

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EMPIRE

# England Re-Oriented

How Central and South Asian Travelers  
Imagined the West, 1750–1857



HUMBERTO GARCIA



## ENGLAND RE-ORIENTED

What does the love between British imperialists and their Asian male partners reveal about orientalism's social origins? To answer this question, Humberto Garcia focuses on westward-bound Central and South Asian travel writers who have long been forgotten or dismissed by scholars. This bias has obscured how Joseph Emin, Sake Dean Mahomet, Shaykh I'tesamuddin, Abu Talib Khan, Abul Hassan Khan, Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, and Lutfullah Khan found in their conviviality with Englishwomen and men a strategy for inhabiting a critical agency that appropriated various media to make Europe commensurate with Asia. Drama, dance, masquerades, visual art, museum exhibits, music, postal letters, and newsprint inspired these genteel men to recalibrate Persianate ways of behaving and knowing. Their cosmopolitanisms offer a unique window on an enchanted third space between empires in which Europe was peripheral to Islamic Indo-Eurasia. Encrypted in their mediated homosocial intimacies is a queer history of orientalist mimic men under the spell of a powerful Persian manhood.

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*University of California, Merced*



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To my wife, Shimy

Love is a stranger with a strange language,  
like an Arab in Persia. I have brought a story;  
it is strange, like the one who tells it.

Jalal al-Din Rumi



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this book has been a long disorienting journey. In 2011, I aspired to reframe the social history of British imperialism between 1750 and 1857 from the perspective of westward-bound Central and South Asian travel writers who have received scant attention in eighteenth-century studies. My hope was that such a provincializing approach would yield a prehistory of modern occidentalism as a counterweight to the orientalism that was in formation circa 1800, as argued by the late Edward Said. Little did I then foresee that these travelers' marginalized writings had the potential to reposition Britain's imperial history as marginal to the Persian-speaking world in greater Indo-Eurasia, and that the metropolitan encounter with the so-called Orient in this period was the impetus for the re-gendering and re-sexing of an English and Irish national body receptive to Persian, Arabian, and Indic influences. Only after I reoriented myself toward Persian and South Asian studies, beyond my disciplinary home in British eighteenth-century and Romantic literature and culture, did I discover that there was no occidentalism to write about. And what I thought was a dominating orientalist discourse turned out to be a by-product of an insecure queer orientation implicit in the strong friendships between British male imperialists and the Asian male partners who wielded masculine authority over them. My thesis crystalized in June 2019 as I, like my featured travelers, visited London for the first time and was awestruck by its touristic, theatrical, and artistic wonders. Against the backdrop of mounting tensions between the United States, United Kingdom, and Islamic Republic of Iran during that summer and against the "Londonistan" decried by Islamophobes, the hospitable English cosmopolis described in this book took form.

This broad historical perspective is brought to bear on the conceptual vocabulary that I deploy loosely and interchangeably. In this book, "English," "British," "Irish," "Indian," "Armenian," "Hindustani," "Iranian," "Persian," "European," and "Asian" are fungible referents – kept in scare quotes – for imagined communities in transit rather than closed containers for a definable nation, ethnicity, or geography that did not yet exist. My occasional preference for non-standard English spellings of Persian and Arabic terms is faithful to the semantic fluidity of that time. These choices reflect the twofold intellectual challenge involved in writing this anomalous book: first, how to connect histories of empire and gender by working across siloed disciplines in the humanities that still operate under the shadow of the nation-state paradigm, and, second,

how to conceptualize these connections without possessing proficiency in Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. Even as seasoned scholars warned me about the perils of dabbling in other disciplines as a non-specialist and even in moments of self-doubt, I persevered in completing this book under the conviction that specialists in these languages would never do so. These academic and linguistic hurdles were great indeed, but my gratitude for the people who helped me to overcome these hurdles is greater.

I thank Kathleen Wilson, Mrinalini Sinha, and Catherine Hall, the editors who found a home for this book in their interdisciplinary Cambridge series. The press's executive publisher, Michael Watson, was also helpful in overseeing the book's publication. The generosity of my colleagues at the University of California, Merced is commendable. Susan D. Amussen, Jayson Beaster-Jones, and Katherine Steele Brokaw were unwavering in their support from the moment I first arrived at this new institution in 2015, especially when I temporarily lost my bearings while writing the book. Sholeh A. Quinn was patient in answering my persistent questions about Persian terms and in directing me to crucial resources. I am forever indebted to her. Library staff at my home institution also proved indispensable in my archival research, as were staff at the Huntington and British Libraries. Equally important was the support of former Vanderbilt University colleagues, especially Jonathan Lamb, Bridget Orr, and Jay Clayton. They commented on chapter drafts in addition to providing wholesome advice. I also thank Daniel O'Quinn, Robert Markley, Michael H. Fisher, Mana Kia, Bernadette Andrea, Misty G. Anderson, Nile Green, Donna Landry, and Maryam Ala Amjadi for their guidance. Waqar A. Khan, the founder of the Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies, was extremely generous in sharing his unpublished essay on the Swinton family. I am grateful to the press readers who helped turn the manuscript into a readable monograph. And I could not have written it without Ehsan Siahpoush and Amin Azad Sadr. They translated into English the Persian texts cited herein and those in [Appendices A](#) and [B](#), which have been reproduced with the kind permission of the University of California. Though I consider all of these folks as my virtual travel companions, any errors in translation and conception are my own.

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Finally, I thank my parents and my wife, Shimy, for their emotional support.

## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For Persian, Arabic, and Urdu words, I have followed the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* with few exceptions. To make the book accessible to non-specialists, diacritic marks have been preserved in-text only for *‘ayn* and *hamza*, marked as a single opening quotation mark and a single closing quotation mark, respectively. To facilitate research, diacritic marks are fully transliterated for the applicable names and titles listed in Appendices A and B. For historical accuracy, non-technical terms in Persian, Arabic, and Urdu are spelled in English according to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British usages.





## Introduction

### Why Re-Orient?

Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder.

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*<sup>1</sup>

Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, Giovanni Paolo Marana's *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, and James Justinian Morier's *Hajji Baba*: novels about Eastern travelers in Europe and Britain that encouraged eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British readers not only to see themselves as foreign but also to locate their national home in pan-Eurasia. They were not merely exoticizing the Orient, they were living its fiction. By the 1810s, many people in Britain were strutting in "Mirza turbans," dancing to Persian music, speaking Persian, and raising toasts to the shah of Iran, with ladies displaying Eastern-style hairdos, riding Arabian horses, and sporting elegant Kashmir shawls. Most of these revelers were native-born Britons who had discovered foreignness within themselves, a borderless sense of belonging that Julia Kristeva considers the condition for an ethical and political reckoning with alterity in nationalist self-understandings. Unruly crowds swelled by the hundreds in London, from Mansfield Street to Piccadilly, to pay homage to their fashion guru: Mirza Abul Hassan Khan Ilchi Shirazi (1776–1846), the Iranian envoy to Britain in 1809–1810 and 1819.<sup>2</sup> Morier, a British diplomat in Iran at the time and Abul Hassan's friend, satirizes this xenophilia in *Hajji Baba*. Yet Morier's disdain for fellow citizens' bizarre performances (as discussed in my [Epilogue](#)) is reoriented affirmatively toward the Islamic Persian-speaking world in the pre-1858 writings of Central and South Asian travelers to England, Scotland, and Ireland; the genteel men who have received less attention than their fictional counterparts. Joseph Emin, Sake Dean Mahomet, Shaykh I'tesa-muddin, Abu Talib Khan, Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, and Lutfullah Khan reveal how national space and time are coterminal with the Anglo-Persian parity that rendered Abul Hassan a media celebrity.

<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Morning Post*, December 21, 1809, 3, and March 19, 1810, 3; "General Observations of Fashions and Dress," *La Belle Assemblée: or Court and Fashionable Magazine*, July 1819, 276.

Scholarship since Edward Said has emphasized the impact of a philologically-based orientalism on Western ideas of Eastern difference. What this approach has concealed is the ways in which other forms of English knowledge about the world also provided the resources through which non-Britons could negotiate their place in a hybrid polity. The previously named travelers found in their cordial interactions with Englishwomen and men a strategy for negotiating East-West relations and for inhabiting a critical agency that appropriated various media to make Europe commensurate with Asia. Drama, dance, masquerades, visual arts, music, optical recreations, and newsprint enabled these citizens of the world to recalibrate Eurasian ways of behaving and knowing. These mediums gave them the tools to refashion themselves in metropolitan publics that were more accommodating than in territories ruled by the British East India Company. Their remediations expose an enchanted third space between empires, an inter-imperial modernity in which the European episteme was non-hegemonic.<sup>3</sup>

As such, this book joins a recent wave of scholarship on how print and visual mediations transmit love between strangers: histories of xenophilia that vex imperial, artistic, and literary borders.<sup>4</sup> Journeys to faraway lands and oceans acquire textual form in the encounter with the unknown, embedding travelers' textured experiences in their social surroundings. Such processes are at work among Asian and Muslim traveler writers fixated on commensurable understandings of religious and ethical comportment. In their narratives, Europe is continuous with greater Eurasia, spanning north Africa, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Hindustan.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the featured travelers participate in a foreign mediascape that links their homeland to a pluralistic Britain on the political,

<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Kathleen Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire: Theatre and Performance in the British Imperial Provinces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Su Fang Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Daniel O'Quinn, *Engaging the Ottoman Empire: Vexed Mediations, 1690–1815* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Nile Green, *The Love of Strangers: What Six Muslim Students Learned in Jane Austen's London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires*; Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*; Wendy Laura Belcher, *Abyssinia's Samuel Johnson: Ethiopian Thought in the Making of an English Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Hamid Dabashi, *Reversing the Colonial Gaze: Persian Travelers Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Mary Searle-Chatterjee, "Travel Writing in a Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspective," in *The Interwoven World: Ideas and Encounters in History*, ed. Burjor Avari and George Gheverghese Joseph (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing, 2016), 117–28; Somdatta Mandal, "Introduction," in *Journeys: Indian Travel Writings*, ed. Somdatta Mandal (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2013), 1–31; Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma, eds., *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2013); Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder*; Tabish Khair, "A Multiplicity of Mirrors: Europe and Modernity in Travel Writing from Asia and Africa," *Indian Literature* 52, no. 6 (2008): 211–22; James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press,



economic, and military ascendant. They locate the Indo-Eurasian frontier in its female-dominated contact zones – the salons, drawing rooms, and theaters in which a genteel masculinity was fiercely contested.<sup>6</sup> What their cosmopolitanism reveals is a hyper-mediated history of orientalism as a discourse of powerlessness that is profoundly gendered. Epistemic mastery over the Orient is a compensatory fiction vis-à-vis a resilient Persian manhood, as in Londoners' fandom for Abul Hassan.

To flesh out this history, [Chapters 2](#) through [7](#) each focuses on an Asian traveler writing about his metropolitan life in English, Persian, or Urdu, for European or Asian readers or both: Joseph Emin, an Iranian-Armenian freedom fighter who traveled from Calcutta to London in the 1750s; Mirza Shaykh I'tesamuddin, the Mughal emissary who visited England from 1767 to 1769; Abu Talib Khan, the Lucknow nobleman who reveled in Anglo-Irish and London high society; Dean Mahomet, the Patna native who settled in Cork, Ireland in 1783 after resigning from the Bengal army; Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, the Afghan military captain from Lucknow who toured London in 1837–1838; and Munshi Lutfullah Khan, an elite Muslim from Malwa on a mission to England in 1844 with the royal heir of Surat. Their writings respond to connected crises of gender and empire: the masculine impotency resulting from British military setbacks during the Seven Years' War (1756–1763); the Company's 1757 conquest of Bengal, which alienated Mughal aristocratic men; the paternalistic subordination of India and Ireland to England with the 1801 Act of Union; effeminate male monarchs and their domineering courtesans during the Regency period; uncertainty about Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne in 1837; and paranoia over the unmanly colonial violence that drove South Asians to rebel in 1857–1858.

In response to such crises, these travelers direct their gaze toward what I call “alter-Europe”: the communal feelings, shared behaviors, odd reciprocities, and ironic performances that transmit Eurasian values multilaterally. To “re-orient” Britain – a composite state composed of various classes, faiths, and ethnicities – is to integrate it within a diverse Indo-Eurasia rather than a Europe that had

2009); Nabil Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2008) as ed. and trans., *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*; Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*; Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Simonti Sen, *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870–1910* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005); Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nasrin Rahimieh, *Missing Persians: Discovering Voices in Iranian Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds. *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> I am invoking Mary Louise Pratt's definition of contact zones: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

never crystalized into a cohesive cultural, political, and territorial unit.<sup>7</sup> Applying Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenology, I examine the "Orient" as an exotic geography bound to the dynamic interplay of bodily proximities and distances that gather social force affectively by switching directions or orientations. The process by which bodies are sexed, raced, and classed in strange environments made familiar starts with a disorientation – getting lost or dumbfounded. Finding a home away from home depends on which specific spaces one occupies, which mediums one thinks through, and who or what one turns to.<sup>8</sup> This home-making journey blurs national and geographical borders. The "alter" in "alter-Europe" works like a rehoming device: the quest for an alternative non-Eurocentric universality becomes internal to Britain through the liminal spatiality that appears when social actors contest patriarchal norms by behaving like someone else. The hyphen between "alter" and "Europe" signals the indeterminate queering dynamics at stake in these contestations.

Although the quest for another homeland unfolds differently for each of the travelers I discuss, their experience of Britain as alter-Europe pivots on how they and their metropolitan interlocutors are oriented toward one another as gentlefolk, strangers, and mediators. The trans-imperial valences implicit in these three subject positions will be historicized in the [next chapter](#). In this introduction, I will sketch the book's three interlocking themes: elite transcultural homosociality, male bonding over women's alienated bodies, and the different modes of theatricality that mediate these social performances.

### Historical Reorientations

Joseph Emin, Shaykh I'tesamuddin, Sake Dean Mahomet, Abu Talib Khan, Abul Hassan Khan, Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, and Lutfullah Khan were among the few Asians who wrote about their travels to Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, greatly outnumbered by the European officials, soldiers, diplomats, scientists, traders, and missionaries traveling east and writing about their foreign adventures.<sup>9</sup> These Asian travelers arrived in a traveling nation; British men and women obsessed with reading guidebooks and tours of other lands, writing about their personal travels, and, most of all, having foreigners

<sup>7</sup> On Europe as an indeterminate, contradictory, and contested idea, see the essays in *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading*, ed. Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2002); Bo Stråth, "Introduction: Europe as a Discourse," in *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, ed. Bo Stråth (Bruxelles: PIE Peter Lang, 2001), 13–44; Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Palgrave, 1995); the essays for the special issue of *Past and Present* 137 (1992); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Fictions of Europe," *Race and Class* 32, no. 2 (1991): 3–10; Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> See Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*; Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto, 2002).

write about them as if they were strangers in their own country.<sup>10</sup> These Asians' accounts, whether written in or translated into English, were published in imperial entrepôts like London, Cork, and Calcutta to meet the market demand for touristic sightseeing, within and outside Britain.

Because these Asians possess different class, regional, and religious backgrounds, they would not consider themselves the same people. However, they share a familial history of Eurasian migration: well-connected families who had left Persia, Arabia, and Afghanistan to serve South Asian rulers in a civil or military capacity, as they had mastered Persian – a transregional lingua franca that granted them access to networks of power and patronage. Because the Company inserted itself within these networks after its 1757 conquest of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, Persophone travelers to Britain identified this governing body with male-to-male affection in recreational spaces unhampered by differences in religion and language. These spaces affirmed their Persian linguistic orientation across diverse societies, east and west of the Iranian plateau.

The regime change that these travelers had witnessed in Hindustan is grounded in a Eurasian patriarchal governmentality, as evident in their admiration for “gentlemen.” Since the fifteenth century this word had gained currency in the English language as a complimentary designation for men who were not necessarily born into the nobility but, in bearing arms and acting chivalrously, acquired social distinction, as if they had belonged to the sovereign's household.<sup>11</sup> For the seven Persophone travelers, this performative identity is not unique to Britain and Europe. Noble-like English, Scottish, and Irish men remind them of cosmopolitan soldiers or leaders who adhere to the Persian ethical ideal of *javanmardi* (youth-manliness): men – and potentially women – from varying walks of life whose honesty, courage, generosity, and prowess qualify them to be just rulers.<sup>12</sup> These travelers therefore understood as congenial the conquest led by youthful British gentlemen in 1757. Claiming to have restored sociopolitical order after a century of Mughal decline, the Company gradually replaced Persian-acculturated patriarchs responsible for managing their territory and household, parallel to how propertied gentlemen in Britain had assumed the aristocracy's traditional prestige. This change in administrative personnel never made early Eurasian travelers sensible of European superiority overall. While they praised Europeans' martial, political, scientific, and technological supremacy, they did so under the impression that these foreigners were of the same racial stock, committed to the same principles of benevolent rule, and bred with the same norms of gentlemanly self-restraint. It was not until after the 1857 Indian rebellion that South Asians began to perceive Europeans as fundamentally distinct.

<sup>10</sup> See Benjamin Colbert, “Britain through Foreign Eyes: Early Nineteenth-Century Home Tourism in Translation,” in *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Benjamin Colbert (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 68–84; Turner, *British Travel Writers*.

<sup>11</sup> OED, s.v., “gentleman, n.” Oxford, 2019, accessed April 30, 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/77673?redirectedFrom=gentleman](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77673?redirectedFrom=gentleman).

<sup>12</sup> See the essays in Ridgeon, *Javanmardi*.

Before then, Britons were considered the latest conquerors to inherit a multi-lingual Islamic imperium. Marshall G. S. Hodgson was one of the first scholars to map onto this imperium “the rise of Persian” that had initiated “a new overall cultural orientation within Islamdom.” Persian is not synonymous with an Iranian ethnic identity, as Hodgson elaborates: “the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims likewise depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call all these cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, ‘Persianate’ by extension.”<sup>13</sup> To be precise, New Persian written in Arabic script (as distinct from earlier variants, Pahlavi and Avestan), mainly by and for imperial bureaucrats and the literati, provided educated Eurasians traveling west a heuristic paradigm. They assimilated the English they heard and (for those who did) wrote in a recognizable pan-elite, Persian-fluent multiverse, which encompassed the vernaculars spoken in Britain, Russia, India, and China and from the Balkans to Southeast Asia. Up to 1900, the Persianate world was pluralistic and permeable, booming at its geographical and social frontiers: the dynamic spaces of cultural *métissage*, where linguistic, literary, and artistic fusions were most intense.<sup>14</sup> For the writers I will be discussing, this world’s westernmost frontier was in England and Ireland, where languages in contact, they thought, had allowed Persian to thrive with and for a new vernacular – English, especially as spoken by respectable upper-class gentlemen affiliated with the Company.

By imagining a kinship with them, these writers arrived at a home distinct from their birthplace, religious affiliation, and family lineages; Persianate selves without a fixed ethnicity. Yet this socio-linguistic interface also makes visible the semantic-cultural tensions that arise as the Persian language and Indo-Persianate sociability increasingly vied with Anglophone diffusionism west to east. Sociable transactions at the interstices of Persian- and English-speaking could as easily consolidate as constrain a shared cosmopolitanism, at times resulting in communicative breakdowns. The homosocial commensurabilities examined in *England Re-Oriented* test a Persianate episteme that had a wider reach and a longer shelf life than most scholars have reckoned. Its suppleness and limitations become apparent if scholars shift their analytic frameworks toward gendered bodies *in situ*: the empirical environments that endow embodied actions with affective meanings from other centuries and continents.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 293.

<sup>14</sup> On recent scholarship that has decoupled Hodgson’s definition of the Persianate from Islamic political supremacy from 1600 to 1900 and an Iranian nationalist paradigm, see Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); essays in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, ed. Nile Green (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), esp. Nile Green, “Introduction: The Frontiers of the Persianate World (ca. 800–1900),” 1–71; the essays in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019).

The present study therefore plots a “new imperial history” that begins with people’s movements in space and time, dislodging a polycentric modernity from a historical teleology in which past multivalent possibilities are denied and made tributary to future nations and empires. Power does not reside in concrete institutions alone, and the local is not a frozen discursive field where ideas about empire are discussed in the abstract. Mediated bodies are shaped by a palpable spatial awareness that render these ideas meaningful in the first place. How metropolitan life transformed “foreign” identities has received minimal attention in scholarship on pre-1858 Persianate travelers; the specific British publics and gendered spaces they traversed, and the literary genres and aesthetics they used to describe these spaces, are treated, if at all, as mere background. Scholars have situated their views on European sexuality in a Central or South Asian context only, as if unrelated to concurrent debates about gender, race, and class in Britain. Deploying the postcolonial-feminist methodologies pioneered by Kathleen Wilson, Tony Ballantyne, Ann Laura Stoler, and others, I show how these travelers’ metropolitan sociability empowered them to critique white imperial manhood in public showplaces.

Crucial to this historical reorientation are female bodies through which reciprocal agencies were formed and disparate imperial ideologies were fused. Under the British and Mughal Empires, noblemen asserted their civil command mainly with the help of powerful public women – wives, mistresses, and courtesans. They connected male supplicants to royal and wealthy patrons, acquainted genteel men with their duties, directed the outcome of their political struggles, arranged diplomatic marriages between elite households, and opined authoritatively on domestic and imperial policies. For Persianate travelers who felt lost in Britain, Englishwomen’s beautiful bodies helped reorient them toward a second home, a familiar gentlemanly community. According to this logic, metropolitans’ manners follow the established rituals of Eurasian polities held together by vast transcontinental networks of Persian-speaking aristocratic families and the women who presided over them.

In other words, female bodies negotiated imperial differences and similarities. Mistaken for magical creatures – mostly fairies – as well as royal courtesans who dance, sing, and excel in conversation, Englishwomen appeared to Central and South Asian travelers as transparent portals to other enchanting life-worlds; sites of convivial socializing that nourished a lively cosmopolitan openness toward strangers-as-strangers, without the social pressure to assimilate to the language, religion, and customs of the dominant society. Such feminine conviviality activates a cosmopolis that exists independently from, and in tension with, English patriarchs’ global design to subsume alterity under a universalist imperial-familial order in which certain races and sexes are deemed more equal than others. An exclusive masculinist imperialism therefore yields to what Walter D. Mignolo calls “border thinking”: when local histories, creeds, and identities are translated into a playful yet critical cosmopolitan idiom to foster “the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the

perspectives of people in subaltern positions.”<sup>15</sup> Early modern Persianate travelers and their polite metropolitan hostesses imagined a fantastical kingdom outside European patriarchal control, a pluriversality decoupled from male hegemony over the family and the state: the twin pillars of the Company’s legal-racial classification of Asians as inferior feminine-like subjects who require paternal supervision and discipline.

By joining British gentlemen in recreational venues centered on females’ display, Persianate travelers immersed themselves in Britain’s media ecology, adopted its perceptual modes, and acted out its alien personas with gusto. Because this theatricality had defined the Company’s public-facing Mughal persona in South Asia, dramatic acts inscribe legible bodily histories through which these travelers and their lady friends imagined empire anew. Theaters, museums, ballrooms, newsprint, postal mail, and music concerts granted them entrée into hospitable communities of convivial strangers without borders. These mediations, I argue, are not secondary elaborations of external social factors, but are visceral worldmaking ventures that puncture that which is normally perceived as real with the made-up stuff of history. The optical, theatrical, and musical shows that these media-savvy visitors encountered resonate palpably with Iranian-Hindustani rituals of power and pomp. The British Empire therefore appeared to them as the realm of magic and mimesis.

More precisely, their ethnographic remediations reveal the decolonial prehistory of the mimetic desire to embody the other, what anthropologist Michael Taussig calls “mimetic excess”: when the distinction between the West and the Rest is blurred by non-European agents who imitate Europeans’ imitation of their supposed primitive mimicry.<sup>16</sup> Natasha Eaton has shown that such uncanny encounters were an organizing trope for British art producers and consumers in Calcutta and elsewhere in India, insofar as mimesis was both a tool of imperial governmentality and a strategy for disrupting its domineering visual modalities.<sup>17</sup> Bewitched by the colonial mirror’s backreflection, Persianate travelers pierce through the surface image of Great Britain as an originary Occident inhabited by superior Christian civilizers. In other words, their texts are like ricocheting funhouse mirrors in which Britons appear as the quintessential mimic men, contrary to those who reserved this role for Anglicized Indians as famously argued in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” (1835) – a polemic on the superiority of the English language that remains silent about Persian’s ongoing status as a transregional *lingua franca*. Nor are these textual mirrors dependent on the ambivalences generated by resistant hybrid selves whose “colonial mimicry,” according to Homi K. Bhabha, stages a subversion of the dominant English culture, as if imperial processes presuppose a homogenous, nonimitative Occident adverse to cultural mixing.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 721–48, 736–37.

<sup>16</sup> Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 252–55.

<sup>17</sup> Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires*.

<sup>18</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 121–31.

Because early Persianate travelers were not colonial subjects, they experienced Britain as a frontier zone where incongruous worlds meet. In this virtual borderland, science and sorcery converge to invest aesthetic copies with more power over their referents than the people who created them. European imperialists would displace this mimetic otherness onto a fabular East, conjuring an illusion of epistemic power to conceal their (male) impotency.

Persianate travelers to pre-1858 Britain should therefore be understood through a performance studies lens. My interpretive method is inspired by dramaturgical anthropologists such as Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, who minutely focus on how the codependence of social rituals, texts, and dramatic genres constitutes human agency. According to Judith Butler, these performances align gendered subjectivities with certain speech acts, and Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor have shown how enacted memories transfer knowledges across histories, geographies, and languages.<sup>19</sup> “Deep description” allows me to decode similar processes of enactment in Asian travelers’ works, turning the spotlight on fanciful forms of community-building that would otherwise be dismissed as ahistorical. My methodological orientation broadens the body of history in respect to its subject matter and interdisciplinary scope.

### The Trajectory of the Book

This book chronologically traces the circuitous itineraries of obscure individuals in their specific place and time, without treating them as a cohesive social group or adherents of fixed intellectual movements. Taking my cue from Roxanne L. Euben, each chapter dwells on bizarre reflective moments in these travel accounts, moments in which ideas of empire acquire meaning through “embodied travelers whose sense of self, knowledge, time, and space at once emerges and is transfigured by the doubled mediation between rootedness and distance, familiar and unfamiliar.”<sup>20</sup> But unlike Euben, I locate this “doubled mediation” in the print and visual technologies that equipped these travelers with methods of self-reflection – the new social media that shaped the narrative arc of their travels. These multimedia doings induce a gendered field of vision; how conjoined histories of gender and empire become imaginable in various medial genres, from romance to satire.

However, this study on the particularity of media-oriented subjectivities is not comprehensive. Outside its purview are nineteenth-century travelogues that

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds., *Critical Theory and Performance*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982); Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 19.

were strictly instrumental to British intelligence-gathering in northern India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.<sup>21</sup> Nor does my book consider the accounts of Central and South Asians who traveled to and beyond Britain during this period for reasons other than documenting the empire's fabulous entertainments.<sup>22</sup> The itinerant bodies of *England Re-Oriented* can nonetheless attune scholars working in media, ethnic, gender, Islamic, Persian, and South Asian studies, as well as in comparative literature, to worldmaking activities in travel mediums centered on geographies and itineraries outside a fictive Europe.

Chapter 1 examines the Company's transformation into Bengal's territorial sovereign in 1764 as an embodied history: *sarkar-i kampani angrez bahadur* (The Government of the [Hon'ble] English), a Persian title that mimics the polite historical protocols of Perso-Turkic-Mongol empires since the fifteenth century. Absorbed into the habitus of British gentlemen trained in Persian, Hellenic, and Sanskrit classics, this title personified a corporate English body as an individual nobleman who was the imperial family's only and most powerful patriarch – the ultimate mimic men. A shared ethical and linguistic orientation inspired these travelers and their British hosts to imagine an ethnic kinship, as mediated by the Indo-Persian political treatises that Company lexicographers had translated into conduct books for genteel Englishmen aspiring to a career in India. This trans-imperial masculinity was what empowered Asian travelers to climb social rank as they befriended metropolitans in public showplaces – theaters, salons, and drawing rooms. The chapter proposes that orientalism and occidentalism are inadequate paradigms for understanding these travelers' multimedia engagements in Georgian and Victorian Britain, laying out the historical and theoretical groundwork for what will follow.

In Chapter 2, I consider the use of chivalric romance tropes in *Life and Adventures of Emin Joseph Emin, an Armenian, Written in English by himself* (1792). In Emin's letters to his Bluestocking patronesses Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Catherine Talbot, he plays a humble knight errant or "Persian Slave" as a strategy to master British politeness. In doing so, he befriends patrons such as George Lyttleton, Edmund Burke, and William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, the youngest son of King George II and commander of a German army Emin had joined in 1757. His epistolary interactions with the Bluestockings who coproduced his romantic fantasies allow him to identify Persian-Islamic notions of chivalry with British liberty. His memoir records ironic episodes in which he affiliates with brotherly Muslim warriors during his Islamophobic quest to liberate his people in the Caucasus from Ottoman and Persian despots. Such affinities render him a patriotic English gentleman while his lady friends expand their civic roles by adopting

<sup>21</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 229–35.

<sup>22</sup> See Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India*, 315–21; Digby, "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative of a Journey from Bengal to England"; Fisher, "From India to England," 165–66; Storey, *Persian Literature*, vol. 2, part 1:159.



cosmopolitan identities, an exchange that compensates for a British manhood scarred by military failures during the Seven Years' War.

Chapter 3 argues that the Mughal emissary I'tesamuddin adopts contradictory personas in London parks, theaters, and ballrooms. His Persian travelogue, *Shigarf Namah-i Vilayat* ("The Wonder-book of the Province/England"), narrates his 1767–1769 diplomatic mission to deliver Mughal Emperor Shah 'Alam II's letter requesting military assistance from King George III, circumventing the Company's authority. Because this mission failed after Robert Clive withheld the letter, the Mirza instead writes about London's theatrical and touristic attractions, including William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, and a pantomime farce. Enthralled by these shows, he morphs into a black-masked Harlequin in sexual pursuit of white fairy-like Englishwomen – the repertoire by which he judges off-stage Britons as deluded by worldly gain, figured as a Protestant work ethic that values efficient labor and capital accumulation. By the end of his narrative, his identity shifts from an admirer of an Islamized Anglican state to an ascetic Muslim who prefers elite Mughal society and its veiled light brown women.

In Chapter 4, I argue that Dean Mahomet's English memoir, *The Travels* (1793), and Abu Talib's travelogue, *Masir-i Talibi* (1803), are bookend ruminations on Ireland before and after the 1798 revolt. Their ambivalent feelings about war are implicated in the dense web of social relations that link India to Ireland. I first examine Mahomet's account of the 1781 British capture of the Raja of Benares Chayt Singh, as mediated by newspaper reports about Irish MP Edmund Burke's condemnation of unmanly colonial abuses in India during the Hastings impeachment trial (1788–1796). Then I discuss Abu Talib's reaction to the 1799 British defeat of the ruler of Mysore Tipu Sultan, as celebrated in the Dublin circus production of Philip Astley's *The Siege and Storming of Seringapatam*. These writers' patriotic responses to the theatrics of power imply a kinship with Irish hosts who, in their minds, belong to an Indo-Celtic Eurasia.

For Abu Talib, Ireland's status as the bridgehead between Georgian Britain and Mughal India is also reflected in London performance venues dominated by women, as I argue in Chapter 5. My argument is framed from the jaded viewpoint of Bengal ex-captain Thomas Williamson, who lambasts the Indo-Persian as an effeminate poser for bragging about his romantic intimacy with English noblewomen. Indeed, Abu Talib's travelogue, Persian poems on London, the *Diwan-i Talib* (never fully translated into English), and his essay "Vindication of the Liberties of the Asiatic Women" (printed in 1801 in European periodicals) was forged in two overlapping spaces of female sociability: the salon of the Duchess of Devonshire Georgiana Spencer, a politically outspoken socialite, and the London playhouses where star actresses ravished the Indian spectator with their professional artistry. Both spaces recall the skilled courtesans he would have known in Lucknow, mainly their perceived ability to debauch men. His subtle critique of elite British theatergoers who indulge in such impropriety aligns the feminized imperial capital with Persianate court rituals, while racist

chauvinists like Williamson malign such a cultural commensurability with the dramatic genre of romantic farces.

Uncertainty about an empire run by women is recurrent in Yusuf Khan Kambalposh's Urdu travelogue, *Tarikh-i Yusufi*, which I examine in [Chapter 6](#). Published in 1847, it records the dreamlike vision of the Lucknow Muslim captain who arrived in England on August 1837 and three months later witnessed Queen Victoria's stately procession for the Lord Mayor's feast. In Yusuf's eyes, this spectacle renders Britain a fairyland, an immersive virtual world indeterminately woven with the actual and the artificial. Its wonders emanate from visual recreations like Astley's Amphitheatre, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Diorama, the Colosseum, Vauxhall Gardens, Madame Tussauds wax museum, and the British Museum – what he calls “magic houses” that connect disparate geographies, creeds, and languages virtually. Through his repartee with female fairies in these tourist sites, he imagines an ephemeral empire of strangers. Refashioning his masculinity in this empire, he behaves like the autonomous subject of a new female monarch who is yet to become an icon of imperial self-confidence.

Whereas Yusuf experienced Victorian Britain as a magical simulation, Lutfullah Khan became its virtual celebrity. In [Chapter 7](#), I argue that his critical views on empire went viral after he left Britain, as he garnered positive reviews in London magazines commenting on the 1857 Indian mutiny. Published in June of that year and edited by his friend and former employer, Captain Edward Backhouse Eastwick, *Autobiography of Lutfullah, a Mohamedan Gentleman* encodes the two men's divergent politics: a Company conservative who campaigned against Crown rule in India and a munshi patriot perceived by the Victorian press as opposing a belligerent Company. By integrating picaresque fictions on Indian thugs, the memoir enabled periodical readers to imagine retrospectively the transition from a Mughal Empire under the Company's inept custodianship to direct rule under Victoria. Her 1858 proclamation that the feelings of the natives of India were to be henceforth respected was felt by Lutfullah's readers before these feelings congealed into a new ruling ideology. *Autobiography* shows that the nation-state's attempt to repair its intimate relationship with Asian subjects was mediated by those subjects' struggle to claim a stake in the national body.

The [Epilogue](#) briefly ponders how the media reorientations that vexed these travelers sedimented over time to turn a discursive power formation into what appears in retrospect to be an encrusted orientalism, frail and impotent within. The classic case study is James Morier's *Hajji Baba* novels, which I interpret as satires against the English dandies and damsels who adopted Persian dress and demeanor to display social exclusivity, rather than against Persians like Abul Hassan Khan, whom Morier hosted in England in 1809–1810 and 1819. The ambassador's queering in the English news circuit prompted Morier, a social climber anxious to claim masculine gentility, to project Londoners' transculturation in Qajar fashions onto an orientalized Iran wallowing in Regency-era

effeminacy – the Anglo-Persian dandy whose uncertain sexual orientation functions as a satirical parody of the British Empire's homosocial gentlemen.

Ultimately, the transcultural ideologies of gentlemanly civility unearthed in this book run counter to occidentalizing strategies that organize races, languages, creeds, and sexualities in terms of East-West binaries. The travelogues that furnish the evidentiary basis for this critique serve as vivid reminders that we have never been "Western." Even more remarkable is how these travelogues mobilize the dialectical interplay between homeliness and foreignness that Kristeva attributes to an interconnected global modernity and its socio-psychological imperative: to live with others is to live as others. The Central and South Asians who, between 1750 and 1857, fell in love with a British metropolitan society that resembled their Persianate homeland challenge the clash-of-civilizations narrative as weaponized by Islamophobic politicians, academics, and media pundits against present-day border crossers.

## The British Raj's Mimic Men

### Historicizing Genteel Masculinities across Empires

In that glad time Kampanī [a nobleman named “Company”] is splendour  
 seated, like a mountain, upon the throne of government,  
 summoned his advisers and ministers  
 so that he might give order to Hindustān.  
 Since Kampanī was a moon of bright spirit,  
 a knower of men’s countenances and much experienced,  
 he looked at them one by one  
 to find among them a man full of accomplishments.  
 He sought a great *Sāhib* to smite down the age,  
 to bestow justice in all graciousness and wrath.  
 He looked at all the pillars of his state,  
 and judged the wisdom and understanding of each.  
 Out of those advisers he chose one with majesty;  
 he approved Hashṭīn [Hastings], lord of generosity.

*Angrez-nama* [Book of the English], epic poem composed circa. 1783<sup>1</sup>

Written by an unknown panegyrist in India, the epic *masnavi* (rhymed couplets) excerpted in the epigraph showers praise on Warren Hastings’ governorship only in so far as he was appointed to this position by an erudite London nobleman named “Kampanī Bahādur.” This Persian title conflates a corporate trading institution, the honorable English East India Company, with a noble individual of flesh and blood: a benevolent patriarch who rules overseas seated upon his throne in Britain. “Kampanī Bahādur,” I will argue, casts a long shadow on Central and South Asians who traveled to England, Ireland, and Scotland between 1757 and 1857, when an association of gentlemen-merchants had inherited an empire from the Mughals in India (1526–1858). Working for the Company in different capacities, Joseph Emin, Shaykh I’tesamuddin, Dean Mahomet, Abu Talib Khan, Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, and Lutfullah Khan obsessively write about its gentlemen, whom they believe share their Persian-speaking ancestry: pioneering administrators, soldiers, scholars, saints, and clerics who emigrated from Iran, Transoxiana, and Afghanistan to Hindustan for profitable occupations, royal patronage, or political asylum. These travelers

<sup>1</sup> This poetic excerpt was translated into English by Simon Digby, in “Beyond the Ocean: Perceptions of Overseas in Indo-Persian Sources of the Mughal Period,” *Studies in History* 15, no. 2 (1999): 247–59, 259.

saw in wonderous cities like London gardenlike paradises as prosperous as the ones their ancestors had discovered in Timurid, Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal territories – an imperial homosocial arcadia transposed onto Eurasia's far western fringe.<sup>2</sup> Assimilated to past figurative topographies that feature newly discovered cities and bodies, real and imagined, these heavenly metropolitans were celebrated in the same way that *Angrez-nama* did: these people epitomize Persian politeness, bravery, generosity, and true manliness.

Indeed, the figure of the English gentleman helped to define national virtue and imperial greatness in the long eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as I will argue throughout, these civic ideals were compromised by the affectionate friendships between gentlemen who behave like married couples in blurring the distinction between friends and lovers. Since the medieval period these queer intimacies found expression in European sociopolitical and literary norms that are erotically suggestive but not necessarily equivalent to homosexuality.<sup>4</sup> Haunted by this ambiguous love, the “Company” (pun intended) is a heteronormative fraternity that overlaps with the recreational spaces of genteel sociability where Eurasian travelers felt at home. Orientalism has no reality for them apart from their British male partners, whose Persianized masculinity they decode according to precolonial discourses and practices that locate a virtuous sovereignty in interpersonal bonds. How these discourses and practices shaped the Company's hybrid identity and that of its servants is the focus of this chapter.

Polite masculinities were vital to the Company's dramatic makeover from a joint-stock business chartered by Queen Elizabeth in 1600 to a foreign sovereign body after the 1757 battle of Plassey, when its army had defeated the Nawab of Bengal and consolidated power in the region. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British had to contend with other rival foreigners, mostly of Iranian, Afghani, and Turkic extraction, as the Mughal Empire splintered into regional successor states. Rulers, scholars, and bureaucrats in these states spoke and wrote in Persian, a lingua franca that set the stage for British conquerors to vie with them for representing Indo-Persian political traditions. The Company's rising fortunes was spurred by its integration within trading patterns that, from 800 to 1830, formed “mainland mirrors”: Eurasian-wide economic cycles of growth and decline that the Company's fiscal-military policies exploited partially and precariously by emphasizing “similarity, convergence and complementarity,

<sup>2</sup> See Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 4–6, 14.

<sup>3</sup> On masculinity as a driving force in Western European civilization, see Mosse, *The Image of Man*; Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> See George E. Haggerty, *Queer Friendship: Male Intimacy in the English Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

rather than stark difference.”<sup>5</sup> To mitigate the tension between making money and dispensing justice after the Plassey victory, the British Raj adopted the polite Persianate masculinity that early Persian-educated Asian travelers would rediscover in England and Ireland.

These gender parallels make visible another socioeconomic vector through which the Company balanced its financial and administrative ties in London with its new need to project political authority in Mughal India. In locating the geopolitical in the corporeal, empire was the place where British men could prove their manhood, and, conversely, acting manly was how these men gauged the empire's vitality. John Tosh's critical formulation that “Empire was a man's business” cuts both ways when considering that Britons' military foothold in Bengal required more than sheer manpower; this conquest involved a long-term pragmatic investment in an elite Persianate masculinity transferred from Indo-Persian rulers to Company men, as implicit in panegyrics like *Angrez-nama*.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, this masculinity granted early Eurasian travelers from India to Britain opportunities to climb social rank. They did so by befriending elite British gentlefolk in public performative spaces – theaters, salons, and drawing rooms. Turning into performers as a result, these perceptive travelers challenged the Company's claim to a Mughal patriarchal lineage, thanks, in most cases, to the Englishwomen who inspired their self-fashioning through various media. These travelers' adaptive resilience depended less on their manipulation of the power-knowledge nexus now known as orientalism than on their bodily orientations as gentlemen, strangers, and mediators. The trans-imperial resonances of these three subject positions will be discussed in the following sections, respectively.

### The Company of Gentlemen

After the British East India Company acquired *diwani* (revenue collection rights) by defeating the combined forces of the Nawabs of Bengal and Awadh and Mughal Emperor Shah 'Alam II near the town of Buxar in 1764, this commercial entity morphed into an Asian territorial sovereign.<sup>7</sup> By the late 1780s, the Company legitimized its conquest by adopting a Persian title: “*sarkār-i kampanī angrez bahādur*” or “The Government of the [Hon'ble] English,” imitating Perso-Turkish political terminology in its official communications with Indian

<sup>5</sup> See Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, vol. 2, *Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). The second quotation is from P. J. Marshall, “Afterword: The Legacies of Two Hundred Years of Contact,” in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, ed. H. V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Woodbridge, UK and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2002), 223.

<sup>6</sup> Tosh, *Manliness*, 193.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 74.

rulers. In usage since the fifteenth-century Timurid invasion of Iran and Central Asia, *sarkar* literally means supervisor or superintendent and loosely connotes the royal household's patrimonial figurehead; *bahadur* is the honorific of an individual nobleman working for the empire.<sup>8</sup> Performing this identity as a political expedient, the Company became the sole gentlemanly patriarch qualified to rule the family/empire. This political and personal body underwrote the textual codification of South Asian languages, knowledges, and legal traditions, oral and written, even after Crown rule replaced the Company and the House of Timur in 1858.<sup>9</sup> In Indian popular parlance, the new *bahadur* was figuratively and – as in *Angrez-nama* – literally conceived as a wise London gentleman, or an old lady, who advises their servants to rule Hindustan virtuously.<sup>10</sup> The British laid claim to a royal Persianate domesticity that linked their metropolitan home symbolically to courts, harems, shrines, and madrassas (religious schools) in Islamicate Indo-Eurasia.

Under Warren Hastings' governorship, this transcultural gendering of empire formed the crux of his ambitious policy to accumulate "knowledge . . . such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest," a knowledge "useful to the state," as he writes in his oft-quoted letter prefixed to Charles Wilkin's 1785 English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>11</sup> Although this letter confirms Edward Said's theorization of orientalism as a corporatized and systematized domination of the East by European powers, Britons back home are the intended addressees; Wilkin's translated text "attracts and conciliates distant affections" by "imprint[ing] on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence."<sup>12</sup> In other words, Hastings sought to acclimate his "countrymen" to the Mughal standards of patronage and education, repackaging Asian languages, religions, philosophies, histories, and arts for metropolitan consumption.<sup>13</sup> A generous patron and statesman, he helped to set up the institutional infrastructure not only for what is known retroactively as orientalism, but also for the westward transmission of the ethical, religious, and aesthetic sensibilities valued by the Persian-educated elite. For pragmatic reasons, the Company under Hastings

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas J. Abbott, "Bringing the *Sarkār* Back in: Translating Patrimonialism and the State in Early Modern and Early Colonial India," in *State Formations: Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood*, ed. John L. Brooke, Julia C. Strauss, and Greg Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 124–37, esp. 135.

<sup>9</sup> See Bang, "Elephant of India'."

<sup>10</sup> Digby, "Beyond the Ocean," 258–59.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Hastings, "Letter to Nathaniel Smith," in *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 189.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See P. J. Marshall, "Warren Hastings as Scholar and Patron," in *Statesman, Scholars, and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland*, ed. Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 242–62, esp. 256; Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 1–66; Kumkum Chatterjee, "History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 913–48; Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 52–53.

morphed into the latest and only *bahadur* by absorbing everything Persian, the administrative *lingue franca* of north India and the Deccan from the eleventh to the nineteenth century.

A “language of command,” Persian allowed previous invaders to integrate vast territories across Indo-Eurasia, connecting the Caucasus to Khurasan, Turan, and Hindustan.<sup>14</sup> Given the prominence of Persian in Eurasian courts, but not exclusive to them, its speakers had access to a cosmopolitan gentility that spread well beyond Persia (the former Safavid domain). This language found renewed expression in works written in Turkic, Armenian, Dakhni, Hindi, Urdu, and, I will argue, English, even after the British had made the latter the empire’s official language of law and bureaucracy in 1833–1837.<sup>15</sup> Although the Company’s claim to Mughal continuity was driven by *realpolitik*, this was a policy as well for instilling educational discipline in British administrators and soldiers, who were mostly inexperienced young men. The Company required these men to study the Persian language formally with the founding of the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 and Fort William College in 1800, extending this language socially and geographically to England with Haileybury College in 1806 and Addiscombe Military Seminary in 1809.<sup>16</sup> For loyal Indian subjects, this expansion of Persian to a new social frontier made the British the custodians of Mughal benevolence, courage, and wisdom. Indo-Persian idioms bequeathed to these newcomers transferable cultural capital: the skills, tastes, speech acts, and manners that, pace Pierre Bourdieu, constitute the body’s *habitus*: the means by which Europeans and Asians were socialized into the same elite corps.<sup>17</sup> Persian’s symbolic power allowed the British to project their authority in South Asia as if they were the ultimate mimic men.

To promote this self-image, Company men spoke the Indo-Islamic and Persian language of hospitality. Welcoming the other by offering them respect, respite, shelter, and the space to speak was a cardinal virtue in Muslim societies and literatures for centuries, a divine duty associated with *adab*: an Arabic-Persian term for those who act chivalrously, speak nobly and elegantly (akin to

<sup>14</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism*, 16–56.

<sup>15</sup> Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 131–98; Rahman, “Decline of Persian in British India”; Majeed, “The Jargon of Indostan’.”

<sup>16</sup> See Michael H. Fisher, “Persian Professor in Britain: Mirza Muhammed Ibrahim at the East India Company’s College, 1826–44,” *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 21, no. 1–2 (2001): 24–32; Fisher, “Teaching Persian as an Imperial Language in India and in England during the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012), 328–58; Éva M. Jeremiás, “Matthew Lumsden’s *Persian Grammar* (Calcutta, 1810),” *Iran* 50 (2012): 129–40 and 51 (2013): 197–206.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).



refined literature), and make strangers feel at home.<sup>18</sup> As such, this term extends kinship relations to generous non-family members, such as teachers and foreign governors, contrary to legal and ethnic definitions of social belonging. Integrated into Mughal ideas of kingship, Islamic hospitality defines a noble chivalric masculinity or, in Persian, *javanmardi* (young-manliness). Difficult to translate into English, this protean concept refers to heroic figures who have fought honorably for their faith, family, and fatherland. They are mostly, but not exclusively, youthful Muslim men who are honest, brave, resilient, and hospitable, cunning enough to defeat their enemies with dignity and evade social predicaments with ease. Their masculine *adab* is not predicated on geographical specificity and confessional identities.<sup>19</sup> *Javanmardi* sagacity and benevolence is what Hastings tried to nurture among metropolitan residents. In turn, this ethic is what led Persianate travelers in wartime Georgian and Victorian Britain to imagine a familiar home among such kind hosts.

Britons and Asians therefore share an ethical orientation. Drawn from medieval Islamic, ancient Iranian, and Hellenic sources, and institutionalized as an official Mongol-Timurid ideology under Emperor Akbar's reign (1556–1605), *akhlaq* treatises prescribe ways to secure virtue and remove vice. In these treatises, speaking politely, eating properly, bathing, curing diseases, and acting charitably ensures good government. Maintaining order in the household, the family, and the kingdom balances the body's humors. Justice is realized when kings act like good physicians who heal the body politic by eliminating its defects and forging intimate bonds with subjects as fathers do with their children.<sup>20</sup> Because in these treatises the royal bureaucracy, the individual, and the household form a continuous body, corporeal configurations of gender undergirded patriarchal sovereignty in South Asia well into the late nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Discipling servants, arranging marriages, and regulating bodily dispositions is what imperial personnel and munshis (learned secretaries) were tasked with, as evident in classic Mughal manuals like Shaykh Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i-Akbari* (Institutes of Akbar) and Chandar Bhan Brahman's *Chahar Chaman* ("The Four Gardens").<sup>22</sup> Hence, the British *sarkar*'s "prescriptive fiction" was to outman

<sup>18</sup> Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 10–11, 33–35.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd Ridgeon, "Introduction: The Felon, the Faithful and the Fighter: The Protean Face of Chivalric Man (*Javanmardi*) in the Medieval Persianate and Modern Iranian Worlds," in Ridgeon, *Javanmardi*, 1–27.

<sup>20</sup> See Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 12–17; Muzaffar Alam, "Akhlaqī Norms and Mughal Governance," in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Delvoye Nalini, and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 67–95; Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 26–80.

<sup>21</sup> See Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 889–923; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

<sup>22</sup> On munshis as modeling a nonsectarian gentlemanly civility in South Asia, see Rajeev Kinra, *Writing the Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 32, 39, 42, 61–65, 73, 82, 127, 166, 170, 182, 194, 196, 199, 263, 277, and 293; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam,

rival households demoted to “princely” successor states.<sup>23</sup> Acting like *javan-mards*, the new white Mughals communicated to their Asian rivals – and at-home Britons – that only by joining the honorable Company’s service can a man truly be a man.

This message spread to British urban centers through the printed Persian texts and lexicons used to instruct current and prospective recruits in the linguistic skills and etiquette necessary to pass the Company’s language exam. For example, the lexicographer Francis Gladwin, who had served in the Bengal army, acquired international fame as a prolific compiler of such dictionaries and as a competent translator of Persian classics into English, most notably the *A’in-i-Akbari* (in 1783–1786), ‘Attar’s *Pand-nama* (in 1788), and Sa’di’s *Gulistan* (in 1806). As a result, he was one of the founders of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, thanks to Hastings’s patronage, and one of the first professors of Persian to join Calcutta’s Fort William College when it was established in 1800.<sup>24</sup> In 1795, he published his famous Persian textbook with English translations, *The Persian Moonshee*, which went through several reprints and features excerpts from the *Chahar Chaman*.<sup>25</sup> Reflecting the munshi secretarial curriculum, this textbook would have taught British readers more than Persian syntax, pronunciation, and orthography; they would have rehearsed a virtuous masculinity by memorizing Arabic, Persian, and Hellenic literary passages, Perso-Arabic calligraphy, Qur’anic verses, short dialogues about Persophone elites’ qualifications and discipline, and a “compendium of ethics” (*adab*): beneficence, generosity, humility, compassion, wisdom, faith, patience, prudence, followed by censures of arrogance, greed, ignorance, lust, oppression, impiety, and parsimony. The final sections of *The Persian Moonshee* list the formal greetings between superiors and inferiors, advice on court etiquette, and selections from the Gospel of Matthew (Jesus’s sermon on the mount) that were translated into Persian by the orientalist William Chambers and his munshi.<sup>26</sup>

Such textbook writers exploited the intellectual labor of multilingual dubashes or interpreters, displacing their scribal practices to construct discursively the quaint “moonshee” disciplinarian. This identity was modeled after the conduct books and Latinate pedagogies used in Britain for inculcating normative masculine behaviors. Since the Elizabethan and Tudor eras, the humanistic school curricula in Greek and Latin grammars sought to regulate male affect through the study of rhetoric in oral recitation, standardized testing, and textbooks: the

“The Making of a Munshī,” in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 185–209.

<sup>23</sup> Abbott, “Bringing the *Sarkār*,” 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Gladwin, Francis.” 2001, accessed July 10, 2018, [www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/v11f1/v11f1010.html](http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/v11f1/v11f1010.html).

<sup>25</sup> Kinra, *Writing the Self*, 5–7, 100–1. On *The Persian Moonshee*’s contents, see Kinra, “Secretary-Poets in Mughal India and the Ethos of Persian: The Case of Chandar Bhān Brahman” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 134–54.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Gladwin, *The Persian Moonshee* (Calcutta: Chronicle Press, 1795). On the company’s use of such textbooks to reinterpret *sarkār*, see Abbott, “Bringing the *Sarkār*,” 134.

crucible of a genteel masculinity that the British gentry had inherited over generations, but not exclusively so.<sup>27</sup> Ethical works by Aristotle, Plato, Asclepius, and other ancient Greek sages are referenced in the *akhlaq* literature through which Company cadets and administrators cultivated a transcultural habitus consistent with their English education.<sup>28</sup> Their mastery of such Hellenic classics conveys the generous sociability befitting a civilized empire.

Arguably, then, the “prescriptive fiction” that the Company *sarkar* imposed on its neighbors hails the London financial and service sectors that supplied the new *bahadur* merchants with investors, court directors, bankers, captains, and shipbuilders: the “gentlemanly capitalists” who financed imperial expansion in South Asia and elsewhere through an alliance with the landed aristocracy, whose wealth, property, and prestige they assumed.<sup>29</sup> These new monied men’s symbolic power is palpable in the hybrid British “nabobs” or *nawabs* (deputy governors of the Mughal Empire) who purchased estates, libraries, art collections, and parliamentary seats in Britain as if they were still living in South Asia, making them notorious figures in metropolitan culture and media.<sup>30</sup> This power also permeates Anglicized *akhlaq* treatises as well as the writings of the Central and South Asian travelers who befriended hospitable “nabobs” and treated them as familial companions.

“Love as paternalism without arrogance” was the Company’s main slogan, propagating the fiction of a noncoercive friendship between equals.<sup>31</sup> Orientalists set out to uncover an ancient kinship between Europeans and Asians based on the idea that Latinate and Romance languages, as well as Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit, evolved from an earlier Indo-European language in or near pre-Islamic Persia. Aryanism was narrated as a “family reunion”: British rule in South Asia is about reclaiming a home that once belonged to ancestral Europeans (Aryans) and embracing its current inhabitants as long-lost siblings.<sup>32</sup> Consider, for example, how the Greek and Latin antiquarian Stephen Weston perceives Iranians as proto-Europeans, in line with his research on Persian-Teutonic linguistic correspondences.<sup>33</sup> Using the pseudonym Philoxenus Secundus or “Second Lover of Strangers,” he purports in his *Persian Recreations or Oriental*

<sup>27</sup> See Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 14; Alam, “*Akhlaqī* Norms,” 68–69.

<sup>29</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 23–103, 278–84; H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15; Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> In *A Specimen of the Conformity of the European Languages, Particularly the English, with the Oriental Languages, Especially the Persian* (London: S. Rousseau, 1802), Weston claims that Persian transmitted Teutonic words to Germanic languages, which eventually enriched the English language (vii).

*Stories, with Notes* (1812) that “the inhabitants of Iran . . . resemble the French in the days of Gallic civilization, more so than any other nation of Europe.”<sup>34</sup> Modeled on successful lexicons like *The Persian Moonshee*, Weston’s book furnishes “different descriptions of wit and pleasantry” necessary for classicists to master Persian conversational styles.<sup>35</sup> The fictive idea that Iran is more European than Europe is what authorized Company gentlemen to transplant their domestic order, as the ideal sovereignty, in foreign soil, while Persianate travelers in Britain were to imagine a primordial affinity with its residents. According to Sudipta Sen and Durba Ghosh, the hierarchal intimacies between husband and wife, parents and children, and master and servant in Britain was the crucible from which Asians were racialized as infantile and effeminate subjects.<sup>36</sup> But for pre-1858 Persianate men who rediscovered home in a strange land, this metropolitan-imported household found cultural and political expression in *akhlaq* paternalism.

However, I am not arguing that transcultural sympathy always results in commensurable understandings, or that such amiable exchanges are untainted by oppressive ideologies. On the contrary, the friendships discussed in this book are the loci of fraught contestations over the signs and symbols of white imperial manhood. For early Persianate travelers, loving a stranger alienates other bodies deemed to lack this noble emotion: Africans, native Americans, or Jews cast as effeminate, black, and savage as well as arrogant Company men and British aristocrats who fall from social grace by violating gender decorum. How competing models of masculinity align with the family, the military, and public entertainments, and which one of these models prevails, depends on who loves whom – an xenophilia that alienates those who are considered inhospitable. In the writings I will be examining, love congeals social solidarities by regulating which bodies to exclude from the civic sphere.<sup>37</sup>

Before leaving overseas, Abu Talib wrote an *akhlaq* treatise on a regulatory love that would be profoundly dis(re)oriented in Britain (Appendix A). Composed between 1793 and 1796 while working as a tax collector for the Nawab of Awadh, a British client, his “Treatise on Ethics” categorizes the virtues that culminate in justice, the vices that afflict the soul, the intellectual refinement that secures happiness, and the cures for mental and carnal ailments. He recycles old advice literature, most likely the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* by the Muslim Iranian polymath Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201–1274). Abu Talib adheres to Tusi’s influential schema: the rational faculty, the source of right judgment; the irascible faculty, the source of anger, bravery, and the will to power; and the appetitive

<sup>34</sup> Secundus, *Persian Recreations*, ii. Stephen Weston is identified as the author in the new edition to this book, retitled *Persian Recreations, or New Tales, with Explanatory Notes on the Original Text, and Curious Details of Two Ambassadors to James I and George III*, new ed. (London: S. Rousseau, 1812).

<sup>35</sup> Secundus, *Persian Recreations*, i.

<sup>36</sup> Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*; Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, 85–118.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*.

faculty, the source of lust, hunger, and greed. When reason, courage, and continence balance the three faculties, a man is masculine enough to dispense justice by developing “honest friendships” with his subjects.<sup>38</sup> Yet in Britain Abu Talib (and Sake Dean Mahomet) ascribes this moral perfection (*javanmardi*) to hospitable Irishmen rather than to London aristocrats whose vices render them politically inept (Chapter 4). The worst ailment listed in his treatise – “the ignorant man [who] conceives himself as knowledgeable” (see p. 319) – is reserved in his travelogue for British orientalists or “self-taught masters.” He disparages them and Sir William Jones’s famous *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (1771), which he calls an immature “defective” work.<sup>39</sup> Munshi I’tesamuddin, who claims to have aided Jones in compiling this work while in London, likewise denounces these wannabes (Chapter 3).<sup>40</sup>

For these travelers, British imperialism is an ailing body pretending to be the whitest and most masculine Mughal. Hence, they scrutinize what Britons eat, drink, sleep, and wear, the way they speak and act, where they recreate, whom they elope with, and how often they bathe and wash their bottoms. They were too riveted by these people’s singing, dancing, art-making, theatergoing, news-printing, and letter-writing to notice orientalism, which they attribute to insecure pretentious men suffering from impostor syndrome.

### Male Bonding over Female Bodies

In the early modern period, intellectual production is dispersed across networks of mobile people who embody new identities and bask in alien worlds to reimagine their homelands. Sociability is therefore a two-way street for the transfer of literature, art forms, rituals, and affect between empires.<sup>41</sup> If

<sup>38</sup> For information on Abu Talib’s manuscript *Lubbu-s Siyar wa Jahannuma* (*The Essence of Biographies, and the World-Reflecting Mirror*, composed ca. 1793), which contains his “Treatise on Ethics,” see Ed. Sachau and Hermann Ethe, *Catalogue on the Persian, Turkish, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Part 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 302–15; N. Bland, “On the Earliest Persian Biography of Poets, by Muhammad Aúfi, and on Some Other Works of the Class Called Tazkirat ul Shuárá,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 9 (1847): 111–76, 157. On the pervasive influence of Nasir al-Din Tusi’s *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, see O’Hanlon, “Kingdom,” 895.

<sup>39</sup> Khan, *The Travels*, 150, 214.

<sup>40</sup> I’tesamuddin, *Shigurf Namah I Velaet*, 64–66.

<sup>41</sup> On bodily affects, gendered intimacies, and performances that traverse nation and empire, metropole and colony, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Introduction: The Politics of Intimacy in an Age of Empire,” in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1–28; Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Antoinette M. Burton, *At the Heart of the*