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Budapest, 2023. 04. 19.

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ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*Haywood és Reeve: A keleti nő archetípusa a nyugati
irodalom képzeletében*
*Haywood and Reeve: Oriental Female Archetype in the
Occidental Literary Imagination*

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Haywood and Reeve: Oriental Female Archetype in the Occidental Literary Imagination

1. INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century witnessed, for the first time, the emergence of the “Orient” as a literary motif in English literature. Although Eastern themes were not an entirely new phenomenon within the English literary discourse, especially in regard to travel literature, it was only in the eighteenth century that the Oriental vogue came to preside over the literary, cultural, and artistic movements all across Europe. This is largely attributed to the translation of the Arabic tales *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* into French *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1704–1717) by Antoine Galland, at the beginning of the century. The French translation was a huge success across Europe and was immediately translated into English as *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* (1706–1721) by the anonymous “Grub Street” translator. The translations soon became key texts pivotal in literalising the Orient for the European imagination, providing a rich literary resource for English authors. The excessive exoticisation of Oriental people(s) and cultures within these discourses cemented their *Otherisation* and contributed to their dehumanisation.

Given that the Orient itself was largely a product of the Occidental imagination, it can be contended that it was reshaped and redefined through English literature to serve various purposes. This paper examines how Eliza Haywood’s *The Adventures of Eovaai: Princess of Ijaveo* and Clara Reeve’s *The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt* underscore that women in the eighteenth century found female fantasy and freedom in the alterity of the Orient realm. These assertions signpost that an inevitable association existed between the Orient and the exotic, which included a derogatory aspect, and as such, all that was forbidden and considered subversive in the *proper* English society found its way seamlessly in the “savage narrative.”

The imagined identification with the Orient gave effortless expression to English female authors through the archetypes of odalisques, conniving enchantresses, and amoral

queens. The following thesis explores the use of these Oriental female archetypes consciously constructed through the Occidental literary imagination.

2. ORIENTALISM

Before this paper posits its proposed thesis, a brief examination of the term, “Orientalism,” is needed, upon which the ideological framework of this paper is premised. Ascribing a singular meaning to the term would only further augment the annals of historical biases that aimed at, and succeeded, in reducing vast peoples and their cultures to a large abstract category. Described by Edward Said as “western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3), Orientalism could exist in as many forms as the Orient or the Oriental was experienced. European Orientalists—usually self-commissioned—including authoritative figures, such as Sir John Mandeville, Robert Orme, Sir William Jones, and Charles Wilkins, have a long history of probing and prodding into the idea of the Orient with a curiosity dating as far back as antiquity. Orientalism was dubbed as “an organised science” (49) and approached by Orientalists with a determination befitting the task. However, it failed to ascertain a decisive veridic discourse, since the entire construct of the Orient was purely imaginative: undefined by geographical limits, somewhere between blurred lines of the vast and formidable East, unknown and boundless, shaped and imagined by one traveller, only to be reshaped and reimagined by another, until it became an exhaustive entertainment and a common preoccupation for the average European historian, traveller, or chronicler (Said 50). To attribute this to a faltering of the methods that European Orientalists employed would be to discredit their relentless efforts in consciously devising, dissecting, dividing, and consequently dominating the Orient. Their study was disciplined—perhaps even regulated—and although the seeming goal of unearthing the *truth* of the Orient was defeated, the actual aim of this

“hardly innocent scholarly endeavour” (Said 333) was aptly fulfilled in conceptualising and conveying the Oriental as the *Other*.

The Orient was a place of Europe’s oldest colonies, sharing the history of an antagonising relationship, especially in the context of post-Crusades Europe. A blanket term for the multiple locales of Egypt, Persia, India, Turkey, and China amongst others, the Orient evoked turbulent and recurring epithets of the Other: the Saracen, turbans, odalisque, Arabian Nights, magic flutes, and the Koran. The Oriental became the ultimate cultural contestant, who spoke a different language, practiced a different religion, and posed a threat to all that was familiar and safe—in other words, all that represented the European way of life. The Occident’s attempt at studying and documenting the Orient (the Other, the opposite, the threat), resulted in the emergence and documentation of the Occidental identity itself (Kabbani 10). It is within these doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental where “an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident” (Said 2) is delineated. This distinction between the antithetical positioning of the *west* against the *rest* is further demarcated through the fantastical portrayals of the Orient as a place of “romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences” (Said 1). This paper views “Orientalism” repurposed in its imperialist context, where the Orient came to be a product of Occidental reimagining, reinventing, and restructuring to “cater to the needs of sedentary audiences desiring depictions of the extraordinary” (Kabbani 3).

3. THE SAVAGE NARRATIVE

Occidental literary imagination fashioned a mosaic of totalising assumptions about the vast expanse of the Orient, depicting visceral portrayals of the marvels of the East, and perhaps more importantly, its monstrosities. These abstractions were built on inherited ideas, creating a timeless narrative outside of history, affixed in an immutable stagnancy, void of any inner

capacity to voice a change. Red rising mists in deserts to fortune-telling eunuchs, the extraordinary accounts of travellers and tradesmen gathered across centuries were by no means lacking in their fantastical scope. Yet, despite their dazzling array of diversity, they regurgitated with an exacting singularity a repertory of replicated images, culminating in the construction of “the savage narrative.” It is important to distinguish the term “savage narrative” from “Oriental tale”, which though often used interchangeably, here connote two very distinct meanings. The savage narrative focalises white European males’ perspective and the subsequent narration of the Orient as primitive and barbaric, whereas the Oriental tale is a much more neutral term and doesn’t necessarily include derogatory aspects which came to be associated with the Orient.

Shakespeare’s Othello referred to as a “Barbary horse,” Massinger’s synonymous use of the words “Tartar” and “cannibal” in *The Great Duke of Florence* (1636), and Dekker’s *Honest Whore* (1604) describing the Turk’s facial features to be “uglier than a dead man’s skull”—all rehearse the savage aspects of the *Orient Other*, which inextricably linked the Oriental (person) with deformity and deviancy. The Saracen were often likened to the Cynocephali, portrayed as someone ugly, dog-headed, and bestial (Friedman 65). The association between the Oriental person and beasts further cemented their *Otherisation*. This literary *topos* was also reflected in the works of renowned Orientalist painters from the eighteenth century. For instance, Johan Zoffany’s painting, *Colonel Blair with his family and an Indian Ayah* (1786), depicts the young *ayah*¹ in the corner of the room, barefooted, and coupled with the family pets. Continuing this mode of representation in the nineteenth century, *The Snake Charmer* (1879) by Jean-Léon Gérôme portrays a young boy standing naked with only a snake coiled around his body for covering and entertaining a group of elderly men. In the same vein, *Selling a Slave Boy* (1872) by Vasily Vereschagin depicts the image of a bare-

¹ In Urdu language, “ayah” refers to housemaid.

backed young boy being inspected by elderly religious men holding a *tasbih*.² Jean Joseph Benjamin-Constant's painting, *A Royal Palace in Morocco* (1880), shows the exotic and wild Cheetah held on a leash by a woman (possibly a lady-in-waiting) inside the walls of the seraglio, for the entertainment of the multiple wives and concubines of the Sultan, who gaze upon the restrained animal with interest and curiosity. Ironically, these women were in a similar fashion the entertainment for the Sultan, and in turn, served the purposes of satisfying his curiosities and sexual ardours. These images were equally literalised, furthering the savage narrative; depicting the self-indulgent stupor of endless pleasures the bestial nature of the Oriental plunged him into; where neither boy nor animal were spared from the virulence of the Oriental's sexual appetite, luxury, and degeneracy. A description by Scottish painter David Roberts further elucidates this depiction: "the barbarism of the Muslim creed . . . as savage as wild animals by which they are surrounded. Often have I gazed on them till my heart actually sickened within me" (qtd. in Ballantine and Roberts 104). These exaggerated and excessively exoticised accounts constructed and conveyed the Oriental (person) as the Other.

The hot climate of the East further fuelled the polemic that the Orientals were a licentious and lewd race, incapable of governing their "hot-blooded" sexual instincts (Daniel, *Islam, and the West* 270). This lasciviousness and brutality were articulated by a particular tale in vogue around the mid-seventeenth century, where a Turkish Sultan falls in love with a slave-girl and abandons all affairs of state to lie in her caresses (Daniel, *Islam, Europe, and Empire* 18). Advised by his ministers to prepare for the approaching battle, he disregards them, disapproving of their meddling into his private matters. One evening, he bids his mistress to dress in the most splendid and revealing silks and greet him at the banquet, where in front of all his courtiers, he first lavishes her with provocative kisses and embraces and, then, abruptly draws his sword and cuts her head off and marches to battle. Another account follows that he

² In Arabic language, "tasbih" refers to a string of beads used by Muslims for recitations and prayer.

bids his ministers instead to enter his bedchamber, where upon lifting the bedclothes on his command, they find both lovers in the intimate state of copulation. The Sultan, having displayed the naked charms of his mistress to his ministers, stabs her to death and marches to battle.

In a similarly disturbing account, Sir George Courthope detailed a voluptuous scene from the palace grounds in Constantinople around the mid-seventeenth century:

Here he putteth in his Concubines stark naked and shooteth at them with certain pellets that stick upon them without any damage to their bodies. And sometimes he lets the water in such abundance upon them . . . that being above their heights they all bob up and down for life; and when his pleasure is satisfied with the sport, he lets down the water, and calls the Eunuchs who wait upon his women, to fetch them out if alive. (123)

Portraying the Turkish Sultan as a temperamental degenerate categorised the most esteemed and powerful of the Orientals as debased and beyond redemption. This carried dire consequences for ordinary Orientals, who were viewed as a lesser reflection of their aristocratic superiors, and were deemed even more corruptible. These accounts were by no means isolated occurrences and were often purposefully coloured by travellers with exaggerated fantasies and fabrications of their foreign escapades to entertain their male compatriots back home (Kabbani 18). The artistic and literary depictions of the Orientals as sexual fiends, usually paired with animals, portrayed them as instinctual, barbaric, and primitive beings, who could not be trusted to govern themselves. These ideas were promulgated across centuries in various forms, but the message remained the same: the Calibans of the New World had to be tamed. This continued polemic led to a seamless stitch-up of a narrative regarding the savage, where Enlightenment

idealism compelled Europeans to embark upon *mission civilisatrice*³ and do the thinking for the Oriental as he could not think for himself. Their motives, of course, maintained an honorary guise of enlightening the savage, and the aim to subdue and subjugate the native through colonial dispossession and resource exploitation remained hidden and unaddressed for the greater part of history.

4. ESSENTIALISING THE SUBALTERN

The projection of blame upon marginal groups for society's ills has historically been an effective tool of social control orchestrated by the ones in positions of privilege and power. The patriarchal set-up and imperialist enterprise of English society made convenient scapegoats out of women and Orientals. Similar to the grave mischaracterisations of the Orientals in the savage narrative, women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came to be associated with "sexual rapaciousness, cannibalism, consorting with evil spirits, and being generally intractable and capricious" (Kabbani 5). "The articulation of sexism . . . went hand in hand with the articulation of racism" (Kabbani 7), with women being treated as a sub-group in patriarchal English society, just as other races were treated as sub-groups under the colonial regime.

The overarching homogenising and gendering of the East rendered it feminine: "passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious, and tempting," whereas the West was thought of as masculine: "active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled, and ascetic" (McLeod 42). This is further evidenced in the use of highly sexualised descriptions found in Western travelogues of the East, where the masculine coloniser is "seduced by the passions and promise" of the feminine East, and he endeavours to "penetrate, possess, and cultivate" the

³ The "civilising mission" was a political rationale for military intervention to colonise and westernise indigenous peoples, especially in the period from the 15th to the 20th centuries.

fertile territories, “ravishing” their mysterious charms, and “domesticating their wildernesses” (McLeod 42). The eighteenth century also produced multiple medical discourses which further consolidated the link between women and Oriental peoples by finding in women “the qualities of children and *primitives*” (Schiebinger 46, emphasis added). German physician Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring concluded that the “Negro was somewhat nearer the ape, particularly in respect to the brain, than the European” (14), positioning Oriental races at the far bottom of the chimerical hierarchy. Based on methods deemed unscientific by today’s standards, Soemmerring’s findings aided the process of essentialising the Orientals and women as the subaltern: primitive, hysterical, monstrous, irrational, unreliable, emotionally immature, physically underdeveloped, and sexually overheated. These vague abstractions and large generalisations made it easier for them to be de-personalised and categorised under a sub-group identity, and consequently be controlled by the hegemony of European white males.

5. STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM

Coined by Gayatri Spivak in 1984, the term, “strategic essentialism,” was used in a modern and political context. However, this paper borrows the term and (re)positions it retrospectively in the eighteenth-century context of English female authors strategising the essentialism and the consequent lumping together of women and the Orientals by the patriarchal English society. Through their writings, authors, such as Eliza Haywood, Frances Sheridan, Cornelia Knight, Clara Reeve, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu amongst others, cultivated the fabled common ground women shared with the Orient. Whether any real congruity existed between the experiences of Englishwomen and Orientals did not bear any significant relevance: the imagined identification with the Oriental archetype—that in turn was just as imaginary a construct—allowed freedom of expression that had up until that point been denied to women. In fact, Ros Ballaster argues that it was precisely the “distance and disengagement” (6) of a far

foreign land which was crucial in conjuring “new visions” of female fantasy in the illicit scape of the Levant.

The Occidental male gaze feminised the Oriental identity—deeming it inherently sensuous, secretive, and senseless. Categorised as subalterns, both women and Orientals received the same treatment of being mystified, eroticised, toyed with, side-lined, objectified, tabooed, and coveted. In a classic example of turning “weakness resourcefully . . . into advantage” (Ballaster 6), English female authors, for their gain, used this shared grievance: availing the alterity and metaphor of the Orient as an opportunity for subversive expression(s). What was deemed improper for an Englishwoman in the eighteenth century was perfectly acceptable for a black-tongued Odalisque, a conniving *Zōstē patrikia*,⁴ or a snake-charming enchantress of the Sultan’s court. The source of all these emancipatory conduits was the key text, *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah*, which first entered the European imagination through Antoine Galland’s French translation, *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1704–1717). It was hugely popular and immediately translated into English as *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* (1706–1721) by the anonymous “Grub Street” translator. These tales entered the English literary discourse at a time when Romanticism was in literary vogue. This further fostered the Eastern themes, with popular Romanticism works, such as *Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford and *Kubla Khan* (1797) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, amongst numerous others, who sought to trace a muse in the sublimated locales of the Orient. Entering the English shores through France, the tales had become “hybrid commodities,” echoing erotic elements of the eastern harem as much as the *précieuse* of the French salon (Ballaster 4). These continental European affinities added further allure to the exotic tales and completely engrossed the English reader, owing to their culturally nuanced character.

⁴ The chief lady-in-waiting to the Empress.

Although the Oriental vogue had gripped Europe, the adoption of Oriental motifs by female authors had more to it than the simple following of a literary trend. This is amply evidenced in the culturally significant periodical, the *Female Spectator*, founded by Haywood and generally considered to be the first female-led periodical in English history. The periodical acted as a precursor to the eighteenth-century movement of female authors writing female-centric literature, majorly intended for, and consumed by a female audience. Although the *Spectator's* success was short-lived, its influence, however, was not. *The Ladies Magazine: or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* (1770–1832), aimed at promoting a similar agenda, soon followed pursuit and continued publication with an enduring popularity for six more decades. It frequented the genre of the “Oriental Tale” featuring eastern travelogues and translations of Arabian and Persian literature (Batchelor 1). *The Ladies Magazine's* first two volumes alone contained a total of 36 Oriental tales. Given it was “supplied entirely by female pens” (Batchelor 4) with most of the readership comprising of females, it shows how the Orient came to preside over the female fantasy, and in turn became its prized possession.

The periodical culture of eighteenth-century England, with its female-centrism, intertwined with the frequent use of Oriental motifs, establishes that there was a conscious construction of an English female identity through the metaphor of the Orient, to give platform to subversive female expression(s). Female authors, such as, Eliza Haywood and Clara Reeve, consciously laboured to craft a female identity out of the Arabian literary scape, where lay “the magic of being able to imagine oneself into the role of multiple others” (Ballaster 6). The crisis and conflict of the female experience which Haywood and Reeve hoped to convey found literary expression through its similitudes with the Oriental female archetypes, which amply appeared in *The Ladies Magazine* and in other works relating the Orient. The genius of their craft was not wholly original, nor was it an isolated occurrence. It followed in the silent trend

of many others, who only through a retrospective study of the eighteenth-century literary scape have emerged as the pioneers of a movement which is still for the most part unrecognised.

6. THE ORIENTAL FEMALE ARCHETYPES

The formidable yet fascinating portrayals of the East plunged the Oriental identity into a bottomless pit of depravity, from which Eliza Haywood and Clara Reeve fashioned a rich resource for their literary exploits. It was here, in the far and foreign realm of the East, that all secret and strange passions were not only permissible but also paraded. This provocation is personified in Eovaai, the protagonist of Haywood's tale, *Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo: A Pre-Adamatical History* (1736), and in Charoba, the protagonist of Reeve's short tale, *The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt, According to the Traditions of the Arabians* (1785). Both tales share stark similarities, with the female protagonist of each being a young maiden who inherits her father's crown and becomes a ruler in her own right, entering womanhood through a journey of self-discovery, where various threats personified as male love interests come to challenge her autonomy. After all losses incurred, each heroine emerges a mistress of her own fate.

In both works, we encounter a "female cult"—feminine flaws and strengths personified in the female protagonists and peripheral characters, each of whom narrates her tale, self-fashioning an introspective private memoir, like that of Scheherazade's from *Arabian Nights*. Where Scheherazade's agency of tongue spares her neck from the executioner's blade every day, the female characters in both these tales similarly come to convey the potency of having a voice. Although both protagonists are queens and afforded empowering portrayals, their voices do not serve the purpose of elevating the female experience only. They equally articulate the folly of desperate measures, violent passions, and endless vices the characters partake in, providing a holistic and truthful account of their person(s). The commitment to paint the reality

of female experiences, specifically the tabooed ones, through a female protagonist, surrounded and supported by female characters, and penned by a female author, was a momentous step in English literary history—to say the least. It went against the tide of social, medical, and literary discourses, mostly dictated by men, which sought to castigate and invalidate the female voice.

The imagined identification of the English authors with the Oriental archetype was precisely premised upon their contrapuntal coexistence. The Oriental archetype, being an Occidental construct, reflected what was lacking in the English society. The appeal for Haywood and Reeve lay in fashioning an identity out of the malleable, shape-shifting Orient. From bull sacrifices and hidden treasures under mausoleums in *Charoba* to a carriage flown by doves in *Eovaii*, the magical Levant offered an escape into literary novelties, where the extraordinary became the metaphor for the most ordinary.

6.1 THE DEFIANT DAUGHTER

The *Treatise on The Education of Daughters* (1687), a pioneering text on female instruction and upbringing, summarily posed the question “why make [women] learned?” (qtd. in Jones 102). Fenelon’s comments embodied the general eighteenth-century attitude towards female education. A woman’s place was by the hearth, and her foremost duty as a maiden was to her father, and after marriage, to her husband. This eighteenth-century English archetype of a dutiful daughter and wife is contested in *Eovaii* and *Charoba*. Initially, both characters are portrayed as compliant daughters—motherless and entirely dependent upon their father’s wisdom and guidance. But as the tales progress, this father-daughter dynamic drastically changes. It may be argued, that it is perhaps to heighten their ultimate defiance of the older dominating male figure that we are at first given such pliant portrayals of their girlhood.

Fenelon’s advice that “we should be on our guard not to make [women] ridiculously learned” (qtd. in Jones 102) is disregarded in *Eovaii*, where “virtues of the Mind were what

[her father] laboured to inculcate” employing “no Masters expert in the Arts of Singing, Dancing, Playing on the Musick, or any other the like Modes of accomplishing young Ladies” (3). Instead, Eojaeu, King of Ijaveo and father to Eovaai, regularly instructed his daughter in statecraft and had her assiduously repeat his words back to him. Her early upbringing defied traditional gender norms, as women were not expected to step out of the safe confines of their homes, let alone govern entire kingdoms.

Much later in the tale, we see a greater dissent in Eovaai’s character following her father’s death. In a perilous course of events, she is tricked by Ochihatou, the power-hungry minister of Hypotofa and an expert necromancer, into falling in love with him. Eovaai disregards her late father’s teachings and the advice of his learned ministers, declaring a passion for Ochihatou, “despis[ing] the lessons of her youth” (41), which had burdened her with a duty she did not choose. She questions the knowledge imparted to her by her father and abhors the notion of having inherited his ideas, without forming any of her own:

. . . she thought all the Time lost, which she had spent in endeavouring to subdue her Passions, and the Pains she had been at for that purpose, an Injustice to herself. —Not all the principles of Religion and Morality, given her by Eojaeu, not a long Habitude of Virtue, nor the natural Modesty of her Sex, had power to stem the Torrent of Libertinism, that now overwhelm’d her Soul. (46)

Although, she ultimately regains her crown and kingdom, it is not before she travels to various kingdoms, observing and learning their ways of life and journeying through the desert without food or water, that she willingly takes charge of what she considers her destiny—firstly asserting that she has one—rather than blindly submit to the duty passed on to her by her father. Where the traditional eighteenth-century trajectory of a woman’s role as a daughter is to transition into her role as a wife, Eovaai defies the expectation of domestic duty by stepping out of her role as a daughter into that of an explorer, traveller, adventurer, and most scandalous

of all: a passionate lover. Her libertine phase equally defies the domestic conclusion of marriage. Instead of a “ruined woman,” she emerges a learned, matured, and experienced woman from her failed romantic escapades, possessing agency and wisdom. At the end, when she does marry, it is not for convention nor out of duty, but for desire and choice.

Eovaai’s defiance is further symbolised through Oriental motifs present in the tale. Totems and talismans appear frequently in the *Arabian Nights*, conveying the magical allures of the East. Traditionally, these objects were rendered conduits of intentions and energies, at times personified by a *genii*. In *Aladdin*, the wish-granting magic lantern is symbolic of this possession. Similarly, in Haywood’s tale, Eojaeu gives Eovaai a carcanet, “a jewel worth more than ten thousand empires,” which she is advised to wear around her neck at all times if she wishes to maintain her kingdom. The word carcanet comes from the French word *carcan* meaning “iron collar.” The jewel symbolised her father’s wishes and teachings, which may have been suffocating to Eovaai—the way an iron collar would be. And it is only once the jewel is lost, shortly after her father’s death, that Eovaai is liberated—mentally and physically—to introspect, defy the counsel of her father’s advisors, and journey into the outside and unfamiliar world. The Oriental practice of bejewelling women with family heirlooms, symbolic of family values, bound women to their domestic role and duty. Eovaai’s lack of regard for the carcanet, and its eventual loss, symbolises her defiance and abandonment of her role as her father’s dutiful daughter.

In Reeve’s tale, Charoba, the only daughter of the Egyptian King Totis is brought up in a similar fashion of being trained to inherit her father’s crown and rule over a kingdom. Diligent in her duty to her father, the people and the crown, the tale begins with a description of her hospitality to her father’s guests, lavishing them with generous gifts. This portrayal of a loving and obliging daughter is quickly turned when the King grows cruel and suspicious with age and begins to suspect and murder those around him. Her commitment to her duty—not her

domestic duty as a daughter—but her duty towards her people as their future sovereign, compels Charoba to kill her father: “it was surmised that she contrived at the conspiracy against [Totis’] life; for he was poisoned, but no man knew by what means, or by what persons” (113).

She similarly defies the expectation to marry. When pursued by Gebirus, the king of Gadites, she delays his marriage proposal through various plots, at last resorting to his murder, despite his multiple peace offerings and compliance with all the terms of her treaty. In his dying moment, Charoba reminds him “this is the fate of such men as would compel Queens to marry them, and kingdoms to receive them for their Kings” (132). She then had Gebirus’ ending written on palace pillars, inspiring awe and fear wherever her tale travelled. In her echoes the despotic craft of Cleopatra and the “noble ruin of her magic” (Kabbani 32). This affinity is further asserted in the circumstances surrounding Charoba’s death. She dies from the poison of an accidental snakebite, similar to the fabled account of Cleopatra’s suicide from a poisonous snake bite. Upon her deathbed, true till death to her defiance of traditional roles, she dies a virgin, not having married or borne a son to take her place. Instead, she chooses her kinswoman Dalica as her successor, who continues her legacy in a vastly prosperous female-led empire—signifying the unconventional as the ideal, in this case.

6.2 THE SENSUAL WOMAN

The eighteenth century witnessed a whirlwind of conflicting discourses regarding female sexuality. The dichotomous traffic between “women as angels and women as whores” (Jones 57) easily turned *vulnerability* into *culpability*. It took away all agency from the female body ascribing it “a passively functional role” and “a natural modesty” owing to their “angelical natures” (Jones 59). Alternatively, it violently countered this docile asexuality with maxims such as: “every woman is at heart a rake.” Dwelling on two extremes, the conduct ideology dictated that the profligate potential of the “aberrant and mysterious” (Jones 58) sexuality be

realised and restrained through restrictive measures. The idea of the *naïve* young maiden, the *ruined* woman, the *exploitative* man—all endeavoured to inculcate “morals” into society through a demonised depiction of sexuality. The women in eighteenth-century English society had very little opportunity to contribute to this discourse. Retaining a sense of sexual expectancy from the East, Haywood and Reeve turned to its exotic scape to embody what was forbidden in elegant English identity. The thousand and one reveries and the “all-invasive seraglio with its crimes of passion” (Kabbani 22) forged the female Oriental archetype of “the sensual woman.”

When Eovaai realises Ochihatou’s passion for her, she weaponises her sexuality—her only viable asset—by making a titillating sport of it. She refuses him, aware that it is her denial that holds power over him, and her submission would render her completely powerless. In her mind, he “ought to purchase [her] Blessing by a long series of Hopes, Fears, Perplexities, and, at last, Despair” (38). The use of the word “purchase” makes apparent the transactional nature of their interaction, where sex is a commodity like any other, and up for sale, given the right price. Although this commodification of the female body existed in the West as much as it did in the East, the crude openness with which it was accepted and practised in harems, courts, and palace gardens remained unparalleled in the West. Even the Eastern home sphere, often being a place of polygamous relationships, was well-attuned with the libertine climate. Whereas in English society, Eovaai’s invitations would have been extended only with the aim to be withdrawn, here Haywood in a shocking turn of events has her protagonist partake in a love affair outside of wedlock, where by her own admittance, she “received a Pleasure not inferior to that she gave” (48). Later, upon discovering Ochihatou’s villainous nature and repenting the error of her ways, Eovaai does not follow Fantomina’s fate of ruination—another novella by Haywood where the protagonist finds herself in a similar predicament. Instead, in Eovaai, we

see a female character redeemed and repossessed through her experiences and follow her to her happy conclusion of a blissful marriage and a prosperous kingdom.

The fetishistic aspect of sexuality is detailed in the account of Atamadoul's curse and captivity. Betraying the princess Syllalippe, whom she is attending as a maid, Atamadoul tricks Ochihatou to elope with her by pretending to be her mistress, Syllalippe. Upon discovering this, Ochihatou turns her into a monkey using dark magic and keeps her chained. In a disturbing detail of voyeuristic pleasures and bestiality, Ochihatou unleashes a baboon on the lady-turned-monkey, Atamadoul, who possesses all her human faculties of comprehension and suffers the following ordeal on a regular basis, the account of which she gives to Eovaai:

He causes a very ugly and overgrown baboon to be brought into the Room to me, which taking me for one of his own Species, leaps upon me, caresses me after the way of those Animals, till my strength is wearied out with struggling; and, in spite of my Horror at suffering so detestable an Action, the Brute is sometimes very near taking an entire Possession of me. (154)

The sexual violence here is conveyed through the animalistic, senseless instinct of the perpetrator and the tragic, feeling, and human reception of it. This dynamic can easily be read as rape of a woman by a man, where the chained monkey's physical constraint and inability to speak may embody the helplessness and voicelessness of female experience. Such a description may have been too stark for the English audience, if not conveyed so covertly through the metaphor of the Orient.

6.3 THE FEMALE SAVIOUR

The eighteenth-century portrayal of women in traditional English society tossed between two extremes; regarding women as either damsels in distress or witches to be burnt at the stake. It can be inferred that the portrayal of women as pliant and docile beings helped to further the

patriarchal agenda to subdue women, and provided a justification for men to protect and guide them, which conveniently transmuted into the entrapment of women. Centuries of repetitive phalli-oriented definitions and demarcation of the roles and positions of women validated the entrenchment of the idea of women as the weaker sex, appointing men as their saviours. However, historically, when English society was faced with alternative presentations of women as witty courtiers or wilful rulers, women were either put to death or their legacies were marred by the mere question of sex; Ann Boleyn was beheaded, and we still wonder if Elizabeth I was indeed a woman and a virgin. Yet, there was a place for alternative expressions of female identity in the Orient.

Grosrichard claims that “[t]he despotic orient delights in metamorphosis” (79). The Oriental motif of shape-shifting malleability aided the fluidity of fixed gender roles, allowing women to be autonomous in instigating and resolving trouble, rather than being passive recipients of male chauvinism and chivalry. The sphinx-like wisdom of Balqis of Yemen (Queen of Sheba), disguised under her bejewelled appearance, riddled King Solomon, while the beauty and brilliance of mind became an inseparable and compounded trait in Salome. This “perpetual alteration of forms” (Grosrichard 79) to achieve a gainful end is further demonstrated by Princess Badoura from *Arabian Nights* who comes to command a kingdom by disguising herself as her husband. Similarly, we can see a woman revelling in her feminine traits when princess Tourandocte, from a twelfth century Persian tale, “glories in the bloody Spectacles [that lead to the deaths of many princes contending to win her over], which her Beauty exhibits to the People” (Porter 181). These female traits, which traditionally served to weaken women, were weaponised in the Oriental literary motif, portraying women as saviours and/or avengers.

In *Eovaai*, Haywood masterfully demonstrates how Atamadoul, a maid of honour, deceived the cunning Ochibatou into eloping with her instead of her mistress since she wanted

him for herself. She used his own magic to “bind him to [her] in the most lasting chains” (147). Later in the narrative, even in her state of captive punishment, she managed to trick him again: when Ochibatou captured Eovaai and raped her in the dark, Atamadoul took her place without his knowledge (161). In spite of her past betrayal, or perhaps an attempt to redeem it, Atamadoul is presented as a sharp-witted plotting woman, who heroically helps another woman in distress through personal sacrifice. Atamadoul emerges as the ultimate saviour for Haywood’s female protagonist, instead of the numerous potential male heroes Eovaai is surrounded by.

Similarly, in *Charoba*, the “fair young lady [who rose] out of the sea” (122) bested the shepherd many times in wrestling, and even after losing to Gebirus, she successfully negotiated that she be allowed to be with the shepherd who “hath captivated [her]” (124). In doing this, she saves the shepherd from Gebirus’ rage, becoming the saviour for her beloved in a role-reversal of traditional gender roles. A profound demonstration of the intellectual acumen of women is seen in the character of the nursemaid to Charoba. She was her confidant, her advisor, and an excellent strategist. She stalled Gebirus’ advances on Egypt and towards Charoba by cajoling him into striving to build a city as “an honourable mark of [his] affection for [Charoba]” (119), and as a “discovery of [his] great power and strength” (119). Since the city was never to be built because the nurse maid had employed the demons of the sea to pull down the buildings every night, Gebirus could not conquer Egypt or its ruler. A further step in his defeat was to serve “poisoned meat” (130) to all his soldiers. And the final blow was struck in debilitating and then killing him, accounted as follows:

. . . the King (Gebirus) rose up, and went forward to meet her. Then the nurse threw over his shoulders a regal garment, which was poisoned, and which she had prepared for that purpose; afterwards she blew a fume into his face, which almost deprived him of his senses; then she sprinkled him with a water that

loosened all his joints, and deprived him of his strength, so that he fell down in a swoon at the feet of Charoba. (131)

Raised, taught, and counselled by her nursemaid and chief advisor, Charoba is protected from men, including her father and potential love interest, who ironically are supposed to be the appointed protectors in the traditional sense. The portrayal of men, no matter how beloved, as inherently untrustworthy and unreliable, reverses eighteenth-century gender stereotypes. Moreover, the trust in appointing her female companion, Dalica, as the successor to the throne and ensuring a female-led legacy for the Egyptian empire further enables the role of “the female saviour” by putting women in positions of power and privilege, being able to help themselves and their female companions. The “female cult” of peripheral female characters in both tales serves to elate and empower the female protagonists through portrayals of female solidarity and support.

6.4 THE CONQUEROR

The reclining and reclusive disposition imposed upon women in the eighteenth century is articulated in John Gregory’s book of enduring popularity, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), where he describes “one of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration” (qtd. in Jones 45). Such ideologies limited women to the sphere of home and hearth as the “angels of the house.” Discouraged from what were deemed “masculine” pursuits, women were expected to bear and rear children: “The Life of the Ladies of the most eminent Quality, was not to be a life of revelling, visiting and gadding about; but to be employed in educating their beauteous Offspring, in the ways of Virtue and Modesty: And to make the Husband’s Home, the Chief Comfort and Enjoyment of his Life” (qtd. in Jones 79).

In sharp contrast to this “amorous softness” (qtd. in Jones 45), the Oriental archetype of the female warrior, gallanting on horseback, charging into lands foreign and strange, with her horde at her back, opened new avenues for female experience—if only through imagination. The impassioned Dido, conniving Cleopatra, merciless Medea, and the formidable Roxalana—exemplars of the female Eastern conquerors—all resounded the resolute obstinacy Haywood and Reeve endeavoured to replicate in their female characters. Both tales have queens as protagonists. In assuming the role of being the defenders of their lands and the sovereigns over their people, they resist Fenelon’s view that “[women] are not formed to govern the state, to make war, or to enter into the church” (qtd. in Jones 102). Both protagonists retain their power and remain sole rulers of their kingdoms. Even upon marriage, Eovaai retains her kingdom and crown, not sharing any part of her sovereignty with her husband.

Haywood’s tale, *Eovaai*, features multiple female rulers. Tygrinoniple, the queen of Icinda, is as ambitious as she is unforgiving: “she took the same pleasure in revenging the slightest injuries, as in retaliating the greatest benefits; both equally gratified her darling passion of making known her power” (51). Making strategic alliances and retaining her freedom through consistent refusal of marriage, she is driven and ambitious—traits reserved only for men in the eighteenth century. Yximilla, the exiled queen of Ginkfy, presents a perfect example of fortitude and patience through the ordeal of her defeat and subsequent imprisonment. Moreover, Hypotofa housed monuments of their old king and queen, Glaza and Ibla, to commemorate their bravery in the historic event of a battle where Hypotofa was attacked on both fronts. Glaza charged to defend one side, while Ibla, “throwing off all the delicacies of her sex and rank, went at the head of the other” (86), returning victorious. The brief yet significant references to the peripheral female characters augment the defiance of conventional gender roles in both tales.

7. CONCLUSION

The commitment to telling one's truth, albeit through fiction, may be observed in *Eovaai*, where Haywood craftily addresses the false nature and the "inconstancy of imagination" (Jones 82) associated with women in the following words from the preface, where the translator⁵ urges "every reader will so far mortify his own vanity, as to believe [the tale] not less real, because he is unable to comprehend them" (xii). The Orientals suffered a similar mischaracterisation: "untruthfulness, is in fact the main characteristic of the Oriental mind" (qtd. in Said 38). Haywood's request may be read as an indirect rebuke intended specifically for men who sought to dismiss and invalidate the female experience as a fleeting and fickle notion of female fancy.

Haywood's imaginary realms elemental of the East and Reeve's exuding Egyptian essence, positioned their narratives in the fantastical scape of the Orient, giving them freedom to retell, reshape, and reinvent history, which for so long had been the exclusive pleasure and pursuit of men. In presenting Oriental women as powerful and tactful—unhindered by their follies or by shame, unconquerable and willing to conquer, not merely the playthings of men or their domestic decorations, not narrated as supporting or defiant characters in men's stories, not looked down upon for their ambition whilst not being unfairly glorified either—they attempted to strike a chord with the English women, by voicing questions that many women already might have asked themselves in silence: "O why . . . can nothing but our torment be acceptable to Heaven? Why must our pains alone be virtue, and all our pleasures vices?" (Haywood 83) The sustained attitude of reassessing the paradigm of the Orient and correcting the erasure of female experience continued well through the eighteenth century and beyond, the foundation for which may be credited to Eliza Haywood and Clara Reeve.

⁵ A hypothetical translator who wrote the preface, son of a Mandarin living in London.

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