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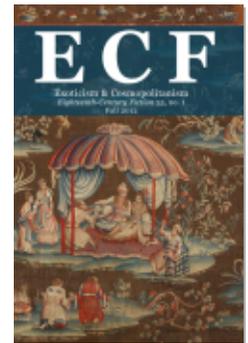
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Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Volume 25, Number 1, Fall 2012, pp. 227-242  
(Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2012.0057>



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# Response: Exoticism beyond Cosmopolitanism?

Srinivas Aravamudan

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Exoticism overstates the empirically unfamiliar into a full-fledged aesthetics involving both detection and delectation. Any notion of the exotic relies on an implicit understanding of a boundary, inside which relative familiarity reigns and outside which the wild things roam. What, then, led to a generalized *exoticism*, one that rendered wondrous so many parts of the world? There is a sequence of identification, transmission, and consumption that characterizes exoticism, a series of delivery mechanisms that renders the exotic as legible and continuous in its mystery despite repeat exposures. As Tzvetan Todorov suggests, “knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be. This is its constitutive paradox.”<sup>1</sup> What is exotic for one person is not necessarily exotic for another. Eighteenth-century European sailors and chambermaids possessed different knowledge frameworks, leading very different lives: the mariners would have had many more chances to exoticize foreigners than their compatriots of either sex who stayed at home—and as the history of exoticism went, women were much more susceptible to sexual exoticization.

1 Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 265.

However, even more relevant to us is that exoticism in general relies on the singularity of an irreducible aesthetic experience, one that creates an experiential object in the place of a reciprocal ethical transaction with the other.

How did exoticism maintain the sense of aesthetic surprise? A non-exoticist sensibility would systematically assimilate novelty into the observer's life experience. To allow the exotic to linger, novelty has to be placed in a framework that resists assimilation and revels in the perceived unavailability of the sensibilities produced by the exotic object. For instance, the Renaissance institution of the *Wunderkammer* (or curio cabinet) isolated objects taken from typical locations and cultures, even as their mutual contiguity and juxtaposition (in the cabinet) created ersatz patterns of recognition.<sup>2</sup> The incongruity of random architectural fragments juxtaposed as an outdoor folly did something similar, as did the expansion of the museum and the art gallery in the eighteenth century, creating sites of public aesthetics that decontextualized and recontextualized artifacts.<sup>3</sup> Art and literature went about delivering the exotic through their own modes, genres, and styles.<sup>4</sup>

As Todorov also suggests, exoticism often went hand-in-hand with primitivism, combining principles of egalitarianism, minimalism, and naturalism—principles that we might alternatively dub as fallacies.<sup>5</sup> While Rousseau's noble savages became a celebrated exotic construct that strongly influenced the Romantics, many earlier eighteenth-century exoticisms often highlighted civilizational complexity, focusing on the sophisticated refinements of those deemed more advanced than Europe in ideas or in material culture, with Ming–Ch'ing China (and occasionally Ottoman Turkey) serving as the most celebrated example. As many satirical implementations from Jonathan Swift to Denis Diderot demonstrate, exoticism as a phantasmagorical projec-

2 See Oliver R. Impey and Arthur G. MacGregor, eds., *The Origin of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

3 See John M. MacKenzie, "Orientalism in Architecture," in *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 71–104; and Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

4 See G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

5 Todorov, 273.

tion could be harnessed to a loose allegorization of geographically distanced others with an aim to critique European selves.

If the exotic implies a free-floating object or person that delivers strange effects—whether frissons of delight or shivers of danger—the cosmopolitan denotes a free-floating subject who connects hitherto distinct spheres. In some ways, it could be argued that the cosmopolitan subject arose by being able to harness the unproductive remainders of exoticism into a kind of comparative engine. The cosmopolitan was a new kind of subject who could rise above specific objects, properties, and principles. Fashioned partly out of the empirical experience of enhanced travel and exposure to other cultures, the cosmopolitan subject was nonetheless beholden to a philosophical articulation of the objectives of such random exposures, making a virtue of necessity given the new disorientations produced by global travel and commerce in an age of enhanced mercantilism headed for capitalist transformation.

The cosmopolitan sensibility, whether wilfully chosen or contingently experienced, is broader than any single context, nation, or culture. Going beyond the narrowly familiar, the cosmopolitan accounts for multiple locales at the price of coming across as unrooted, alienated, and even disloyal. If exoticism manages objects and phenomena by drawing a tight boundary between the self and the external world, cosmopolitanism makes boundary-crossing obligatory, embracing strangers and internalizing them.<sup>6</sup>

A standard intellectual history of Europe during the Enlightenment would see exoticism as giving way to a forked outcome, of cosmopolitan promise and nationalist result. The shock of the exotic forced some observers to recognize that the world was vast and that it needed a new philosophy—cosmopolitanism. The same shock fed into the reinforcement of the familiar and the rejection of the strange—nationalism. Cosmopolitanism is nationalism's opposite in terms of political loyalties, even as exoticism is nationalism's pretext in terms of reinforcing cultural affinities. The nationalist could remain an exoticist, or turn away from exoticism towards full-blown nationalism, but cosmopolitans could remain nationalists or exoticists only at the price of compromising their cosmopolitanism. If cosmopolitanism is "ethics in a world of strangers" as Anthony Appiah puts it, exoticism could be

6 See Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

described as “aesthetics in a world of novelties,” and nationalism would be “politics in a world of familiars.” Nationalism refuses strangers and gathers citizens around familiar attributes of language, ethnicity, or religion, whereas exoticism does not even recognize strangers except as sheer exotics, more as objects than as persons. Cosmopolitanism converts novelties back into the persons who created or sustained them and strangers back into the familiars they would be in their own societies. Cosmopolitanism is, therefore, a philosophical approach that crosses boundaries and frames, but, along with that move, it has the tendency to set the self apart, unmooring it from native prejudices and opening it up to long-distance affinities. Cosmopolitanism is more susceptible to contemplation than to action, but that weakness could also be revealed as a major strength when compared to various nationalisms with their histories of violence and repression.<sup>7</sup>

Chi-ming Yang’s brilliant essay on toy dogs is a springboard into the topic of eighteenth-century exoticism. The fetishistic object-choice consumers made in relation to dogs as pets led to their anti-functional miniaturization, and eventually to their substitution by china replicas. Exoticism is, ultimately, a poetics of the object. Not only about object acquisition, exoticism can be a dynamic process of making and framing, through breeding, cryogenics, and commissioned portraiture. At the same time, exoticist diminution of the canine companionate species into a “toy” breed speaks of managerial containment. The prehensile cathexis of the object reduces it by a force that is epistemic and acquisitive: squeezing the pet both symbolically and literally, the pet-keeper makes it more controllable, even while enhancing its fragility. As the pet’s size and vitality diminishes, the pet-keeper’s psychic investment increases. What is the object’s lost original? Why does the exoticist acquire an endless series of surrogates? Exoticism prefigures the modern collector’s voraciousness. At the same time, the logic of surrogacy confuses fetishist and fetish, as we find in the case of William Hogarth’s famous self-portrait with his pug—making them both look reciprocally pugnacious. The fetish is also a factotum of the fetishist: qualities and traits circulate across the boundary that no longer sharply divides desiring subjects from acquired objects, and names from things.

7 See Todorov; and Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006).

Yang is to be credited for making some intriguing suggestions about connectivity and surrogacy, speaking as she does of “migrating signifiers” whereby “traits are imagined to transfer across objects and species.” As Joseph Roach demonstrates in his discerning work on theatrical performance, surrogacy can take place through the most unpromising materials of popular ritual and daily life.<sup>8</sup> Even the most debased exotic object of eighteenth-century fiction, such as the lapdog Pompey the Little, featured in an it-narrative, might help us rethink social and intercultural relations.<sup>9</sup> As Yang notes, exoticism might be one route towards secularizing the sacred effigy, forging a pathway out of traditional religious fixation into auto-affective forms of affiliation. When taken to the limit, exoticism sows the seeds for the internal destruction and recreation of the psychic economy of the exoticist, who undoes himself by the melancholic affect of his attachment—a perfect exemplification of what Jacques Derrida describes in other contexts as an autoimmune disorder.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, in such an instance, exoticism also anticipates what the Russian Formalists called *ostranenie* or what Bertolt Brecht would later theorize as the defamiliarization or alienation-effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*)—although the political effect that Brecht sought for in his theatre was by no means assured with respect to exoticism, often a culturally conservative phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, some of the most inventive examples of eighteenth-century fiction take exotic unfamiliarity into radical defamiliarization and the unmaking of the self, as, for example, in pseudoethnographic works such as Marana’s *L’Espion turc* (1682–97) and Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721). I have recently discussed this strain of narrative as a form of “Enlightenment Orientalism,” a combination of exoticism and cosmopolitanism in the manner of a fictional thought experiment.<sup>12</sup>

8 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

9 Francis Coventry, *The History of Pompey the Little; Or, the Life and Adventures of a Lap-Dog* (London, 1751).

10 Just as terrorism is the autoimmune disorder within the structure of democracy, exoticism could be the autoimmune disorder within the structure of Enlightenment. See Jacques Derrida, Giovanna Borradori, and Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 94–102.

11 For a helpful discussion of Brecht’s V-effect, see Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 39–42.

12 See Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Jennifer Milam's essay on chinoiserie in Russian garden design addresses at the level of state policy what Yang follows through in terms of popular culture. Gardens could be made to perform identities topographically: as Milam explains, Catherine the Great commissioned the most expansive Chinese garden in eighteenth-century Europe at Tsarskoye Selo after building a Chinese palace at Oranienbaum. Spurred on by Voltaire, Diderot, and other philosophes who courted her, Catherine was not just a solipsistic collector, instead fashioning herself as an Enlightened despot who aimed to promote a universal taste that transcended language and local tradition. Instrumentalizing exoticism to leverage cosmopolitanism, Catherine as grand patron of the arts demonstrates that monarchical capriciousness could dictate a new national idiom. Unlike the private palace at Oranienbaum, the gardens at Tsarskoye Selo were semi-public, as all visitors to the palace passed through them before reaching the audience chambers. Milam's Catherine uses Russia as an "in-between space" that mediates Asia for Europe, along with juxtaposed exotic landscapes redolent of Dutch, French, English, and Turkish origin. Catherine's aesthetic exoticism appears to have been converted by her into the political project of a sovereign cosmopolitanism. What is not clear is whether this attempted conversion had any lasting impact—the standard interpretation by Dimitri Shvidkovsky sees Catherine's chinoiserie as imitative rather than politically consequential.<sup>13</sup> All the same, Milam's article demonstrates that if one context renders exotic taste pertaining to chinoiserie as solipsistic, another context appears to have taken the gambit of using Chinese gardens to surrogate universal comparison and comprehension. Countries such as China, India, and Persia, when represented as exotic destinations from where travellers brought back both personal impressions and material practices, allowed a double reflectivity. Asia offered several practical examples of alien civilizations demonstrably antecedent to those of Europe, both testing and reconfirming moral values.

The chronologically latest example of exoticism as a form of philosophical bafflement comes from Daniel O'Quinn's subtle

13 See Dimitri Shvidkovsky, *The Empress and the Architect: British Architecture and Gardens in the Court of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

comparative reading of Mirza Abul Hassan's experience as Persian envoy to London (1809–10) and James Morier's ethnography of Persia published just after the British embassy to Tehran (1812). The Briton and Persian mirror each other, forming a mutual reverse ethnography. Morier focuses on the spectacular *Ta'ziyeh* performances around the month of Muharram even as his depictions place Persians in a distant past. That is indeed the first step beyond mere geographical exoticism, whereby the perceived culture conjures up the metaphorical experience of time travel. At the same time, Morier worries whether the religious enthusiasm on display is feigned. Does the seemingly exotic event banally manage community affiliation, even while exploiting the credulity of the European observer? Tourism continues to be confronted with such conundrums—if fakirs are fakers, do natives hoodwink visitors by performing the local marvel as an age-old confidence trick? Exoticism, when functioning as an epistemological one-way street, can classify the foreign culture as non-allochronic, a vestige of a distant past, and yet duelling reverse ethnographies can undo multi-chronicity into the experience of what Johannes Fabian has called radical contemporaneity.<sup>14</sup> However, as various examples show, by being a non-allochronic contemporary, the native is not necessarily an equal, instead trading the position of fossil for that of charlatan. The history of Orientalism is littered with examples of scholarly thrill-seekers receiving counterfeit manuscripts and artifacts that fulfilled superficial expectations and were later proved inauthentic: fake Sanskrit manuscripts that purported to show links between Biblical and Vedic mythologies; retranslations of Aladdin and Ali Baba from Antoine Galland's French that were hawked as Arabic originals and later disproved; instantly manufactured African sculptures and masks passed off as if they were ancestral totems.<sup>15</sup>

If one side of O'Quinn's equation is Morier's fear of fraudulence, the other side of the story is Hassan's anguish and loss. O'Quinn dissects Hassan's melancholic response to *opera seria*, ballet,

14 See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

15 See Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 34; and Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991): 336–57.

and a performance of *King Lear* in the London theatre, wherein the Persian seeks connection and identification with a foreign culture even while missing his own. An intriguing example of the surrogacy we have been discussing, Hassan's *Hayrat Namah*, or Book of Wonders, evokes the *Tā'ziyeh* performances he misses through his emotional reaction that is partly sorrowful about his own state and partly critical of the English audience he sees before him. Hassan disparages the audience's lack of restraint and the confusing mixture of tragedy and pantomime. Unlike his counterpart, the homesick Persian envoy is not so much suspicious of his host culture as he is expressing the superior cadences of his own. The plot of Guglielmi's opera, *Sidagero*, functions in the manner of a surrogate for the martyrdom of Hussain, dramatized annually through the Shi'i festival of the Ashura. As O'Quinn points out, Persia and Britain are on a relatively equal footing in the early nineteenth century, united in mutual dislike of Ottoman suzerainty in the Levant. However, what results from the bicultural encounter is not so much cosmopolitanism as a differential kind of disculturation. Through Yang's, Milam's, and O'Quinn's examples, we see three overlapping and incomplete outcomes for exoticism: the recontextualization and assimilation of the object in the case of the toy dog, an open-ended mediation that refashions the object towards creating new political subjects in the case of Catherine's Chinese gardens, and the failure of mutual intersubjectivity mapped through Morier's and Hassan's travel narratives.

At this point, we can turn our attention away from exotic departures to three other articles in this volume that focus on cosmopolitan arrivals. Megan Kitching's essay on Oliver Goldsmith is a good case in point. Adopting the Enlightenment pseudoethnographic vantage point through the Chinese persona of Lien Chi Altangi in *The Citizen of the World*, Goldsmith is a precursor for the issues that came up in O'Quinn's reading of Morier and Hassan: professional anxieties around authority and credentialing, and the syndrome of detached withdrawal in relation to exotic phenomena. Goldsmith writes at a time of profound change in the British literary scene. The long eighteenth century saw the meteoric rise of a reading public, the rapid professionalization of criticism and the discourse of taste, and the major pressures these modern developments made on authors who had to navigate the resulting changes in systems of patronage. Responding to these challenges, Goldsmith chooses

an exotic persona that he also capriciously undermines: perhaps the point is to arrive at a philosophical cosmopolitanism while starting with the unpromising materials of exoticism.<sup>16</sup> Kitching finds that Goldsmith retreats into a shell when he finds that the commercial marketplace cannot accommodate an enlightened “republic of letters.” Unhappy with the changing world of criticism, Goldsmith sees the author as hard-pressed, and eventually abandons the oriental persona. Goldsmith’s narrative of cosmopolitanism is alienated, mourning the decline of genius, even as the target audience is lost because of changing sensibilities. As Kitching puts it pithily, Goldsmith’s cosmopolitanism exudes an “air of defeated inevitability.”

A similar perspective of defeatism is discovered through counterfactual history in Laura Rosenthal’s reading of Sophia Lee and Samuel Jackson Pratt. Rosenthal documents the beginning of a trend of nostalgic counterfactualism involving tales of other places and times that would become much more widespread in the nineteenth century among Romanticists in Scotland as well as in India, featuring stalwarts such as Walter Scott and Bankimchandra Chatterjee.<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal shows the unusual collocation of slave resistance alongside the recuperation of Scottish nationalism by Lee through the figures of the lost daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots, as well as the refashioning of comic butts through characters such as “Hannah Bananah” in Pratt’s farce. The crowning of Matilda as “the Queen of Sorrow” in Lee’s novel is a prototype of sentimentalism and also nostalgically imagines redemption through the unpromising emotional materials of doom, dread, and victimization. Rosenthal indicates how much modern slavery was also being reinterpreted as “Gothic,” helped no doubt by the perception that “unenlightened” institutions had to be interpreted as “antique” in their origin, especially as they defied alternative beliefs in rationality and individual freedom. If “there was something medieval about the colonial project” as Rosenthal avers, it comes from the political and conceptual unification of slavery and despotism. Matthew Lewis’s journal of his plantation holding in Jamaica along with his authoring of a major Gothic novel could be brought into further conversation with

16 For my interpretation of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World*, see Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 97–101.

17 For the case of Bankim, the “Scott of Bengal,” see Aravamudan, *Guru English*, 69–77.

Rosenthal's article, as could recent studies of this rich confusion in eighteenth-century France by Doris Garraway and Madeleine Dobie.<sup>18</sup> It remains debatable whether these materials fashion a truly discrepant cosmopolitanism of transcolonial solidarities across imperial divisions, as Rosenthal suggests, or whether they fabricate obscurantist dead ends of Romantic nostalgia and alienated parody. However, it is always worth hypothesizing about earlier hypotheses, however discrepant, counterfactual, and non-allochronic, to reimagine worlds outside the strait-jacket of national realism.

Fuson Wang's reading of Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* explores yet another manner in which cosmopolitanism is not so much a successful vantage point as a step away from nationalist assimilation. Eschewing the nationalist-oriented politics of action and revindication, cosmopolitanism reveals itself as a philosophy of mediation. Whether a theoretical cosmopolitanism from above, of the Kantian variety, or an embodied cosmopolitanism from below, garnered from practical experience, the vantage point of cosmopolitanism is a place of the refusal of familiar solidarities and its rearticulation in relation to a larger world. Finding in the character of Erasmus Bethel a surrogate of Edmund Burke (given the common initials), Wang sees Bethel as a mediator who takes the debate away from the pamphlet wars between Burke, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Paine, and Price that dominated the British reaction to the French Revolution. While Smith was definitely on the progressive side of the British response, her careful refashioning of the Burke-like figure is a cosmopolitan "third way" of sorts, imagining a position that avoided the sterile clash between English radicalism and Burke's reaction. As Wang puts it in measured tones, "Smith (via Bethel) offers us the necessary counterpoint to the brash radicalism of youthful revolution; rather than violence, she offers measured conversion, and rather than mere responsibility, she demands judicious integration." Wang finds an alternative for the cosmopolitan as an enduring rather than a vanishing mediator. Through Rosenthal's, Kitching's and Wang's cosmopolitan triptych, we find at one extreme Lee's counterfactual history that hopes to

18 Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Madeleine Dobie, *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

rewrite existing dispensations; at another extreme, Goldsmith's conservative retreat from the public sphere; and as a *via media*, Smith's dispassionate alternative that refuses to embrace either progress or reaction.

Having discussed six essays: three that lean towards analyses of exoticism and three that explore more fully the possibilities held out by cosmopolitanism, the remainder of my response concerns the two articles that communicate to some degree the equally unsteady but necessary traffic between both terms. Ingvild Kjørholt's reading of Voltaire's heady combination of exoticism and cosmopolitanism in *Candide* brings in the logic of cynical diminution, a favourite of Voltaire's, maybe a dog-eat-dog level up from Yang's study of the exoticist interest in canine miniatures. Parody, explored by several of the contributors to this special issue, works by exacerbating and ridiculing incongruities of scale, as we know from probably the most famous satirical work of all time, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a reflection on the dead end of exoticism through Gulliver's curious acquisitions from his various voyages. *Gulliver's Travels* also performs the unavailability of the cosmopolitan position at the satire's end, when Gulliver's insanity results from the inassimilability of the stark binary between Houyhnhnm and Yahoo that he hopes to transcend. Scale becomes a method for Swift, as it does for Voltaire in shorter satires such as *Micromégas*, even as this device is a frequent favourite for Voltaire's attempt to describe the Earth as an insignificant speck, a diminutive "globule" full of warring humans, no different than insects when seen from a cosmic scale.<sup>19</sup> Smallness at the infinitesimal level creates insignificance, but also a supplementary aversion, leading to a misanthropic disappointment that fills the space of humanist aspiration that has just been evacuated. At the same time, as Kjørholt shows, Voltaire features the discrepancy of historically different situations—the incommensurability between different cosmopolitanisms, and also different systems of slavery. The cosmopolitan is the philosophical product of the Enlightenment par excellence, even as the slave is its capitalist outcome. Both figures are each other's specular opposite: the cosmopolitan hovers above the globe in the ether, unwilling to be identified with any single locale or polity,

19 For my interpretation of Jonathan Swift's and Voltaire's fables, see Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 140–59.

the omnivoyant philosophe of Abbé de Raynal's Enlightenment best-seller *Histoire des deux Indes*, even as the slave labours in chains on the ground in an alien land, the single best example of historically enforced cosmopolitan alienation by empirical experience. Taking the genre of the moral *conte* as her illustration, Kjørholt spells out the two forms of cosmopolitan belonging exemplified by the European world traveller who sees the world as exotic and by the African slave who experiences the world as cosmopolitan. Candide, the cosmopolitan title character who loves mankind, and who synonymizes optimism, is also a send-up for the blindness of one kind of exoticizing cosmopolitan, who experiences the world and retires from it into cultivating his garden, even as the true cosmopolitans are conscripts, such as the slaves and the prostitutes who remain the collateral damage and the refuse of that world, and who cannot escape from it into any philosophical refuge. From refuge to refuse, this powerful reading of Voltaire pits one type of cosmopolitanism against another, multiplying the levels of cynicism available to the observer: in order to examine that world, Voltaire sows the wind of cosmopolitanism and yet reaps a whirlwind filled with the overwhelming detritus of colonial exoticism. If one reading of *Candide* implies that the sordid nature of reality leads humankind to prefer detachment to engagement, such a resultant cosmopolitanism might be accused of being an escape from commitment as much as exoticism might be a dangerous lurch towards it. Voltaire leads us to the point of acknowledging that there are never any philosophically grounded certainties.

Focusing on the eighteenth century's aspirational beginnings, Edward Kozaczka departs from conventional readings of Penelope Aubin's conservative piety to make a case for the alternative depiction of sexuality as a tropicopolitan outcome to nascent British imperialism in her fictions. By way of classical allusions and innovative plots, Aubin finds geographical refuge to explore the alternatives engendered by the female public sphere. Through *Count de Vinevil* and *Lucinda*, Kozaczka shows Aubin to be interested in gender-bending and imperial heterotopias wherein accountability is not required. Alternative sexualities are suggested through imaginative hybridization with harems. We can point out additional examples for cross-fertilization with Aubin's: Gabriel de Brémond's *Hattigé*, Mary Wortley Montagu's experiences in Turkey, or Denis Diderot's fictionalization of anthropologies of

sexuality in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*.<sup>20</sup> Sexuality as the realm of discovery makes for a different account of sovereignty, where transition from one mode of being to another is situated in relation to the sexualized ontology of individual experience. In the manner of Daniel Defoe, Aubin reveals a great discrepancy between her prefaces and her plots, and we read the prefaces as a circumvention of censorship even while the plots tell the true story. Here is scope for an autopoiesis that puts exoticism and cosmopolitanism together in a liberatory register, seeking the process I had discussed as “levantinization” in relation to Montagu in an earlier study.<sup>21</sup> Kozaczka explores Aubin’s fictions of empire as a pretext for a special form of fiction, not so much bound by cultural nationalist norms and aspirations, but oriented towards virtualities that were radically indeterminate. Rather than seeking active and dynamic agency in classic Enlightenment fashion, Aubin’s characters fade away into the margins of empire’s literary interzones.

A somewhat contagious transfer of open-endedness occurs from Aubin’s reveries to Kozaczka’s interpretation of them and then on to our appreciation of this interstitial form of hermeneutic freedom. Might exoticism as escape mechanism fashion the tools for our liberation from what is now seen as the eighteenth century’s colonialist, economic, and ethnocentric clutches? The necessary critique of ethnocentric stereotypes has also led, perhaps as an unintended consequence, to a certain squelching of what was potentially radical in exoticism, a process that *could* undermine—rather than predictably reinforce—power relations, as Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins suggests by way of Victor Segalen’s unfinished study of exoticism in her introduction.<sup>22</sup> There is a progressive remainder within exoticism that can only be found when the conceptual cluster it represents is released from the clutches of colonialism and commodity culture and oriented towards what Segalen hoped for as a true aesthetics of epistemological and ontological diversity, a source of all energy. What was most exciting about exoticism then—and to the degree that it exists

20 For interpretations of *Hattigé*, see Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 205–10; and on *Bijoux indiscrets*, see *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 187–201.

21 On Montagu and levantinization, see Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 159–89.

22 Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*, trans. and ed. Yaël Rachel Schlick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

today in a world that knows no outside—was/is the desire for an elsewhere. By attempting to escape from the clutches of domestic accountability exoticism rejects confinement by the category that Elizabeth Povinelli has called the (t)autological subject.<sup>23</sup> In wishing for Utopian possibilities, whether sexual, gustatory, aesthetic, or experiential, the exoticist could be much more than just an unreconstructed racist. Exoticism sought a brave new world that would open itself up to pleasure and even danger, but ideally without responsibility and without violence, indeed also through the world of fiction for which the eighteenth century is best known. Is it possible to make a case for eighteenth-century “immaturity” and “irresponsibility,” maybe a queer-oriented advocacy for exoticism as a desirably “infantile” cosmopolitanism? We might say that a nascent cosmopolitanism exists in proto-exoticism, one of heterocosmic desire untrammelled by this-worldly responsibility, not a cosmopolitanism of philosophy or politics at all, but a polymorphous perversity of infantile play and queer excess, something that the libertine, the deviant, and the hedonist might have sought, but that encapsulates within its dictates the aspirations of a child in a world that was too much in the throes of becoming adult. If the Enlightenment subject was undergoing the process of emerging from “his self-incurred immaturity” as Immanuel Kant opines in his manifesto, “What is Enlightenment?,” exoticism beckons the subject away from that teleology towards delicious pleasures, and perhaps even a future to come.<sup>24</sup> As James Clifford puts it, through a careful reading of the post-Orientalist theory of exoticism propagated by Segalen, “when ‘the coefficient of weirdness’ floats free from ‘the coefficient of reality,’ the result is a new sort of exoticism.”<sup>25</sup> Eighteenth-century fiction was a vehicle for those weirdnesses that preceded the functionalization of exoticism in the service of colonial rule by full-blown Orientalism. There were some early Enlightenment “exots,” such as Behn, Swift, Montagu, Voltaire, and Diderot, who prefigured Segalen’s theorization in their practices, acting out

23 Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

24 Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.

25 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 151.

singularities and eccentricities towards uncertain horizons, given that “Exoticism and Individualism are *complementary*.”<sup>26</sup>

What is fiction, if it is not a vehicle for the imagination of weirdness? A simple reversal here: rather than accuse exotic fictions of fanciful escapism or colonial violence and promote domestic novels as political manifestoes of realist progress, what if we abandoned the unrelenting focus on domestic fiction and instead embraced the power of exotic tales? The universalism behind cosmopolitanism also represents a kind of smugness, at bottom a happy disenchantment arising from the fact that the earth is round. As Segalen puts it dramatically, if slightly inaccurately, “On a spherical surface, to leave one point is already to begin *to draw closer to it!* The sphere is Monotony ... this is where tourism began. From the moment man realized the world was a sphere.”<sup>27</sup> Unfair indeed, as cosmopolitanism might be more than tourism; nonetheless, it introduces the idea of commensurability, drawing principles and properties of nonlocal situations together to create detached synthesis. The “exot,” however, seeks an experience that is neither the lover’s nor the ascetic’s, revelling in strong interaction but not fusion and emphasizing incommensurability.

If there was not the touristic urge to return home, something that Segalen puts down to the discovery of the spherical surface of the earth itself, Gulliver might happily get lost in the South Seas, rather than return as the insane British Yahoo in the fourth voyage; Montagu might stay on forever in Istanbul as she clearly ought to have done, given how much she thought back to those moments as the high point of her life; and Candide need not have returned to his periphrastic garden but could have sorted out Surinam. *The Arabian Nights* as action fiction would rule this alternative vision of the eighteenth century, rather than the subjective morass that is *Pamela* or *Émile*. Counterfactual fictions here, even more than counterfactual histories, imply exotic trajectories and cosmopolitan outcomes, and maybe counterfactual literary history would be asymptotic rather than spherical in Segalen’s sense, following the narrative tangents that were not taken but that were implicit in the fictional universe in which readers immersed themselves. Combined with exploring the

26 Segalen, 21.

27 Segalen, 43.

unexplained disappearance of many national subjects, the world as reconfigured by its “exots” would be a storehouse of not quite cosmopolitan fictions and persons, rather than one that stayed obsessed with the discipline and discourse of history as the sole testimonial for the imagination of the nation within the banality of modern life that excludes alien sensibilities. And if the most exotic of those fictions were given full licence, the unassimilated persons within the nation’s borders would be retroactively transformed into “exots” rather than exoticists. The nationalists would have to risk, as in some apocalyptic narratives, being left behind.

