungheera" (1828), almost three decades later, where the young Eurasian poet, moved obviously by a colonial education where he is instructed in his native "literature," announces his intention of "writing a ballad, the subject of which should be strictly Indian."²⁶⁰ In this long ballad, Nuleeni, a Hindu *sati*, is saved from immolating herself at her husband's funeral pyre by her childhood lover, a Muslim outlaw of "divine aspect," and "hallowed form," who nevertheless submits to Nuleeni, affirming "no more to Mecca's hallowed shrine/ Shall wafted be a prayer of mine...Henceforth I turn my willing knee/From Alla, Prophet, heaven to thee."²⁶¹ Romantic love between two individuals here, then, is negotiated in terms of religious association—the Muslim abandoning "Mecca" for the woman he loves, while the Brahmin widow chooses his form over her own martyrdom.²⁶² This scenario may not seem particularly remarkable given the proliferation of such themes in Orientalist poetry during the nineteenth century except for the

²⁵⁹ An interesting perspective on this reappears in Richard Burton's fully eroticized translation of the *Arabian Nights* in 1885. In the "Translator's Preface," he reasserts the Muslim origins of this text, decrying the Empire and Orientalists' "over-devotion to Hindu, and especially to Sanskrit literature," which "has led them astray from those (so-called) Semitic studies, which are the more requisite for us as they teach us to deal successfully with a race more powerful than any pagans."

²⁶⁰ Thomas Edwards, *Henry Derozio, The Eurasian Poet, Teacher, and Journalist* (Calcutta: Newman and Co. 1884), 199.

²⁶¹ Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. "The Fakeer of Jungheera" in *Derozio, Poet of India: The Definitive Edition* ed. Rosinka Chaudhuri (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 176.

²⁶² *Ibid.* 198.

fact the poem itself is not about forbidden love between a Brahmin and a Muslim, but rather about the interruption of a sacred Brahmin ritual. Even though the poem allows for a childhood tryst between Nuleeni and the Fakeer, they are ultimately punished because of the “ruined hopes” and “blighted name” of Nuleeni’s “venerable father,” “demanding vengeance” from the Prince Shujah whose “stars of Moslem chivalry” are sent to attack the robbers and their chief.²⁶³ Nuleeni dies after she fails to hear the “faint, small beat” when she lays her hand on her lover’s heart, fulfilling her role, somewhat belatedly, as a *sati*.²⁶⁴

In her study on Derozio, “An Ideology of Indianness,” Rosinka Chaudhuri the Fakeer’s devotion to Nuleeni asking whether “there is a suggestion that to assert his love for the Hindu the Muslim has to disown his religious identity, to refigure himself, to be absorbed within the Hindu body?” Arguing that the “sentiment is not dwelt upon at any length,” and that later verses in the poem suggest “the institutionalised passion of religion cannot compete with living emotion” Chaudhuri leaves us with the rightful notion that the poem embodies the “certain contradictions which belong to the specific logic of the colonial situation.”²⁶⁵ The crucial question, however, rests on the intent with which the poem and its constituent characters are actually constructed. In other words, Derozio’s sympathy, apathy, or animosity towards the Muslim is overridden by the larger idea behind the poem—the creation of an Indian body of poetry that derives almost directly from Orientalist models of what Indian, or Oriental poetry must be. “Indian literature,” *deliberately* unfolding from the moment of *Śakuntalā* for colonial subject of Derozio’s social milieu, then, for much of the nineteenth century remains close to questions of Hindu religion, and law, while the figure of the Muslim resides in its peripheries.

²⁶³ Ibid. 212.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 226.

²⁶⁵ Rosinka Chaudhuri, “An Ideology of Indianness: The Construction of Colonial/Communal Stereotypes in the Poetry of Henry Derozio.” *Studies in History* 185 (2004): 186.

In his succinct way, Siraj Ahmad recapitulates the consequences of Calcutta Orientalism, the “dissemination” of the “Brahmin ideology—which in the precolonial period had only a local or regional function—from the centralized structures that colonialism introduced to India: not only printing presses but also educational institutions and, not least of all, the judicial system.”²⁶⁶ My journey in this chapter, departing from the strained, but indubitable relationship Beckford carved with the broader questions of Orientalism and imperialism, and from England’s own consistently uncomfortable stance on the colonization of India, arrives finally at the deceptively humanistic gesture of the Calcutta Orientalists that is the translation and elevated categorization of *Śakuntalā*. Traversing the deep terrain of the Orientalist scholarship of Hastings, Halhed, and Jones, in order to arrive at this moment, brings to the forefront the problematic reasoning that rests behind the revived, or “disseminated” ideology that is now the religion of the Hindus, defined by Calcutta Orientalism as the aboriginals of the Indian subcontinent. Extant or precolonial structures of being in this space, most noticeably those involving Islam or the presence of a “Muslim” culture in India, are subsequently rewritten in the Orientalist history of India as invasive, alien, and obstructive to the natural Hindu civilization. This is not to say that the Calcutta Orientalists completely disregarded the Muslim presence in India, but rather that their study of legal texts such as the *Fatvāh-e Ālamgirī* and the *Hedaya*, would remain heavily decontextualized in terms of a grounded location. While this first phase of Calcutta Orientalism puts Sanskrit, and the modern Hindu subject in possession of a “literature,” there is no equivalent for the Muslim.

²⁶⁶ Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital*, (Kindle Location 3555).

The earlier moment of the Oriental tale, marked by works such as the *Arabian Nights*, *The History of Nourjahad*, and even later in *Vathek*, employed the figure of the Muslim despot, or the sultan in order to represent Islam's associations with structures of empire and absolutism, and through this representation, became a medium of critique for politics and culture in the metropolis as well. This same figure of the Muslim in later moments is reduced from his own voracity, and aggression to a passivity that paves the way for Europe's own imperial ambitions. It is the reinvention of the Indic Orient, however, in terms provided by both the European Enlightenment *and* its critics that absorbs and redeploys the earlier premises of Islamicate Orientalism, as I have shown over the course of this chapter. In the Orientalist scholarship of Halhed, and Jones, the figure of the Muslim shrinks from his regal character in the Oriental tale to barbarism and finally to a mere crow *unable return to his past*. Any grandeur that is possibly restored in the poems of Derozio is provided by the bounded tropes of Orientalism. It is this inability, or rather impossibility of return that is branded into an emergent literary culture in the modern colony over the course of the nineteenth century through the colonial implements of print and education. The stage for this contradictory state of existence finds its design in precisely the literary and scholarly projects I have described in this chapter, but directs the process of a Muslim alienation within India through carefully produced vernacular textualities.

CHAPTER III

COLONIAL PEDAGOGY AND THE ORIENTAL TALE: HINDUSTANI, URDU, AND THE QUESTION OF A VERNACULAR LITERATURE

Hardly a static or definitive form, the Oriental tale begins, from the very start of the nineteenth century, to travel from the European republic of letters to the emergent literary space that was culled, and then exposed by the work of late eighteenth-century Orientalists in India. Its various forms—ranging from the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* to more recent additions from “Oriental languages,” for example, *Śakuntalā*—over the next few decades would be mediated into this nascent, but dynamic cultural arena by means of a series of re-translations. Taking place largely within educational institutions, the focus of these translations would remain on the development and enrichment of “native languages,” the foremost of which was Urdu. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Oriental tale, directed by a series of imperial interests in India, would inhabit and alter a number of forms, literary and other, in the variant registers of what can be imagined as an expansive, north-Indian language-complex. What changes in this moment, however, is that the concerns of language, whether its attempted vernacularization or its re-classicization, would never be far from the form of the Oriental tale in Calcutta, and later north-India, as it negotiates literariness, pedagogy, and linguistic registers in centers of imperial education.

In this chapter, I study, on a broader level, the shift from the classically-inclined, revivalist Orientalism of Jones and Halhed to a discourse, and subsequent literary practice, that attempt to engage with vernacular possibilities, prompted and perpetuated, largely but not entirely, by the economic opportunities and needs of a fast-expanding empire. On a more specific level, I examine the transformation of the Oriental tale as it enters into the fluid north Indian language-

complex whose various, shifting registers are at once instrumental and implicated in the imperial endeavor to systematize and utilize native languages for effective governance. Marked by the founding of Fort William College in Calcutta, an institution for the education of freshly-arrived British officers, this second phase of Calcutta Orientalism sets into motion a forced vernacular modernization whose rather powerful implications for pre-colonial north-Indian culture have gone largely ignored by scholars of the period. While the vogue for the Oriental tale continued to rage in England, the Fort William setup—complete with printing presses, and *munshīs* performing the role of native authors—extended the earlier possibilities of the genre into what was designated as an originally Oriental space. I will argue in the first part of this chapter that Fort William College, established in 1800 by Lord Wellesley for the purpose of training young Company officers in the native languages, institutionalizes the Oriental tale, almost deliberately so, by shifting its production directly into the Oriental space, reinventing it as a genre that would both populate an artificially produced literary canon, as well as function as a moral compass for both Westerners and natives in India.

In the second part of this chapter, I will examine the nature of the intervention that the simulated texts of Fort William College bring about in the extant north-Indian aesthetic tradition, with a particular focus on Mir Amman's *Bāg-o Bahār* (1804). The prefatory remarks of its author draw our attention to what though hardly the first *commissioned* work to be produced in Urdu is most certainly a literary innovation, and an experiment with the idea of vernacularity that permanently alters the direction and shape of the extant aesthetic tradition. But despite the limited description of Fort William College's initial students, the curriculum put in place for this body of Company officers is transplanted onto a fast-expanding colonial nexus of native schools in less than two decades, redefining entirely the purposes of these newly composed literary texts

in the modern colony. The issue at the heart of the colonial education of India's native population, then, often read as a struggle between the Orientalists and Anglicists, is, in fact, a more elaborate and drawn out debate on how to make language conform and perform in accordance with the cultural transformation that the colonial administration repeatedly desires to see take place in India. I will examine, in the case of *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, what we can imagine as a canonization by translation, the process by which a work composed in Urdu according to its author once translated into English is made to simultaneously inhabit for its European readers the category of an authentic Oriental tale, while for its Indian readers, it serves as an example of classic literature. Finally, in the last part of this chapter, I will turn to Delhi College, an institution celebrated for being a "confluence" of knowledge between colonizer and subject, but that I will argue, becomes a final point of transformation in the process of the flawed or inconsistent vernacularization that the colonial government had set out to achieve at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁶⁷ That is to say, Delhi College leaves us with a language, to use an approximate word, that is neither a vernacular, nor the elite, aesthetic register we encounter at the close of the eighteenth century, rather it is a part organic, part synthetic linguistic construction in the service of select elite and bourgeois subjects.

Central to some of the most significant and lasting linguistic and literary developments in nineteenth-century India, Fort William College was conceived, at least initially, as an answer to the East India Company's recognition of its possession of "one of the most extensive and populous Empires in the world." Company officers, no longer "the agents of a commercial concern," were now required as "statesmen" to "discharge the functions of Magistrates, Judges,

²⁶⁷ The term "confluence" is Gail Minault's. See her article "Delhi College and Urdu," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 14, (1999), 119-134.

Ambassadors, and Governors of Provinces,” in the Company territories.²⁶⁸ Consolidating the Orientalist scholarship of previous decades with the newly recognized need for a British mastery over the “popular,” or “vernacular” languages of India, Fort William College became possibly one of the first institutions in modern history whose specific purpose was to instruct in imperial governance, and that would, in the process, invent a curriculum for the pedagogy of young colonial officers. Though the College was often referred to as the “Oxford of the East,” providing its students with instruction in the sciences, and European classics, it remains best known, of course, for its dedication to “Indian” languages beyond just Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, the classical languages that had obsessed the earlier generation of Orientalists. With self-taught, perhaps more seasoned scholars such as John Gilchrist and Henry Colebrooke steering the nascent language departments at the College, the ideologies underpinning the language curricula could often be ascribed to the powerful opinions of a single Orientalist. Problematically enough, contemporary scholarship on the topic of Fort William College has often, possibly unwittingly, lauded the institution for its role as “chief patron for an indigenous literary and cultural revival,” and its particular influence in the theoretical founding of the modern languages of Hindi and Urdu.²⁶⁹

Debates between mid-twentieth century scholars including David Kopf and Sisir Kumar Das chose to focus on the relationship of the College to traditional notions of Orientalism, rather than on the permanent impact this colonial institution had on the fluid eighteenth-century north-Indian oral and written practices. Not until very recently has Fort William been scrutinized as an

²⁶⁸ Richard Colley Wellesley, “Minute in Council at Fort William: by his Excellency The Most Noble Marquis Wellesley” in *The Annals of Fort William College*, ed. Thomas Roebuck (Calcutta: Philip Pereira, 1819), ii.

²⁶⁹ David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 96.

institution where the “linguistic disciplining” of the colony took place,²⁷⁰ and where the aforementioned “modern languages” emerged not as a “gift” from the Orientalists, but rather as a harsh rupture in the “infinitely varied”²⁷¹ linguistic spectrum that defined pre-colonial north-India. My particular interest in Fort William College begins with its inception as a training site for Company officers and its professed focus on the “literature, science, and knowledge” relevant for the “Writers,” as newly arrived Company recruits were called.²⁷² Intellectually and administratively structured such that a group of British scholars, including Gilchrist, William Carey, and Colebrooke, the heads of the “Hindostanee,” Bengali, and later “Hindi” departments respectively, commanded a series of native *munshīs*,²⁷³ whose responsibilities ranged from composing textbooks to instructing students, language instruction at Fort William was from the very beginning of an Orientalist design. The construction or invention of a curriculum for these British students ranged from several “native languages,” “Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindoostanee, [and] Bengalee” principal among them, “Hindoo” and “Moohumudun” law, Greek, Latin and English classics, “Modern languages of Europe,” “General History, ancient and modern,” to “Natural History.” Aware of the “peculiar depravities incident to the climate and the

²⁷⁰ Rashmi Bhatnagar, “Prēmsāgar” and the Orientalist Narratives of the “Invention” of Modern Hindi,” in *boundary 2*, 39, no. 2 (2012), 76.

²⁷¹ Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 2001), 24.

²⁷² Richard Colley Wellesley, “Minute by Wellesley” in *The Annals of Fort William College*, xvi.

²⁷³ The *munshī* till very recently was often dismissed as merely a clerical or scribe-like figure in the courts of South Asian rulers of various stature. Described in his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam in “The Making of a *Munshī*,” the *munshī* of Fort William College was hardly just a passive figure. In a pertinent description the article argues that “the pragmatic realities of political economy that had to be dealt with could not be comprehended within the *adab* of the aristocrat, and the representatives of Company Bahadur were, in any event, scarcely qualified themselves to claim such an unambiguous status. The real interlocutor for the Company official thus was the *munshī*, who was mediator and spokesman (*vakīl*), but also a key personage who could both read and draft materials in Persian, and who had a grasp over the realities of politics that men such as Warren Hastings, Antoine Polier, and Claude Martin found altogether indispensable.”

character of the Natives,” the College would also attempt to insure the morals of its students by providing a guiding figure in the form of Provost, who would “superintend and regulate their general morals and conduct,” as well as “confirm them in the principles of the Christian religion.”²⁷⁴

This particular description of the college curriculum is deeply relevant to a broader examination of how nineteenth-century British Orientalism begins to imagine itself—no longer the self-professed instrument for the administration of basic justice amongst the natives, it was now an all-encompassing body in India, its didactic and moral arms informing the knowledge systems that would emerge within the next year or so. In just half a decade, the College had become the patron body behind some hundred or so works in “Hindustanee,” a “language” that Gilchrist himself took the credit for founding, Bengali, Tamil, Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic, all of which would serve as textbooks for students. Though many of these works were abridged or simplified legal or religious texts, an equally significant number, if not more, consisted of what Gilchrist or Colebrooke would term “fables” or “moral tales,” a series of translations from constructed European works such as *Aesop’s Fables* into these Oriental, target languages, or were original compositions by *munshīs* in the same. The emergent Oriental tales, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* and *Baitāl Paçīsī* two of the best known, would consequently be read as texts reflecting a kind of “Oriental” morality that becomes affixed to or grafted upon this particular “orient,” and its particular peoples.

I. John Gilchrist and the Production of Hindustani

One of the founding faculty members of the College, John Gilchrist, was a Scotsman who had come to India as a doctor for the Company, later dabbled in indigo farming, and towards the

²⁷⁴ Wellesley, “Minute by Wellesley,” xvii.

close of the eighteenth century become a specialist in what he referred to as “the grand popular language of Hindoostan.” Even prior to the founding of the institution, Gilchrist was a serious proponent of the argument that all officers arriving in India be trained as “linguists” in order for the Company’s continued success in the subcontinent.²⁷⁵ He had earlier, as part of his efforts to support himself in India, compiled a rough dictionary of “Hindostanee,” a dialect, he argued in the preface to the work, unlike Persian is “their native speech...the genuine effusion of nature and the heart, equally developed on every ordinary, private, or endearing occurrence, in the cottage of a clown or amidst the voluptuous recesses of an Indian grandee.”²⁷⁶

Gilchrist’s obsession with what can broadly be thought of as a rough, and hardly stable, spoken dialect, what he believed had been mistakenly termed “Moors” by other Orientalists, and what he termed “Hindostanee,” then, begins as an almost entrepreneurial venture, but concludes with the problematically widespread cleft languages of Hindi and Urdu by the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, what is important to note is that even before the idea of a college or linguistic training institution had come near fruition in Calcutta, the notion that a universal, and accessible Indian dialect existed, and could be reigned in and organized for the personal profits of one Orientalist was already being exercised and exploited. Gilchrist would exert serious pressure on Calcutta’s colonial administrators, not just through works such as his *Dictionary, A Grammar of the Hindostanee Language* (1796), and *The Oriental Linguist* (1798), a wide selection of essential words, phrases, poems, and stories, but also through a series of letters, to officially invent a discipline, or academic department, to start with, for the study of the dialect he believed himself to have discovered.

²⁷⁵ John Gilchrist, “Preface” to *The Oriental Fabulist or Polyglot Translations of Esop’s and other Ancient Fables*, (Calcutta: Harkaru Office, 1803), ii.

²⁷⁶ John Gilchrist, “Preface” to *A Dictionary, English and Hindoostanee*, Volume I (Calcutta: Stuart and Cooper, 1787), p. xxii.

As an independent scholar teaching officers on a small scale at the Oriental Seminary, a precursor to the later and larger Fort William College, Gilchrist wrote excessive and meandering tracts on “Hindustanee,” and its significance in India, often addressing a professional rivalry with George Hadley whose *Compendious Grammar of the current corrupt dialect of the jargon of Hindostan* from 1796, furthered a somewhat different idea of the Indian vernacular. By the time Gilchrist was hired by Wellesley as a professor at the College, his ideas had gained some credence, and he now set about to further develop “Hindustanee,” given the manpower and financial means that suddenly became accessible to him through the facilities of the College. I want to focus my examination of Gilchrist on the process, and arguments, through which he shapes “Hindustanee” during his brief, but deeply impactful foray at Fort William College, suggesting that for this entrepreneurial Orientalist, invention, and not discovery, were at the heart of the scholarly endeavor in India. What emerges, as a result of Gilchrist’s aggressive efforts, then, is not a fully-bloomed language that could theoretically rival any European counterpart, but rather an artificial dialect, deliberately molded and directed to reflect its origins, one whose “literature,” also Gilchrist’s special project, consisted almost exclusively of regurgitated and reconstructed fictions meant to recall Europe’s own Oriental tales from the previous century.

In the *Oriental Fabulist*, one of Gilchrist’s works from the Fort William years, the argument around the nature of “Hindustanee” is posed most clearly:

Its basis is the Old Hinduwee or Brij Bhasha, from which, by the gradual intermixture of Arabic and Persian, a new language or the Hindostanee has at last been formed... If these premises be well founded, the intelligent reader must allow, that the Brij Bhasha, Hindostanee, Persian, and Arabic languages are so intimately connected

that it is not easy to disjoin the study of them in a country where each has occasionally its particular ascendancy.²⁷⁷

The Oriental Fabulist, consequently, is laid out by its composer as a translation of Aesop's fables, each one rendered first in English, then in romanized "Hindostanee," "Farsee," "Bhaka," "Bongla," and finally "Sanskrit." Gilchrist's conscious choice of using "Dodsley's *Esop*" for "the express purpose in question" turns to a late seventeenth-century form of popular Orientalism, the fable, popularized by Joseph Harris's translation of La Fontaine's *Fables* (1688-94), as the *Fables of Pilpay* (1699), and Dryden's *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700). Aravamudan in an extensive discussion on the *Kalila wa Dimna*, alternatively known as *Fables of Bidpai*, *Tales of Pilpay*, "a cycle of beast fables [that] came Europe through complex transformations via Asia and the Levant," has read this text as a part of "Enlightenment Orientalism." He argues that translations and interpretations of these stories in England revealed their "roots from the East," allowing "for the belated recognition of fabulistic forms as simultaneously imported and home-grown... exotic and folkloric, Orientalist and autochthonous."²⁷⁸ Gilchrist, historically much closer to Dodsley's edition of the *Aesop's Fables* (1781), contrary to Aravamudan's limited study of this didactic form, uses the fable because he seems to understand it as somehow linked to the acquisition and development of language. Dodsley's own essay, "The Life of Esop" infers that Esop, a shadowy figure inhabiting both Oriental and Western identities,²⁷⁹ learnt the

²⁷⁷ Gilchrist, *The Oriental Fabulist*, ii-iii.

²⁷⁸ Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 154. The fable, to draw out Aravamudan's point a little further, is almost inseparable from the Oriental tale for it often constitutes this form. We encounter the fable in the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* in the stories of the farmer and his ass, as well as in that of the merchant and the rooster, instrumental in the communications of Scheherazade and her father.

²⁷⁹ In Dodsley's introduction to the *Fables*, Aesop is a shepherd boy who after being sold as a slave comes to Athens and eventually, but temporarily becomes a favorite of Croeseus. Dodsley seems to suggest that the Ethiopian, the real "Oriental fabulist," really, is Locman, who Planudes,

“Grecian language” as a result of his enslavement at Athens, and “there also he might be led to the thought of writing Fables, from the mode of instruction then in fashion, which was by conveying it in moral sentences, or proverbs.”²⁸⁰ In other words, the form of the fable is able to serve the function of a language primer, while also imparting good moral advice to its readers.

Several of these fables, including the second, in which the Republic of Frogs repeatedly asks for a new king until Jupiter finally grants them a crane who eats all of them, and the thirteenth, in which a stag’s vanity leads him to his own death, also serve as excellent allegorical justifications for colonial rule in India. Though Gilchrist does not offer any readings of these stories, his interest extends beyond his target audience at Fort William College in the hope that “the translation of these Fables has now diffused a taste among the Hindustanees for such exercises with the most beneficial consequences on the literature of India.” At other points he recognizes the utility of “short, amusing lessons or stories” for the purposes of language instruction, but his broader vision is fixated on the prospect of “the Orient gleam of learning in the days of Hastings and Jones [being] totally eclipsed by that precocious dawn in Eastern lore apparent now.”²⁸¹ It would be precisely these two pedagogical arguments that would distinguish Gilchrist’s approach to the teaching and learning of the language he believed himself to be the sole intellectual patron of, though, of course, financial rewards and incentives from the Company were hardly unwelcome.

Gilchrist’s other directive, that Hindostanee should follow a Romanized script, in part through his own admittance, and in part due to existing conditions, gained very little credibility.

“a great distorter of Esop’s life,” has “confounded” with the actual Esop. Esop, then, at least in Dodsley’s version of events, seems to occupy a largely Greek, and in the later part of his life, Athenian identity.

²⁸⁰ Robert Dodlsey, *Select Fables of Esop and other Fabulists* (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), xv.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* xvii.

But his ambition for the empty landscape of “Hindustanee” to be populated with simple stories and moral tales for the benefit of both the language and its learners, however, mutated into a complex textual act. This invasion of an extant aesthetic tradition based on an elite, north-Indian register known as “Urdu,” one of several appellations, would not only cleft the latter, but also initiate new and communal rivalries between Hindostanee, and what would soon become Colebrooke’s particular focus, Hindi. Justified by Gilchrist for its pedagogical benefits and its cultural potential, the Oriental tale would experience both a transplant and a carefully manipulated rebirth in the linguistic laboratory of Fort William College. Its forced introduction into the colony eventually becomes the dominant narrative shaping ideas of Indian literariness over the course of the nineteenth century, many of these stories clearly modeled on a prior European conception of what an “Oriental literature” should resemble or look like, as I will show a little later on.

It is important to keep in mind, of course, that in the first decade or so of their creation, texts such as *Bāg-o Bahār* and *Ārā’ish-e Mehfil* were not explicitly intended for a native audience, rather their utility was limited to the English officers of the Company.²⁸² Yet, a discrepancy remained because for Gilchrist, the stakes were no longer restricted to financial gains from the Company, but rather he saw himself to be inventing “such a body of useful and entertaining literature in that language as will ultimately raise it to that estimation among the

²⁸² Constantly barraging the Company for funds with which to develop the Hindustani department, Gilchrist believed that financial rewards would serve as incentives for the development of the “Oriental literature” he had become visibly obsessed with. In a letter to the College Council dated 19th August, 1803 he wrote: “Convinced as I am that the liberal protection and encouragement of learned natives and their literary works of acknowledged utility, is one of the many popular and judicious motives for the institution and continuance of the College, I have invariably done all in my power to stimulate the exertions of moonshees, poets, and other men of letters by promises of reward from the present Government.” See, M Atique Siddiqi, *Origins of Modern Hindustani Literature* (Delhi: Naya Kitab Ghar, 1963), p. 132.

natives which it would many years ago have attained among an enlightened and energetic people...”²⁸³ Manifest in this excerpt from one of Gilchrist’s letters is a somewhat contradictory rivalry with the Orientalism of Jones and Halhed—on the one hand, there is the marked desire to gift the natives with a cultural legacy not unlike that of his predecessors, while on the other hand, it is clear that the gift is not a revival, or renaissance, but rather an admitted import from Europe.

In Gilchrist’s fertile and ambitious imagination, Hindostanee was intended to “ascend as high on the Indian scale... as the English has done in a similar predicament in our own country...”²⁸⁴ That is to say, Hindostanee, as Gilchrist saw it, would be textually produced and mediated such that it would serve as a vernacular, or standard language in India. The personal and public writings of this Orientalist betray both a rivalry with the earlier generation of Sanskrit-inclined scholars such as Jones as well as an anxiety around the direction that new texts in the “Hindostanee” would have to take. Gilchrist’s concept, or to employ a more contemporary phrase, *roadmap*, for the language was hardly of an original or extempore design, rather it relied on earlier and popular notions of Oriental fictions in the metropolis to populate itself. As a critical component in this roadmap, the Oriental tale in what we can at best refer to as an *anticipated vernacular* would remain an object of translation from both European and Oriental sources, simultaneously serving as an instrument of colonial pedagogy.

II. The Emperor’s New Clothes: Courtly Urdu and Mir Amman’s *Bāg-o Bahār*

Gilchrist’s financial patronage and guidance to the *munshī* authors at Fort William College resulted in a number of fictions in the various registers of the vernacular he imagined himself to be founding, including Haidari’s *Ārā’ish-e Mehfil* (1808), Nihal Chand’s *Qiṣṣā-e Gul Bakaulī*

²⁸³ Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 83.

²⁸⁴ Gilchrist to College Council, Calcutta, 20th June 1803 in *Origins of Modern Hindustani Literature source material: Gilchrist Letters*, compiled by M. Atique Siddiqi (Aligarh: Naya Kitab Ghar, 1963), 127.

(1804), Khalil Khan Ashk's *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā* (1803), and even a translation of the *Alf Lailah* (1803) whose source text was the English *Arabian Nights*.²⁸⁵ But *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, composed by Munshī Mir Amman, and published by the Hindostanee Press in 1804, garnered the most fame as an example of Oriental "literature," maintaining a continuous presence both in debates around this literary form, as well as in various colonial education curricula till at least the early decades of the twentieth century. Simultaneously praised and reviled by critics, from the time of its publication until today, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* is considered by some to be the first authentic example of Urdu prose writing, even as others categorize it as one type of Urdu *dāstān*.²⁸⁶ Serious detractors have variously accused its author of producing an unfaithful translation, and a compromised style of writing. What is at stake with a text such as this one is its very entry and belonging, and in fact, its own participation and interpolation of the idea of an "Urdu literature." In other words, it is essential that we interrogate, in the case of *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, and several other "vernacular" texts descended from British Orientalism, the aesthetic territory or literary landscape that these texts are envisioned as occupying, as well as the actual nature of the encounter that subsequently ensues, given the gaps that exist between the Orientalist imagination and the elite, pre-colonial, aesthetic tradition of Urdu that had flourished in north-India for several centuries.

In trying to locate *Bāḡ-o Bahār* on the historical nexus of the popular, north-Indian register we variably refer to as Urdu today, it is critical that we unpack with the utmost care the process by which this text became associated with the term Urdu, and the contribution or the settling of this text into a tradition that itself seems to be in constant flux at this moment in time. I want to

²⁸⁵ See Frances Pritchett, "Selected Publications of Fort William College, Calcutta," draft, Columbia University, May 1991.

²⁸⁶ See Gyan Chand Jain's *Urdu kī naśrī dāstāneiñ* (Karachi: 1965), for example, where Jain spends a chapter or so discussing the *dāstān*-like qualities of several Fort William texts.

trace in this section the exact genesis of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* at Fort William College and attempt to locate it outside of extant practices of written or even oral fiction in the register associated with the term Urdu. Far from being nestled within a stable Urdu tradition, or being a mere innovation from earlier prose compositions in this elite register, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* must be read as a carefully constructed text, whose deviation from its initial pedagogical purpose becomes a problematic and transformative moment in the pre-existing politics of language in north-India.

The text in question, interchangeably known as the *Qiṣṣā-e Čahār Darvēsh*, performs as both an exercise in an attempted standardizing of the linguistic register of Urdu, as well as a carefully styled dalliance with the *dāstān*, a largely oral genre whose narrative conditions and thematic crescendos seem to have preserved it from easy or careless replication. Though the actual set of stories contained in the text, the fantastic, but often calculated events in the lives of four wandering dervishes, and the Ottoman king Azad Bakht, do not appear to assert a specific purpose, Mir Amman's preface to the composition, a meandering, yet pointed tract, deliberately positions *Bāḡ-o Bahār* as a pioneering text in the aesthetic field of the language he refers to as "Urdu," but that Gilchrist mostly seems to refer to as "Hindostanee" in his writings. The first, that he had composed the story of the four dervishes in the language spoken "by the people of Urdu," (jō urdū kē lōg bōltē haiñ) piqued in no uncertain manner, the aesthetic rivalry between the courtly poets and aesthetes of Lucknow and Delhi, causing the text to be unwittingly drawn into this competition, and through this debate into more contorted questions of belonging and originality.

His second claim, an extended and largely erroneous history of the "Urdu" language, penned at the request of Gilchrist, was challenged by various scholars both from the colonial period as well as in the years following, yet the problematic source, that is to say, Mir Amman's

desire to play historian, remains unquestioned. Other parts of the preface engage with Mir Amman’s own life history, his exile to Calcutta after Delhi’s fall to Ahmad Shah Durrani, in addition to several encomiums dedicated to Gilchrist and Wellesley. This excessive praise for these colonizing figures though standard to every work composed at Fort William, in the case of Mir Amman stems directly from the author’s own biography—the decline of Delhi as a center of high culture can somehow be compensated for by rise of a new, and modern literary Calcutta. Under this ruler, the “good fortune of the country” (qismat kī ḳūbī is mulk kī thī) is that “the tiger and goat can drink from the same stream,” (shēr aur bakrī ēk hī ghāt sē pānī pītē haiñ) and “the vogue for knowledge prevails” (čarčā ‘ilm kā pḥailā).²⁸⁷ Evoking a desire in his reading audience for the continuity and expansion of the colonial rule under which he has temporarily found refuge, Mir Amman is able to position *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, literally, the “Garden and Spring”, as precisely that: the harking of a season of rebirth and renewal in a country that has endured such “destruction” from Afghan invasions in the past few years.

Bāḡ-o Bahār, then, “composed in the language of Urdu-e Mu’alla,” is offered by Mir Amman as both tribute and aid to the rulers who have demanded “an acquaintance with the Urdu language, so they are able to converse with the people of Hindostan, and attend to their work in this country with the fullest information” (shauq huā keh urdū zubān sē vāqif hō kar, hindustānīōñ sē guft-o shanūd kareñ aur mulkī kām kō beh āgāhī-e tamām anjām deñ).²⁸⁸ Mir Amman’s constant affixing of the text within a term that itself held different meanings as it moved from Delhi to Lucknow allowed for *Bāḡ-o Bahār* to become roughly and clumsily imbricated within a tradition of Urdu writing. Innovative, definitely, but not necessarily the first

²⁸⁷ Mir Amman, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, ed. Rashid Hassan Khan (Delhi: Anjuman-e Tarraqi-e Urdu, 2009), 5.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

to adopt a leveled style of prose that could now be associated with Urdu writing, *Bāg-o Bahār* was in many ways closer to the early Quranic translations by eighteenth-century Islamic scholars, Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Abdul Qadir, than it was to the complicated poetics of figures such as Hatim or Tahsin. Identified by Meher Afshan Faruqi as “neglected examples of early Urdu prose,” that “linked the spoken and literary language and led the way towards the “Fort William” style of prose,” these translations of the Quran into Urdu provide a close equivalence to the innovation I repeatedly speak of Mir Amman as undertaking.²⁸⁹ Faruqi has argued that Abdul Qadir and Abdul Aziz’s works be “recognized as participating in the development of those later literary prose forms,” i.e. the Fort William College texts, and though her argument is hardly unreasonable, it seems to ignore the cultural agency that Mir Amman deliberately claims for himself and Gilchrist in his preface.²⁹⁰

In other words, Mir Amman by way of his prefatory story writes himself and his version of an Urdu literary history into the early nineteenth-century conversation around this term and its variations around north-India. While the actual term “Urdu,” did not connote a language, or even a linguistic register till very late into the eighteenth century, its usage in what we can roughly term pre-colonial texts, or texts at a distance from the colonial ambit to be more accurate, most often referred either to the royal corridors of the city of Delhi, or to the register taken up by a select population of Delhi, or Shahjanabad, as it was then known. Often, within these references, the register being pointed to had little or no resemblance to the broader, encompassing

²⁸⁹ Meher Afshan Faruqi, “Changing Literary Patterns in Eighteenth Century North India: Quranic Translations and the Development of Urdu Prose,” in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. Francesca Orsini, (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010), 242.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

vernacular imagined by Halhed, and Gilchrist, its Persian-leaning aspirations keeping it from becoming common parlance.²⁹¹

We can gain a more direct, primary context of the meaning of Urdu, as it would have been understood by the *munshīs* of Fort William College, in Inshallah Khan Insha's *Daryā-e Laṭāfat* ("The Ocean of Refinement," 1803), a slim volume that behaves as a somewhat satirical, but veritable guide on the register of the "great men and the pure of speech" (ṣāhib-e kamāl aur faṣāḥ).²⁹² Covering variances in grammar, sources and commonalities with Turkish, Persian, Punjabi, and Braj, among others, and even the letters of the script, Insha, nevertheless, maintains a focus on what to him is the defining feature of an Urdu speaker, *faṣāḥat*, or what can be described as a purity and correctness of speech. Guarded by a strict orthography (*tanāfur-e harūf*), the rejection of insertions from languages such as Deccani, Bangla, and Pahari, or mountainous dialects (*ḡarābat lafzi*), and inaccurate usage (*muḡālfat-e qyās-e laḡvī*),²⁹³ Urdu left little room for experimentation and innovation by poets and aesthetes.²⁹⁴ Addressing the rivalry between Delhi and Lucknow as centers of this aestheticism, Insha admits that Delhi was the city where

²⁹¹ For a detailed chronology and account of the metamorphoses of the term "Urdu," see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's comprehensive study *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). In addition to close tracking the use of the term over the course of the eighteenth century, Faruqi also closely examines the early stages of the linguistic usages that evolve into this term, challenging in no uncertain way Orientalist assertions—Hobson-Jobson, Halhed, and Gilchrist, to name a few—that Urdu was a Muslim import, born out of the conqueror's practice, rather than an organically evolved, upper-class register largely reserved for poetic composition.

²⁹² Inshallah Khan Insha, *Daryā-e Laṭāfat* (Delhi: Anjumman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1988), 27.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* 48.

²⁹⁴ Shamsur Rahman Faruqi issues a sharp critique towards attitudes such as Insha's in *Early Urdu Literary Culture*: "Urdu literary culture from the late eighteenth century onwards does place an unfortunate stress, which is also entirely disproportionate to its value, on "purism," "language reform," "purging the language of undesirable usages," and—worst of all—privileging all Persian-Arabic over all Urdu. Urdu is the only language whose writers have prided themselves on "deleting" or "excising" words and phrases from their active vocabulary." p. 154.

the “well-spoken decided to extract the best words from various languages...and made a new language, separate from these others that they named “Urdu,” (ḳush bayānōñ nē muttafiq hō kar mut’addid zubānōñ se aḳhē aḳhē lafz nikālē...aur zubānōñ sē alag alag ēk na`ī zubān paidā kī jis kā nām urdū rakhā).²⁹⁵ Himself one of many transplanted aesthetes from Delhi to Lucknow on account of the decline of Shah Alam II’s court in the Mughal capital, Insha is quick to point out that the “pure of speech and people of good breeding...are now collected in this (Lucknow) city, thus Delhi has been rendered lifeless, and Lucknow now holds the life of Urdu (faṣīḥ aur ahl-e salīqāh... is (lucknow) shehr meñ ikathē haiñ pas shāhjahānābād qālib-e bējān hai aur lucknow is kī jān hai).²⁹⁶

I am raising these broad, but deeply pertinent remarks from *Daryā-e Laṭāfat*, to illustrate the idea of Urdu as it was understood *outside* of Fort William College, and defined by the same texts that populated the oral and written practices of this register. Insha’s presence in the courts of Lucknow and Delhi reminds us that Urdu was at this early juncture in the nineteenth century “gradually supplanting” Persian as the language of courtly aesthetics.²⁹⁷ Insha’s account in *Daryā-e Laṭāfat* can in some ways be understood as an account of the canonization, or the maturation of this register from high aestheticism to various literary forms. What it does not attempt is a literary canonization, or the description of a canon proper to the Urdu language, a process that has somewhat synthetic beginnings at Fort William College. It is important to note here is that the system Insha describes is hardly a “language,” as it was empirically understood in Europe from the Enlightenment onwards, its rational “origin” described by figures such as Gottfried Herder to have been a human invention, uniquely developed according to its

²⁹⁵ Insha, *Daryā-e Laṭāfat*, 28.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. 101.

²⁹⁷ Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1994), 4.

geographical precincts.²⁹⁸ “Urdu,” in Insha’s account appears simultaneously as a register consisting of a limited set of words, whose expansion was held close by the upper echelons of its aesthetes and poets, as well as its variations, dilutions, and improvisations throughout Delhi, Lucknow and close proximities outside of these cultural centers.

Mir Amman’s intervention in the preface of *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, then, is a serious one that sets eighteenth- and then nineteenth-century Urdu at irreparable odds with the aesthetic qualities that defined this register outside of the colonial ambit. As mentioned earlier, in his preface to *Bāḡ-o Bahār* Mir Amman claims that he has “composed *Bāḡ-o Bahār* in the language of the people of Urdu” (Urdū-e mu’allā kī zubān meñ bāḡ-o bahār banāyā) citing Gilchrist’s desire to acquaint himself with the tale.²⁹⁹ Only when this statement is read alongside the further qualification of having written by Gilchrist’s request in “idiomatic Hindustani conversation, that which is spoken by the people of Urdu, that in which Hindu, Muslim, man, woman, young boys, elite and commoners, conduct their daily business” (ñhññ hindustānī guftagū meñ, jō urdū kē lōg, hindū, musalmān, ‘aurat, mard, laḡkē bālē, ḡāḡ-o ‘ām āpas meñ bōltē čāltē haiñ) does the contradiction become apparent.³⁰⁰ Mir Amman at this point is describing *a vernacular*, a spoken language available to all, rather than an elite register that by its very definition and conditions of usage resists being leveled into a popular or mass dialect. His use of the word “Hindustani” to describe this universality, can easily be misread, making us think of Shamsur Rehman Faruqui’s argument

²⁹⁸ See, Gottfried Herder’s 1772 essay: “Treatise on the Origins of Human Language,” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁹⁹ Mir Amman, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, 2.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 6.

that “Hindustani,” when employed by the British, connoted a “largely Muslim language, although they also granted it was spoken, or at least understood all over India.”³⁰¹

A more cogent description of his style is present in Maulvi Abdul Haq’s introduction to *Bāḡ-o Bahār* written almost a century later: “the author has great control over his language, and at every instances makes use of appropriately idiomatic words...[The work] is neither excessively long nor is it florid” (muṣanif kō zubān par baḡī qudrat hai aur voh har mauq‘ē par isī kē munāsib thēt ilfāz ist‘amāl kartā hai... nā bē ṭōl nā faẓūl lifāzī hai).³⁰² For Haq, a founding Urdu literary critic, Mir Amman’s text is remarkable precisely because it reads the same way a century later as it did upon first being written. Perhaps the closest approximate term we can use for *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, then, is to think of it as an exercise in “literary vernacularization,” to borrow and conjugate Sheldon Pollock’s term.³⁰³ In his groundbreaking work on Sanskrit and cosmopolitanism, Pollock argues that the development of pre-modern South Asian “vernaculars,” or what existed as parallel to what we recognize as European vernaculars, “vernacularization” should be understood as “the historical process of choosing to create a written literature.”³⁰⁴ Mir Amman by way of his new style in *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, then, manages to enlarge or expand the Urdu repertoire into a kind of literary vernacularity that though leveled like the aforementioned Quranic translations, nevertheless attempts to enmesh itself within a more elite aesthetic practice.

Mir Amman’s self-assignment of his narrative’s linguistic origins is carried out through a short, yet generously expansive, history of the creation of “Urdu” in his preface. This “history”

³⁰¹ Shamsur Rehman Faruqi, “A Long History of Urdu Literature: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 808.

³⁰² Abdul Haq, “Muqadmah-e *Bāḡ-o Bahār*,” in *Bāḡ-o Bahār* ed. Rashid Hassan Khan, 20.

³⁰³ Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 22.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 23.

or rather a “true account of the Urdu language as heard from our ancestors,” (ḥaqīqat-e urdū zubān kī buzurgōñ kē mūñh sē yūñ sunī hai), regurgitates, with some detail, the argument that “Urdu” as a linguistic formation, could not have existed without Muslim invasions, and its eventual patronage by the Mughal kings Akbar and Shahjahan. To rehearse the major milestones as narrated by Mir Amman: prior to the “thousand years of Muslim rule” (hazār sāl musalmānōñ kā ‘amal), the Hindus who occupied Delhi “spoke their own language” (apnī bhākhā bōltē thē); after the coming of Mahmud Ghaznavi, Ghauri, and Lodi, however, “some languages benefited from the mingling of Muslims and Hindus” (kuḥ zubānōñ nē hindū musalmān kī āmīzish pā`ī). After Akbar became the ruler, people from “surrounding countries,” hearing of the court’s greatness came to meet the king, but “each one’s manner of speaking and language was distinct” (har ēk kī goyā`ī aur bōlī judī judī thī). By way of their coming together, their various interactions, exchanges, “Urdu as a common language was decided upon” (ēk zubān urdū kī muqarrar hu`ī). Shahjahan’s rule brought further construction in Delhi, and the “bazaar” of the new city became known as “Urdu-e Mu’alla.” Whether deliberately misplaced chronologically or not by Mir Amman, Taimur establishes rule after Shahjahan, and under the lineal succession of these kings, “Urdu, at last, after persistent polishing, became so refined that no other city’s language could come close to it” (nidān zubān-e urdū kī manjtē manjtē aisī manjī keh kiso shehr kī bōlī us sē takar nahīñ khātī). But an “impartial connoisseur” (qadardān-e munṣif), namely Gilchrist, was now required to add worth to Urdu, and it was thanks to his efforts that the “language has become popular in the provinces, and with this new beginning has an added life to it,” (zubān kā mulkōñ meñ ravāj huā aur na`ē sirē sē raunaq zāydāh hu`ī).³⁰⁵ Mir Amman, of

³⁰⁵ Mir Amman, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, 7-8.

course, has come under fire for his disturbingly inaccurate version of events³⁰⁶ in the formation of Urdu, but what remains glaringly obvious in this particular rendition is the acceptance, and imbrication of an earlier, Orientalist history, one version of which is Halhed's in *A Grammar of the Bengal Language*.³⁰⁷ That is to say, the salient points of his narrative far from complementing, completing, or even rivaling Insha's, occur on the parallel plane of Orientalism, one that within the next decade or so would be uncomfortably hinged to the term "Urdu." An abridged rendition of Halhed's story was presented by Gilchrist in his introduction to *The Oriental Fabulist*, and now in Mir Amman's preface is inventively translated into Urdu.

III. Elitism, aestheticism, and universality: A ruptured tradition

To try and locate Mir Amman's style on the plane of either the Urdu that was used by his contemporaries, or that of the "oral vernacular" Gilchrist believed could be called Hindustani would be futile. Mir Amman's claim that he "started writing in a conversational idiom" (us mahāvarē sē likhnā shur'ū kiyā jaisē kō'ī bāteñ kartā hai) is perhaps the most accurate statement contained in the preface, the author's proffered reading and interpretation of his own work.³⁰⁸ The text and narrative of *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, then, is precisely this: a simplified, often colloquial style, motivated into existence for linguistic training of officers at Fort William, yet one that interjects

³⁰⁶ Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and Frances Pritchett are two late twentieth-century scholars of Urdu who have taken it upon themselves to deliberately rebut and reject Mir Amman's facetious history.

³⁰⁷ I quote here from Halhed's preface to *A Grammar of the Bengal Language*: "Thus we may suppose that when the Mahometan Invaders first settled in India, and from the necessity of having some medium of communication with their new subjects, applied themselves to the study of the Hindostanic dialect, the impenetrable reserve of the Jentoos would quickly render its abstruser Shanscrit terms unintelligible; and the Foreigners, unpracticed in the idiom, would frequently recur to their own native expressions. New adventurers continually arriving kept up a constant influx of exotic words, and the heterogeneous mass gradually increased its stock, as conquest or policy extended the boundaries of its circulation. But these alterations affected words only." p. xi.

³⁰⁸ Mir Amman, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, 6.

and interrupts the more serious and longstanding tradition that Mir Amman identifies with in his autobiographical wanderings. Mir Amman's most vociferous attacker was, of course, Rajab Ali Beg Surur, a rival from the court of Lucknow, who taking offence to the register presented in *Bāg-o Bahār*, composed *Fasānā-e 'Ajā`ib*, a stylized *dāstān*-like story that seemed to portray its sole purpose as righting the aesthetic wrong done by the former. Critical in the *creative historiography* of the term Urdu as it was understood then, and the language it has become today, is Surur's own preface to the *Fasānā-e 'Ajā`ib*, a text scholars such as Rashid Hassan Khan believe to have been composed as an offering to the king of Lucknow for ending the author's exile from his beloved city. While a good part of Surur's opening is concentrated on the requisite adulation required for a possible invitation to the court of Lucknow from Naseeruddin Haider, the second half acts, inadvertently, as an exemplary text for Insha's argument in *Daryā-e Laṭāfat*, and more importantly, exposes and denounces Mir Amman's register from *Bāg-o Bahār* as inauthentic and unrepresentative of Delhi. Describing the fantastic tale of Prince Jan-e Alam, and his wives Mehr Nigar and Anjumman Ara, Surur tells his readers to "call it a *qiṣṣā*, a story[...], a book of fancy. Each page is the envy of the flowers; the book is a garden, the zenith of springtime... The perceptive, the exacting [...] should see this manuscript and what is written in it for themselves. I have let flow a river of *faṣāḥat* (kehnē kō qiṣṣā hai, kahānī hai... muraqq'a-e mānī hai. har ṣafḥa rashk-e gulzār, bāg hai, sarāpā-e bahār hai... barīk bīn, nuktāh sunḥ ḷud dēkh lēñ gē keh nusḷōñ meñ kyā hai aur is meñ kyā likhā hai. faṣāḥat kā daryā bahā diyā hai).³⁰⁹

Towards the end of his preface, his "hope from the wise audience is that they will examine [the text] with a critical eye, one that nourishes and corrects, and where they encounter an error or mistake, adorn [the text] with correction (umīd nāzrīn-e purtamkīñ sē yeh hai keh bah ḷashm-e

³⁰⁹ Rajab Ali Beg Surur, *Fasānā-e 'Ajā`ib*, ed. Rashid Hassan Khan (Delhi: Anjumman-e Taraqqi- Hind, 2001), 24.

‘aib, pōshī-o nazar-e iṣlāḥ mulaḥiẓa farmā, jahāñ sahō yā galtī pā`eñ, bah iṣlāḥ muzayyan farmā`eiñ).³¹⁰ Surur’s focus, it would appear, is on the narrative style and the finesse of the register he employs to compose the story, rather than on the plot or characters. But this is not just any exercise in style—it is premised almost entirely on *faṣāḥat*, or the chastity of its language, inviting the reading audience, moreover, to participate in upholding this chastity by offering *iṣlāḥ*, or correction to the word or phrase that may offend the register’s elite sensibilities. Consistent with Insha’s writing in *Daryā-e Laṭāfat* as opposed that of Mir Amman, Surur’s preface and text acquire heightened relevance precisely because they enact the role Urdu should play in a prose narrative, implying the fixedness of the register and emphasizing the importance of the skill and artistry of words while never compromising correct usage.

Thus Surur launches an attack on Mir Amman, traditionally borrowing the latter’s own self-deprecating phrase, “a crumbled brick of Delhi,” (dillī kā roṛa), to begin his tirade against Mir Amman, “he writes that he is a crumbled brick from Delhi, but he has broken the hands and feet of idiom,” (likhā to jā`ē keh hum dillī kē roṛē haiñ par, mahāvarē keh hāth pāōñ toṛē haiñ). His ambitiously named *Bāḡ-o Bahār*—and here Surur puns on the idiom of the garden and spring—is a “thorn in the flesh” (ḡār khāyā), a “mangled” (bakḥērā)³¹¹ version of the language of Shahjahanabad. Surur’s wittily worded, stinging “repudiation” of Fort William’s conversational style, as Mufti has called it,³¹² though ostensibly an exhibition of clever repartee between two literary rivals, inadvertently succeeds in imbricating Mir Amman’s novel text with the older, pre-existing tradition that Surur seems to associate with, despite the latter’s recognition that *Bāḡ-o Bahār* was a “commissioned account” (īfā-ē taqrīr). But even as he derides Mir Amman’s style,

³¹⁰ Ibid. 30.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Mufti, “Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures,” 487.

Surur becomes complicit in the canonization of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* among those narratives he believes constitute literary practice in Urdu. That is to say, rather than remaining exactly what it was intended to be, a series of simple stories for the edification of students at Fort William, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* would now enter into and forge some kind of belonging within an older and internally defined Urdu tradition, one that traditionally, as evident from Surur's measured diction, leaned towards poetry, but had not historically been averse to prose either. Surur's misreading, then, must be taken to be simultaneously the first act of resistance against the colonial codification of a literary register into a standard language, as well as the admission of this deviation into the narratives constituting this register.

To really comprehend the utterly critical nature of this moment in the literary history of the register we know as Urdu, we must turn to the texts themselves: Mir Amman's hastily assembled patchwork of tales from the *Alf Leila* and Tahsin's *Nau tarz-e murassa* (1770?);³¹³ Surur's highly-stylized, erroneously self-termed *dāstān*; and finally a second text from Fort William College, one whose disregard by Gilchrist ironically can be read as attesting to its stylistic integrity, Khalil Khan Ashk's *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā*. For purposes of stylistic comparison, I have chosen passages from each text in which the birth of a long-awaited prince is announced. At the same time, however, birth, or the possibility of perpetuating dynasty or empire, itself takes on various meanings, according to the contexts from which the relevant text itself has emerged.

³¹³ Several stories in *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, including that of the merchant and the two dogs, appear in slightly different versions in the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. Gilchrist himself remained obsessed with the idea of publishing a translation of the *Arabian Nights*, which when he eventually did, he held in "great estimation," describing it as "a work that promises much for the Hindoostani." Though a new Arabic translation, one Muhsin Mahdi calls "Calcutta I," by Sheikh Ahmad Sherwani, whose source, according to the *Annals of the College*, and Mahdi was the Paris edition, was published in 1814, Shakir Ali's 1803 (presumed to be preparing for print) translation could not have been based on this. Frances Pritchett's bibliography of works printed at Fort William seems to suggest that the "Hindustani" *Alf Laila* was based on the *Arabian Nights*.

Bāgh-o Bahār begins with Azad Bakht's grief at his childlessness, a prayer that is hurriedly answered at the very end of the narrative, but only partially, for Azad Bakht has to share the infant prince with the king of the fairies, Shah Bal. Mir Amman narrates the birth in a conversational, but concise manner: "In the meanwhile, a guard from the king's palace came running to them and paid congratulatory homages to the presence of the king, and announced that just this moment a prince had been born, so beautiful that the sun and moon were embarrassed to be in his presence" (itnē meñ ēk mahel-dār bādshāh kē mahel meñ sē doṛā huā āyā aur mubārik bād kī taslīmeñ bādshāh kē huṣūr bajā lāyā aur 'arṣ kī keh is vaqt shāhzādāh paidā huā keh āftāb-o mahtāb is kē huṣn kē rū bah rū sharmindāh haiñ).³¹⁴ But the prince is abducted every night by Shah Bal's army of fairies, leaving Azad Bakht's rejoicing kingdom alternating their celebrations with outpourings of grief. Though it would be hard to assume that Azad Bakht's story is directly influenced or steered by Orientalist tropes of the eastern despot in flux, the conclusion of his story suggests a certain continuity with Mir Amman's earlier narrative of Muslim history in India. That is to say, Azad Bakht's son, incidentally born to a slave girl and not a queen, becomes part of the decline of an earthly Islamic empire when as an infant he is betroth to the princess of the fairies. The event can be read as a fictional parallel to the decline of Muslim kings described in the preface, the solution to which in Mir Amman's view has been the arrival of the foreign rulers.

Presenting an opulent and deliberate contrast to Mir Amman's direct narration, and elementary diction is Surur's painstaking, almost classicized prose: "Finally, their prayers and supplications were granted by the Creator, the ignominy of childlessness was removed. After seven years, in their old age, a lustrous ornament, the adornment of a king, in a providential

³¹⁴ Mir Amman, *Bāgh-o Bahār*, 239-40.

manner, a pearl was born from the womb of the queen. Young and old, all fell in love with his presence. Feroz Bakht named this exhilaration of spirits, Jan-e Alam” (aḳirash janāb-e bārī meñ tażarr’u-o zārī us kī manzūr hū`i, lāvaladī kī badnāmī dūr hū`i. sāt bars kē san meñ, buḳhāpē kē din meñ, gauhar-e āb, dur-e shāhvār, şadaf baḳan-e bāno ḳajastāh iṭvār sē paidā huā. ḳhōtā baḳā us kī şūrat kā shīdā huā. us rūh afzā kā, ferōz baḳt nē, jān-e ‘ālam nām rakhā).³¹⁵ Though not apparent in translation, Surur’s prose is measured to the extent that it often reads as rhyming *sh‘ēr* or couplets, emphasizing at the same time its proclivity for Persian, a definitive quality in the classical Urdu register. Where Mir Amman is direct—the prince is born—Surur employs elaborate allusion to signal the continuity of the royal family. The name of this prince, in the fashion of the opulent narrative style, translates to the “Life of the World,” and his quest is motivated by the hearsay of the beauty of the captive Princess Arjumand Ara, whom he eventually takes as his second wife. In other words, Jan-e Alam, as a figure in a narrative largely concerned with exhibiting its attachment to the *nawab* culture of Lucknow, is himself, beginning from the moment of his birth, a jewel, or a coveted object, which is precisely how Surur seems to portray this last bastion of high culture in north-India.

A less celebrated participant in the making of Gilchrist’s grand and popular language is Khalil Khan Ashk who announces in the preface to his translation of the *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā* that “at the request of Mister Gilchrist... for the benefit of beginners, I wrote this *qişşā* of the Hindi³¹⁶ language in the language of *Urdu-e Mu‘allā* so that it is easy for the honorable young scholars to read” (nau amōzavan zubān-e hindī kē is qişşē kō zubān meñ urdū-e mu‘allā kē likhā

³¹⁵ Surur, *Fasānā-e ‘Ajā`ib*, 34.

³¹⁶ For a detailed discussion on the various names used with various specificities for the north-Indian language in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see again Shamsur Rehman Faruqi’s article “A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part I: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*.

tā kē ṣāhibān-e mubtadiōñ kē paṛhnē kō āsān hō).³¹⁷ In Ashk’s description of the register he employs, we find both the polysemic nature of the various terms used to denote the same literary language—Hindi, that would later denote the Sanskrit-leaning version of the same register, and the language of *Urdu-e Mu‘alla*, here, are the *same*. But Ashk’s language once narrating the *dāstān* is far from leveled, its shifts in diction prompted by the plot rather than the requirements of a non-native audience. The birth of Naushervan, the Persian king whose kingdom would eventually be saved by the hero of the *dāstān*, Amir Hamza, is told by the narrator in the following way:

When nine months had passed, and the day had risen on the clock, a eunuch came from inside the palace, softly whispered something in the king’s ear and left. The king ended the court that very moment, and retired. He sent for the venerable and noble Hamza, and informed him that the birth he had expected for some time had happened; a boy has been born in our house... The fountain of drink that for some years now had dried out, today, on its own, flowed with water, and on account of this happy event, the venerable and noble Hamza named the boy Nausherwan, and some narrators say that at the moment of birth, the king held a goblet of wine, and Hamza said to the king in the Persian language, “O Majesty, let the wine flow...”

(jabkeh nau mahīnē guzar ga`ye ēk rōz ghaṛī par dīn čaṛḥā keh mahal kē andar sē ēk ḳvājā sirā āyā aur kučh ahistāh sē bādshāh kē kān meñ keh kar čalā gayā bādshāh nē usīvaqt dīvān barḳvāst kar kē ḳalvat kīyā aur

³¹⁷ Khalil Ali Khan, Ashk, *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā* (Calcutta: Janab Qazi Ibrahim Sahib), 2.

of genre, to use this generally rather fixed term to describe traditions that defy easy categorization. In other words, how does the pre-existing tradition of *dāstān-gō`i*, which usually involved both oral recitation of the *dāstān* in court and the writing down of the *dāstān* for this purpose, reconcile or retract in the face of texts such as *Bāg-o Bahār*, *Ārā`ish-e Mehfil*, and even Gilchrist’s own fable-like compositions whose style, and themes were officially sanctioned for suitability at the College? Despite some twentieth-century Urdu scholars, including Gyan Chand Jain, largely grouping the latter set of texts under the umbrella of the *dāstān*, the move is clearly an erroneous one, for as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi argues in his powerful study of the *Amīr Ĥamzā* cycle, the elusive and arcane demands of a narrative such as the *dāstān* prevented easy replication. Though *Bāg-o Bahār* could boast the “magic, charms, demons, [and] fairies” that were an essential presence in the *dāstān*, it could not boast an almost “interminable length,” “highly artificial, dense, and often, in order to stir the audience, tortuous language,” the frequent reiteration of the same event, a lack of consistency in the extended narrative, in addition to the spiraling world of battlefields, romance, camaraderie, and destiny that it unlocked for its listening and reading audiences.³¹⁹

As a prose form “intended for oral narration” (*zubānī sunānē kē li`yē*), the *dāstān* contains “examples of all kinds of prose” (*har ṭarḥāñ kī naṣr kē namūnē*) and is “a treasure of words, terms, and idioms” (*ilfāz, iṣṭalāhāt, aur maḥāvarē kā bīsh bahāz ḵhairāh*).³²⁰ Ashk was not the first to translate or render the *Dāstān-e Amīr Ĥamzā* into a text form, but his version was certainly the first to go to print at the Hindostanee Press set up by Gilchrist.³²¹ Despite the

³¹⁹ Shamsur Rehman Faruqi, *Sāhirī, Shāhī, Ṣāhib Qirānī: Dāstān-e-Amīr Ĥamza Kā Mutāl`ah* (New Delhi: Qaumi Kaunsul Barai Farogh Urdu Zuban, 1999), 67-8.

³²⁰ Ibid. 64.

³²¹ By the 1860s, Naval Kishore, the entrepreneurial publishing magnate in colonial India, would reprint Ashk’s version of the Amir Hamza cycle, replacing it eventually with Abdullah

popularity of the *dāstān* in the higher echelons of north-Indian society at the time, as well as its later well-documented mass appeal in urban centers such as Delhi, Gilchrist displayed mixed feelings towards Ashk, “who now considers himself the Hereditary Story Teller of the Emperor, Princes, and Nobles of India,” describing the *dāstān*, on the one hand, “to be an inexhaustible fund of legendary narrative and diversion” appreciated by “the patrons and admirers of the Hindoostanee,” while dismissing it, on the other hand for “Oriental knight errantry and Harlequinism can hardly possess many charms for the present age.”³²²

Ashk’s one-volume (though he claimed that the complete *dāstān* would fill fourteen volumes) rendition though wildly popular once reissued for popular consumption in the late nineteenth century, would for the moment be overshadowed by more innovative, colonially conforming works such as *Bāgh-o Bahār*, the latter praised by Gilchrist as “attaining a plain and perspicuous style... a pleasing description of the manners and customs of Asia.”³²³ Ironically enough, of the three texts I have just examined, it is perhaps only the *dāstān* that can boast a true engagement with idea of an Islamic Empire, in fact, this geographic expanse is formative for the plot and movements of the hero. Despite its dynastic heroes, the *dāstān* is deeply secular, its narrative boundaries porous, welcoming all kinds of characters, and its traditions, far from governed by Islamic law, spontaneous and riotous. Yet, *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā* fails to acquire much popularity with the nineteenth-century metropolitan and colonial consumers of Oriental

Bilgrami’s, extending the text to fit several volumes rather than confining it to the single volume that was originally produced.

³²² John Borthwick Gilchrist, *The Hindee Story Teller, or Entertaining Expositor of the Roman Persian, and Nagree Characters*, vol. 2, (Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1802), iii.

³²³ As quoted in Duncan Forbes and Mir Amman. *Bāgh-o Bahār, consisting of entertaining tales in the Hindustani Language* (London: W. H. Allen, 1860), iv

fictions.³²⁴ With a hero as volatile and unpredictable as the *ayyars* or tricksters that accompany him in his quest, the *dāstān* cannot provide, for administrators and subjects alike, the moral rigidity that the Oriental tale must contain. *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, *Ṭōḡā Kahānī*, and even *Baitāl Pačīsī*, on the other hand, with comparatively passive, non-militant despot figures better conform to the requirements of the Oriental tale in the colony. Of the dervishes in the first text, each one is a figure overcome by his circumstances, whether the first whose princess is taken by *jinns*, or the third, a prince of Persia, who loses his wife and father-in-law at sea after a prolonged battle for the former.

But the crucial resemblance the stories of the dervishes maintain with the eighteenth-century Oriental tale is that all the protagonists are essentially regal wanderers. Even Azad Bakht, in whose kingdom they convene, must leave his palace in a pilgrim's garb in order to become privy to the stories of his companions. The thematic of a Muslim homelessness or exile, in the case of the four dervishes, each one incidentally of royal descent, then persists until the very end of the larger narrative where the quick resolutions dealt by the King of Fairies, seem attached mostly in order that the stories maintain a moral bent. Over the course of the next two decades, as I will show later on in this chapter, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* would go on to be promulgated and recognized as the first member of "Urdu prose literature" through the various mechanisms of colonial culture, while Ashk's work would remain largely in a part of the popular realm, unregulated by colonial structures, continuing to be recited and told by *dāstān-gōs* as well as

³²⁴ My use of the word secular here suggests that the *dāstān*, a cyclical story in which the hero, Hamza, is the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, nevertheless, remained a deeply fluid form, unattached to the more rigid structures of nation, religion, dynasty, or country. As Shamsur Rehman Faruqi reminds us, the *dāstān* takes place in an alternative universe and its concerns are removed from reality, or the present, allowing it to operate outside of the rigid structures that often constitute culture.

read by a slow emerging bourgeoisie for whom a developing print industry would be transformative.³²⁵

The critical point I have been trying to make by way of these comparisons is to demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings of the term “Urdu” in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. We can say that the Fort William intervention *ruptures* this polysemicity by attempting a standardization of this term by way of its commissioning and promoting of particular texts that by the 1830s become integral instruments in native education as well. *Bāg-o Bahār*, *Ṭōḡā Kahānī*, *Qiṣṣā-e Gul Bakaulī*,³²⁶ and to a lesser extent *Ārā`ish-e Mehfil*, are just a few examples of texts that once published at Fort William College, and translated into English within the decade, would be read as authentic examples of the Oriental tale by European audiences. Their life within north-Indian cultural space would largely be negotiated through their persistent presence in colonial institutions of education as examples of native literature for the consumption of native students, now being instructed to learn Urdu as a standardized register that can be closely approximated with Gilchrist’s earlier vision of it.³²⁷

³²⁵ Gilchrist’s frustration with finding suitable texts in “Hindustani” is evident from his letter to the Company from 19th August, 1803 in which he complains that “in the Hindoostanee, there is not a prose work in existence of sufficient worth or accuracy to put into the hands of my pupils; it is therefore impossible for me to extract honey from a quarter which cannot boast the possession of a single hive.” See Siddiqi’s *Origins of Modern Hindustani Literature source material: Gilchrist Letters*.

³²⁶ In his translation of the *Qiṣṣā-e Gul Bakauli* from Persian into “Hindi,” renamed as *Mazhab-e ‘Ishq*, Nihal Chand Lahori describes the various alterations he was forced to make, including “dropping the verse of the book at several points, and translating as I deemed appropriate for the selection at certain junctures. In some places I translated in verse, and in others, in prose...” (nazam-e kitab ko kitne mauq’e mein bilkul chora diya aur b’aze muqam mein jo munasib dekha to bataur intakab ke tarjama kiya), 6.

³²⁷ The *dāstān*, on the other hand, and here I refer specifically to a work of *Amir Hamza’s* proportions, by virtue of its very proportions, its alternative realities, and the simultaneous highs and lows of its alternately hawkish, romantic, and fantastic themes could neither be assimilated easily under the broader definition of the Oriental tale, nor could it, with its variant register, be a

IV. Colonial education and literary canonization: Fort William texts in the public sphere

The aforementioned “formalization,” or perhaps deliberate codification of the “literatures” in standardized native languages could, of course, never have been possible without the ambitious and extensive network of Company and later Government of India schools for Indians that would be set up in each of the presidencies administered by the English. The first historic landmark in the colonial education program is generally considered to be the Charter Act of 1813 that promised “a sum of not less than one lakh rupees in year...applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India...”³²⁸ But native education, or rather *re-education* by the colonizer, arguably has already begun at Fort William College, where, as described, the figure of the *munshī*, deployed under the “professors,” the Orientalist scholars of Indian languages, performed the functions of both instructor and scribe. Lord Minto, during his term as Governor-General, decried the “progressive state of decay” of “science and literature” in India, suggesting in 1811 that that “unless Government interpose with a fostering hand, the revival of letters may shortly become hopeless, from a want of books, or of persons capable of explaining them.”³²⁹ Simplified versions of the colonial debate on how to best educate the natives have historically focused on the theoretical disagreement between the Indo-phile Orientalists and the Anglicists on the value

source text for an English translation to send back to the metropolis as one example of “Oriental literature.”

³²⁸ “East India Company Charter Act of 1813, section 43” in *The Great Indian Education Debate*, edited by Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 91.

³²⁹ Gilbert Elliot Murray-Kynynmound. “Minute by Lord Minto, March 6, 1811,” in *Lord Minto in India: Life and Letters of Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto* (London: Longman 1880), 117.

of native languages and knowledge structures.³³⁰ The narrative of this disagreement stems from an easy misreading of the more complicated question of education whose actual focus was a *cultural reconfiguration of the colony* based on a transformation of the native body through a canon quite literally “imbued with the ideas and feelings of civilized Europe.”³³¹

The more pressing problem as the colonial administrators appeared to see it was the paucity of literary texts in the vernacular language that would achieve the above mentioned cultural transformation. The source, whether India or Europe, though a constant concern in the education debates, was in many ways a redundant question given that the ultimate dissemination and interpretation of these texts would continue to be an imperial function. I want to use two points of entry in an attempt to reorder the terms of this debate: the first examines the process by which the colonial administration populated what it repeatedly, and erroneously called a “vernacular literature.” The second, more technical point refers to the persistence of the Fort William curriculum in the native schools—that is to say over the course of the nineteenth century, the linguistic, literary, legal and historical education of Indian subjects does not differ significantly from that made available to officers at the College. Both these trends in the native education system direct us towards a reexamination of how the “literature” or the canon of a previously loose linguistic entity such as Urdu is artificially and deliberately constituted as an integral part of a colonial culture. Initially directed by the Orientalist narrative of a Muslim identity in India

³³⁰ It may be helpful here to explicate briefly on the arrangement of the colonial education system as it operated for much of the nineteenth century. Colleges were the select institutions for the education of a native elite intended to rule directly underneath the colonial administration. Instructors were either directly trained by Orientalist scholars, or were often of the latter category. Schools, district schools (*tehsilee*) and then rough approximate to village schools (*hulkabandee*), the last often administered only by native schoolmasters, constituted the lower order with the middle and lower classes in attendance.

³³¹ R. Campbell, G. Smith, and J. Masterman, “Letter from the Bengal Public Department,” *Bengal Public Records 1830-1835*, 449, from the India Office Records and Private Papers in the British Library, London.

as it appeared in metropolitan Oriental tales, and in the subsequent scholarly works of the late eighteenth-century Calcutta Orientalists, this inorganic canon of writing gained new impetus as an instrument of colonial pedagogy.

The nature of the imperial debate on the desired means and ends of native education is perhaps best exposed in this series of letters from the Bengal Public Department, the first one of which discusses the “most desirable object,” that is “a class of persons qualified by their intelligence and morality for high employments in the civil administration of India.” To form this class, the writers of this letter, raise “a familiarity with European literature and science, imbued with the ideas and feelings of civilized Europe,” as one viable and tested method.³³² In a letter some five years later, from J. C. Sutherland, the Secretary-General for public education, to the James Prinsep, secretary to the Asiatic Society, the former argues that while “the great body of the people must be enlightened through the medium of their own language, and that to enrich and improve these, so as to render them the efficient depositories of all thoughts and knowledge, is an object of the first importance to be kept prominently in view,” education directly in the vernacular or the “learned languages,” would not achieve the desired ends. Instead:

The Foreign literature must be studied in itself, and if it be stored with superior Knowledge and capable of imparting a new vigour and capacity of thought, an indigenious and independent Literature will arise from it, and become the medium for diffusing knowledge through the body of the people, in the forms most suitable to their National circumstances, Character and wants. It is by rousing and strengthening the mind of the Educated classes for original efforts,

³³² Ibid.

that the general extension of national Education can alone be accomplished.³³³

In other words, what the letter seems to suggest is the re-education of a pliable bourgeoisie that would then take it upon itself to redirect the “career of National Civilization” in India. Echoing Gilchrist’s core argument from three decades earlier, it concludes with the assumption that “when the power of forming enlightened and enlarged ideas, and the desire to give expression to them shall first have been secured, a language fit for their expression will soon be framed...”³³⁴ In the meanwhile, however, the writers of the letter, as well as other officers with an interest in education, were content with the re-deployment of the Fort William College curriculum in the native schools, educating subject students in the newfound “vernaculars.”

The urgency that the idea of “literature” acquires in the various letters and memorandums of the Company officers becomes much larger than it seems in the theoretical domain. Evident even in Sutherland’s letter is that “literature” is the force behind the cultural, moral, and almost spiritual transformation that the writer wants colonial education to enact in India. Though Gauri Viswanathan shows how education in English language and literature became a central point for political control in India in her classic study *Masks of Conquest*, the somewhat unfamiliar but persistent instruction in the apparent vernacular, Hindustani or Urdu, remains largely misunderstood. In a more recent work, Sanjay Seth has tried to parse the inconsistencies in the networks and discourses of western education in colonial India, ultimately suggesting, “western

³³³ “Letter from J. C. C. Sutherland Esq. Sec General of the Committee for Public Instruction, to H. J. Prinsep, Secretary to Government in the General Department, Fort William, Jan 21, 1835,” Board’s Collection V.1846, India Office Records and Private Papers.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴

knowledge reshaped what it was thought to be merely describing.”³³⁵ Following from this, Parna Sengupta examines the development of a religious education in India, as it moves from the missionary school to semi-autonomous, local religious schools. Vernacular education though established for different purposes, by the late nineteenth century, Sengupta argues in her book, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*, became instrumental for native religious reform movements, casting vernacular education as a “dense nexus of state, missionary, and local demands and desires.”³³⁶

What neither one of these commendable works on the unfolding and the effects of colonial education in India examines, however, is the particular aspect the idea of a literature takes in the native culture over the course of the nineteenth century. Another way of phrasing this question is to ask how these nascent “vernaculars,” as the colonial administration repeatedly refers to them, come into possession of literatures, and literary canons? Evident in the above Minute and letter by Sutherland is that the social functioning of literature was a European, or even particularly British specification. Paul Keen argues that in the earlier phase of Calcutta Orientalism, the discovery and regeneration of “Oriental literature” by scholars such as Jones and Halhed and the subsequent “beneficial literary consequences” were viewed almost as a kind of “atonement” for “the troubling violence of imperial conquest,” as well as a means of containing the “disturbing excesses of imperial commerce” by placing “an alternative emphasis on the morally improving nature of cultural acquisitions.”³³⁷

³³⁵ Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) xxi.

³³⁶ Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and Refashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xxviii.

³³⁷ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 210.

In these first few decades of the nineteenth century, however, the imperial patronage received by Hindustani/Urdu and Hindi gave rise to a new, more utilitarian approach towards literature based on the idea that “the role of educational institutions [was] to monitor and facilitate the proper ideological functioning of literary texts.”³³⁸ Understood by Terry Eagleton as a means of molding the middle-classes of England, literature was replicated in the imperial space as “a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation.” Developing upon Eagleton’s argument, Alan Richardson argues in his book, *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, that literature becomes a “cultural institution predicated on a canonical set of “imaginative works,” disseminated through schools and centralized publishing venues, and managed by a professional group of critics and interpreters.”³³⁹ Though both Eagleton and Richardson here draw their reference from England during the Romantic period, a very similar process of unfolding seems to accompany the youthful vernaculars that came into existence at Fort William College. In this case, a series of texts generated for purposes of linguistic pedagogy become *representative* of culture for particular sets of people in India, the most relevant example, of course, being that of the new Urdu canon and its bearings on an elite Muslim population in India. As late as the 1840s, “Hindustani” or “Urdu” was considered to be “exceedingly deficient in compass, in precision, and generally its power of expressing what we propose to teach by its means.”³⁴⁰

In order to populate and develop Hindustani or Urdu such that it could perform the functions of an enlightened “vernacular,” the administration would turn to the Fort William

³³⁸ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as a Social Practice 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 31.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1844-45* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), 7.

curriculum, engrafting texts such as *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, *Ārā'ish-e Mehfil*, and even Gilchrist's late *Rissalah or Rules of Hindustani Grammar* (1820), onto syllabi for the natives. The core of the Hindustani curriculum at an institution such as the Benares College in 1851 consisted of *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, and curiously enough, Suroor's *Fasānā-e Ajā'ib*, whereas at the Agra College, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* was paired with Gilchrist's *Rissalah* from at least between the years 1845 to 1851.³⁴¹ In 1857, the Urdu texts for the entrance examination to the Calcutta University were *Bāḡ-o Bahār* and *Gul Bakaulī*, while the Arabic texts were *Alf Leila*, and *Nafhat al-Yaman*, the latter an eclectic set of stories, several of which overlapped with those of the former. It is only in the last two decades or so of the nineteenth century that *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, for so long a staple text on school and college syllabi, is relegated to younger students. The early efforts on the part of the administration to raise Urdu as a vernacular medium for broader instruction in the natural and social sciences, however, were not restricted to just placing particular texts on the curriculum.

At the Delhi College, an institution I will discuss at length in the following section, one examination question asks the student to elucidate how “literary compositions” in English and Urdu differed from each other. In response to this question, a student by the name of Surroop Narrain answers: “The subject of which the Urdu writers treat frequently is love, their compositions always filled with exaggerations, and their attention is seldom directed towards any scientific or historical objects.” In comparison to English, the student continues, the Urdu style is “florid,” and the language can often be “so abstruse and difficult as to puzzle the best scholar.”³⁴² Examination questions at the Agra College testing the proficiency of students in

³⁴¹ *The General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* 1882-84.

³⁴² “Appendix M” in *The General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1845-1846* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press), p. xxxvii.

“Oordoo” during the 1840s often asked for translations of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* into Persian.³⁴³ In the examination report for the Agra College from the same decade, C. C. Jackson and William Muir jointly advise that to “remedy” Urdu’s immaturity:

the students in the two Senior Classes be employed... in translation into Oordoo from the best models of English composition, for instance the Spectator, Speeches of English Orators, or from Indian or English History and that their translations be subjected to correction in their presence by the best Oordoo Moonshee, and, after lapse of a fortnight, be again turned into English without aid from the original.

Only through perpetual acts of translation and retranslation, these pedagogues seem to believe, could Urdu be “remodeled” for the “purposes of Narrative and Science.”³⁴⁴ James Ballantyne’s remarks from the 1848 examinations at Benares College betray, quite explicitly, the fabricated, syntheticity of the imperially patronized register: “The best way to teach Oordoo in the College would be to make the Moulvee give his instruction chiefly under the form of lessons in Persian,” the report advises. “The boys grudge the time spent in learning Oordoo, because when they go home they may expect praise and admiration for having read Sanscrit or Arabic, or English, or Persian, but not for Oordoo.”³⁴⁵

Persian, the language of the courts until replaced by Urdu in 1837, and of instruction in native schools prior to their incorporation into the colonial system, remains a constant obstacle to

³⁴³ *General Report on the Public Instruction in the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1846-47* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1849), 39.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 33.

³⁴⁵ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1848-49*, p. 15.

the growth and realization of the latter till as late as the 1870s. In the education report for the 1864-65 year, Matthew Kempson blames the native “moonshee” for “forgetting” his “duty” to “favor” the “grammatical study of the Vernacular.” The *munshī*’s “repute, considered from a Native point of view, depends on Farsiyat and Arabiyat.” As a result of this dismissal of Hindustani/Urdu, the Indian student “acquires a habit of regarding his ordinary speech as incapable of conveying in an elegant form, the ideas of the author he is engaged in studying.”³⁴⁶ It is obvious from these remarks that the linguistic goals of the administration and the native elite in attendance at colonial schools and colleges remain at odds with each other till late into nineteenth century.

The problem would be of concern till as late as the 1870s when reformist Muslim writers including Nazir Ahmad and Altaf Hussain Hali would attempt to devalue the relevance and cultural significance of Persian to the bourgeois Muslim male in didactic prose and verse narratives. The colonial administration, continuing on the vein introduced by Gilchrist, desired a “vernacular,” a universal native language that would become the medium through which to produce an ideal Indian subject as well as a modern culture reflective of European influence. The native student body, on the other hand, not particularly compelled by the idea of this “vernacular,” continued to associate aestheticism and cultural capital with higher registers and classical languages till well into the end of the nineteenth century.

Persian, however, wasn’t the only obstacle in the uninterrupted development and acquisition of the new, universal vernacular. In the fifth or so year of Fort William College, a rival register to Gilchrist’s Urdu, championed by Sanskrit-leaning Orientalists such as Henry Colebrooke, had been raised as the appropriate language for the Hindus of India. Colebrooke was

³⁴⁶ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1862-63* (Allahbad: Government Press, 1864), 56.

not the first or the last Orientalist to further the basic argument that “Hindi” was and could be a separate language from Urdu, but he did pioneer the more rigid notion that the origins of this language lay in Sanskrit.³⁴⁷ “Hindi,” or what Colebrooke described as befitting the term, initially remained in the shadows of the more aggressively impelled Urdu. It was largely after a decline in Gilchrist’s power that the *munshī* Lalluji Lal, under Colebrooke’s patronage, was able to compose a series of texts, including *Prēmsāgar* (1803), *Rājnīti* (1809), and *Baitāl Paçīsī* (1805) that became the cornerstones for the nationalist language movement later on in the nineteenth century. The best summation of this still ongoing linguistic division is Rashmi Bhatnagar’s which argues that “the invention of Hindi narrative, and Hindi’s division from Urdu were second order effects” of Lalluji Lal’s *Prēmsāgar*, a series of instructive tales, resembling the *Arabian Nights*, that begin with Hindu king Prakshit’s downfall due to his careless passion. “The linguistic divide” that took place between Urdu and Hindi in the vernacularization process was, Bhatnagar argues, “in effect the dispersal and dissemination of effects assembled to embody a larger and more abstract idea.”³⁴⁸

This “abstract idea” would take tangible form late in the nineteenth century when the status of Urdu as the official language would be contested, whereas Persian at this time was no longer a working register in courts and other administrative offices. That is to say, not until the late 1870s would Hindi, here implying a Sanskrit-leaning register of the north-Indian language complex, make a serious claim to the right of becoming the universal and rightful Indian vernacular. It is critical to note that “Urdu,” or “Hindustani,” had consistently been forced to occupy this title by the colonial administration, and hardly ever by a Muslim elite, for whom I have shown over the

³⁴⁷ See Henry Colebrooke, “On the Sanskrit and Prakrit Languages” in *Asiatic Researches*, v. 7, p. 199-231 (Calcutta, 1801).

³⁴⁸ Bhatnagar, “Premsagar” and the Orientalist Narratives of the “Invention” of Modern Hindi,” 80.

course of this chapter, this register was unfamiliar, often written off as merely colloquial, lacking aesthetic merit. *Far from claiming or adopting the idea of this universal language, influential Muslims of north-India seem to have resisted and disavowed from it*, as is abundantly obvious from the frustrated remarks of colonial educators.

The dissemination of the “Hindi” effect, as Bhatnagar calls it, in the colonial education nexus was deliberately orchestrated with institutions such as the Agra College being divided into “Hindu departments,” where students associated with that religion would be syphoned into the study of “Hindi,” while the “Muslim” department would, of course, be instructed in either Persian, or by the mid 1830s in the “Urdu” or Hindustani vernacular.³⁴⁹ In 1846-47, the “Oriental” department of the Agra College was split between “Urdu,” and “Hindee;” literature in the former consisted of *Bāg-o Bahār* and *Ārā`ish-e Mehfil*, while texts in the latter were the Fort William editions of the *Mahabharat* (1802?) and the *Ramayan* (1811). In 1862, Kempson wrote that Urdu was “now gaining vigour and pliability,” but that Hindi remained in a “still an underdeveloped state.”³⁵⁰ Within a few decades, however, Hindi would become an important instrument in the Indian nationalist movement that cast the Sanskrit-leaning register “under the sign of the indigenous,” to use Mufti’s phrase, while Urdu denigrated for its Persian-Arabic influences would be branded as a non-national linguistic formation in modern India.³⁵¹ I raise the

³⁴⁹ “Letter from J. M. Duncan, Secretary of the College to the Committee of Public Education, January, 1831” in *Report of the General Examination of the Agra College 1831*

³⁵⁰ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North West Provinces, 1862-1863* (Allahbad: The Government Press, 1864), 7.

³⁵¹ Decades earlier, at Fort William, Lalluji Lal, a Brahmin *munshī*, had introduced *Prēmsāgar*, a work that acquired a comparable status to that of *Bāg-o Bahār* later on in the nineteenth century, as rejecting the languages of the *yavanas*, or outsiders (*yavanī bhāshā čhōrī*), and instead “composed in the upright language of Delhi and Agra” (*dillī āgrē kī kḥarī bōlī mēñ kahī*). In some ways being as innovative with the intricacies of register as Mir Amman, Lal was most probably not suggesting that his experimentation become a cornerstone for nationalist movements that demanded Hindi be the sole vernacular of an independent India. For a detailed

question of Hindi here as part of my efforts to describe the particular influences that compound the question of Urdu's religious and cultural identity towards the close of the nineteenth century. If Persian had historically been the preferred language of an Indian elite, "Hindi" would become symbolic of an Indian nationhood that evoked earlier Orientalist tropes of origin, religious identity, through its constant affiliation with Sanskrit.³⁵²

Two things should be abundantly clear at this juncture: the first, that Urdu, or Hindustani, the colonially patronized vernacular formation comes up against not one, but two rivals, Persian, representing the traditional, pre-colonial order, and Hindi, the purportedly rightful, modern Indian vernacular. And the second, that Urdu, as it is being developed through instruction in the education nexus, for the most part remains restricted to a select number of texts, *none* of which are drawn from what we can call an aesthetic space *outside of the colonial ambit*. The idea of literary Urdu as it unfolds within the modern colony, then, is shaped against its relationship to Persian and Hindi, and more significantly by the texts that are made to constitute its artificial canon. The stamp of an alien Muslim identity is placed on the register never from within, but during much of the nineteenth century, from *outside* of its narrative formations.

The generation of a literary canon for Urdu that reflected this association with an abstract Islamic culture is best exemplified in *Bāg-o Bahār's* journey from the curriculum of Fort William College to the native public sphere, and finally through translation to the metropolis and its wider Anglosphere. I will examine three nineteenth-century translators of Mir Amman's text and show that these Orientalist translator's manage not only to locate this text as belonging to a

reading of Lal and *Prēmsāgar*, see Bhatnagar's "'Prēmsāgar" (1810) and the Orientalist Narratives of the "Invention" of Modern Hindi."

³⁵² The role of Orientalism in the generation of the artificial "Hindi-Urdu" issue has best been explored by Mufti in "Orientalism and the Invention of World Literatures," a groundbreaking paper in which he connects the rise of these rival "national" languages to eighteenth-century Orientalism's unrivalled role in the cultural and political reordering of colonized societies.

generally “Oriental” literary domain from whence the *Arabian Nights* had also emerged, but also mark this domain as morally compromised, needful of a Western editor in order to make it palatable for a non-native audience.

Translated into English by Lewis Ferdinand Smith just a decade after its first edition was printed in Calcutta, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* was declared by this translator to be “the best and the most correct that has been composed in the Urdu language.”³⁵³ As a linguistic guide this book excels because it “contains various modes of expression in correct language; it displays a great variety of Eastern manners and modes of thinking; and it is an excellent introduction [...] to the colloquial style of Hindustan.”³⁵⁴ But *Bāḡ-o Bahār* is not merely categorized in technical, textbook terms—Smith’s effortless association of “the Tale” as an “Asiatic” “Romance or History,” follows the reasoning that this text like other Oriental tales cannot be “consistent, or free from fabulous credulity, the cautious march of undeviating truth, and a careful regard to *vraisemblance*,” for “wildness of imagination, fabulous machinery and unnatural scenes ever pervade through the compositions of every Oriental Author.” Nevertheless, very much like “the *Arabian Nights Tales* the grand prototype of all Asiatic Romances,” *Bāḡ-o Bahār* too can be “read with undiminished pleasure,” by the European reader if these various “imperfections” are ignored.³⁵⁵

Smith’s early remarks on this text are critical markers here in the way that they establish the place of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* in a circulating canon of “Oriental literature,” rather than just that of Hindustani. What is taking place here in the first translation of this imperially sponsored text is the reiteration of contexts created by eighteenth-century Orientalism for the purposes of locating

³⁵³ Mir Amman and Lewis Ferdinand Smith, *The tale of the four durwesh* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1895), i.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. ii.

Urdu fiction works from Fort William for the Western reader.³⁵⁶ Hindustani, according to Smith, is still incapable and ill equipped for the expression of all but the fantastic. Unlike many of the Oriental tales that circulated in England and France, these *orientalized* fictions fail even to communicate an appropriate moral conclusion. The footnote on the tragic lovers Farhad and Majnun reads “Farhad and Majnun are two mad lovers celebrated in Eastern Romance. See Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque Orientale*.”³⁵⁷ Mir Amman’s personal narrative in the preface is peppered with the translator’s explanations and opinions, including “How proud the slave seems of his chains!—but such is the nature of Asiatic minds, under the baleful influence of Asian despotism,” in reference to the former’s obeisance for Humayun. Smith’s final argument that “his [Mir Amman’s] Genii, and his Demons, his Fairies, and his Angels formed parts of his religious creed,”³⁵⁸ and that the “Mohammedan” readers of this text, “more superstitiously attached to their Religion than we are to ours,” therefore suggests that for the Muslim subject, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* constituted a realism that only the rational Westerner could see as mere “superstition.” At one moment in the story of the man with the two dogs, Smith’s footnote reads: “Here I have changed the original a good deal, to render it less absurd and less incredible.” While Mir Amman speaks of the dog as “contemplating” (*fikar doḡā’i*), Smith, in his version, allows “divine instinct” to inspire the dog into saving his master.³⁵⁹ “The formalized roles of an

³⁵⁶ Somewhat different is the reaction to *Baitāl Pačīsī*, believed to be translated from an a Sanskrit original. The tale of King Vikram and his dangerous moral games with a sprite, is likened to “our stories of the Knights of the Round Table” by William Barker in his 1855 translation of the text into English. The protagonist and his nemesis do to each other “as Mephistopheles does to Faust”—the translator essentially locating these figures in the contexts of European rationality rather than in the realm of the fantastic opulence that characterized the Oriental tale.

³⁵⁷ Smith, *The tale of the four durwesh*, 20.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.* iv.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 180.

editor, a reader, and a translator who had to make sense of the stories,” are now concentrated in the figure of the colonial interpreter and cultural enforcer of the readability of native fictions.³⁶⁰

Though over the course of the next few decades, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* would undergo several translations, I am most interested in the contrast that Duncan Forbes’ remarks to the fourth edition of his 1841 translation of this text provide to Smith’s looser accommodation of the supposed peculiarities of Oriental or “Asiatic” literatures. Carefully reproduced in Forbes’ preface to this edition is letter from Captain William Nassau Lees, the “Director of Public Instruction and Principal of Calcutta University” requesting that the translator “omit all such passages as are to shock the modesty of an Examiner or injure the morals the Student” from future editions of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* now that the text had “been selected as one of the textbooks the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University has been introduced into all Government Colleges and in which Oordoo is read.”³⁶¹ Forbes’ edition, therefore, is a prudent response to what is not merely colonial censorship, but rather the *imposition of an entire standard of literary judgment* motivated by the concerns of the metropolis, on “a few passages of an nature such as we meet with in all Oriental compositions.”³⁶²

Though the first edition of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* seems to have largely disappeared, it is clear from these early translations that Mir Amman’s composition undergoes some amount of purging in later Urdu editions, including that popularized by Maulvi Abdul Haq in the early twentieth century. In Edward Eastwick’s 1851 translation of the first tale, the scene where the Princess of Damascus witnesses the sexual licenses of her lover with a hag-like slave, the reader is told “that goblin of a woman lying beneath him in that condition began to indulge in the blandishments of

³⁶⁰ Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 64.

³⁶¹ Forbes, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, ii.

³⁶² *Ibid.* iii.

love, and kisses, and close embraces took place between the two.”³⁶³ Forbes, from whose first translation Eastwick borrowed liberally, translates this passage in his second edition to read: “the shameless harlot likewise got beastly drunk and took very unbecoming liberties with that vile youth.”³⁶⁴ Smith, the earliest translator, like Forbes abridges the passage to read: “the barefaced villain consummated before me his career of infamous indecency with his hideous mistress, who gave herself many airs and appeared very squeamish.”³⁶⁵ In Haq’s definitive Urdu edition, the pertinent passage reads “*aur voh pičhal pā`ī bhī us hālat mēñ nīcē paṛī hū`ī naḳrē tallē karnē lagī aur dōnōñ mēñ čūmā čāḳī honē lagī,*” and would translate quite literally to “the slimy mistress, lying beneath him in the same state, began flirting and coquetting, and the two kissed and licked one another.” I am trying to draw attention by this comparison to what though not necessarily censorship is a process of selective and interpretive translation, beginning with Smith who omits all of Mir Amman’s crudely expressed, prurient detail, while Forbes and Eastwick, interestingly, permit a broader description, but nevertheless do not replicate the street jargon of the original.

Haq’s edition, then, may well be a reverse translation of sorts, or at the very best, a comparatively purged version of Mir Amman’s original. That is to say, the current Urdu text of *Bāḡ-o Bahār* is affected by colonial readings and translations of the first edition, as well as by the demands faced by the text upon its entry into the curriculum for colonially administered schools and colleges. Once corrected for its immodest moments, the text provides “much useful information as to the manners habits and feelings of the natives of Hindustan” and though it “was written five centuries ago such is the stereotyped character of Orientals that it affords even at this

³⁶³ Edward Eastwick, *The Bagh-o Bahar, or The Garden and the Spring* (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1851), 60.

³⁶⁴ Forbes, *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, 90.

³⁶⁵ Smith, *A tale for four durwesh*, 79.

day a most vivid picture of Eastern life.”³⁶⁶ Evolving in the space of these translations is the typification of not merely an “Oriental” fiction, but a peculiarly Muslim literary type that is continuous to some extent with the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*. Though it owes much of its existence to Orientalist figures such as Gilchrist, the native Oriental tale nevertheless remains morally and aesthetically compromised, a failing that only further contact with English and Enlightenment thought can cure. Inhabiting, according to these translators, an “Eastern” or “Oriental” realism that is equated with European fantasy, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* becomes a classic example of the Oriental tale in the vernacular, while for the native population, it is made to take on the role of a literary classic in Urdu.

V. Delhi College: Translation and Education in Urdu

Possibly the most renowned site in the production of a Muslim intelligentsia in north-India, Delhi College was established by the colonial government in the late 1820s in the place of a madrasa founded by Nawab Ghaziuddin in the eighteenth century. As an institution of colonial education, the College became a center for what has often been referred to as the “scientific development” of Urdu, or to phrase it differently, the proposed expansion of the Urdu register into a learned vernacular, a medium for the scientific and literary instruction of the natives. In her study of religious education and the Muslim elite prior to 1857, Avril Powell writes of the institution as existing “on the brink of a renaissance,” more specifically, a “Muslim renaissance,” a mood reminiscent of, but different in focus from Calcutta’s “Hindu Renaissance” of a generation earlier.”³⁶⁷ Haq reminds us in his glowing commemoration to the College that it “was

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Avril Ann Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in pre-Mutiny India* (London: Curzon Press, 1993), 197.

the first educational institution where Western knowledge was taught by way of Urdu,” (pehlī dars gāh thī jahāñ mağribī ‘alūm kī t’ālīm urdū kē zar‘iyē dī jātī).³⁶⁸ Though the history and activities of Delhi College are the basis of various scholarly studies, my interest here is in the College’s Vernacular Translation Society, and in the implications this dedicated curriculum of translation held for Urdu as it was forcibly made to enter the realm of an artificial vernacularity. More specifically, I want to argue that the “renaissance” Delhi College has often been viewed as instrumental in bringing about takes places as part of the final stages of an Orientalist pedagogy that affixes a Muslim identity to the Urdu register in India.

Founded in the 1840s by Felix Boutros, the first principal of the College, the Vernacular Translation Society of the College was dedicated to the enrichment and expansion of Urdu into a language that could become the medium of instruction for natives. Students at the College would translate a variety of texts into Urdu, including the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, John S. Mill’s *Political Economy* (1848), as well as various mathematical and scientific treatises, as part of the goal to enlarge the scope, expression, and lexicon of the target language. Boutros even tried financing the College through the sales of the translations undertaken by the Society, advocating that the Government of India use these in its school system, while admitting, however, that the works “though tolerably correct are no doubt, more or less imperfect.”³⁶⁹ His own model for translating from European works followed that the Urdu translation should borrow and incorporate terms from English. Haq speaks of the Society as “the first endeavor that followed particular rules and standards to make Urdu into an intellectual language,” (urdū ko ‘ilmī zubān banana kī yeh pehlī sa‘ī thī jō k̄āṣ aṣūl aur qā‘idē kē sāth ‘amal mēñ āy`ī), many of which were

³⁶⁸ Maulvi Abdul Haq, *Marhūm Dihlī Kālīj* (Delhi: Anjumman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1945), 171.

³⁶⁹ “Appendix R,” in *General Report for Instruction in the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-45* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), cxi.

directed by Boutros.³⁷⁰ The second, and perhaps more successful effort would be at the Osmania University in Hyderabad, though it would take flight in the later part of the nineteenth century.³⁷¹

Some years after the decline of the College, Charles Freer Andrews, a missionary, and friend and biographer of Maulvi Zakaullah, one of the College's well-known and influential students, wrote of the "efflorescence of modern learning in Delhi," as a "movement... whereby East and West are coming together are coming together into a unity in terms of creative life and thought."³⁷² Several twentieth-century historians including Kopf, and Gail Minault have viewed Delhi College as enabling, and generative for Urdu, its emphasis on constant translations into the language enriching, and progressive.³⁷³ More recently Margit Pernau, in her powerful introduction to *Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State and Education before 1857*, argues for a more nuanced understanding of the way translation was carried out at the College. "Translation," she suggests, is in itself a "conceptual tool" with which to examine "the multiple ways" in which cultural boundaries between colonizers and natives are "crossed and transgressed from both sides." More specifically, Pernau sees works of the native translators as testament to "their cultural assumptions... and their reinterpretation of the British texts they imported into the Urdu language."³⁷⁴ Yet, Mushirul Hassan in his study of Zakaullah reminds us that despite "ambiguities and ideological fissures," the Delhi College "spearheaded a heterodox movement

³⁷⁰ Haq, *Marhūm Dihlī Kālij*, 167.

³⁷¹ See Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013) for a detailed examination of how this Hyderabad university chose to develop the Urdu language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

³⁷² C. F. Andrews, *Zakaullah of Delhi* (Lahore: Universal Books, 1929), 45.

³⁷³ See, for example, Gail Minault's article "Delhi College and Urdu," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 14, (1999), 119-134.

³⁷⁴ Margit Pernau, "Introduction: Entangled Translations" in *Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State and Education before 1857*, ed. Margit Pernau (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-4.

with strong emphasis on Western learning and reconciliation with the West.”³⁷⁵ The brilliant analyses of both scholars, however, fail to see the College as continuous with a longer system of colonial education in India, its agenda of translation a natural development upon Gilchrist’s program for an “Indian vernacular.” The “Delhi Renaissance,” as Andrews termed it, then, was not so much a rebirth for pre-colonial Delhi culture as much as it was a realization of the Orientalist goal to create an Indian language capable of communicating European knowledge to native subjects.

Powell’s somewhat pointed remark about a “Muslim renaissance,” is an important one for over the course of the two decades between 1833, when Muslims made up some forty-four percent of the student population, and 1855, when this same number had dropped by ten percent, the College was nevertheless still seen and associated with a Muslim elite.³⁷⁶ Though the founding aims of the translation society had included Hindi and Bengali as target languages, by the 1840s, “the concentration was on Urdu alone.”³⁷⁷ But Delhi College, like other colonial institutions of its ilk, reinforced in no minor way the colonial desire to produce what Thomas Babington Macaulay famously called a “class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”³⁷⁸ The task itself was to “draw out” the “resources” already available to “Hindustanee,” in order that the vernacular may be enriched by European ideas, only in order, however, that “we may best look for the foundation of the new

³⁷⁵ Mushirul Hassan, “Maulawi Zakauallah: Sharif Culture and Colonial Rule,” in *Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State and Education before 1857*, ed. Margit Pernau (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 271.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute recorded in the General Department,” in *The Great Indian Education Debate*, 165.

literature which we hope to see established.”³⁷⁹ Thus, despite the best aims of Felix Boutros to keep “the study of languages” “distinct” from vernacular instruction in the sciences, the College forcibly initiated, or in the very least, *equipped*, a new wave of literary writing that was self-consciously concerned with producing works that were beneficial, and instructive for their native audience.³⁸⁰

The curriculum so critical in the shaping of this new Muslim literature relied heavily on the Fort William texts—*literature*, in 1847, consisted of *Bāg-o Bahār*, *Gul-e Bakaulī* and *Anvār Sohēlī*, a Persian version of the Fables of Pilpay, selections from the *Spectator*, Johnson’s *Rasselas*, among others. Muslim students translated and read texts such as John Marshman’s *History of India from the Ancient Times* that described their own presence in India as a largely conquest-driven migration, while on the other hand they also became translators of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* into Urdu and Arabic. Leading translation questions also included the translations of essays such as Thomas Carlyle’s “The State of German Literature” (1827), from which students were asked to translate theses such as: “A country which has no National Literature, or a Literature too insignificant to force its way abroad, must always be to its neighbours, at least in every important spiritual respect, an unknown and misestimated country.”³⁸¹ Steered by Boutros till 1845, the Muslim students at the College “who appeared to set very little value” on “Geography... History, and Political Economy,” preferring apart from “law books,” “the translations of the “Goolistan,” the “Alif Leila,” and the “Hudayakool bulaghat,” were discouraged from continuing “in their present state of comparative ignorance”

³⁷⁹ “General View and Observations” in *General Report on Public Instruction in the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1843-44* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1845), 7.

³⁸⁰ “Appendix N: Minute” by Felix Boutros in the *General Report on Public Instruction in the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1843-44*, lxxiii.

³⁸¹ “Scholarship Questions: Vernacular Translation” in *Annual Report from Delhi College, 1854-55*. National Archives, New Delhi India, p. xxv.

through the reconfiguration of their literary palates.³⁸² Sprenger, the Austrian Orientalist who succeeded Boutros as principal of the College in 1845, held similar views on “the literature of the East,” describing it as “containing few sentiments or ideas which we can admire or would like to adopt.”³⁸³ Clear, then, from the attitudes of these Orientalist scholars and teachers, is the dismissal of extant writing in Urdu, literary and other at the College from intellectual and cultural canons patronized by imperial authorities.

Though supportive of the efforts of the Translation Society, Sprenger disagreed with his predecessor on the sources through which to enrich the native language. Arguing that the natives were incapable of processing even simple English—“I have only to mention that they made *simpkin* out of champagne to show how they distort words”—Sprenger suggested that Urdu should draw on Arabic in order to populate its vocabulary.³⁸⁴ A few years later, this opinion would be reiterated by the character of Noble Sahib in Nazir Ahmad’s novel-like work, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* (1888) when he tells the protagonist “the Urdu language does not have the scope for the translation of all the terminologies of modern knowledge into Urdu” (urdū zubān meñ itnī vas‘at nahīñ keh ‘alūm-e jadīdāh kī tamām muṣṭilḥāt kā urdū meñ tarjam‘ā hō sake).³⁸⁵ Sprenger’s major contribution is considered to be a printing press for the College that published a journal of his own founding, the *Qiran-us Sadain* (1846), which Ikram Chaghatai rather flatly describes as intended for the “introduction of Western ideas, specially scientific ones, to the Indian

³⁸² “Appendix R: Letter from Felix Boutros, Principal of Delhi College to J. Thornton, Secretary to the Government of the North West Provinces, April 13, 1844,” in *The General Report on Public Instruction in the North West Provinces, 1843-44* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press), 193.

³⁸³ Aloys Sprenger, “Preface” to *A Catalogue of the Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Giesen: Wilhelm Keller, 1857), iv.

³⁸⁴ As quoted in Charles Hay Cameron, *An Address to Parliament on the Duties of Great Britain to India in respect of The Education of Natives* (London: Longman, 1853). 100.

³⁸⁵ Nazir Ahmad, *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, in *Majmū‘ā-e Nazir Ahmad* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 2004), 107.

people.”³⁸⁶ But Sprenger’s efforts, much like those of Boutros, fell short in their ambitions to alter the state of Urdu into a language that could be of service to the state.³⁸⁷ Till as late as 1870, Matthew Kempson and his inspector, Nazir Ahmad, were reporting that “bald renderings are but too common” in the “Oordoo translations” of college and school students whose interest still seemed to be in Persian and Arabic, despite it having been “put to them very distinctly that the enrichment and development of the Vernacular should be a main object.”³⁸⁸ Nazir Ahmad himself an ex-student of the College became, like several others including Master Ram Chandra, the mathematician, involved in the perpetuation of the imperial education program in the capacity of both writer and school inspector. While I will discuss the figure of the reformist author, Nazir Ahmad, in detail through his literary works in the following chapter, it is important that we note the lasting influence of the College through someone who espoused Boutros and Sprenger’s emphasis on the sciences.

Maulvi Zakauallah (1832-1910), another student from this period, culled special favor with the British government during the second half of the nineteenth century. He and Nazir Ahmad were in their distinct ways promulgators of the repeatedly emphasized need for the development of Urdu as a national vernacular. Zakauallah, born into an elite family historically employed as teachers for the young princes of Delhi, shone at the College as a translator of mathematical and

³⁸⁶ Ikram Chaghatai, “Dr Aloys Sprenger and Delhi College,” in *Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State and Education before 1857*, edited by Margit Pernau (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

³⁸⁷ In *The Language of Secular Islam*, a history of the Osmania University, Hyderabad, Kavita Datla describes a separate effort to enrich the Urdu language, motivated by the largely the same reasons as those of the Delhi College. Aided by Abdul Haq, the Translation Bureau of the University “was responsible for coining approximately fifty-five thousand words for use in their translations,” during the years 1918 and 1946. See *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 73.

³⁸⁸ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North-Western Provinces for 1869-70* (Allahbad: Government Press, 1870), 53.

scientific texts into Urdu. Motivated to a large extent by the desire to see *his* language become a medium of universal instruction, Zakaullah's efforts have been read by Hassan as illustrative of "self-pride in a linguistic-cultural tradition, and his creative attempt to safeguard it with the aid of scientific translations into Urdu."³⁸⁹ But perhaps a figure of Zakaullah's background and leanings should be read in the historical contexts into which he was born—Delhi, no more a princely city, was now fully under the imperial government, and host to the College, a center for the production of a new cultural elite.

Andrews' description of Zakaullah's work, in a biography that has become a critical sign of the times for contemporary scholars such as Hassan, insists that his works "and their use in school have done not a little to set a standard for Urdu literature; to make it lucid and clear and easy to follow for the ordinary reader; and to free it from an overgrowth of Persian and Arabic words, which none but the learned understand."³⁹⁰ Earlier on, Andrews quotes Zakaullah in an unreferenced paragraph reminding India's Muslims, "the Urdu language has intimate associations with our religion... to abandon Urdu for English...is the surest way to bring about the neglect of the Mohammedan religion."³⁹¹ But despite his marked efforts to favor Urdu, Zakaullah remained deeply committed to altering the culture of writing such that it could bridge or even overcome what he seemed to see as an East-West divide.

In the introduction to his detailed and copious *History of India*, Zakaullah writes of a decline in the "histories available to us in Eastern languages" (mashriqī zubānōñ mēñ jō tārīqēñ hamārē pās maujūd haiñ) for they are now not just "separate" from those by "Western authorities" (mağribī muḥāqiq), but in fact, seem to consider the latter "untouchable corpses" (nāpāk murdāh).

³⁸⁹ Hassan, "Maulawi Zakaullah: Sharif Culture and Colonial Rule," 267.

³⁹⁰ Andrews, *Zakaullah of Delhi*, 92.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* 97.

Modeling his history of the subcontinent on that of “Mill Sahab,” Zakaullah attempts to introduce a scientific, European method of history writing in Urdu.³⁹² Though Zakaullah is much larger figure than the scope of this section permits, I have undertaken this brief exploration in order to link his writings and influence to a movement of Muslim reform rooted in imperial pedagogies. His focus on the development of Urdu, a language he understood as distinctly Muslim, and his critiques of what he dubbed as “Eastern” knowledge structures closely follow colonial instruction as it unfolded from the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is not to say that I am devaluing Zakaullah’s intellectual merits or his contributions to literary writing in modern Urdu, but rather locating the emergence of this figure within the broader historical and cultural reconfiguration that colonial education enacts in nineteenth-century India.

Delhi College, closed in 1870 by the British Government, operated in many ways as a native parallel of Fort William College for the first few decades of its existence. Both institutions became critical instruments in the realization of British Orientalism’s particular aims through their focus on instruction and by enabling the proliferation of textual materials into the native public sphere. If at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Fort William College served as the site for an Orientalist image of Urdu or Hindustani as an embryonic language that could be of possible service to an expanding empire, then four decades on this partially grown language would be handed to a conditioned native intellectual elite at Delhi College. But Urdu, once again centered in Delhi, came to this elite portrayed as a deficient language, a hopeful vernacular unable to withstand the demands of the contemporary era. At no point, however, can we forget the contradiction this language comes to inhabit once it enters the colonial education system—Urdu, the elite north-Indian register, is never meant to be a vernacular, or a universal language.

³⁹² Maulvi Zakaullah, *Tārīq-e Hindustān: Salṭanat Islāmīā kā bayān*, v.1 (Aligarh: 1915), 36-7.

The Orientalist attempt to transform or enmesh Urdu by forcing it to perform in the capacity of a progressive vernacular through the adoption and formal use of colloquial registers, then, leaves this polysemic linguistic system at odds with the native body forced to inherit it.

A ubiquitous presence in the education of the Indian natives, the Oriental tale first appears as an instrument of instruction at Fort William College, and subsequently enters the public sphere through the dissemination of the same curriculum in government schools. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, however, the question of the Oriental tale in what the colonial administration persists in referring to as the “vernacular,” becomes a problematic one. Though stories such as *Bāḡ-o Bahār* continue to be used in the linguistic and cultural education of the natives, they are by this time, considered insufficient and occasionally improper for a language that was intended for the cultural transformation of the Indian subject into a figure who could best and most efficiently serve the needs of the British Empire. More important, however, are the consequences the journey of the Oriental tale holds for an emerging Muslim bourgeoisie. The figure of the Muslim, largely fictional in the Oriental tales of the metropolis, is now both the composer or translator of these fictions, as well as a target audience. Though in *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, *Gul Bakaulī* and even the *Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzā* often located their center outside of India, choosing the Persian Empire as the scene of narrative action, the geography in these texts remains fluid, unbounded, and of course, largely disproportionate. The Muslim protagonist as he appears in these texts is neither homeless, nor exilic, but also rather unconcerned with questions of nationality and origin. Not even when an elaborate, almost neo-classicist composition such as Surur’s emerges in response to the claims of Mir Amman does the question of a Muslim identity in India arise within what we now consider to be an Urdu literature. Instead this literary identity

is culled out of what is an inadvertent rivalry with “Hindi,” a register equally ill equipped for the tasks of a vernacular, or a national language.

Questions of identity, of traditions and linguistic registers “belonging” to Muslims or Hindus begin to formulate only within the colonial education system. “Hindi,” with its acquired preference for Sanskrit, as it must be obvious from the argument in this chapter, goes somewhat unnoticed in the transcribed concerns of the colonial administration that sees Persian as the real obstruction for the development of Urdu. Nevertheless, Hindi is proclaimed by Hindi nationalists as the “true,” or “rightful” Indian vernacular, by virtue of its indigeneity, and its rooted origins, in a series of terms structured within the Orientalist discourse. Neither register, of course, could attain the universality it sought, yet nationalist intervention on this issue, as well as the events and backlash of the 1857 Mutiny, force the form of the Oriental tale in Urdu to grapple with its place in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century India.

CHAPTER IV

MUSLIM REFORM AND THE ORIENTAL TALE: ISLAM, EMPIRE, AND DOMICILE IN NAZIR AHMAD'S *MIR ĀT AL-ʿARŪS*, *TAUBAT AL-NAṢŪĤ*, AND *IBN UL-VAQT*

As late as 1884, Sir William Muir, an Orientalist, an administrator, and the author of a disparaging biography of Mohammed, wrote in his “Preface” to Matthew Kempson’s translation of Nazir Ahmad’s *Taubat al-Naṣūḥ*: “The vernacular languages of India are singularly wanting in sound literature of a useful and amusing sort. Such works as there are abound, for the most part, in matter of an objectionable tendency.”³⁹³ Striking about Muir’s remark, of course, is its familiarity and its reiteration of an imperial concern that had resurfaced in the copious records of the colonial education system with the utmost regularity over the past several decades despite the rise and influence of institutions such as Delhi College. William Wilson Hunter, in an influential pamphlet published in 1870, had earlier announced what had become an accepted truth after 1857, that: “The Musalmans of India are, and have been for many years, a source of chronic danger to the British Power in India.” Unlike “the more flexible Hindus,” the Muslims resisted British education and employment, Hunter believed, thus making them harbor resentment and enmity for the new rulers of India.³⁹⁴

Seen as mired in a religion that took direction from the “Holy City of Arabia,” or alternately, in a poetic culture lacking in morally sound “literature,” the Muslims became the particular project of the colonial administration in the decades following 1857.³⁹⁵ Though the Fort William texts and their select respondents, *Bāḡ-o Bahār* and *Fasānā-e ‘Ajā’ib*, for example,

³⁹³ William Muir, preface to *The Repentance of Nussooh*, by Nazir Ahmad, and translated by Matthew Kempson (London: W. H. Allen, 1884), viii.

³⁹⁴ William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans: Are they bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (London: Trubner and Company, 1876), 11.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

remained ensconced on the educational curricula, the British administration felt the increasing dangers of the “unaided prosecution of Oriental learning” that they believed had “produce[d] a people who may talk beautifully, but who think and write most inaccurately.”³⁹⁶ To that end, a new wave of “literary invention,” facilitated and funded by the Government of India, would sweep over the second half of the nineteenth century, one of its specific objects, the misplaced, north-Indian, Muslim bourgeoisie.

In this chapter, I want to turn to this moment of Muslim reform—religious, cultural and literary—in an attempt to contextualize it in terms that extend beyond just the events of 1857 and that involve the longer history and involvement of British Orientalism with the Muslim Orient. Marked by its bestselling novels, poems, and conduct book-like pamphlets, this effort at social correction with its heavy focus on Urdu narrative and aesthetics, I would argue, is one culmination in the extended and transformative journey of the Oriental tale from the metropolis to the orientalized, and colonized space. Though motivated by economic and political incentives on the part of the colonial government, this “reform” of an infant, and unwilling Muslim bourgeoisie played out in the instructive, novel-like tales of Nazir Ahmad, the extended, moral poetry of Altaf Hussain Hali, and the historical novels of Abdul Halim Sharar. Not just the bland effects of colonial attempts to manage and mold Muslim culture in north-India after the Mutiny, these works also occupy a compelling place in the grander trajectory of Orientalist fictions as they arrive and occupy language and literariness in the colony. More specifically, these late nineteenth-century reformist texts, then, represent the tortured emergence of bourgeois Muslim culture in north-India in the decades following the final fall of the Mughal empire to the British government. Focusing heavily, but not exclusively, on the reform of Muslim women, these

³⁹⁶ Matthew Kempson, *Report on the Progress of Education in the North West Provinces 1869-70* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1870), 112.

works are traditionally seen as having sought to produce a Muslim subjectivity that was simultaneously “progressive,” amenable to colonial rule, but that also remained close to a version of Islam increasingly centered around class practices that here, were neither plebian nor aristocratic.³⁹⁷

My interest, in this final part of my project, is largely in the novels of Nazir Ahmad, written between the years 1868 and 1888, intended, ostensibly, for the religious and domestic reform of the emergent class of bourgeois Muslims in north-India. While the bulk of scholarship around these novels has focused on issues of gender—defining the role of the Muslim woman in the modern colony through a prescribed curriculum—or on the correction of religious practice—the reorientation of the Islam outside of local customs—there exists comparatively little work on the nature of the “literariness” that is imposed on novel-like works such as *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* (1868), and *Taubat al-Naṣūh* (1872). Anthropological, historical, feminist, and sociological readings of these novels remain deeply valuable in helping us understand the reformist movements of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, but so far critical arguments by scholars such as Faisal Devji, David Lelyveld, Francis Pritchett, and more recently Ruby Lal have failed to properly unpack the form that these works seem to, at once, inhabit and repel.

A return to the question of the literary allows us one way of understanding the very premises that in a significant manner force the development of this program of cultural reform which takes the text, particularly fiction, as its favored implement. Nazir Ahmad’s novel-like stories are deliberately developed to counter and alleviate the effects of an extant Urdu literary culture, including Fort William “Oriental tales” such as *Qiṣṣā-e Gul Bakaulī*, and *Ārā`ish-e*

³⁹⁷ See Faisal Devji, “Gender and the Politics of Space: the movement for women’s reform 1857-1900” in *Forging Identities: Community, State and Muslim Women*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24.

Mehfil. Nevertheless, these fictions themselves seek the form of the Oriental tale, restricting its territory to the *sharīf* Muslim home, and its ostensible function to the cultural, moral, and religious improvement of this embittered, and still embryonic bourgeoisie. It is only Ahmad's later work, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* (1888), literally, the "Son of His Times," that is staged as a unresolved dilemma about what the author seems to see as inevitable clash and compromise of Islam when brought into contact with the overpowering force of Western thought.

Mir`āt al-`Arūs, and *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, though not direct imitations of Oriental tales such as *The Arabian Nights*, or *Rasselas*, exist as part of a contradictory form proper to the colony. They are self-orientalizing, but also desirous of exploring and imitating contemporaneous genres in English didactic writing, including the conduct book, and the moralizing novel.³⁹⁸ Both of these stories are concerned with the correction, or *iṣlāh*, of particular aspects of Muslim life in north-India, whose degradation is seen to have occurred over the past two centuries or so. In the case of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, Nazir Ahmad's first "best-seller," the dominant narrator's focus remains on the figure of the bride, and the possibility of moral and social renewal that she brings to her husband's home. *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, more complex and unforgiving, uses the figure of the reformed father to elaborate the project of religious and cultural reform as journey that must turn away from familiar and local structures, towards a way of existence that is centered in a kind of neo-Islamic abstraction. *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, however, breaks away from notion of *iṣlāh*, choosing instead to explore the reverse colonial practice of native "reform" through an elite Muslim product of Delhi College, whose chance entry into the world of the colonizer forces a renewed understanding of the place of Muslim culture in nineteenth-century India. If the earlier fictions

³⁹⁸ Ruby Lal, most recently, has reiterated the English influences on Nazir Ahmad, including Daniel Defoe's *The Instructor* and Thomas Day's *History of Sanford and Merton*, in her book *Coming of Age in nineteenth-century India: the girl-child and the art of playfulness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

echo and revisit tropes from the Oriental tale, then *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, a text that interrogates the past century of colonial education in India, is a later disenchantment with these forms, an embittered response to the colonial desire for a transformed Muslim.

Each of these tales performs an orientalizing of its subjects that conforms with colonial perceptions and literary representations of the Muslim, and simultaneously *re-orientalizes* these same subjects to show them as existing in a sharp contradiction with the culture of the modern colony. In other words, I'm suggesting that the reformist paradigm in *Mir`āt al-'Arūs* and *Taubat al-Naṣūh* depends on a prototype of the Muslim that has earlier appeared in English, and vernacular "Oriental tales" produced under Orientalist configurations. The narrator of these stories enacts a reformation, or correction of these varied experiences, modeling the ideal Muslim man and woman in response to colonial strictures issued after the events of 1857. That is to say, the reformed or improved Muslim is evolved in accordance with imperial instruction whose intimacy with the local is replaced with an intangible connection to an imaginary Islamic center. The third work, almost autobiographical, encompasses the themes of its predecessors through its engagement with the public realm of Muslim cultural re-education in colonial institutions. *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, with its centeredness around the supremacy of the Islamic faith and practice, must nevertheless be read as critical of Orientalism's legacy despite being mired within it. Though disillusioned, and helpless, when faced with the degraded condition of the *sharīf* Muslim who wanders outside of the religion and traditions that have for centuries defined his place in north-India, *Ibn ul-Vaqt's* critique is equally directed towards an inconsistent and arbitrary West that has replaced the Muslim empire in India.

Nazir Ahmad, an inspector of colonial schools as well as an examiner in Arabic and Persian, remains one of the best-known authors of the Urdu reformist movement that unfolded in

the second half of the nineteenth century, stewarded by colonial stalwarts such as Syed Ahmad Khan. Muslim men of their ilk maintained an almost symbiotic relationship with the British in the years following 1857, the former dependent on the colonizers for employment and identity, while the latter, believing the majority of Muslims to be violent and dangerous to the Empire, required conditioned mediators to undertake the process of reconciliation. Educated at the Delhi College, under the tutelage of Felix Boutros, briefly, and then Aloys Sprenger, Ahmad always made the claim that his education was a lucky mistake, the consequences of which he later reaped in the form of employment and patronage by his superior Simon Matthews Kempson, also the translator of *Taubat al-Naṣūh*. Though his schoolteacher father famously forbade him from learning English, and Ahmad dutifully eschewed the language at Delhi College, service to the British made him rethink his choice, and by 1861, he had completed a translation of the Indian Penal Code into Urdu.³⁹⁹ When Master Ram Chandra, a close friend and mentor of Ahmad's from Delhi College, converted to Christianity, Ahmad and Zakauallah remained sympathetic amidst the furor, one among "several hints that Nazir Ahmad too at a time was inclined to take baptism."⁴⁰⁰ In truth, Ahmad's time at Delhi College, and his career as an education inspector for the British Government were marked by intense internal consternation and reflection. Mushirul Hassan in his careful documentation of Ahmad's speeches and personal writings speaks of a man whose "beliefs were rudely shaken and his religious universe was

³⁹⁹ The traditional education of a well-to-do Muslim youth has been described in painstaking detail by David Lelyved in his fascinating work, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. Largely "standardized," this education, often private, and other times at a "maktab" ranged from instruction in the Quran, Arabic and Persian, but also more pleasurable pursuits such as chess, kite-flying, and chess. Kalim, a principal character in *Taubat al-Naṣūh* exemplifies this learning.

⁴⁰⁰ Christina Oesterheld, "Deputy Nazir Ahmad and the Delhi College," in *The Delhi College*, 306.

contracted by scientific and philosophical discussions.”⁴⁰¹ This agonized flirtation with rationalism at the College, often confused as a distancing from Islam, is played out to some extent in *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, though his earlier novels remain strictly concerned with the domestic sphere.

His earlier moralizing fictions sprang not from an exclusively creative or aesthetic urge, but in response to William Muir’s initiative advertised in the Allahabad Government Gazette, in August 1868, “encouraging authorship... in one or other of current dialects, Oordoo or Hindee.” Muir’s notice further stipulated that the respondent works could be “fact or fiction... prose or verse,” but must “subserve some useful purpose, either of instruction, entertainment, or mental discipline,” with “books suitable for the women of India,” specially preferred for the set prize of rupees one thousand. Nazir Ahmad’s first attempt at a “useful” fiction, *Mir`āt al-‘Arūs* won the prize, as would *Taubat al-Naṣūh* a few years later, while *Banāt al-N`āsh* was recognized with an award of rupees five hundred.⁴⁰² In raising these biographical and technical details of Ahmad’s life, I am attempting to locate him within the multifarious workings of nineteenth-century Orientalism and Anglicism in India, as well as contextualize him as a product of Delhi College. That is to say what we encounter in Ahmad is a figure whose works are prompted by their author’s association with certain tropes ascribed to him by the dominant cultural discourse. At the same time he remains an elite Muslim man prepared to serve the British Empire, to reconcile his religion with Western science and philosophy, and finally, to instruct his own social and religious class in accordance with these tenets.

⁴⁰¹ Mushirul Hassan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslims Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007) 138.

⁴⁰² As quoted in C. M. Naim, “Prize-Winning *Adab*: Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Gazette Notification No. 791A (1868),” in *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C. M. Naim* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 123.

While the place and conduct of women remains a critical, in fact, indispensable element in Nazir Ahmad's stories of reform and improvement, it can never be isolated from the more serious condition of the Muslim *ashrāf* that these texts appear to address, one Mufti has described as a "reluctant transition to bourgeois society, a *reluctant embourgeoisement*...that imbued an entire social and cultural milieu with a distinct structure of feeling."⁴⁰³ This transition from elite and aristocratic to bourgeois subjecthood is guided by the notion of *iṣlāḥ*, correction or improvement, or, as I shall show, a return to chastity or *faṣāḥat*, only now this movement in Urdu writing would focus both on themes and language that issue a return to a previous state of Muslim existence, prior to its corruption in the Indian subcontinent. Any reading of these fictions, then, must remain aware of the moment in which they arrived—the first, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, just a decade after 1857, though ostensibly the story of two sororal brides, is also the story of redirecting the class aspirations and social values of a family unable to reconcile itself with the decline of the Mughal empire and with it, the Muslim elite of India. *Taubat al-Naṣūḥ*, expanding the sphere of influence, forces the seemingly decadent Muslim family not so much towards the West, as earlier texts did, but towards a redefined origin outside the locus of both the colony and India. And finally, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* departs entirely from the private realm, forcing a reexamination of the very possibility of a public Muslim existence, one that could effectively balance or negotiate between the British Empire, and loyalty to both the abstract and daily ideals of Islam.

I. *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*: The reformist's Oriental tale

In his laudatory recommendation to the first edition of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, Matthew Kempson describes the book as at once "equal to the recently published letters of... Ghalib," and

⁴⁰³ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 112.

“resembl[ing] the *Alf Lailah* and Badr-ud Din Khan’s *Bostan-e Khayal*,” the latter a seven-volume *dāstān*-like cycle translated into Urdu from Persian.⁴⁰⁴ In some ways Kempson’s comparison was ironically astute for some years later, Ahmad would ascribe his knowledge of English to “rote learning,” (ratā kartā), “ten or fifteen pages of the *Arabian Nights*” (arabian nights kē das das pandrā pandrā ṣafhē) during his postings away from home as an inspector.⁴⁰⁵ Nazir Ahmad himself in his introduction to the book, however, would speak of having arrived at the story of Akbari and Asghari after having searched extensively for a text that was “replete with good morals and sincere advice” (jō iqlāq-o naṣāḥ sē bharī hū`i hō), but having failed to find anything, he composed a “new type” (na`ye ṭaur) of *qiṣṣā* to serve his purpose.⁴⁰⁶ More importantly, as per instructions of the “rulers” (sarkār), the language is “idiomatic, the ideas, pure” (bā maḥāvāra, ḡayālāt, pākīzā) and free from “affectation” (banāvat).⁴⁰⁷ Invention, once again, is deemed a necessity for the development of Urdu, and in this particular case, for the reorientation and reconciliation of a certain class of Muslims towards conditions in the modern colony.

Not a novel, or a *dāstān*, this rather deliberate categorization from an author who was somewhat familiar with English literary texts allows *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* to exist simultaneously in the still fluid, if somewhat deliberately molded space of Urdu writing. At the same time, this work serves the purposes of a colonial agenda for the social and cultural reform of a class that increasingly begins to view itself as a threatened minority in the post-1857 colony. Kumkum Sangari in *Politics of the Possible* understands this text as marking “the entry of the UP *ashrāf*

⁴⁰⁴ Matthew Kempson, “Recommendation” for *The Bride’s Mirror* by Nazir Ahmad, trans. G. E. Ward, ed. Frances Pritchett (Delhi: Permanent Black) 200.

⁴⁰⁵ Nazir Ahmad, *Lekḡarōñ kā majmū`ā*, Vol. 2 (Agra: Mufid-e Aam Press, 1918), textfiche, p. 427

⁴⁰⁶ Nazir Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs in Majmū`ā-e Nazir Ahmad* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 2004), 792.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

into an ideological configuration conjointly produced by British and Indian in Bengal, but now in the rescue of dispossessed or declining upper-class groups, in the mobility of a new service strata of vernaculars intelligentsia, and in the self-description of middle classes.”⁴⁰⁸ More recently, Ruby Lal has spoken of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* as part of a series of reformist works in which “the “class anxiety” of respectable Muslim men comes to be elaborated by way of the discussion on women,” as part of what she terms the “resuscitation of respectability” for this new class of people.⁴⁰⁹

My reading of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, though always aware of questions of gender, will return to the basic question of genre and literary types in an attempt to contextualize this text as continuous with colonial interpretations of Urdu. I want to suggest, first, that *Mir`āt* borrows themes and tropes from European Oriental tales such as the *Arabian Nights` Entertainments*, in order to represent the state of the unreformed Muslim. Essentially inhabiting the form of the Oriental tale, *Mir`āt* expands its function in the colony from a means for vernacular education to an instrument for the rehabilitation of the Oriental subject. This is not to say that *Mir`āt* is a blatant imitation of the *Nights*, but rather that the problematic issues of class, religious practice, and linguistic purification acquire the symbolism that marked evils such as promiscuity, greed or opulence, and sorcery hold in the latter text, as social evils that are either corrected or receive retribution. At the same time, the logics of the masculine representation of the feminine come into play in *Mir`āt* in a way not particularly removed from the disguised didacticism that Nancy Armstrong identifies at work in Victorian novels that include Charlotte Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, and Dickens’ *Dombey and Son*. Negotiating an unanchored, and early nationalist

⁴⁰⁸ Kumkum Sangari, *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narrative, and Colonial English* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 200.

⁴⁰⁹ Ruby Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-child and the Art of Playfulness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 136.

sentiment, this work also takes upon itself to authorize a new style of writing that differentiates itself from earlier Urdu aesthetics, envisioning its purpose of *iṣlāḥ* as indelibly attached to thematic and syntactic *faṣāḥat*.

Often told as the story of two sisters, Akbari, the elder, and Asghari, the younger, and their respective marriages, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* over the past century or so had largely settled into a serving a limited role as a guide for young, middle-class, north-Indian Muslim women. Akbari, raised by her doting grandmother, is a spoilt and obstinate girl whose marriage to Muhammad Aqil ends in disaster. Asghari, married to Muhammad Aqil's younger brother, Muhammad Kamil, on the other hand, exceeds all expectations as a bride, managing her new household, ridding it of its scheming maid, opening a private seminary for girls, and even grooming her husband for eventual service with the British government. Three of Nazir Ahmad's characters in this text are of particular interest to my argument, Akbari, Mama Azmat, and Muhammad Kamil, each one of who embodies problematic notions of Muslim existence as elaborated in Orientalist fictions and essays over eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Asghari, the reformist figure, an innovative, if somewhat flat "model of "Muslim" womanhood that could fuse language, religion, and culture," then, performs the function of a Scheherazade, saving her nation by purifying it of its ills.⁴¹⁰ Asghari's most obvious contrast, of course, is with her sister, a comparison Lal has a somewhat limited reading of, suggesting that it is precisely through their difference that Nazir Ahmad "spells out his notion of the respectable woman."⁴¹¹

The story of Akbari, though occupies hardly a third of the narrative, is introduced by the narrator as an "entertaining *qiṣṣā*" (*mazē kā qiṣṣā*) that illustrates the "pains" (*taklīfeīn*) caused

⁴¹⁰ Sangari, *Politics of the Possible*, 220.

⁴¹¹ Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India*, 146.

by “ignorance and lack of talent” (jahālat aur bēhunarī).⁴¹² Already set up to serve more as a dire warning than a source of amusement, Akbari is so irrevocably ruined by her grandmother’s idiotic affections” (ehmaqānā lād) that even marriage failed to improve her bad temper, or her clumsiness.⁴¹³ Within a few months of getting married, Akbari demands a house of her own, assaults her young sister-in-law, Mehmuda, and eventually through her own stupidity and carelessness is robbed by the various lower-class characters she seems to befriend. A *sharīf*-born woman who consorted with the daughter of laborers and working-class families, Akbari is “condemned” to the ruin that eventually befalls her. Like Husn Ara from *Banāt al-N’āsh* and Naeema from *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, Akbari is hardly an original character, rather she appears to embody the particular licentiousness, or state of dissolution that reappeared periodically in certain female characters in both English Oriental tales from the previous century as well as fictions closer to home, including *Bāḡ-o Bahār* and *Ṭōṭā Kahānī*. The frame story of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* is, of course, the story of two queens whose infidelities instigate their husbands’ agonized moral transformations. Schahriar’s first wife’s adultery, however, is hardly simply just that, rather it is critical to remember that Masoud, her black lover, can almost immediately be assumed to be a slave, or at the very best, a servant, given the status of blacks in the *Nights*.⁴¹⁴ In the “Story of the two sisters who envied their younger Sister,” the two elder sisters are represented as gluttonous, materialist, and discontent, while the youngest is blessed with abundant patience and fortitude. Not too far removed is Nouronihar from *Vathek*, who moved by her “vanity,” the “conflict of her passions,” her assurance that Vathek’s passion for

⁴¹² Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 809.

⁴¹³ Ibid. 810.

⁴¹⁴ See Felicity Nussbaum, “Slavery, Blackness, and Islam: *The Arabian Nights* in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Slavery and the Cultures of Abolition: Essays marking the bicentennial of the British Abolition Act of 1807*, edited by Brycchan Carey and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 150-172.

“would gradually increase,” enters into a state of reckless abandon that eventually leaves her in the same inferno as the wayward king.⁴¹⁵

In the various tales of *Bāg-o Bahār*, we encounter a variety of women who if not necessarily “bad” or adulterous like the women of the *Nights* have wandered out of the private sphere or the enclosed space of the home, making themselves vulnerable to male exploitation and social destruction. An obvious example, of course, is the princess in the story of the first dervish whose indiscretions with a pageboy lead to her having to witness his sexual depravity with his hag-like slave woman. Similarly, in the story of the third dervish the European princess converses and sympathizes with lower-order characters including the hag-like beggar woman who almost succeeds in enslaving the princess by capturing her ring. In *Ṭōṭā Kahānī*, Khojista’s physical virtue is controlled by the stories of her husband’s parrot, and she is forced to remain within the space of the house, even though by the end, her emotional infidelity and violence on the myna bird is avenged by her husband upon his return.

My point in raising this variety of women from earlier Oriental tales is to provide some kind of context for the formation of a character such as Akbari. By no means am I undermining the moral premises of *sharāfat* that guard her movement for as David Lelyveld reminds us: the ideal was to stay at home from marriage to death, visited not visiting, carried in.... in a bridal palanquin, carried out in a coffin.”⁴¹⁶ Rather I am suggesting that the particular tropes surrounding her in the story are hardly restricted to just the *sharīf* class but rather have been powerfully present in the literary trajectory traced in this project. Akbari is first and foremost associated with an older order of existence, that is to say, with her grandmother who we can assume exists at a distance from the colonial space, and thus is necessarily illiterate and ignorant

⁴¹⁵ Beckford, *Vathek*, 128.

⁴¹⁶ Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation*, 37.

of the benefits of modernity. Like so many of the female characters in earlier Oriental tales, Akbari wanders outside of the domestic enclave, whether it is outside of the family home to a house of her own, or whether through contact with her more mobile, and thus necessarily compromised friends, Zulfan, and Chuniyan. Though Akbari is never shown to be promiscuous or to engage in sexual dalliances—probably in accordance with the puritan rules that marked colonial patronage for native writing—her general slovenliness and willfulness perform these attributes or rather act as substitutes for the female vices that appear in the earlier corpus. During a fight, she tells her husband that as a child “That Bannu used to be my friend. How could I not see her? Despite my mother’s insistence [not to see her] I married not one but two of my dolls to hers, and I would sneak food and money and clothes to her behind my mother’s back,” (vōh bannū hū`ī thī mērī sahēlī. Bhalā meiñ is sē kaisē nā miltī. ammā kī źid meñ maiñ nē bannū kē sāth ēk čhōṛ dō guṛyōñ kē beyāh kiy`ē aur ammā sē čurā čurā kar anāj aur paisē aur kapṛē bannū kō dētī). In response to these lies, or Akbari’s elaborate and self-serving (or preserving) fictions, her husband tells her that she merely “acted foolishly,” (jhak mārā), leaving the reader in no small doubt as to the place of bourgeois women who engage in, or become part of imaginative tales.⁴¹⁷

Akbari’s naïve friendship with the *Hajjan* (literally a woman who has performed Haj, but here a deceptive title), described by the narrator as a “procuress” (kuṭnī), is marked primarily by the elaborate stories that the thieving woman uses to entrap a bored and irrational Akbari. Attempting to sell Akbari a few cloves that will help her gain her husband’s affections, the Hajjan tells her an improbable story of her service to the Begum of Bhopal. Mainly about this royal personage’s journey in the hopes of producing an heir, the story takes its listener from

⁴¹⁷ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 813.

north-India towards Mecca on a boat where prior to reaching her destination the Begum seeks the help of a holy man (faqīr) who resides atop a mountain on the “Island of Blacks” (kōh-e ḥabshā). This hermit, respectfully referred to as “Shah sahib,” by the Hajjan “lived all by [himself] in a cave...” (tan-e tanhā ēk ghar mēñ rehtē thē) but “what a hallowed face, like an angel...” (kyā nūrānī shakal thī, jaisē farishtā). With the help of his charmed cloves and the performance of the Haj, the Begum wins over her husband and becomes the mother of four boys, finally giving leave to the Hajjan to go and help other unfortunate women.⁴¹⁸ Akbari, of course, is deeply affected by this story which if not for its brevity and one-dimensionality could easily belong within the long-winded tales from *Bāḡ-o Bahār*, or even the *Nights*, and not only buys the cloves from the Hajjan, but also decides to trust her with her jewelry with which her new friend promptly disappears, never to be seen again.

The episode of the Hajjan concludes Akbari’s story, one that the narrator reminds us could not but end in ruin given that her grandmother failed to teach her any skill or reprimand her temperament. “Enough is known about Akbari that if we wished to write it all down, it would make three or four books, but reading about her conditions sometimes causes anger, and at other times, makes one feel distressed,” (akbarī kē ḥālāt m‘alūm haiñ keh agar hum sab kō likhnā čāhēñ tō aisī tīn čār kitābēñ banēñ magar akbarī kē hālāt paṛhnē sē kabhī tō ḡušā ātā hai aur kabhī tabīyat kuṛhtī hai).⁴¹⁹ More than just the spoilt product of an illiterate woman’s love, Akbari is a deliberately “orientalized” figure, her particular vices, including anger, mobility, naiveté, and ignorance, continuous with the problematic women of earlier Oriental tales. I’m suggesting here that we read Akbari not as an innovation on Nazir Ahmad’s part, but as a

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. 833.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. 837.

character whose involvement with a previous or older Muslim culture is written in the terms provided by the pervasive lens of Western Orientalism.

If feminine sexuality remains a barred theme on account of Orientalist views of the vulgarity of Oriental writing—here, we can think about the careful editing undergone by *Bāg-o Bahār* or Shaftsebury’s reluctance to share the *Nights* with Englishwomen—Akbari’s character, by virtue of her mobility and inappropriate friendships, exists just at the rim of this interdict domain. In her reading of *Adeline Mowbray*, Nussbaum has argued that the English “women’s failure to be proper ladies who conform to conventions of dress and behavior connects them to a more broadly generalized Other in Turkey, India, and “savage” nations.”⁴²⁰ This “Other”—earlier Nussbaum uses the example of the sexually liberated Roxana—is, of course, also associated with promiscuity and compromised virtue. Akbari’s imprudence, carelessness, and susceptibility to stories of magic and enchantment, prototypes of Oriental tales, must be read, therefore, as typical to her “Oriental,” particularly Muslim bearing as produced through two centuries of Orientalist representations of flawed Eastern femininity.

The story of Akbari, in many ways, is the framing story for that of Asghari—Akbari is the erring queen of the *Nights* on account of whom others are caused pain and embarrassment, even briefly but unsuccessfully threatening, the angelic Asghari’s prospects of marriage to Muhammad Aqil’s younger brother, Muhammad Kamil. Because of the distress she seems to cause even the narrator, “one does not feel the desire to write more about her,” instead “why should we not write about the state of her younger sister, Asghari, the smallest events of which will be cause for joy for readers and listeners,” (us kē zyādā hālāt likhnē kō jī nahīñ čāhtā. us kī čhōtī behen asgarī kā hāl kyūñ nā likhēñ keh bāt bāt par paṛhnē vālōñ aur sunnē vālōñ sab kā jī

⁴²⁰ Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, sexuality, and empire in eighteenth-century English narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 41.

ḡush hō jāy`ē gā).⁴²¹ Asghari, Scheherazade-like in her earnestness to redeem the family she marries into, is treasured in her mother’s house “like a rose, or like the eye in the human body,” (jaisē gulāb kā phūl yā ādmī kē jism mēñ ānkh); “there was no skill she did not possess,” (har ēk ṭarāḥ kā hunar...usē ḥāṣil thā). Her other qualities include “wisdom, sense, manners, etiquette, humility, kindheartedness, sociability, devoutness, dignity, consideration,” (dānā`ī, hōshyārī, adab, qā`idā, ḡrbat, nēk dilī, milansārī, ḡudāparastī, ḥayā, lihāz). Unlike her sister, Asghari, “from childhood, had hated playing games, or laughing and joking,” (laṛakpan sē us kō khēl kūd, hansī or ḡhēṛ sē nafrat thī).⁴²² Constructed against the typical Oriental or Muslim woman of the harem, a figure the Western imagination often saw as unproductive or childlike till the end of her life, Asghari like Scheherazade is located as distinct or separate from other female companions, defined *against* contemporary femininity rather than in conjunction with it.⁴²³

Both Scheherazade and the Akbari/Asghari dichotomy, however, possess more complexity than is often allowed to them. I have in the first chapter of this project argued that Galland’s Scheherazade is constructed to reflect in many ways the bourgeois eighteenth-century European male, and through this moral and cultural superiority made capable of civilizing the Oriental despot’s savagery. It is worthwhile to think about this triad of Eastern women, Akbari and Asghari, in particular, as not very different from what Nancy Armstrong has isolated as “Victorian women who embodied self-discipline—which required not only some extraordinary

⁴²¹ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 837.

⁴²² Ibid. 838.

⁴²³ Ruby Lal thinks about “playfulness” in the nineteenth-century bourgeois Indian woman as the “feminist position of rethinking selves that implies social and sexual interaction without asserting authority, and allowing forms of self-expression and literary creativity that are not dependent on masculinist definitions of fulfillment.” At the same time, she remains aware that this very position is primarily defined by the masculine author. Nazir Ahmad is, of course, a favorite example. See *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India*, p. 39. More relevant might be Nancy Armstrong’s argument in *How Novels Think*, with which I directly engage.

act of self-renunciation but also some extraordinary excess of self to renounce.”⁴²⁴ Though Armstrong studies the figure of the Victorian heroine as instrumental in the novel’s “considerable power” to “forcibly restrain,” “bad subjects,” through the “apparently natural function by which fiction imagined transforming unleashed individualism into civil morality,” her argument can be extended and reexamined in the contexts of femininity in the eighteenth-century Oriental tale, as well as in the modern colony.⁴²⁵

The nineteenth-century novel, Armstrong suggests, “justified itself as a form of mediation that appeared to be no more than mediation [between domestic culture and official institutions of education], because it declared itself fiction rather than truth.”⁴²⁶ In thinking about Akbari and Asghari, and possibly even Scheherazade and the unreformed, promiscuous Oriental woman, as both “self-renouncing” and possessing “an extraordinary excess of self to renounce,” we arrive at the Victorian heroine, whose “dualism” made up of “femaleness (aggressive tendencies formerly celebrated as expressive of individualism) and femininity (the domestic virtues anchoring the new ruling-class home),” subtly exposes “contradictions within the ruling-class man.”⁴²⁷ Armstrong argues that while “the self-constrained, even tepid heroine survives to restore and perpetuate the domestic culture” the “actively aggressive women,” is “pathologized and criminalized” for “possessing qualities that the same novels would persuade us to forgive in such male characters as Heathcliff, Mr. Dombey...” etc.⁴²⁸

Given both Nussbaum and Armstrong’s arguments on the utility and functions of women, both vile and virtuous, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, we must ask the question as

⁴²⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 94.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.* 65.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* 94.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.* 95.

to whether the women of the Oriental tale, in both the metropolis and the colony, and in its mature, more variant forms, participate in the masculine logics of representation? That is to say, by the time we arrive at a text such as *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, and later, even *Banāt al-N`āsh*, in which the heroine and the metaphorical “harlot” are inextricably connected, are the novel and the Oriental tale, fiction forms that “constitute nationalism...differently” according to Aravamudan, at least in the colony, indistinguishable from one another?⁴²⁹ And if that is indeed the case, the critical question remains as to how an author of Nazir Ahmad’s cultural and historic milieu, negotiates “nationalism,” if we can call the feelings of the displaced, late nineteenth-century Muslim bourgeoisie that to begin with? Another way of examining the matter would be to move from the multi-functioning sisters, Asghari and Akbari, in the direction of the patriarch-reformer, Nasuh, to properly trace the transformation of this conflicted, or possibly inevitable vernacular fiction form, and more importantly, the relationship it carves for the Muslim with structures of nationhood and empire.

The primary object of Asghari’s reform over the course of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* is her husband—only in the sequel to this text, *Banāt al-N`āsh* will her attentions be directed to other girls in need. Akbari remains past reform, while Mama Azmat, Asghari’s nemesis in the form of a housekeeper, as a lower-class woman is better dismissed than corrected or guided according to bourgeois sensibilities. Her marriage to the young Muhammad Kamil, a maturing schoolboy at his best, places her firmly as a self-sacrificing heroine for whom “happiness came to depend... on her ability to renounce desire and accept a position that initially seemed significantly beneath her.”⁴³⁰ Unlike Scheherazade, Asghari’s marriage is neither rife with the excitement of saving the entire nation of women from the Sultan’s wrath, nor does it promise her the kind of social

⁴²⁹ Aravamudan, “In the Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as National Allegory,” 10.

⁴³⁰ Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, 66.

advancement that Scheherazade attains, even if it were to be for just a night. Asghari's battle in the reform of her husband will be against the pleasures of entertainment and play, while she must vanquish the lies and fictions of Mama Azmat, the scheming housekeeper, in order to reestablish economic order to her new home.

Mama Azmat, interestingly enough, is denied her femininity, most probably on account of her class, given that the working classes played little role in the emergent Muslim bourgeoisie's vision of their place in the modern colony that was forced into quick formation by the rise of a rival, and somewhat antagonistic Hindu national. "Groceries and provisions, clothes," (*saudā saif, kapṛā*) in fact "whatever had to be bought from the market, came through Mama Azmat's hands," (*ḡarż jō kučh bāzār sē ātā sab māmā aźmat kē hāthōñ ātā*) allowing her to "manage in household in the manner of men," (*mardōñ kī ṭarhā is ḡhar kī muntaẓim thī*).⁴³¹ Asghari's suspicion regarding her thievery from the family's monthly expenditure and obvious superiority as a cook threatens the old woman who embarks on a series of plots to dislodge Asghari from the affections of her husband and her position as the "polite" (*tamīzdār*) daughter-in-law of the house. Her first "attack" (*vār*) on Asghari is made successful through her position as a messenger between husband and wife, when she is able to deny Muhammad Kamil's wish for *kaṛhāi* cooked by his wife by withholding her husband's message from Asghari.

As part of her second ploy, she suggests to Muhammad Kamil's mother that Asghari was planning to spend her first Ramadan as a bride at her parents' home, possibly even taking her husband with her, further antagonizing the Asghari's in-laws. After putting the family into some debt with the grocer, Mama Azmat further deceives her seemingly illiterate mistress by pasting an official notice on the door of their house, convincing the latter that the notice is a declaration

⁴³¹ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-'Arūs*, 849.

of the family's insolvency. Asghari finally exposes the wily housekeeper, but never attempts to correct or improve her character, possibly because Azmat's existence relies almost solely on falsehood, performance, and storytelling. Fiction and its lesser relatives, in other words, are relegated to the lower classes—Azmat, unlike her mistress, can read, but she uses her skill as a means to deceive, and to interrupt the development of a domestic ideal. Asghari, in turn, reads *against* Azmat, turning the fiction she invents around the notice back into fact.

“Chastised but excluded from reformist tutelage,” Azmat is almost sent to the police (kōtvālī) when exposed by Asghari in the presence of her father-in-law, Maulvi Muhammad Fazil, until Asghari intervenes, suggesting that her dismissal is enough punishment.⁴³² Barely permitted to associate with the feminine sex, despite being the mother of a daughter who is also repelled by her actions, Azmat, her propensity for invention, and her misuse of language exist in a domain that is outside the direct interests of the cultural, religious, and linguistic reform that an author such as Nazir Ahmad believed was essential for both public and private Muslim life in north-India. But given that Akbari is also excluded from the circle of reform, we must reexamine to some extent, the notion that only *sharīf* women could be the objects of *iṣlāḥ*. I want to suggest that the reason women of Akbari and Mama Azmat's ilk are represented as irredeemable is because they appear as direct threats to the virtue and stability of the *sharīf*, reformed woman. Akbari, if we recall from the beginning of the story, “of her own accord would remain angry with her sister. In fact, when she found her alone, she would even hit her,” (ḷud baḷud apnī ḷhōtī behen sē nārāz rahā kartī. balkē akēlā pā kar mār bhī līyā kartī thī).⁴³³ These women, then, lacking in talent and manners, but more importantly, both susceptible to and having a propensity for losing themselves within their fictions, are incompatible with the idea of the new domestic

⁴³² Sangari, *Politics of the Possible*, 214.

⁴³³ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 811.

order that must come into place in order for the Muslim social to regenerate and redefine itself for a colonial modernity that as argued earlier found the literary and cultural preferences of elite Muslims unproductive and frivolous.⁴³⁴ In other words, what is represented most powerfully in the figures of Akbari and Azmat is the *reformist* Oriental tale's antagonism and dissonance with earlier and other forms of fiction, a problematic stance that gains further ground in *Taubat al-Naṣūh*.

Asghari, of course, utilizes “stories” and “riddles” in her girls’ seminary, but avoids “stories of cock- and hen-sparrows,” (čīṛē čīṛyā kī kahānīyāñ) turning instead to Nazir Ahmad’s own compilation, the *Muntaḳib ul-Hikāyāt*, described as a “A Collection of Moral and Entertaining Anecdotes,” in the 1900 edition of the India Office library’s catalogue of “Hindustani Books.” In the preface to this collection of fables, Ahmad speaks of the pointlessness or lack of purpose in extant children’s stories (lāhāṣil) as the reason why he chose to write a book in which “a story was a story,” and “advice⁴³⁵ was advice” (kahānī ki kahānī aur naṣīhat kī naṣīhat).⁴³⁶ The second reason behind this book, Ahmad tells us is so that children are able to learn Urdu well, one that was reiterated at the beginning of *Mir`āt* as well. In the first *hikāyat*, or moral story, a hungry rooster searching for food comes across a precious stone hidden in the ground. Instead of rejoicing at this newfound wealth, all the rooster can think about is the uselessness of such an object in a time of basic need, a lesson that Ahmad repeats in a note at the bottom of the page as well.

⁴³⁴ Here I am referring to my discussion in the previous chapter as well as earlier in this chapter, one of many examples illustrating the colonial government’s clear dissatisfaction with the learning practices, linguistic and disciplinary, of the young generation of elite Muslims.

⁴³⁵ There is no exact equivalent in English for the word “*naṣīhat*,” related to *iṣlāh* or correction, which can best be approximated to “sincere or heartfelt advice” for the improvement of another.

⁴³⁶ Nazir Ahmad, *Muntaḳib ul-Hikāyāt* (Karachi: Urdu Academy Sindh, 1979), 7.

Despite allowing her students only this collection of “good stories” (aĥhī aĥhī kahānīyāñ) to “divert” (behlāy`ēñ) them, Asghari often “interrogate[s] them in the middle of the story, and where they are able, they give answers to my questions” (kahānīyōñ kē bīĉ bīĉ mēñ in sē ulajhtī jātī hūñ aur jaisī in kī samajh hai, yēh mērī bāt kā javāb dētī haiñ). Asghari’s reduction of the story into a history lesson, really, is illustrated by her immediate interruption of her student Fazilat’s reading a story beginning with “There was once a king” (ēk thā bādshāh) “Whom do we call a king” (bādshāh kis kō kehtē haiñ), Asghari asks her students, beginning a discussion that visits the deposal of the last Mughal king Bahadar Shah by the British, and the establishment of Queen Victoria as queen, “our king is the Queen Victoria” (hamārā bādshāh malkā victōrīā hai).⁴³⁷ What is at play in Asghari’s attitude towards stories, then, is in many ways reminiscent of the use of an elaborate fiction in the taming of Nourjahad by Schemzeddin. Whereas in *The History of Nourjahad*, I have argued the deliberate use of “history” serves to diminish the threat of an Islamicate Orient, here, in *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, the interplay of fiction and history reduces the power of the fictional form into little more than a device of instruction, and self-improvement.

If the women of *Mir`āt* serve to illustrate the dangers of unrestrained story telling and performance, then the men, particularly Asghari’s young husband, Muhammad Kamil, whose lives take place largely outside the family home, exemplify the need for a reformed culture of entertainment and pleasure. Muhammad Kamil, we are told, though engaged with his lessons morning and evening also “used to play cards, chess, and dice with boys his age” (ham `umrōñ kē sāth ganjifā, shatranj, chōsār bhī khēlā kartā).⁴³⁸ At some points his play would keep him so engrossed that he wouldn’t reach home till late at night. Believing his habits to be both frivolous and dangerous, Asghari takes him to task one evening, advising him not only to work on his

⁴³⁷ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 903

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* 885.

mathematics and accounting, rather than Arabic or Persian, but also warning him that “playing such games was a habit comparable to opium” (khēlnā afyūn kī sī ‘ādat hai). More important than their addictive potential was the fact that “these games are sinful” (avval tō yēh khēl gunāh haiñ), and “impede man from attaining higher goals” (ādmī kō dūsrē kamāl ḥaṣil karnē sē roktī haiñ). Malleable and amenable to Asghari’s “sincere advice” (naṣīḥat), Muhammad Kamil abandons these pleasures, going so far as to even acquire a mathematics textbook that he would devote himself to during the evenings.⁴³⁹ Unlike Kalim, Nasuh’s eldest son whose failure to reform himself can only end in death, Muhammad Kamil redeems himself enough to serve as an *ideal* rather than a *lesson*, or warning, eventually at Asghari’s urging, even gaining employment at the *kaḥēhrī*, or local court. I would suggest, however, that we take Muhammad’s Kamil’s improvement and even his professional success as an assistant to “James Sahib,” as a temporary moment in Nazir Ahmad’s more complicated and shifting views on the relationship the north-Indian Muslim bourgeoisie could carve with colonial or national culture.

Muhammad Kamil’s second incident of moral decline and subsequent *iṣlāḥ* takes place after he moves to Sialkot with James Sahib at Asghari’s insistence. The episode is an early indication of Nazir Ahmad’s displacement or relocation of this Muslim minority from its illusion of possessing roots in an aristocratic north-India, to a more abstract and spiritual idea of home. When Asghari notices that her young husband’s letters from Sialkot were getting more sporadic, she comes to the conclusion that something is wrong, and decides to set out to correct the matter. Her aunt, Tamasha Khanum is horrified at the thought of the young bride leaving her family home, going so far as to tell her “no one from our family has ever ventured outside [Delhi]” (hamārē kunbē mēñ sē āj tak kō`ī bāhir nahīñ gayā). Asghari’s equal response to this deeply

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 887

significant utterance on the *sharīf* Muslim vision of home and identity is to ask, “What do I have to do with this city? The city is where the one I am bound to is,” (mujh kō shehr sē kyā maṭlab? meīñ tō jis kē sāth vābastā hūñ, vahīñ shehr hai).⁴⁴⁰ My translation of the word *shehr* is a crude one, when Tamasha and Asghari’s reference is clearly to the city of Delhi, where as we are told at the beginning of the story, “there is no *sharīf* neighborhood where a few of the houses were not of the Andesh Khan clan,” (sharīfōñ kā kō`ī mohallā nā hō gā jis mēñ dō čār ghar andēsh k̄ānīōñ kē nā hōñ).⁴⁴¹ In other words, what Tamasha Khanum expresses in her reservations about Asghari’s departure from Delhi is not what has largely been read as shock about a woman wandering outside the home, but rather a discomfort or a feeling of unsettledness at the thought that there is the possibility of a certain way of life outside of the ancestral space, that is Delhi.⁴⁴²

That possibility of having to leave Delhi is brought about by Muhammad Kamil’s moral failings, for he had become “immersed in bad company” (burī ṣoḥbat mēñ mubtalā thā); “flatterers were aplenty, and had made a fool out of him” (k̄ushāmādī lōg jam`ā thē aur vōh is kō ullū banāy`ē hūy`ē thē). Aghari arrives in Sialkot in time to see that “the bribery market was flourishing” (bāzār-e rishvat garam thā), and her husband whom “god had blessed with monetary employment,” (k̄udā nē sau rupai kā naukar kar dīyā) had shown his “gratitude” (yahī shukrīyā) by his lack of “contentment” (qanā`at) with his lot.⁴⁴³ After admonishing him for his weak morals and gaining the promise that he would not waver again, Asghari gets ready to leave

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. 918.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. 809.

⁴⁴² Asghari’s momentous journey that upsets the older women of the household, including her mother-in-law, has often been ignored as an event in Sangari and Lal’s readings that more generally make the argument of the *sharīf* woman being a fixture within the private space. While I myself agree with this to some extent, I have also shown that what is more problematic is the *sharīf* woman’s engagement with fictions and her subsequent ability to wander morally, spiritually, and maybe physically. Asghari’s physical journey away from Delhi, then, signifies the beginnings of the instability of the private space itself.

⁴⁴³ Ahmad, *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, 920.

Sialkot, but not before arranging for her cousin Muhammad Salih, a young man of impeccable morals, to stay with her husband and guard him from future temptations. The urgent lesson being communicated at this point in *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, one that will acquire further complexity and abstraction over the course of Nazir Ahmad's following works, is precisely that the Muslims of north India must rely decreasingly on established order, and traditions rooted in urban ancestries. Instead they must turn to employment in the *kačehrī*, described by David Lelyveld as "the complex of courts and government offices that marked any administrative center," no matter where it may lead them. Their morality and spirituality, likewise, can no longer depend on the home, or the bounds of the private space, and must not be superseded with the worldly or material—the latter, rather, as Asghari points out, cannot exist without the former.

The sequel to *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, *Banāt al-N`āsh*, or "Daughters of the Bier," deals with the private world of *sharīf* women and the education of an aberrant individual, presenting an entire curriculum for the progressive instruction of the Muslim woman. Taking place entirely in the private space of Asghari's home, Ahmad's second work is in many ways a careful selection of the particular notions of Western knowledge appropriate for entry into the home, a theme that will be dealt with in much greater complexity in *Ibn ul-Vaqt*. *Mir`āt al-`Arūs*, however, remains relevant precisely on account of its construction as an Oriental tale, albeit, one now residing within the orient itself. In other words, when we read this text, we must read it as borrowing Western constructs of the Muslim, and aiming to correct precisely those faults that are seen as distinctively attached to this figure. If *Mir`āt-al`Arūs* is the reformed, chastised orient's tale, then *Taubat al-Našūh*, that in many ways is an appropriate successor, must be read as a further adoption of Orientalist tropes around the Muslim that find appropriate salvation outside of the colony.

II. *Taubat al-Naṣūh* and the possibility of a Muslim domicile

Applauding Nazir Ahmad's talent and sagacity for writing the meritorious and moralistic *Taubat al-Naṣūh*'s, Muir wrote, "the religious cast of the tale is quite singular." "That the idea of such a book would present itself to the Moslem mind," Muir continues, was only possible in a "country under Christian influences."⁴⁴⁴ Though Muir is not far from wrong should we take *Taubat al-Naṣūh* to be merely an Indian replica of Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1716), or a contemplation of religious reform inspired by English practice, we would lose to a large extent the various competing and conflicting structures that defined the Muslim reform movement. The story of a man who after a near brush with death changes his rather irreligious lifestyle into one defined by piety and the improvement of those around him, particularly his immediate family members, *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, was described by Ahmad himself as "drowned in religious color" (mazhabī rung mēñ dūbī hū`ī).⁴⁴⁵ Written in much the same register as *Mir`āt al-'Arūs*, "the original Treatise" was also recommended for "the acquisition of Hindustani" in both the native school system and for British officers desirous of learning the language.⁴⁴⁶

Unlike *Mir`āt al-'Arūs*, however, *Taubat al-Naṣūh* has repeatedly been seen as engendering much debate around the notion of Muslim reform, C.M. Naim reading it as a "tussle between the reforming old-new and the recalcitrant young-old, represented by father and son respectively."⁴⁴⁷ Mushirul Hassan reads *Taubat al-Naṣūh* as emerging from a more personal experience, suggesting that Nazir Ahmad "reposes faith in family structures, vouching for their efficiency and inherent resilience." For critics such as Christina Oesterheld, and Lal, the critical point of this work remains an instance where an enraged Nasuh sets fire to Kalim's books of

⁴⁴⁴ Muir, preface to *The Repentance of Nussooh*, ix-x.

⁴⁴⁵ Ahmad, *Lekčarōñ kā majmū`ā*, Vol. 2, 440.

⁴⁴⁶ Muir, preface to *The Repentance of Nussooh*, x.

⁴⁴⁷ Naim, "Prize-Winning Abab," 145.

classical poetry and prose that Oesterheld sees as emerging from a “life full of contradictions.”⁴⁴⁸ Lal, I would argue, has read Ahmad’s third work in a limited way, mainly interpreting it as representative of the male-female hierarchy in the *sharīf* family, interspersing her own readings with Naim’s more powerful offerings. Her reading, it must also be remembered, draws also on Christopher Flint’s reading of Daniel Defoe’s *Family Instructor*, a text that like so many of his “conduct books” advocates “patriarchal governance within the family just as it inevitably expresses energetic resistance to arbitrary authority.”⁴⁴⁹ Flint has astutely pointed out that the English Oriental tale “often had little to do overtly with family,” and this remains true in the case of earlier texts in the colony as well.⁴⁵⁰ Aravamudan has also, at various instances, described the Oriental tale against the form of the domestic novel, ignoring, of course, the transformations of the former once it enters the colony.

Keeping in mind the limited scope of these studies of the Oriental tale, I want to suggest that we read *Taubat al-Naṣūḥ* as a realization of certain tropes around domicile present in the Western Oriental tale. Aware of representations of the Muslim as a travelling, ultimately foreign figure in India, this text begins the relocation of an elite Muslim body outside of its north-Indian cultural stronghold, and into a more abstract, spiritual system of belonging. I am not saying here that Nazir Ahmad was a proponent of the pan-Islamic movement that took hold in India in the late nineteenth century, but rather that increasingly in his novel-like stories, the Muslim male, particularly, is at a loss in the public domain. This is explored with much deeper and painful complexity in *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, whereas in *Taubat al-Naṣūḥ* the theme is restricted largely to the reformer, Nasuh, and his immediate family. What we encounter, then, is two distinct instances of

⁴⁴⁸ Oesterheld, “Deputy Nazir Ahmad and Delhi College,” 323.

⁴⁴⁹ Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 37.

reform: the first, the religious correction of Nasuh that he subsequently replicates by proselytizing to his immediate family. The second, the conversion of his eldest son Kalim, the representative of an older, aristocratic way of life in Delhi is no easy task, leading Kalim to rebel against his father's strictures, attempting to lead a life outside of the domicile, only to be met with poverty, and ultimately a violent death. Kalim, the prototype of the decadent, particularly Muslim Oriental subject, unwilling to abandon poetry and chess for a life as a doctor, or in government service, has to die or be erased from the narrative, in order for Nasuh's program of reform to be properly effective. In other words, *Taubat al-Naṣūh* stages the conflict not between a new and old order, but rather the impossibility of a religious reform without an appropriate purging of the extant culture. The *iṣlāḥ* or correction of the *sharīf* Muslim can only take place once he is able to disassociate from the elite north-Indian culture in which he is so immersed; that is to say, Nasuh's program of religious reform demands a dislocation of its object from India.

In the opening scene of the story, Nasuh while in a deep, medicated sleep dreams of finding himself in a magnificent building that he is able to recognize as the *kaḥeḥrī* because he had at one time served as a Deputy Magistrate. But unlike the Indian *kaḥeḥrī*, “an arena of power,” in the colonial city,⁴⁵¹ there were hundreds of thousands of people milling around here, each carrying an account of their sins and good deeds (*ai'māl nāmāh*). Among these people is Nasuh's dead father whose own life is to be accounted for. When Nasuh glances at his paper, believing that he would find notes on the Indian Penal Code, he sees that “instead of the section on punishment in India, there are references to chapters and verses from the Quran” (*bajāy'ē daf'āt-e t'āzīrāt-e hind kē qurān kī sūratōñ aur āyatōñ kā havālā thā*).⁴⁵² Nasuh's father then proceeds to condemn his son's material way of life, reminding him that salvation could only be

⁴⁵¹ Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 63.

⁴⁵² Nazir Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṣūh* in *Majmū'ā-e Nazir Ahmad*, 284.

achieved through a demonstrated repentance. This encounter, of course, is transformative for the errant Nasuh. Naim has read the location, “the divine *kačehrī*” the site of an inescapable and superior judgment as bearing an “existential similarity,” to the British *kačehrī* “whose terror and justice they had recently experienced in 1858.”⁴⁵³ I want to suggest, keeping Naim’s reading in mind, that this opening scene only begins what will be a continuous theme in the text—the removal of the elite Muslim male from the worldliness and materiality that has corrupted him in colonial India. The divine *kačehrī*, then, forces a reevaluation of the relationship this figure has so far held with objects of power in the colony—no more is the British *kačehrī* the arbitrator of success and power. Nasuh must look to another center of power, this one abstract and intangible, for the rest of his reformed life.

The father of three boys and two girls, Nasuh, on awakening from his dream realizes that his own correction or *iṣlāḥ* is not as difficult a task as that of his household, and thus recruits his wife, Fahmida, to join his efforts. Though the younger children, Hamida, Alim, and Salim readily acquiesce to their parents’ new program of moral and religious education, the two elder children, Naeema, married, but separated, and Kalim, a young man of aristocratic tastes, resist the change. Nasuh’s conversation with his second son, Alim, in which he grills the child about his religious education at the madrassa reveals that the “Quran” is taught “in the language of another country,” and thus little can be understood as to what is contained within it. The “tales and stories,” (*qiṣṣē, kahānī*) Alim reads at school “often contain immoral ideas” (*akśar in mēñ burī burī bātēñ*).⁴⁵⁴ Already a model of Muslim piety, Alim becomes another recruit in Nasuh’s program. Alim’s statements on the nature of religious instruction, of course, echo Nazir Ahmad’s own views: “recourse to the Koran... was a way to eliminate those customs and practices of

⁴⁵³ C. M. Naim, “Afterword” to *The Repentance of Nussooh*, trans. Matthew Kempson, 133.

⁴⁵⁴ Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṣūḥ*, 339.

Indian Muslims, which had no basis in the Koran but were a major obstacle in their social, economic, and political progress...”⁴⁵⁵ The practice of reading risqué Persian stories such as those contained in the *Bahār-e Dānish* though appropriately disavowed and criticized by the young boy continues to plague Nasuh till much later in the narrative through the figure of Kalim. Towards the end of the story, we are told that Alim passes every exam with distinction, and though has many opportunities to serve at good government posts, ultimately decides to “benefit” (naf’ā) his people by becoming a teacher.

Unlike his other brother Salim, who benefited from the good advice of his friend’s grandmother, Alim finds guidance in a book, probably the Bible, given to him by a missionary (pādrī ṣāhib). Written in “simple Urdu” (salīs urdū), the book details the life of a “god-fearing and chaste man,” and upon reading it Alim realizes that his “lifestyle was worse than that of animals” (mērā ṭarz-e zindagī jānvarōñ sē bhī badtar thā).⁴⁵⁶ Lal reads Alim’s reflection as the symptom of a “disparity” in the reformist agenda in which “men were variously invested in contemplative endeavors.” She goes on to argue, “through Alim’s articulation, Nazir Ahmad seems to suggest that it is necessary to think, to understand through reflection, what it means to be a good Muslim.”⁴⁵⁷ Lal’s flat reading of this moment ignores the more critical issue at stake here: Alim becomes a better Muslim by way of a Christian text that is presented to him in *readable, and unadorned Urdu*. In other words, the issue is not so much the relationship of gender to reform, but rather the deliberate linking of a certain style of Urdu writing to the religious program. Alim’s reading and appreciation of the book handed to him by the missionary takes us back to early orientalists, most noticeably Gilchrist who favored the “expediency of a

⁴⁵⁵ Oesterheld, “Deputy Nazir Ahmad and Delhi College,” 322.

⁴⁵⁶ Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, 341.

⁴⁵⁷ Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India*, 156.

Hindustanee and Persian Version of the Holy Bible with the benevolent and pious intention of diffusing the light of the Gospel” among the natives of India.⁴⁵⁸ Alim’s elder brother tears the book to shreds when he finds it, and the boy is told to be thankful by Kalim’s friends for had the book not been destroyed “you would have become a Christian” (nahīñ tō tum krishtan hī ban gay`ē hōtē).⁴⁵⁹

To Alim this book represents something much deeper, “if now my thoughts are at all connected with faith and religion, then it is all the influence of this book,” (agar ab mērē ḡayālāt dīn-o mazhab sē ‘alāqā rakhtē haiñ tō yēh ṡiraf is kitāb kā aśar hai).⁴⁶⁰ Though Nasuh takes this moment to describe Christianity as affiliated with Islam to his son, the book itself has been destroyed, and its possible effect of conversion thus removed. What is being delicately staged in this scene, then, is Ahmad’s own attempt to write a book “molded by Islam” (islām kē sāncē mēñ) that “is free from any such claims that when read by someone of another religion, prove offensive” (is mēñ kahīñ bhī kō`ī aisī bāt nā thī jis kō kō`ī dūsre mazhab kā ādmī dēkh kar burā mānē).⁴⁶¹ To put the matter plainly, this scene proselytizes a docile and passive version of Islam to a colonial administration that particularly after 1857 viewed it as militant and violent. At the same time, it captures the extremely tenuous balance that language, religion, and notions of literary writing seem to be constantly negotiating in the colonial education system. Here, a particular Urdu register is being recruited by Ahmad in the service of Islam, even as he issues a tacit warning of the implications of not doing so.

If Alim is the model son, naturally inclined towards religion and service, then Kalim, his eldest brother, is the prodigal. Kalim describes himself in terms of an older order of *sharāfat*: in

⁴⁵⁸ Gilchrist, *The Oriental Fabulist*, xxv.

⁴⁵⁹ Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṡūh*, 342.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ahmad, *Lekčarōñ kā majmū`ā*, Vol. 2, 440.

a *musha'ira* or poetry recitation his *ghazal* is well received; in chess, the only one who can beat him is the old master Mirza Shahrukh; he plays occasional cards, but once he sits down, he is never beaten by an ace; there are no rivals to his pigeons in the city; he can fly a kite and cut scores of others with his maneuvers; and he is able to read and write on his own.⁴⁶² Unwilling to suddenly change his ways at his father's whim, Kalim ignores repeated entreaties from his brothers and mother to see his father, and to begin a regimen of prayer and austerity. Naim has suggested that it is Kalim and his tortured path to repentance that form the "true subject" of *Taubat al-Naṣūh*. While this remains a viable argument, I want to suggest that we read this complex, resistant, and resourceful character's journey from one temporary abode to another as laid out in sharp contrast to the permanence of the spiritual home offered to him by his father. That is to say, Kalim in many ways prematurely signifies the homelessness, or exile of the aristocratic Muslim from India. The only possible Muslim domicile, the text seems to suggest, lies in "kingdom" (*salṭanat*) that recognizes that it is answerable to the "king of both the worlds" (*bādshāh-e dō jahān*).

Kalim occupies separate quarters in his father's house, the opulent nature of which is only revealed when Nasuh finds out that his son, far from coming to see him has disappeared from the household altogether. Kalim's two rooms, elaborately titled the "House of Pleasure" (*'ishrat manzil*) and the "Room of Retirement" (*ḡalvat ḡānā*), the first furnished for "ceremony" (*takalluf*), while the second, not particularly fancy, boasted a shelf full of books. In the "House of Pleasure," Nasuh finds a book "elegantly bound in gold" (*'umdāh ḡalā'i jild*) that turns out to be an album that far from containing portraits of "scholars, hafizes or dervishes" (*'ālim, hāfīz aur darvēsh*) is replete with images of composers, musicians, singers, and performers, Tansen among

⁴⁶² Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, 365.

them. Similarly, the walls are adorned with “clippings and calligraphies” (qaṭ‘ē aur ṭagrē) whose subjects and meanings were “against faith, contrary to religion” (dīn kē ḳilāf, mazhab kē bar‘aks).⁴⁶³ Nasuh begins his riot of destruction by aiming an ornament at these hangings, but his anger knows no bounds when he enters Kalim’s bedroom to find a collection of a books, all in Urdu and Persian. “All the same, untrue tales, shameless topics, licentious meanings,” (sab kuḥ ḳ̄k hī ṭarāh kī thīñ. jhūtē qīṣṣē, bēhūdā bāteñ, faḥash maṭlab), Nasuh stares at these books for a few hours, knowing full well that in the beautiful bindings, the purity of script, the whiteness of the paper, and the correctness of style, he beheld a veritable “treasure” (zaḳīrā). But the “injurious” (darīdnī) implications of these books for his religion move Nasuh to finally decide that it is best to burn them.⁴⁶⁴

Joined by his son Alim who desires revenge for Kalim’s earlier tearing up of his book, Nasuh throws title after title into the fire, “*Fasānā-e ‘Ajā’ib*, *Qīṣṣā-e Gul Bakaulī*, *Ārā’ish-e Mehfil...Bahār-e Danish* and *Daryā-e Laṭāfat*” some of the more noticeable ones.⁴⁶⁵ Alim brings two volumes of his own to add to the carnage, the collected works of the poet Atish and the fiction writer Abdul Halim Sharar, Nasuh declaring these to be as “vulgar” (behūdā) as the rest. Possibly made more powerful and astounding by the nuances of Nasuh’s hesitation and the outright determination of his young son Alim, this scene has been read largely as “the rejection of the old poetry (and prose)” by the reformist school.⁴⁶⁶ “What Lord Macaulay had only hinted at in his famous minute, Nazir Ahmad has Nasuh put into action,” Naim astutely argues.⁴⁶⁷ Nasuh does not merely burn what is here deemed an immoral and unfit canon of Urdu writing,

⁴⁶³ Ibid. 405.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. 406.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 406-7

⁴⁶⁶ Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 186.

⁴⁶⁷ Naim, “Prize-Winning Adab,” 145.

but rather a suddenly unified canon incorporating both pre-colonial, and imperially sponsored works. Not only does Nasuh's action emphatically echo Orientalist descriptions surrounding texts produced at Fort William College, it also fails to discern between those of colonial origin and those that preceded and resisted them. Several of these texts, however, were also staple items on the literary curricula in colonial schools, as shown in the previous chapter. Their collective destruction marks, in no uncertain way, their fragility and ultimate inutility in a culture that is itself displaced in a world of science and rationality. Nazir Ahmad, the product of Delhi College, then, in this single moment, coalesces a century of Orientalist critique of native literatures into a correctional discourse now adopted by a small, but influential group of bourgeois subjects.

On hearing that Nasuh destroyed Kalim's library, his wife reminds him of the one book he had permitted her to read, Saadi's *Gulistān*, to which Nasuh responds that after his able censorship, what was left were the words of a man who could be "counted amongst the friends of Allah" (in *kā shumār auliyā` allāh meñ hai*). What, then, would be the solution for their son Kalim, his wife asks, who in Nasuh's estimation is at the opposite end, charmed by the chants of the devil? The solution, Nasuh tells her, is "religious and moralistic books" (*dīn-o iqlāq kī kitābeñ*), efficacious only if the Muslim were subject, rather than subjugated entirely by the "snake" and the "devil," the fictions that control men such as Kalim.⁴⁶⁸ These closing remarks to the chapter anticipate what by the next decade becomes a major theme in the writings of Syed Ahmad Khan and Altaf Hussain Hali, the call for not just a "religious" or *mazhabī* literature in Urdu, but rather a *return* to it.

In other words, when Nazir Ahmad refers to Saadi as a "friend of Allah," whose wisdom is clouded by his dalliances in the "licentious topics" (*faḥash bātōñ*) that make up the entirety of the

⁴⁶⁸ Ahmad, *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, 411.

texts that *are* burnt, he is allowing for a hazy notion of an earlier Muslim purity that was slowly obliterated in its opulent north-Indian setting. Hali, a couple of decades later, repeats the gesture when he speaks of Syed Ahmad Khan's reformist journal *Tehzīb al-Aḳlāq*, as reinventing and reviving what he sees as a centuries-long tradition in Urdu of *mazhabī* literature. *Iṣlāḥ*, or the act of correction, this suggests, assumes a previous religious purity in its objects, yet in the case of Urdu, *iṣlāḥ* seems to imply a return to an abstract category, given that it forces a break with what it sees as the tangible past. This problematic category, *mazhab* or religion, articulates finally from within, the religious-historical classification that Gilchrist had provided half a century ago for Urdu, yet, it does so in a state of rupture from the texts that invented it.

Escaping the erasure of his material and physical self, Kalim wanders from his father's house to what he believes is his friend Mirza Zahirdar Beg's house. Aptly named for his false appearances, Mirza poses as the grandson of a distinguished *jemādār*. After the latter's death, his heirs had turned Mirza out with nothing but a small pension to serve as an income, but the young man insisted on posturing as a nobleman, befriending people like Kalim who would nurture his fancies. Kalim runs to Mirza's house believing, initially, that someone from his own home would come after him, but the narrative voice unforgivingly reminds us that this was an "incorrect impression" on his part for "the man and the father of the house had changed. No more was there the same mother or the father of old" (gḥar kā bāvā ādam badlā hūā thā. nā pehlī sī mā nā aglā sā bāp). Kalim's chronic homelessness is confirmed in this moment. Upon reaching Mirza's quarters, he is informed that the man he is searching for resides in a mud shack behind the premises. Mirza finally appears and claiming his wife's illness sets Kalim up in a deserted mosque that is as "desolate and fearsome as the Mosque of Zarar" (maṣjīd-e żarār kī ṭarhā vīrān-o, vehshat nāk). "No *ḥāfiẓ*, and no *maulvī*," this abandoned mosque, a deliberate reference to the

historical mosque the earliest converts to Islam were ordered to demolish, far from a haven for Kalim is a reminder that is he is as removed from his religion as could possibly be.⁴⁶⁹

Kalim wakes the next morning to find the bedding lent to him by Mirza gone, and his own clothes covered in dust and bats' droppings. When he asks for Mirza at his house, he is accused of stealing the sheets and pillow lent to him, and dragged off to the local prison. After reciting verses to prove his identity to the police officer as Nasuh's poet son, Kalim is finally taken to his father. Nasuh, though willing once again to welcome Kalim home, is denied "fatherhood" (pādrī) by Kalim who accuses him of "severing him from [his] childhood" (farzandī sē 'āq).⁴⁷⁰ Once again, Kalim wanders away, this time coming across his cousin Fitrat in the city, another charlatan, who sees the circumstances of Kalim's desertion as an opportunity to make some money of his own. Convincing Kalim to sell off his father's village that belongs to him only nominally, Fitrat entices Kalim with promises of an independent life in Delhi, complete with poetry recitations and dancers, and thus for a mere thousand rupees, separates Nasuh from his hard-earned property. But Kalim is bankrupted within two months, the bills from confectioners, tailors, butchers, bakers, and fruit vendors, piling up in addition to the servants' salaries, and once again finds himself at the magistrate's, and then in prison. Nasuh, upon receiving a letter demanding money, sends more than the set bail to Kalim who uses the extra amount to travel to Daulatabad.

A minor princely town that its deluded, young ruler's tastes had made into a "little Lucknow" (čhōtā luknow), Daulatabad, its very name implying the "city of wealth," once again proves to be only temporary refuge for the exiled Kalim.⁴⁷¹ His poetic utterances and airs fail to

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. 417.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. 427.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. 439.

support him for very long, and hence Kalim decides to present himself to the local military unit to which he is recruited. His fine appearance and haughty demeanor lead to his promotion to the rank of captain, but this too his short-lived. Within a few months, the unit is sent to the front and Kalim, impetuous and carefree, is fatally injured, sent to his father's house to live out his final days. In his last words to his family, Kalim desires that his life "stand as a warning" (namūnā-e 'ibrat), and though he will not be a beneficiary (mustafīd) of his realization, if others could gain something than his existence would not have been an "idle" ('abś) one. Ending on cue with a line of Persian poetry "I did not, but you stand warned," (man nā kardam shomā ḥazar bakīnad), Kalim begs forgiveness and stops breathing.⁴⁷²

My point in detailing Kalim's perambulations is to reiterate that while he remains symbolic of the older order of Muslim *sharāfat*, he is also an itinerant, a nomad, perpetually wandering from one provisional domicile to another. Home would only have been possible had he embraced the new notions of being that his father and mother had established for their progeny. Nowhere is this conundrum more powerfully expressed than in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), where Mufti reminds us the young doctor Aziz is a "culturally homeless figure," for whom Islam is "his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle cry... Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable where is body and his thoughts found their home."⁴⁷³ Nazir Ahmad, writing almost half a century before Forster, then, is one of the critical authorial figures in the rewriting of this discourse from *within* the colony. Here, interestingly, it is the old, aristocratic Muslim order that is homeless, whereas the reformed, corrected Muslims have a home in Islam, much like Aziz. Kalim's fate as a wanderer was decided not when his father decided to convert, but rather is symptomatic of aristocratic Muslim order in the years following 1857, an

⁴⁷² Ibid. 457.

⁴⁷³ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 120.

unavoidable reality for those who attempted to continue with a way of life obliterated with the exile of Bahadur Shah II. Nasuh's redemption, conversion, and subsequent role as a messiah of sorts are as much a response to these conditions as is Kalim's blind, dogged persistence. In other words, the move from the colonial to the "divine *kačehri*" in this text's opening scene is indeed a reminder of an increasing lack of reliance and stability for the Muslims of India in a land in which they are repeatedly cast as alien and invader.

Written from within the Oriental space, employing the problematic tropes of the Western Oriental tale, most noticeably that of the decadent, but displaced Muslim, *Taubat al-Našūh* is one of the first fictions to internalize this effect of Orientalism into a discourse about Islam. Less concerned with the problem of women, and more with the patriarch as the guardian of domestic religious practice, Ahmad's third reformist tale becomes a bridge to his later works that take religion in the public sphere as their primary concern. It is critical to note at this juncture that though these *Mir`āt* and *Taubat al-Našūh* both acknowledge a colonial presence, the engagement is a limited one. But what the latter prepares us for is a movement in Ahmad's own works—the aristocratic Muslim now successfully transformed into a bourgeois subject will subsequently be tested in the public, rather than private sphere. Islam, likewise, no longer a private matter once the Muslim attempts to claim his place in the modern colony, finally must come into contact with the British Empire, the narrative of this encounter becoming the basis for Ahmad's *Ibn ul-Vaqt*.

III. Displaced and dispossessed: the bourgeois Muslim of *Ibn ul-Vaqt*

Written more than a decade after his "prize-winning," reformist works, *Mir`āt al-'Arūs*, *Banāt al-N'āsh*, and *Taubat al-Našūh*, Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, or the "Son of the Moment," leaves behind the resolution of its predecessors, entering a realm of cultural ambivalence and

inherent instability. Partially autobiographical, for its protagonist, the eponymous Ibn ul-Vaqt, has attended Delhi College and served in the colonial administration, this late work concludes in anti-climax, debate, and divided sympathies rather than the final narrative pronouncement that was so visible in Nazir Ahmad's earlier fiction writings. But more than a treatise on the author's own state of being, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* is often read as a satire of sorts on Syed Ahmad Khan, Nazir Ahmad's mentor and friend, who endured much censure from the Indian Muslims for his conciliatory measures with the British in the years following 1857.⁴⁷⁴ Beginning around the time of the Mutiny and concluding a few years after, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* captures in no uncertain way the crisis—social, political, and cultural—that overtook the emergent Muslim bourgeoisie in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

The story of a man from a distinguished and *sharīf* household, living at a time when “studying English was considered tantamount to blasphemy” (*anḡrēzī paḡhnā kufr samjhā jātā thā*), *Ibn ul-Vaqt* details its protagonist's changed fortunes after he mercifully saves an Englishman, “Noble Sahib,” from a cruel death during the Mutiny.⁴⁷⁵ Though Ibn ul-Vaqt had blindly idolized the colonial government even before this incident, a newfound friendship with Noble Sahib allows him entry into the world of his rulers. Before long Ibn ul-Vaqt is attending and throwing dinner parties for the English, dressing like them, and furnishing his house in their style with the wealth he has acquired as a reward for loyalty to the colonizers. But jealousies, specially on the part of the Eurasians, and the departure of Noble Sahib for England leave him somewhat isolated and abandoned, belonging, finally, to neither native nor colonial society. Even as Ibn ul-Vaqt styles himself as an Englishman, he moves further and further away from his own

⁴⁷⁴ See: Muzzafar Alam, *The Language of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (London: Hurst, 2004), 17.

⁴⁷⁵ Ahmad, *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, in *Majmū'ā-e Nazir Ahmad*, 51.

religion, stopping just short of drinking alcohol. The text concludes with a debate on Islamic practice between him and his brother-in-law Hujjat ul-Islam, his name literally meaning the “the one who intervenes on behalf of Islam,” newly returned from pilgrimage, who makes it his job to redeem Ibn ul-Vaqt.

The question of how Nazir Ahmad intended for such a text to be read is a difficult one—more so than any of his other writings, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* is marked by the “conflicting impulses and ideas” that Oesterheld broadly argues were produced by “contact with the colonial administration and the new education system.”⁴⁷⁶ Historically speaking, Ahmad made his views on Muslims of Ibn ul-Vaqt’s ilk quite explicit in later lectures: “We can assume that a Muslim who abandons Islam will never become a Christian or a Jew, or anything. He will just be a heretic and an atheist. And thus if English-loving Muslims had not been restrained, the prevailing thought was that they would long have become heretics and atheists” (y`ānī musalmān jō islām sē bhāgā bas samajh lō kēh vōh nā `īsā ī hō gā nā yahūd nā kučh nā kučh. vōh hō gā tō mulhīd aur dehrīā hō gā aur bas. ġarż angrēzī dān musalmānōñ kī agar rōk thām nā kī ga`ī hōtī tō zin-e ġālib thā kēh vōh kab kē mulhīd aur dehrīyē hō gay`ē hōtē). Likewise, though he was happy to praise Syed Ahmad Khan’s contribution to the education of Muslims, he also warned his audiences that when the young men from Aligarh College emerged from under the “magic spells” (jantriōñ) of reform and English education, it would be the duty of the “old-fashioned Muslims” (purānī faishan kē musalmānōñ) to bring them back to the fold.⁴⁷⁷ Though he “lavished praise on Western civilization and celebrated British rule,” Nazir Ahmad “disgraced and humiliated” Ibn ul-Vaqt

⁴⁷⁶ Oesterheld, “Deputy Nazir Ahmad and Delhi College,” 317.

⁴⁷⁷ Ahmad, *Lekčarōñ kā majmū`ā*, Vol. 2, 43.

when he chose to mimic the English completely, raising the character of Hujjat ul-Islam to enact his spiritual salvation.⁴⁷⁸

I suggest we read *Ibn ul-Vaqt* as continuous with *Taubat al-Naṣūh* in many ways, shifting from the private realm of the home to the public sphere in the colonial Delhi. Ibn ul-Vaqt, like the vagrant Kalim, tests an alternative existence to that made possible for him by way of religion, wandering into a cultural space that initially eludes, and finally rejects him. We encounter, towards the conclusion of the text, a protagonist who is essentially made homeless by his own transgressions; neither properly a Muslim, nor English, the solitary figure of Ibn ul-Vaqt becomes a final symptom of British Orientalism in the Indian subcontinent. That is to say, we can locate the narrative surrounding Ibn ul-Vaqt as emerging from within the literary conditions of the colony. Though ostensibly he resembles the displaced Muslim of Oriental tales such as *Vathek* and *Nourjahad*, and at times even the familiarized Friday from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Ibn ul-Vaqt is the ironically final response to the series of wandering Muslims that have populated English and imperially patronized fictions over the course of almost two centuries.

When I refer to him as ironic and final, I am pointing to the irreversibility of his condition, one that has formed in the wake of a series of fictional and scholarly representations that become imbricated within the narratives of a native elite. His decline, both as a Muslim and as a resource to the colonial government, is followed by the rise of Hujjat ul-Islam, a servant simultaneously faithful to Islam and to the English, interestingly, an adherent of a return to traditional Oriental learning, a native Orientalist of sorts. Compared to Ibn ul-Vaqt who echoes edicts learnt from Western histories about India, Hujjat ul-Islam advocates a return to classical Arabic, and servility to the English. What both of these figures represent, very powerfully and poignantly, however, is

⁴⁷⁸ Hassan, *A Moral Reckoning*, 180.

the compromise and subjugation of Islam outside of an empire-formation that it is not its own. In other words, *Ibn ul-Vaqt* stages the relocation of the Muslim from the Islamic Empire into the British Empire, and the subsequent moral and social degradation he is forced to endure.

We are now in the long shadow of the western Oriental tale, in a text that is the dark effect of this literary form within the colony, even as it acknowledges and possibly even reinforces its own subjugation. If we at all seek an affinity with the Oriental tale, I would argue that *Ibn ul-Vaqt* is a colonial recollection of Johnson's *Rasselas*, a controlled, philosophical engagement with its protagonist's "insatiable" desire for a material, in this case, colonially sponsored happiness, that compromises his "virtuous conduct," and the possibility of "God's mercy."⁴⁷⁹ Ibn ul-Vaqt, like the young prince of the story, turns down the certainty of his duties and income at his family's ancestral shrine to become the reformer of his own people. But his inability to control his admiration for the English in many ways a reminder of *Rasselas*' adulation for the stoic philosopher, leaves him disappointed in his chosen mentors, and displaced from home.

A deliberate and occasionally indignant engagement with the post-1857 moment, the narrative opens with a description of the times—"Delhi College was at its peak. The Lats would come, and inspect all the educational institutions. That's what respect used to be, when they went to a classroom, they would shake hands with the teacher... The second Lat Sahib turned around, the Maulvi, with great ceremony, would scrub his hand clean using not English soap, but dust" (dihlī kālij in dinōñ baṛē zōrōñ par thā. mulkī lāt āy`ē aur tamām darsgāhōñ kō dēkhtē bhāltē phirtē. qadardānī hō tō aisī kēh jis jamā`at mēñ jātē madras sē hāth milātē... Lāt ṣāhib kā mūñ muṛtā thā kēh bohat mubālgē kē sāth angrēzī sābūn sē nahīñ, balkē mittī sī ragaṛ ragaṛ kar is hāth

⁴⁷⁹ Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 229.

kō dhō dālā).⁴⁸⁰ Not to be confused with the *Swadeshi* (or self-sufficiency movement) of the twentieth century, this particular version of events tells of a fragile peace, maintained by false appearances, native economic dependencies, and imperial might. Though slavish subjects abounded, Ibn ul-Vaqt, not even desirous of English employment, struts around announcing, “empire was an essential and important consequence of a nation’s superiority” (saḷṭanat ēk žarūrī aur lāzmī natījā hai qaum kī bartarī kā).⁴⁸¹ The English, on the other hand, are depicted mostly as a callous lot; in one instance the shadowy narrator shares the story of a friend who overheard a group of Englishmen, laughing and mimicking the English spoken by natives.

The general response, on the part of the Muslims, to this last incident further captures the moment: “English lordship has destroyed our treasure, our jewels, our traditions, our apparel, our conduct, our customs, our trade, our religion, our knowledge, our crafts, our respect, our nobility, and all that was left was our language...” (anгрēzī ‘amal dārī nē hamārī daulat, śarvat, rasm-o rivāj, libās, važ‘a, ṭaur ṭarīqā, tijārat, mazhab, ‘ilm, hunar, ‘izzat, sharāfat, sab čizōñ par tō pāñī phērā hī thā kēh ēk zubān thī...), but that too has been mutilated by English attempts to speak it. My detailed recounting of these opening moments of *Ibn ul-Vaqt* is an attempt to establish the embittered disillusionment of the Muslim bourgeoisie that forms the background for the events in the protagonist’s life. A sharp contrast to the privacy of the homes within which the characters of *Mir`āt al-‘Arūs* and *Taubat al-Naṣūh* lived their day to day lives, the move to the public sphere is also a move towards negotiating the possibility and place of Islam and religious practice in a foreign empire. Though moments of candid appreciation for the British Empire appear often enough in this text, for example, as praise for its technological advancements, the

⁴⁸⁰ Ahmad, *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, 51.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.* 53.

incompatibility of Islam, as a religion and as the driving entity behind a past empire, with this new ruler ultimately forces the narrative into a state of reluctant unresolve.

Ibn ul-Vaqt comes under the sign of the native elite, by way of his partial education at Delhi College, and more importantly, through his readership of the colonial narrative that he accesses in “Royal libraries and newspapers” (shāhī kutb k̄ānē aur aḳbār).⁴⁸² Appointed as a “reformer” by Noble Sahib, who believes that after the Mutiny the “country’s atmosphere is calling for reforms” (mulk kī āb-o havā refārm refārm pukār rahī haiñ), Ibn ul-Vaqt is the opposite of a “Nasuh,” or one who attempts the *iṣlāḥ*, or correction of a people.⁴⁸³ Ahmad, at this instance, quotes the example of the Prophet Muhammad as the example of true reformer, in comparison and in tacit competition (muqāblē) to whom Ibn ul-Vaqt is, of course, destined to fail.⁴⁸⁴ The agenda of the British reforms, Noble Sahib unabashedly tells Ibn ul-Vaqt, is that “as far as it is possible Indians must be made to become English. In their cuisine, their clothing, their language, their habits... their thoughts, in every way” (jahāñ tak mumkin hō hindustāniōñ kō angrēz banāyā jāy`ē. k̄ōrāk mēñ, zubān mēñ, ‘ādāt mēñ... ḳayālāt mēñ, har čīz mēñ).⁴⁸⁵ We are returned, once again, to the familiar territory of Delhi College and other colonial institutions of higher education where the goal was to produce an Anglicized native who could best serve the interests of the Empire. Only once the Indians were brought closer to their imperial masters could the empire become successful and prosperous once again.

Ibn ul-Vaqt initially criticizes the administration and points to the faults of the Empire in a speech to an English audience that is a blatant reminder of the pamphlets issued by Syed Ahmad Khan, particularly *The Loyal Muhammadans of India*, which attempted to absolve the Muslims

⁴⁸² Ibid. 54.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. 104.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. 147.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. 108.

from blame for the Mutiny. Like Khan, Ibn ul-Vaqt too reminds his English audience that if there is one social group in India that can maintain “friendship” (irtabāṭ) and “unity” (iḳṭalāṭ), it is the Muslims.⁴⁸⁶ Yet, he is happy, as part of his duties as a reformer, to adopt the English habit, to speak broken English, and to eat English food, even as he admits cravings for local cuisine. Despite the new cultural costume, he is not quite the Bengali *babu*, who had the “grandiose pretensions and the economic impotence of the potentially disloyal Anglicised or English-educated Indian.”⁴⁸⁷ Rather, the narrator’s interest seems to lie in representing him as a failed Muslim whose fall is brought on by his excessive consumption of Western culture when an eventual faux pas offends the local Collector. Eventually, we are told that on account “of the influence of English society” (anḡrēzī sosā`itī kā aśar), Ibn ul-Vaqt began missing prayer times, then stopped saying the optional *naḡals*, then the *sunnats*, until even the *farz*, or compulsory portions of the prayer became abridged.⁴⁸⁸ His false intimacy with the rulers, then, leads him to unknowingly cross the lines of the double-subjectivity— to his religion and to the English—that defines his existence.

Even before his loss of favor from the British, illiterate and somewhat bigoted Muslims are convinced that Ibn ul-Vaqt is now a Christian for he ate with and dressed like the Englishmen. “Annoyed” (čīṛṭē), by the fact that Ibn ul-Vaqt could claim a Muslim identity while consorting with the English, the Muslims abandon him leaving him with no *qaum*, nation, or people of his own. As if public desertion were not enough, Ibn ul-Vaqt, like Kalim is cast as homeless, or in his case, in possession of a house that is inhospitable to Muslims. First, Ibn ul-Vaqt moves from his traditional home in the city to a larger, spacious bungalow that would allow him to invite and

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. 130.

⁴⁸⁷ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly” Englishman and the “Effeminate” Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 17.

⁴⁸⁸ Ahmad, *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, 156.

entertain his English friends. But when circumstances change, and he has incurred too much debt from the expenses associated with mimicking the British, he is forced to sell that house as well, and relocate once again. The problem with this second house, interestingly, is its inability to serve as a traditional Muslim home, given that everywhere Ibn ul-Vaqt's returned cousin, Hujjat ul-Islam turns, there are paintings and wall adornments that make prayer a difficult matter. When Hujjat ul-Islam interrogates Ibn ul-Vaqt's cook, he discovers that the rice pudding made in the house is steamed in wine. Though the master of the house ably argues that this is not equal to the consumption of alcohol, Hujjat ul-Islam marks Ibn ul-Vaqt's home as uninhabitable for a true Muslim, for its display of images makes it a veritable "temple" (but *ḳānā*), the dogs make it unclean, and the inaudibility of the call to prayer makes it unfriendly for communal prayers.⁴⁸⁹

Ibn ul-Vaqt's homelessness, then, like Kalim's is caused by his gradual estrangement and exteriority from Islam. If in the western Oriental tale, the Muslim either like Schahriar, resided in an empire formation, or in the case of Vathek, existed in a state of flux, in this melancholic response to that earlier genre, the disavowal of the Muslim identity leads to the loss of both the physical and the spiritual home. Hujjat ul-Islam's role as a possible guide back to religion for Ibn ul-Vaqt, however, is sanctioned by the local Collector, the Englishman personally offended by the latter's aspirations. When excusing Ibn ul-Vaqt for offending him during a chance meeting, the Collector does so by Hujjat ul-Islam's reference, instructing Ibn ul-Vaqt to once again "take up the mode of your brother, which is your national mode, and in which you have lived a good part of your life" (*apnē bhāi hujjat ul-islām kī sī vaẓ'ā iḳtiyār karēñ jō āp kī qaumī vaẓ'ā hai aur jis mēñ āp nē bhī 'umar kā baḳā ḥiṣṣā basar kīyā hai*).⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Ahmad, *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, 199-200.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 233.

The option of a return to Islam, and to a previous mode of being, in this case, then, is mediated through a religious figure who is officially approved by the colonial administration. Hujjat ul-Islam, of course, is the ideal Muslim living and working in the public sphere, and even as he begins the process of redeeming Ibn ul-Vaqt from his social and financial straits, becomes another “reformer,” his traditional ideas and arguments finding favor with the British officers. A slavish subject, he argues against English education by quoting the example of the Bengalis who “by studying English, have become so fearless that they don’t attach any significance to their rulers” (angrēzī paṛh paṛh kar vōh aisē bē bāk hō gay`ē haiñ kēh kisī hākīm kī kučh haiśiyat nahīñ samajhtē).⁴⁹¹ Reiterating an old Orientalist maxim, Hujjat ul-Islam tells the Collector, “the Muslims are not the true of denizens of this country; they came to conquer the country and ended up staying” (musalmān is mulk ke aṣlī bāshindē nahīñ haiñ, vōh mulk kō fatāh karnē āy`ē aur reh paṛē).⁴⁹² Unlike Ibn ul-Vaqt whose new ideas force him to question the idea of a British Empire in India, Hujjat ul-Islam’s regressive servility keeps him a servant to the colonial government in his public life, and a Muslim in the private, abstract realm of religion.

The non-threatening Hujjat ul-Islam, the fleeting Noble Sahib, and the petty Collectors serve in a second capacity: to criticize and expose the contradictions and inconsistencies of British colonialism. Given that the protagonist, Ibn ul-Vaqt fails at fulfilling his duties as a reformer, these auxiliary characters, particularly Hujjat ul-Islam, adopt the narrator’s voice, directing the text away from Ibn ul-Vaqt and towards a greater understanding at how a character with his fate comes to exist. In other words, these characters respond to the problematic cultural constructions prompted by the cohesive, yet competing discourses of Orientalism, Anglicism, and colonial education in the north-India. Noble Sahib, for example, as mentioned in the earlier

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. 228.

⁴⁹² Ibid. 220.

chapter, believes that the Delhi College translation project is a futile one and that Indians should instead access Western knowledge in English. The Collector, William Sharp, on the other hand, “has no patience for an Indian who imitates the English” (mutaḥammil nahīn hō saktā kēh kō`ī hindustānī angrēzōñ kī naqal karē).⁴⁹³ The other Collector in Bengal, contradicting the scholarship of British Orientalism in India for the past century, writes “for thousands of years, the Hindus had neither a literature, nor their own learning” (sēkṛōñ bars sē hinduōñ kē pās nā literēčar thā aur nā ‘ilm). The Muslims, he believes, “have true pride in their classical language, Arabic, besides which Urdu and Persian appear quite flat” (‘arbī par vājib faḡar kartē haiñ jis kē badūn urdū aur fārsī zubānēñ bilkul pḥīkī m‘alūm hōtī haiñ).⁴⁹⁴

Reflective of the ambiguous, undecided note on which the book concludes, this bevy of characters, each with his own opinion about the state of Indian enslavement and education, is unable really to act as a reliable jury for Ibn ul-Vaqt’s case. Though Hujjat ul-Islam’s powerful attachment to his religion echoes that of Nasuh, his desire to be ruled completely by the British leaves this faith somewhat compromised. Given that Ibn ul-Vaqt is in an argument with his brother-in-law till the very end, we must question, then, what the place of the itinerant Muslim is in this particular text. There is, unlike in *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, no abstract, spiritual or religious haven to make up for a vanquished empire and altered way of being. At the end of *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, we see the protagonist, wanting to throw a dinner party at the behest of his old English friends, while simultaneously critiquing them for their hypocrisy. In this final discussion with Hujjat ul-Islam, Ibn ul-Vaqt rejects the former’s arguments in favor of the superiority of Islam by reminding him “gone are those days when people were quickly susceptible to idle, religious tales”

⁴⁹³ Ibid. 227.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. 220.

(vōh bhūlē bhālē zamānē gay`ē kēh lōg jald sē mazhabī dhakoslōñ kā yaqīn kar līyā kartē thē).⁴⁹⁵

The significance of this moment, I would argue, is manifold, extending and applying to both subjects and colonizers, and to religious ideologies as well as to discourses of control and domination. This is not to say that *Ibn ul-Vaqt*, both the text and the man, escape or are properly able to reject the culture within which they are located, but rather that the disbelief of reified structures contained in Ibn ul-Vaqt's utterance is an expression of resistance to the fictions that have for so long been the dominant narrative associated with Islam.

To conclude this chapter with a text of *Ibn ul-Vaqt*'s roaming, often vague conclusions is perhaps appropriate because it signals the unsteady, wavering place of Urdu prose in late nineteenth-century north-India, torn between its aesthetic ideals and their increasing irrelevance. It is more important, however, to remark on how the writings of a single author undergo the violent transformation that is so apparent in these texts. I have, over the course of this chapter, been pointing to a continuity between the three texts that though not necessarily marked by likeness of plot, or characters, is concerned with the place of Islam in India, and its guardianship by the only relevant class of Muslim, the *shurafā*. *Mir`āt al-Arūs* concerns itself with a basic domestic virtue that can be ensured by means of a purged language, and a pure literature, or a departure from a previous literary culture associated with a Muslim nobility. *Taubat al-Naṣūh*, then, furthers this movement, rephrasing it through the strictures of religion—the old Muslim culture threatens and compromises the true practice of Islam, and it is to this *faṣāhat* that the north-Indian Muslims must return. The critical admission that takes place in *Ibn ul-Vaqt* is that of Islam's vulnerability in an empire that is no longer its own, effectively bringing the Western Oriental tale full circle. There are, of course, more complex questions within the text

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. 269.

around the nature of the individual, and the hypocrisy of the colonial government, yet *Ibn ul-Vaqt* forces this final theme from the Oriental tale into the modern colony. The Oriental tale, that persistent form, simultaneously immoral and instructive, imperializing, but critical of empire, acquires a final authority over its vagrant subjects in Nazir Ahmad's fictions.

CONCLUSION: THE NON-DESPOT(IC)

This project set out at the beginning to show that the eighteenth-century Oriental tale, far from just a vogue, or even a form of metaphorical resistance in the metropolis, is the result or consequence of a translated Orientalism, its effects extending into the colony and into the literary fictions of extant aesthetic traditions. The underlying issue in this journey of the Oriental tale, of course, reminded us that Orientalism more than ever needs to remain an object informing our critical reading, rather than one we dismiss, or excuse as no longer pertinent in the face of newer and innovative readings. Only by reexamining Orientalism as a discourse not just present in the Western canon, but as deeply influential in the makings of what we called “modern” literature in native “vernaculars” can we understand the inherent connectedness of certain literary traditions. This interconnectedness today is often expressed through the institutions of world literature and translation studies, neither of which tends to acknowledge the significance of Orientalism in their own founding.

In this conclusion, I want to turn to what has been left underemphasized or unsaid over the course of the four chapters in an attempt to spell out the directions in which this project can further expand and enrich itself. Though my argument opens and closes with the question of gender in the metropolis and the colony, it is one that must continue to unfold by examining the narrative that surrounds the contemporary Muslim woman in postcolonial novels. This narrative, in which the Muslim woman is often portrayed as the abused object of an ostensible masculine Muslim savagery, forms as an extended effect of the dominant tropes of empire and itinerancy. Further revisions or explorations of some of the issues I have raised—the oriental tale, orientalist scholarship, colonial pedagogy, and native reform, among them—should focus particularly on the institutions of colonial education, an area that I feel could further enrich this project. And

finally, given the almost constant engagement my argument has with the practice of translation, I think the judicious study of translation practices and standards from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England would benefit my study of the Oriental tale and Orientalist scholarship.

To return to the postcolonial novel, briefly, what stands out in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* is that each and every female character in the novel is somehow a victim of an assumed Islamic narrative. Whether living in the stupor of a religious trance, abused under Islamic law, or murdered for disregarding it, the women in this novel feel both too close and too far from the harem of the Oriental tale. Kaukab, a fanatical figure, hates Britain, has nothing in Pakistan, and longs only for her spiritual center in Mecca. Suraya whose husband divorced her in a drunken fit longs to marry another man for just a night so she may return under "Islamic law" to her husband. Chanda, the missing woman around whom the whole novel revolves, has, of course, been killed for shaming her family by living out of wedlock with Jugnu. In other words, the novel *is* the story of contemporary Muslim women, each one of whom is debilitated and disabled under the absolute desires of husbands or brothers, a stark, but interestingly imbalanced reminder of eighteenth-century Oriental tales including *The Arabian Nights*, *Mahomet*, and *Nourjahad*.

My point in raising this situation is to bring to the table a critical and urgent question that is constantly being evoked in this project as part of the greater effect instituted by the Oriental tale. This is not merely an issue of gender in this literary form, but rather is the equivalent and corresponding narrative of the Oriental, and specifically the Islamic woman as it unfolds during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both metropolitan and colonial fictions. In other words, what is remarkable or problematic about the journey of the Oriental woman from the Sultan's seraglio in the eighteenth century to the nineteenth-century bourgeois Muslim domicile in north-India? In some ways, as this project implicitly shows, there is a transference or an import of

Western femininity in the reformist fictions of Nazir Ahmad. Asghari of *Mir`āt al-`Arūs* channels Scheherazade, reforming an entire social group through deference to the Empire. A certain narrative of an ideal Muslim femininity in the nineteenth century is determined through the encounter between the colonial and native masculine. Though I chose not to examine the records on female education at colonial schools set up for native women, any deeper analysis of what kinds of literary transformations took place would have to turn to this archive.

This brings me to the second aspect of the project I believe demands a much more rigorous treatment than space and design have permitted here: colonial pedagogy. I mentioned in my introduction and over the course of my argument the recent work of Bhatnagar and Datla, the latter's innovative study of the Osmania University in nineteenth-century Hyderabad and its "secularizing" of Urdu provides an excellent model. The focus in my chapter on education in the colony attempted to trace the unfolding of the motivations behind the Government of India school system over more than half a century. Beginning at the inception of Fort William College, I suggested that a certain curriculum designed under the influence of eighteenth-century British Orientalists was transposed onto the native schools, where the intention was, in fact, to manufacture a colonial subjectivity. In possible revisions of my project or in separate research projects interested in this area, a chapter dedicated entirely to the native school system, with a heavy focus on numbers—of students by religion and language, and of textbooks—would allow us to both locate audiences and gain a more precise sense of the deliberate directions colonial education took in the nineteenth century.

While I have examined the literary curricula and the Orientalist arguments that inform the logic behind these, I do think that my study of this aspect could both be broadened and contextualized further by a brief examination of the syllabi in history and English literature. This

should include, of course, works translated into Urdu by bodies such as the Vernacular Translation Society of Delhi College, a literary archive that seems largely absent in histories of Urdu writing. What I am suggesting here is that any further examination of the effects of the Oriental tale in the colony must always continue to integrate the question of education in order to fully comprehend the cultural dissemination of this literary form.

The constantly present issue of translation in this project is an important one. I argued from the very beginning that translation was perhaps Orientalism's most underrated implement. The production of this discourse through literary fictions and later in the eighteenth century through scholarly tracts is premised almost entirely on the assumption of translation. The diffusion of certain Orientalist arguments around the Islamicate Orient into the native languages of India was managed and directed almost totally by the premise that translation could somehow improve or enlighten the "vernacular." We must eventually turn to canonical statements including Dryden's preface to his translation of Ovid's *Epistles* (1680), and Alexander Fraser Tytler's "Essay on the Principles of Translation" (1791) in order to fully contextualize the practice and reception of translations in eighteenth-century England. A richer understanding of the way translation was both designed and imagined for a reading public, but also for scholarly practitioners can reshape perspectives on the entry of the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*' into the metropolitan reading scene, as well as on the ways in which "pseudo-translations" such as *Nourjahad* and even *Vathek* chose to align themselves with the Orient.

I want to make two final remarks: the first, that this project is committed to the position that Orientalism, in every possibly meaning of the term, is still vital to any understanding of the way certain literary traditions altered and reinvented themselves during the colonial period. And secondly, though it is not always possible to engage with non-English aesthetic traditions on the

level that they demand, we are ethically bound to both acknowledge and if possible re-examine our own translation practices, a motion Spivak has so powerfully illustrated. In skipping from Western literary movements of realism and modernism directly to “postcolonialism,” we are ignoring the vital body of works that is the canon of the colonial encounter.

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