

THE COUNTER-COLONIAL TRAVEL WRITING OF FANNY PARKES AND E.M.
FORSTER

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During the colonial period in India, British travelers wrote various forms of travel writing texts, such as letters, diaries, travelogues, scientific or geographical exposes, and novels.

Usually those texts reflected an attitude of racial superiority and were often forms of propaganda that perpetuated British imperial expansion. This paper discusses the works of two British travelers who were influenced by their experiences in India and wrote texts that did not reflect racism or approval of colonialism. Fanny Parkes and E.M. Forster traveled to India in different centuries and for different reason. Although they both demonstrate an imperialist perspective upon arriving in India, they eventually grew to love and appreciate India's culture and people.

In order to understand the significant ways Parkes and Forster deviated from their contemporaries, the general travel writing trends and theories of the late eighteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century will be discussed, drawing heavily from the travel writing discourse of Mary Louise Pratt and Edward Said, as well as Sinan Akilli, Chinua Achebe, William Dalrymple and others. Representative texts from the various eras, modes, and conventions of the genre will be given and analyzed.

Parkes's published journal, *Begums, Thugs, and Englishmen, The Journals of Fanny Parkes* (2002), was originally published in 1850 and is vastly different than the journals and letters written by other British travelers to India. Her text will be compared to several others, particularly Emily Eden's, *Miss Eden's Letters* (1919). In his novel, *A Passage to India* (1936), Forster's depiction of Indians and Britons is one which includes the full spectrum of humanity, thus deconstructing the colonial proclivity to dehumanize Indians. His novel will be contrasted with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1918).

There are benefits of identifying and studying travel writers who deconstructed the colonial perspective in India. Those benefits will be discussed in the context of comments from scholars and writers in the field, such as: Colin Thubron, Debbie Lisle, James Duncan, and Derek Gregory.

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FORSTER

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CHAPTER 1 TRAVEL WRITING: IMPERIALIST PROPAGANDA

In addition to luggage, travelers bring abstract belongings with them when visiting a new place, such as preconceived ideas of the people who live in the places they visit and partially formed mental pictures of who those people are. Unfortunately, these perceptions are sometimes inaccurate and often negative. When observing differences in physical appearance, social customs, religious beliefs, and political structures many travelers conclude that those differences signify inferiority; the people they observe are objectified into the role of “other.” These views are evident in most of the British travel writing of the nineteenth and twentieth century, particularly texts that were written about colonized countries. James Duncan discusses this dynamic in the preface to *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (1999), “Representations often reveal more about the culture of the author than that of the people and places represented” (1). Travelers tend to project their existing opinions about the cultures they encounter in their writing.

Additionally, these texts often served to enable Britain’s expansionist agenda. In the 2009 article, “Propaganda through Travel Writing,” Sinan Akilli discusses the discourses that “functioned as a channel of propaganda for the pro-imperialist politics represented by the Conservative Party in Britain, which was also the dominant political attitude in the late 1870’s” (3).

Although there are an abundance of texts that could be termed propaganda for imperialism, there were, however, some British authors who traveled to India during the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century who did not write about Indians in a disparaging manner.

Though they traveled to India at different times and for different reasons, Fanny Parkes and E. M. Forster spent a significant amount of time living, exploring, and in Forster’s case, working in

colonized India. They went to India with stereotypical attitudes towards the country and its people. Over the course of their stay, their opinions toward those around them evolved: they became friends with people who they initially viewed as “other.” They also became disillusioned and critical of Britain’s rule over India. Parkes and Forster’s differences of gender, background, writing ability, and experience, as well as their purpose for traveling, are factors that accentuate their unique perspectives. When considered together, their perspectives give a helpful view into the complex nature of the relationships that existed between Britons and Indians in colonial India.

Mary Louise Pratt has written extensively about travel writing. In her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1991), she traces the development of travel writing against the social and political movements before, during, and following England’s colonial involvement with various countries. Her focus is mainly theoretical, though she acknowledges the power travel has to change an individual’s perspective. In the chapter from the compilation *Travel Narratives*, she states: “While travel literature is certainly a place where imperialist ideologies get created, it is equally certainly a place where such ideologies get questioned, especially from the realm of particularized and concrete sensual experience” (215-216). Travel has the potential to alter one’s view of the unfamiliar, though the majority of colonial travel texts illustrate an attempt to maintain the established British sensibility. British travelers typically felt disoriented in unfamiliar lands and often brought, or sent back home, small items to preserve their connection with England. John Plotz argues in “The First Strawberries in India” (2007) that British travelers in colonial India were particularly apt to prize portable items, which included written materials:

Anglo-Indian travel writing shows this defensive posture with special power; it frequently presents English objects as significant bearers of messages from afar so as to defend Anglo-Indianness against a dimly acknowledged autochthonous Indian culture. India, then, was a periphery that threatened to define its own relationship to the metropole, which makes it an ideal place to study metropolitan fear of just such counterflow. Anglo-Indian memsahib texts, which apparently circulated as widely in British settler colonies outside of India as they did back in England, thus serve as templates for Greater British portability. (1)

As Plotz states, portable items were essential elements in the pursuit of defining and justifying Britain's colonial presence in India.

Although most colonial travel writers solidified their existing imperialist perspective through travel, Parkes and Forster are examples of writers whose personal experiences led them to question their culturally inherited ideologies. Were Indians in need of Britain's "civilizing" influence? How does one morally justify the pursuit of raw materials and commerce at the expense of colonial oppression? Parkes and Forster identified and attempted to address these sorts of ideological issues in their writing.

Much has been written about travel writing in terms of its complicity with the imperialist expansion agenda. Said's text, *Orientalism* (1978), is considered to be one of the first to identify the genre's role in the creation of the "other." Said says of any imperial power:

their political societies impart to their civil societies a sense of urgency, a direct political infusion, as it were, where and whenever matters pertaining to their imperial interests abroad are concerned. I doubt it is controversial to, for example, say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century

took an interest in those colonies that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact. (11)

He uses a strong word, *violated*. The fact of England's colonial oppression of India is not arguable, but how the legacy of that violation continues on, as well as how exactly it was brought about and maintained, are subjects scholars continue to analyze. Said comments in the preface of the 2003 edition of *Orientalism* about official colonial discourse: "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort" (xxi). Travelogues, letters, and most other forms of travel writing were not considered "official discourse" during the colonial period, yet they were unofficial texts that had the power to influence the political views of their readers. Aside from its relationship with the imperialist agenda, British travel writing unofficially participated in building Europe's understanding of itself, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 3). Said's text has influenced the way scholars approach colonial travel writing and has brought attention to the role it plays in perpetuating oppression.

The study of travel writing has grown considerably over the last three decades, with a focus on theory and trends. Yet, little has been written about travel writers whose texts varied from the norm, or broke unspoken rules. When British travelers visited colonized countries, they were expected to write in a manner that perpetuated hegemony. Parkes and Forster's writing began in the expected manner but later changed. Why did their views change? Why is it

important to study the few authors whose travel writing deconstructed the stereotypes and objectification that was typical in the work of their contemporaries? The editor of Parkes's journals, William Dalrymple, states in a 2007 *Guardian* article: "Parkes is an important writer because she acts as a witness to a forgotten moment of British-Indian hybridity, and shows that colonial travel writing need not be an aggressive act of orientalist appropriation . . ." (4). An exploration of the specific ways Parkes and Forster's writing evolved, and eventually departed, from the common tropes of travel writing will give insight into the nuanced nature of the relationships that existed between Britons and Indians living in colonial India.

In order to appreciate the significance of Parke's and Forster's variation from the norm of colonial travel writing, it is necessary to have a fundamental understanding of travel writing theory and trends. In her seminal book, *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines the place where two cultures meet:

the possibilities and perils of writing in what I like to call the 'contact zones,' social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today. (6)

The colonial period in India was a contact zone, with the British dominating the country through oppression, and the travel texts that resulted from the clash of cultures can give insight into the colonial period.

Although people have been traversing the world and writing about their experiences for centuries, one might situate the beginning of the study of travel writing in 1735 with the publication of Carl Linne's *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*) and the emergence of

“Europe’s first major international science expedition” (Pratt 16). These events led to a shift in the way Europeans viewed themselves and the world around them. Pratt refers to this period, which covers the mid-eighteenth to the late-eighteenth century, as the onset of a “planetary consciousness” and describes it as a “basic element constructing modern Eurocentrism, that hegemonic reflex that troubles westerners even as it continues to be second nature to them” (16). Carl Linne’s book, *The System of Nature*, spurred “apostles” of his botanical classification system to explore the globe. Travelers wrote botanical descriptions since the sixteenth century, yet the writings that followed Linne’s works are unique. His work can be distinguished from other works: “The systematizing of nature, I am suggesting, is a European project of a new kind...like the rise of interior exploration, the systemic surface mapping of the globe correlates with an expanding search for commercially exploitable resources, markets, and lands to colonize” (*Imperial Eyes* 30).

Simultaneously, in 1735 several European countries worked collaboratively on the international science expedition, named the La Condamine expedition after the geographer Charles de la Condamine, which was a noteworthy endeavor, as they had to relegate current political issues. During the expedition, two opposing motives for travel surfaced: “On the one hand, dominant ideologies made a clear distinction between the (interested) pursuit of wealth and the (disinterested) pursuit of knowledge; on the other hand, competition among nations continued to be the fuel for European expansion abroad” (Pratt 18). Most of the writings that resulted from British travel during this period were either descriptions of the development opportunities of other countries, scientific narratives, or survival literature. The La Condamine expedition was especially significant because it was the impetus for shifts in travel writing. According to Pratt:

It is an early instance of a new orientation toward exploring and documenting continental interiors, in contrast with the maritime paradigm that had held center stage for three hundred years. By the last years of the eighteenth century, interior exploration had become the major object of expansionist energies and imaginings...giving rise to new forms of European knowledge and self-knowledge...new ways of encoding Europe's imperial ambitions. (*Imperial Eyes* 23-24).

This inland form of travel was different because its goal was no longer to locate trade routes but to find natural resources. What superficially appears to be an innocent cataloging of nature was indeed a contrast to the more overt attempts to conquer other lands which preceded the planetary consciousness travel dynamic, but it ultimately lead to imperialist expansion.

There are two distinct and complementary approaches of the planetary consciousness period: the "anti-conquest" system and the "sentimental" system. The anti-conquest system creates a utopian, childlike view of European global power, whereas the sentimental mode encompasses less of a focus on geography and observation and more on the traveler's personal experience (*Imperial Eyes* 75).

Written accounts in the anti-conquest mode were generally descriptions of the surrounding landscape. What is noteworthy in these depictions, however, is the absence of people, especially indigenous people. The tendency to omit humans in nature descriptions can be seen in a late eighteenth century text that influenced nineteenth century travel writing substantially. Anders Sparrman, a Swedish naturalist, accompanied the infamous Captain Cook on one of his travels around the world. Sparrman's *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* was published in 1783. The following passage is from Sparrman's book:

Very late in the evening we arrived at our driver's farm, which was very pleasantly situated on the other side of Bott River. This river was beset at small intervals with pretty high mountains, the peaks and ridges of which delightfully varied the scene. In the declivities of some of them caverns and grottos were seen, which certainly did not exist from the beginning, but were produced by the vicissitudes and changes to which all natural objects are subject. (51)

The exclusion of inhabitants is conspicuous: were there really no indigenous people living near the Bott River? Sparrman's view only depicts the land, perhaps because land without inhabitants made the notion of future conquest more palatable to the Europeans back home.

The second system of the planetary consciousness era was sentimental travel writing. At the turn of the eighteenth century, a Scottish explorer named Mungo Park wrote a book called *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799). He was commissioned by the British-owned African Association, whose goal was "to ascertain the course, direction, source, and terminus of the Niger River and to make commercial and diplomatic contact with those who peopled its vicinity" (*Imperial Eyes* 70). According to Pratt, the sentimentalist quality of his narrative, as well as his depiction of the local Africans exemplifies the sentimental mode:

He made himself the protagonist and central figure of his own account, which takes the form of an epic series of trials, challenges, and encounters with the unpredictable . . . in Park's *Travels*, the scene that generations of readers found by far the most memorable is one that absorbs the discourse of science into the narcissism of the sentimental . . . Finding himself 'naked and alone, surrounded

by savage animals, and men still more savage,' Park confesses, 'my spirits began to fail me.' (75-77)

His experiences are viewed from a personal "I" stance, which differs from the detachment of the anti-conquest mode. Yet, his personalized view does little to change his thoughts toward the indigenous people he encounters. Mungo Park's sentimental travel writing gave the African Association the encouragement it desired to pursue commerce in West Central Africa. In the following quote from E.W. Bovil's *Missions to the Niger*, the African Association's motives are clear:

a gate is opened to every commercial nation to enter and trade . . . it is difficult to imagine the possible extent to which the demand for our country's manufactures might arrive, from such vast and populous countries . . . the imperial exultations . . . in response to Mungo park's return were expressed in a language of racism and an image of remapping: 'so in analogy to the face of the country, does the blank and torpid mind of its people, display occasionally notes of intelligence.' (48)

Britain's intentions were not limited to commercial gain, but also founded on the objectification of Africans as inferior.

The planetary consciousness mode of travel writing spanned the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the included anti-conquest and sentimental narratives. Though they have distinct differences in perspective and narrative style, they both helped usher in an era of renewed European colonial expansion.

CHAPTER TWO: THE “LANDSCAPE PERIOD”

The middle of the nineteenth century brought about changes in travel writing that have continued into the twenty-first century: this is commonly referred to as the landscape period. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, descriptions of nature were not for scientific knowledge, nor were there an abundance of narratives in the anti-conquest or sentimental modes; travelers wrote descriptions of nature with the desire to transplant themselves onto the new land. Pratt discusses the landscape period of travel writing in the chapter, “Travel Narrative and Imperialist Vision,” from James Phelan’s *Understanding Narrative* (1994). She states, “Mid-nineteenth-century travel accounts contain an enormous amount of landscape description, which is likewise shaped by the expansionist project that so impinges on the consciousness of these writers” (206). Landscape travel writing includes three modes: the development mode, the picturesque mode, and the mode of the sublime.

The development mode is an extension of the earlier anti-conquest mode, with obvious omissions of local inhabitants in the descriptive narrative. David Livingstone was an explorer who wrote *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi* in 1866. The following is a quote from Livingstone’s preface, which demonstrates the quintessential development mode:

This account is written in the earnest hope that it may contribute to that information which will cause the great and fertile continent of Africa to be no longer kept wantonly sealed, but made available as a scene of European enterprise, and will enable its people to take a place among the nations of the earth, thus securing the happiness and prosperity of tribes now sunk in barbarism or debased by slavery. (2)

Livingstone's motive for travel is evident: he intended to conquer Zambesi for commercial gain. He embarked on his journey with preconceived ideas of Africans as unhappy, barbarous people who were not counted "among the nations of the earth." The following quote is from Livingstone's prologue and typifies this mode:

If I should perish in my journey, I was willing that my hopes and expectations should perish with me; and if I should succeed in rendering the geography of Africa more familiar to my countrymen, and in opening to their ambition and industry new sources of wealth, and new channels of commerce, I know that I was in the hands of men of honour, who would not bestow that remuneration which my successful services should appear to them to merit. (ix)

There is no sentiment in his writing of a justification for the colonial act of exploiting the natural resources of Africa or for a hypothetical profit for the Africans. Livingstone's focal point is on his goal of charting the geography of Africa for the benefit of his country.

Though similar, the picturesque mode is characterized by flowery, detailed descriptions of nature, but includes an underlying desire to inhabit the land as a sort of paradise on earth. Pratt says, "these garden scenes embody a privatized domestic fantasy of a *locus amoenus* in which to settle one's family" (*Travel Narrative* 207). The naturalist J. Leland wrote *Adventures in the Far Interior of South Africa* (1866) in the picturesque mode. Leland's passage highlights this convention:

On this route, and in many other parts of the Colony, the scenery was most enchanting and picturesque; the hills and mountains were adorned in wild profusion with flowers of various hues, and often of the most brilliant and gaudy colours, filling the air with their delicious perfume. Most conspicuous were the

geraniums, growing three and four feet high. When the flowers were most abundant, the various kinds of Sun-birds [hummingbirds] and Fly-catchers were seen, and thousands of butterflies flitting hither and thither, distinguished by an endless variety of colours. (*Adventures* 72)

Leland paints a picture with his excessive use of descriptive language. Again, there is no mention of local inhabitants.

James Duncan discusses the picturesque mode in the chapter, “Dis-Orientation,” from *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (1999). He says this period can also be referred to as the romantic period of travel writing and quotes from a letter written by Sir Samuel Baker in 1855 as he looks out over the Kandyan Highlands of Ceylon:

Why should this place lay idle? Why should this great track of country in such a lovely climate be untenanted and uncultivated? How often have I stood upon the hills and asked myself this question when gazing over the wide extent of undulating forest and plain...in my imagination I have cleared the dark forests, and substituted waving crops of corn and peopled a hundred ideal cottages with a thriving peasantry. (154)

One would venture to say that if the native people of Kandyan had been given the opportunity to answer Sir Baker’s two rhetorical questions, they may not have given him the answer he was looking for. Where did they fit in to his grand scheme? Duncan says that the native is either completely omitted, or if he is included he is “not summoned in order to speak his mind . . . which is to say to add to the picturesqueness of the scene” (157). Relegating the local inhabitants to objects in the background scenery is to objectify them into something less than human and contributes to imperial hegemony.

Narratives in the sublime mode are often a description of the traveler's initial view of the foreign land. Pratt explains, "This convention is frequently used to textualize arrivals at major geographical discoveries or landmarks . . . I have elsewhere called this the monarch-of-all-I-survey convention . . . because so often in exploration literature these prospect scenes encode a relation of dominance of the seer over the seen" (Travel Narrative 207). James Grant's *A Walk Across Africa* (1864) records his arrival at Victoria Nyanze and is an example of the monarch-of-all-I-survey mode, "The now famous Victoria Nyanza, when seen for the first time, expanding in all its majesty, excited our wonder and admiration . . . and I made a sketch, dotting it with imaginary steamers and ships riding at anchor in the bay" (196). Grant's presumption of eventual ownership of the bay is typical of the sublime perspective.

Another explorer who wrote in the sublime mode was Richard Burton, who traveled to Africa in the middle of the nineteenth century. In his book, *Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1860), as Burton surveys Lake Tanganyika in the monarch-of-all-I-see convention:

Nothing, in sooth, could be more picturesque than the first view of the Tanganyika Lake, as it lay in the lap of the mountains, basking in gorgeous tropical sunshine . . . Villages, cultivated lands, the frequent canoes of the fisherman on the waters . . . give a something of variety, of movement, of life to the landscape, which, like all the fairest prospects in these region, wants but a little of the neatness and finish of art—mosques and kiosks, palaces and villas, gardens and orchard. (*The Lake Regions* 43)

Ironically, Burton was not truly "discovering" Tanganyika Lake; he had to pay local inhabitants to guide him to the lake. These same inhabitants are nominally mentioned in his text. Burton's

arrogant declaration that the land needed “neatness and finish” is typical of the imperialist need to inscribe European ideals onto new lands. The assumption is one of superiority.

An alteration of the landscape mode took place at the turn of the nineteenth century, as racial ideologies of white superiority gained popularity in Europe. In the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), Roy Bridges describes travel narratives of this period, “It became at once more strident in asserting European technology and racial superiority over non-Europeans and full of fears about ‘falling behind’ rival powers” (59). Similarly, Helen Carr notes that the genre perpetuated England’s colonial involvement around the globe. She asserts in the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* that, “The period from 1880-1940 was the heyday of the British Empire, and much travel writing shows the complicity with imperialism—if not outright support” (71).

In addition to the travelogues of the prior era, travel writers of this period began to articulate their travel experiences by writing novels. During this period Joseph Conrad wrote a well-known novella, *The Heart of Darkness* (1918). Conrad traveled extensively at sea, and many scholars believe that his protagonist, Marlow, is a reflection of his personal experiences and attitudes. The novella describes Marlow’s voyage through central Africa, depicting racist perceptions of Africa along the way. Conrad’s protagonist recounts what happened to his predecessor:

the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed . . . I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens . . . Fresleven . . . thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn’t surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time to be told that Fresleven

was the gentlest, quietist creature that ever walked on two legs. No doubt he was; but he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore, he whacked the old nigger mercilessly. (14)

Apparently, the narrator is not surprised that a European would be driven to violence after living “out there” for some years. He also asserts that the colonial oppression of Africans is a “noble cause.” Conrad’s character Marlow later tells his crew a story. He compares their mission with that of the Romans:

They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale...as is proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves . . . what redeems it is the idea only. (12)

What “idea” Marlow refers to can be filled in with many pursuits: natural resources, slave labor, proselytizing, etc. Marlow sees the manner in which the “ideas” are achieved for what they are: robbery, violence and murder. The most disturbing sentiment Marlow expresses is that he believes the means justify the ends: if it requires robbery and murder to civilize savages then it is necessary, “An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish idea belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (*Heart of Darkness* 12). Aside from perpetuating British imperialism, Chinua Achebe sees a deeper dynamic at play in Conrad’s text. In his article, “An Image of Africa,” he says, “it is the

desire—one might say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (2). Conrad describes Africans in a disparaging manner throughout the novella. A passage that exemplifies the objectification of the unknown into “other,” is one in which Marlow removes the human from the Africans he sees by replacing their faces with objects that mimic humanity. Marlow sees a boat pass on the river and says, “It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the whites of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps” (18). It is this sort of passage in *Heart of Darkness* that Achebe is responding to when he asserts, “the *Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as “the other world,” the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (3). Conrad’s obsession with the “dark” motif reflects European fear. In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt quotes from *Heart of Darkness*, “then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well” and concludes, “Night here threatens European subjectivity with destruction and annihilation. The heart of darkness revolves around a vortex of fear” (216).

It is noteworthy that Conrad’s novella is still considered a classic. In fact, the 2006 Prestwick House publication of the book is intended for school children and includes text at the start of the book titled, “Notes,” and begins with the question, “What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?” (5). The answer to the question is given as:

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and it says it with great artistry. A classic through its enduring presence has withstood the test of time and is not

bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality” (5).

Then the text claims that *Heart of Darkness* is a classic and that Conrad is “considered one of the most important British novelists of his time” (5). It is peculiar and arguable that a text with such overt racism and colonial overtones is deemed as “not bound by time, place, or customs.” That such a statement can be written in 2006 simply confirms the value of identifying and studying divergent texts, such as those written by Parkes and Forster.

The mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century includes the development of the planetary consciousness mode and landscape modes of travel writing. As Helen Carr notes, 1880-1940 was a period characterized by Britain’s colonial rule over much of the globe. Julie Codell summarizes this period in a 2007 article, “Reversing the Grand Tour: Guest Discourse in Indian Travel Narratives,” by stating, “Most Western travelers explored the ‘unexplored’-places Europeans had not been before, which they tried to dominate through heroic claims and notions of the other as exotic, inferior, quaint, erotic, and picturesque” (1). These sorts of depictions are not found in Parkes and Forster’s later writing. Understanding the development of a planetary consciousness and the landscape movement lays a foundation on which to discuss the specific ways in which their writing deviated from these trends and countered the colonial writing of their contemporaries.

CHAPTER 3: FANNY PARKES: HOW A CIVIL SERVANT'S WIFE BECAME AN INDOPHILE

Though she is not the most well known British woman to write about her travels in India, Fanny Parkes is thought to have produced one of the most well-written travel journals on India during the British colonial period. Born Frances Susannah Archer (1794-1875), Parkes had writing in her blood, as her father was a published author of the travel journal, *Tours in Upper India, and in Parts of the Himalaya Mountains; With Accounts of the Courts of the Native Princes*. Fanny married Charles Crawford Parkes, also an author, who worked for the East India Company. Parkes moved to India in 1822 with her husband, traveled extensively throughout India, and thoroughly immersed herself in Indian culture and customs. She kept detailed journal accounts of her travels, which were originally published in 1850 with the title, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque During Four and Twenty Years in the East with Revelations of Life in the Zenana*, and later compiled and published by Dalrymple in 2002 as, *Begums, Thugs, and Englishmen, The Journals of Fanny Parkes*.

Aside from her enjoyable narrative style, her journals are noteworthy because her perspective was a unique one for the time period. In the 2005 article, "Imperial Boredom," Jeffrey Auerbach expands on the popularity of colonial diary writing and its broader political implications:

More than simply a way to fill time, however, or a method of record keeping, diaries of this sort may be regarded as a means of 'colonial self-fashioning.' They provided a context for saying who one was—what the meaning of one's life was—a human need, perhaps, that may have been particularly heightened in the colonial context when, as so many scholars have pointed out, identities were

being challenged and in flux. Diaries were or could be a discourse about the self. They were also a means of imposing order on a disorderly world created by new experiences in unfamiliar places. (1)

Traveling during the landscape era, her works are primarily characteristic of the picturesque and sublime modes and are in diary, or journal, format. In his 2007 article on Parkes for the *Guardian*, William Dalrymple says, “Parkes was an enthusiast and an eccentric with a love of India that is imprinted on almost every page of her book” (2). When she and her husband moved to India, Britain was increasing its colonial power in the country. Most other British at the time viewed Indians with condescension and disdain. Parkes eventually grew to love and appreciate India and its people, staying over twenty years before returning to England.

Parkes and her husband moved to India in 1822, several decades before it became customary for wives to accompany their husbands. In the 2000 article, “Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of India Womanhood in Englishwomen’s Writing,” Janaki Nair states:

By the time direct governance was assumed in 1857 . . . there was a gradual shift in the control of intercourse between English men and Indians, and the colonial regime actively discouraged officials from marrying indigenous women. The separate superior nature of the master race began to be emphasized . . . which, therefore, necessitated the presence of Englishwomen. (225)

As a British woman, Parkes found herself in an unusual position once in India. She found a level of personal freedom and social status that she had not enjoyed in England. Though she already would have been accustomed to the privilege of leisure that comes from having moderate wealth, she faced an entirely new dynamic as an Anglo-Indian, the term used for colonial British living in India. In a 2001 *Victorian Studies* review of the book *Women Travellers in Colonial*

India: The Power of the Female Gaze, Ali Bedad states, “British women travelers . . . were at once powerful *and* powerless, colonizers *and* colonized, the subject *and* the figure of opposition. While the dominant gender ideology of Victorian England inscribed them in a subordinate position of power in the public sphere, the powerful racial ideology of British imperialism located them in a superior position over Indians” (524). A wealthy female Anglo-Indian had higher social and legal status over an equally wealthy male Indian. Certainly the power structure in India exacerbated the racist view held by some British women. Alison Blunt discusses the impact that increased numbers of British women had on the relationship between Anglo-Indians and Indians. In her chapter, “The Flight from Lucknow,” she states that the female presence was harmful: “It was argued that increasing numbers of British women living in India over the course of the nineteenth century had helped to create a separate sphere of exclusively British domestic, social and moral life” (109). Blunt quotes a letter written in 1885 by Wilfred Scawen Blunt:

The Englishwoman in India during the last thirty years has been the cause of half the bitter feelings between race and race. It was her presence at Cawnpore and Lucknow that pointed the sword of revenge after the Mutiny, and it is her constantly increasing influence now that widens the gulf of ill-feeling and makes amalgamation daily more impossible. (109)

Additionally, the early to mid-nineteenth century was a period of change in Britain’s relationship with India. Dalrymple states, “by the 1830’s the British had become the paramount power in India. For the first time there was a feeling that technologically, economically, and politically, the British had nothing to learn from India and much to teach” (Introduction xiv). Additionally, many Britons living in colonial India at the time were disillusioned with their lives in India. They felt that they had been misled by the travel writing texts circulating in England

that portrayed colonial life in India as a continuous adventure. Jeffrey Auerbach addresses this issue in the article, “Imperial Boredom.” He states, “Life in the colonies was not by definition boring. There were clearly exciting moments, and traveling around the empire offered brushes with the unfamiliar . . . The reality simply could not live up to the expectations created by newspapers, novels, travel books, and propaganda” (284). Fanny Parkes managed to transcend the boredom that many other wives in her situation experienced. She reveled in her personal freedom by creating adventurous treks throughout India and, in the process, deconstructed her initial racist view of Indians.

The Parkes set sail for India on June 18, 1822 on the *Marchioness of Ely*. After taking stock of her travelling companions, Fanny enters her cabin and writes, “I joined the party in the cuddy, scrutinized the strange faces, and retired to my cabin, with as solitary a feeling as if my husband and I had been exiles for ever” (2). She records the details of her time on the ship with enthusiasm, detail, and insight into human temperament, saying “Perhaps no friendships are stronger than those formed on board ship, where the tempers and dispositions are so much set forth in their true colours” (2). She also sees that many of her companions on board have impractical notions of the country they are about to encounter, “It was amusing to hear the various plans the different people on board intended to pursue on landing—all too English by far for the climate to which they were bound” (7).

When the *Marchioness of Ely* docked in Calcutta on November 10, 1822, Parkes is enthralled by the beauty of her surroundings. Her journal account is typical of the landscape era and follows the “monarch-of-all-I-see” convention of the sublime mode. She says, “On arriving in Calcutta, I was charmed with the climate; the weather was delicious . . . I thought India a most delightful country, and could I have gathered around me all my dear ones I had left in England,

my happiness would have been complete” (15). At this point, Parkes follows the conventions of the day: she sees a beautiful land and immediately envisions herself, and her English world, transported onto the new land.

For the first few months in India, her journal entries are of a household and listing nature. There are comprehensive descriptions of the new furnishings, Indian terms, and discussions about horseback riding. Though it is evident from her early journal entries that she is an open-minded, affable woman, she has racist opinions about Indians. While explaining the role of the watchmen at her gate, she says, “They say that next to the Chinese, the people of India are the most dexterous thieves in the world” (17). She also complains about the servants, “The idleness of the natives is excessive; for instance, my *ayah* will dress me, after which she will go to her house, eat her dinner, and then returning, will sleep in one corner of my room on the floor for the whole day” (18). In stating that Indians are thieves and idle, Parkes perpetuates the objectification of Indians into people who are inferior to the British. She goes on to compare Indian servants with British servants and finds Indians severely lacking, “It is *impossible* to do with a few servants, you must have many; their customs and prejudices are inviolable; a servant will do such and such things, and nothing more. They are great plagues; much more troublesome than English servants” (18). Though she was critical of Indians when she initially arrived, she approached new experiences with an open mind.

Within a year of having arrived, Parkes observes a religious festival that included a practice known as, *Churuk Pooja*, the swinging of the hooks. The spectacle was graphically violent, but Parkes does not leave. She stays to watch and later records in detail what she witnessed:

Some men swing with four hooks in the back and four in the chest . . .the man I saw swinging looked very wild, from the quantity of opium and *bengh* he had taken to deaden the pain . . . Sometimes four men swing together for half an hour; some in penance for their own sins; some for those of others, richer men, who reward their deputies and thus do penance by proxy . . . I was much disgusted, but greatly interested. (19-20)

Her keen interest in understanding Indian culture, even when she is offended by it, is part of what sets her apart from the other British wives who travelled to India with their husbands. It is not long before Parkes begins to view India differently, and her journal entries reflect a woman who is willing to acknowledge when she is wrong.

It is only a short time before changes are evident in her way of thinking; just a few months later, the weather has changed and she is struck by the influence of the unrelenting heat, “I knew not the oppressive power of the hot winds, and find myself as listless as any Indian lady is universally considered to be; I can now excuse what I before condemned as indolence and want of energy—so much for experience” (17). Her willingness to acknowledge that she is mistaken in calling her *ayah* “idle” demonstrates the strength of her character and foreshadows her bold behavior in following years.

Parkes also faces the difficulty of traveling on poor roads. On her way to a fort near Cairipoor, she becomes frustrated with the slow pace of the buggy, “The road was very bad, therefore I quitted the buggy and mounted an elephant for the first time, feeling half-frightened but very much pleased” (26). Proper British ladies do not ride about on elephants in colonial India, but it is the only mode of transportation in certain circumstances. Parkes’s practical

nature and sense of adventure lead her to do what is necessary without concern for the opinions of others.

Her internal evolution extends beyond a willingness to ride elephants; she begins exploring India without her husband and finds herself falling in love with its people and culture, which is a source of consternation for some of her contemporaries. Parkes was acquainted with other British travel writers, Emily and Fanny Eden. The Edens came to India with their brother, the Governor General, Lord Auckland. Both of the Eden sisters wrote travelogues. Emily's, *Up the Country* (1867), is considered a classic example of British Imperial literature. Parkes and the Eden sisters were not on an equal social status, as the Edens descended from British aristocracy. Even in India, the British social structure of England was maintained. The Eden sisters' disapproval of Parkes goes beyond their class difference: they are repulsed by her obvious admiration for Indian culture and Indians. In the Introduction to Parkes's text, Dalrymple quotes an 1838 passage from Fanny Eden in which she refers to Fanny Parkes:

We are rather oppressed just now by a lady, Mrs. Parkes, who insists on belonging to our camp. She has a husband who always goes mad in the cold season, so she says it is her duty to herself to leave him and travel about. She has been a beauty and has remains of it, and is abundantly fat and lively. At Benares, where we fell in with her, she informed us she was an Independent Woman. (x)

Parkes seeks the security provided by the enormous travel party employed by the Eden family.

Dalrymple explains:

No wonder the Eden sisters turned their noses up at Fanny Parkes, complaining that she clung onto their party, taking advantage of their protection while touring

the lawless roads of northern India and taking the liberty of pitching her tent next to theirs: she was a free spirit and an independent mind in an age of imperial conformity. Behind the jibes of the Eden sisters (‘There is something very horrid and unearthly in all this,’ wrote Fanny Eden on March 17th, ‘nobody ever had a fat attendant spirit before . . .’) lies a clear uneasiness that ‘Bibi Parkes’ (as they call her) is a woman whom they would like instinctively to look down upon, but who is clearly having more fun—and getting to know India much better—than they are. (x)

In December 1837, the three women visit an Indian, and Parkes serves as a translator, as she is fluent in Urdu by this time. She encourages the Eden sisters to accept the man’s offer of a small present to thank them for their visit. The Eden sisters refuse the gift because they are concerned that it may be misconstrued as corruption. Parkes, on the other hand, is concerned with Indian custom and does not want to offend the Indian gentleman. Dalrymple says, “the Eden sisters are more worried about what others will think: instinctively they want to play by the imperial rules, to keep within the acceptable boundaries” (xi). Emily Eden was undeniably a supporter of imperial power in India. She was an avid letter writer and wrote often to her sister, Theresa. Her letters reflect a feeling of disgust with Indians. In a letter to Theresa dated March 24, 1836, she describes India:

It is an odd dreamy existence . . . everything is so picturesque and so utterly un-English . . . after passing a house that is much more like a palace than anything we see in England, we come to a row of mud-thatched huts with wild, black-looking savages squatting in front of them, little black native children running up and

down . . . and no one appearance of civilization that would lead one to guess any European had ever set foot on the land before. (*Miss Eden's Letters* 264)

Emily Eden makes it clear that India needs the “civilizing” influence of Britain’s imperial control. After six years in India, Emily Eden and her family return to England, little changed by their experiences. Parkes, however, continues to become more Indianized, which is reflected in her personal lifestyle and writing.

In 1834, Parkes ventures out to visit the Taj Mahal with an Indian crew and no other British passenger. It is extraordinary for a British woman to attempt a long journey through India without a British companion. Her party encounters terrible weather. They are forced to anchor many miles away from their destination and wait out the strong winds and rain. In her January 9th entry, she records a speech she gives in Hindustani to the crew to encourage them:

Ari! Ari! What a day is this! Ahi Khuda! What a wind is here! Is not this a *tufan*? Such an ill-starred river never, never did I see! Every moment, every moment we are on a sandbank. Come, my children, let her remain; it is the will of God—what can we do? Eat your food and when the gale lulls we may get off. Perhaps, by the blessing of God, in twelve months’ time we may reach Etawah.
(170)

What is particularly noteworthy is the tenderness she expresses toward the crew. Her reference to them, “my children,” does not appear to be one of condescension, but one of genuine care and appreciation. She goes on in the entry to say, “Could you but see the men whom I term my children! They are just what in my youth I ever pictured to myself cannibals must be, so wild and strange-looking, their long black shaggy hair matted over their heads and

hanging down to their shoulders” (170). She notices a change in herself; those who used to seem like frightening animals are now dear to her.

After fifty-one days of travel, Parkes and her crew finally arrive at the Taj Mahal. She is overwhelmed by its beauty and devotes at least ten pages of her journal to detailed descriptions of its architecture, as well as its history. Parkes includes her disgust over the behavior of other British tourist at the Taj, “Can you imagine anything so detestable? European ladies and gentlemen have the band to play on the marble terrace, and dance quadrilles in front of the tomb!” (184). She is moved deeply by the entire visit to the Taj and says:

I cannot enter the Taj without feelings of deep devotion: the sacredness of the place, the remembrance of the of the fallen grandeur of the family of the Emperor and that of Asaf-jah, the father of Arzumund Banoo, the solemn echoes, the dim light, the beautiful architecture, the exquisite finish and delicacy of the whole, the deep devotion which the natives prostrate themselves when they make their offerings of money and flowers at the tomb, all produce deep and sacred feelings. (185)

Later, she describes how the British government sold sections of the steam baths that were housed below the Taj palace. Her disdain is clear:

The baths . . . were broken up by the Marquis of Hastings: he committed this sacrilege on the past to worship the rising sun; for he sent the most beautiful of the marble baths, with all its fretwork and inlaid flowers, to the Prince Regent, afterwards George IV. Having thus destroyed the beauty of the bath of the palace, the remaining marble was afterwards sold on account of the Government; most

happily the auction brought so small a sum it put a stop to further depredations.
(189)

The sincerity and depth of her feelings for the beauty and revered status of the Taj are also a reflection of her feelings for the country itself. She does not approach the Taj as a mere tourist destination for her personal enjoyment, nor does she try to overlay a British sense of culture onto the existing Indian monument, as do the British she witnessed with their band and their dancing. She writes a description of the Taj's beauty without the compulsion to supplant British dominance over that beauty. This writing approach is a distinct break from the picturesque mode of the landscape era. Parkes neither omits the local inhabitants of the scene, nor does she attempt to appropriate the object of description for her own use. Not only does Parkes avoid these two conventions, but she also overtly addresses the fact that other British are doing just that: she writes that they are ruthlessly and arrogantly asserting dominion over the Indian people and their sacred objects. Including her feelings of disgust in response to the band and dancing, as well as the "sacrilege" the British committed against the marble baths, is a bold move for a travel writer of the time and can be termed a form of countering the typical colonial travel writing conventions.

As her stay in India continues, Parkes begins to prefer Indian clothing and food. She writes a comparison of dress styles when observing a party, "crowds of gaily dressed and most picturesque natives were seen in all directions . . . whilst the eye of taste turned away pained and annoyed by the by the vile round hats and stiff attire of the European gentlemen, and the equally ugly bonnets and stiff and graceless dresses of the English ladies" (182). Next, she visits a zenana—the private rooms of Indian wives—and is served a spectacular dish, "these dishes were so very unlike, and so superior to any food I had ever tasted, that I never failed afterwards to

partake of any dish when it was brought to me” (193). While visiting this same zenana, Parkes does something unheard of for an English woman: she eats opium. In her April 2, 1835 entry she says, “Tara, the pretty slave girl, when she darted away over the poppy beds, came back with her ripe poppy-head, out of which she beat the seeds on the palm of her hand and ate them. She then brought some for me, which I ate in her fashion” (238). Later that day at dinner, she eats a dessert made from cooked opium. After describing the recipe for the dish, she says, “The flavor is very pleasant, and if you only eat enough, you will become as tipsy as a mortal may desire” (238). Parkes continues exploring India, taking on more of the customs of the Indians and eventually writing frankly about her disapproval of many colonial actions performed by the British. Dalrymple states that Parkes’ political views significantly changed by the late 1830’s:

she came to be increasingly critical of the East India Company her husband served. In her published work, that criticism was necessarily muted, but her allegiances were clear. At the time when many of her contemporaries were calling for the British to annex the ‘degenerate’ Kingdom of Oude (or Avadh as it is more usually spelled today) Fanny was quite clear that, ‘the subjects of his Majesty of Oude are by no means desirous of participating in the blessings of British rule. (xiii)

Her sarcasm is palpable. She even went so far as to write allegations of specific British lords, “Lord William Bentinck did away with the vaccine department, to save a few rupees; from which economy many have lost their lives” (xiii). Her willingness to write in such a subversive, counter-colonial perspective sets her apart from her contemporaries who were writing texts that perpetuated colonial expansion in India.

After staying in India for twenty-four years, Fanny Parkes prepares to return to England at the request of her mother. Parkes's father dies and she regrets that she did not visit her family in England. Even though she is anxious to see her mother, she struggles with her love for India and the sadness of leaving it behind. Upon returning from one of her adventures, her writing reflects the conflict she feels as she approaches her Indian home and facing the long journey back to England, Parkes writes:

the view is interesting, and the pilgrim will reach the landing-place, below her own peepal tree, within an hour. I have at this moment but little energy left wherewith to pursue my homeward voyage, but my promise is yours, my beloved mother, and your child would not disappoint you for all the wealth of Ormus or of Ind . . . but there is the Fort and the great Masjid, and the old peepal tree, and the memsahib's home, and the *chabutara* (a terrace to sit and converse on), the bank of the river, which is crowded with friends on the look out for the pilgrim and ready to hail her return with the greatest pleasure. (338)

One can hear the bittersweet quality of her thoughts, as she resigns herself to leaving India. Dalrymple notes this aspect of her journals, "It was Parkes's curiosity and enthusiasm that distinguished her approach to India, and her journal traces her journey from prim memsahib, married to a minor civil servant of the Raj, to eccentric sitar-playing Indophile, critical of British rule and passionate in her appreciation of Indian culture" (1-3). Near the end of her years in India, Parkes evolved from a woman who missed many of the British niceties and customs of her home, to a woman who would be happy to remain in India. Dalrymple notes:

Gradually, over the years she lived in India, Parkes's views began to change.

Having assumed at first that good taste was the defining characteristic of

European civilization and especially that of her own people, she found her assumptions being challenged by what she came to regard as the philistinism of the English in India, and by the beauty of so much of the country. (4)

After living for many years in India, Parkes began to see Indians as more than something different from herself, more than just “other” and was one of the few British colonial travelers who wrote counter to the expectations surrounding her. She did not write disparaging descriptions of Indians, as did her contemporary, Emily Eden. Eden’s letters back home to England and her travelogues were humorous and enjoyable reading, yet they were also racist and perpetuated the imperialist party line. Parkes’s text reveals a woman who went to India with racist beliefs, but changed her worldview. Her writing eventually was a direct challenge to the colonial agenda.

Fanny Parkes’s traveled to India from 1822-1846 and witnessed an increase in British domination; E.M. Forster came during the decline of the British Empire. Though their experiences were vastly different, they were both changed by India, as was their writing.

CHAPETR 4 E.M. FORSTER: EXAMINED BY INDIA

Unlike Parkes, E. M. Forster is an immensely well-known author. After attending Cambridge, he traveled to Italy and India. Forster first traveled to India in 1912-1913 and then again in 1920. His travels influenced several of his novels, particularly his last novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), which was met with positive reviews. It won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (1924) and was included in the list of 100 great works by the Modern Library. In a 1924 review, Edward Arnold says, “The first duty of any reviewer is to welcome Mr. E.M. Forster’s reappearance as a novelist and to express the hope that the general public as well as the critics will recognize his merits and their good fortune; the second is to congratulate him upon the tone and temper of his new novel” (1). When many were stereotyping and objectifying Indians, Forster was credited for depicting the complex relationship between Indians and the British during the last years of the colonial period with sensitivity and respect for both countries. Forster traveled to India several times and wrote numerous letters about his travels. *A Passage to India*, in particular, is a significant departure from the travel influenced fiction writing of the time because it gives a voice to the many sides of the colonial quagmire Forster observed. Abu Baker states in “Rethinking Identity: The Colonizer in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*” (2005), “Forster’s novel is generally well received and viewed in a positive light. Indeed, a ‘semi-anonymous Indian’ (‘A.S.B.’), wrote in 1928 that ‘for the first time I saw myself reflected in the mind of an English author without losing all semblance of a human face’” (71). This is a sharp contrast to *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*, where Africans are denied the dignity of a face and instead are given a “mask.”

Forster’s motivation for writing *A Passage to India* has been analyzed and argued extensively. As Forster continued to write about his experiences in India, his writing becomes

progressively pessimistic. His writing is influenced to a large extent by his fascination with religion and philosophy. Baker quotes Forster in a September 27, 1929 letter to Syed Masood, “When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go, my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested whether they sympathize with one another or not” (“Rethinking Identity” 69). Despite its popularity, there are some who are critical of Forster’s novel, calling it an uneven representation of Indians, or filled with underlying racism. A more thorough evaluation shows a man who was disillusioned with humanity. In his essay “A Passage to India” Peter Childs notes, “Reviews were the best Forster had received with critics in Britain, America, and India praising the book highly. However, reviewers in the British-Indian press were deeply critical, finding their reflection in the book both unpleasant and inaccurate” (3). The novel’s male protagonist, Dr. Aziz, is a Muslim, which is problematic, as this choice does not reflect India’s majority religion. Childs points out, “in his 1954 article ‘Passage to and from India,’ Nirad Chaudhuri criticized the book for its apolitical liberalism and for having a Muslim protagonist who was necessarily unrepresentative of a predominantly Hindu country or of the ‘India question’ the novel putatively sought to address” (3). Forster said that he was not attempting to address any problem, nor was he concerned that his characters represent any specific majority. He also explained in the essay, “Notes on the English Character” from his book, *Abinger Harvest* (1936), “The nations *must* understand one another and quickly; and without the interposition of their governments, for the shrinkage of the globe is throwing them into one another’s arms” (14). In his review of the book, Arnold may capture the core of Forster’s purpose in writing *A Passage to India* when he states, “Mr. Foster, in fact, has reached the stage in his development as an artist when, in his own words about Miss

Quested, he is ‘no longer examining life, but being examined by it.’ He has been examined by India, and this is his confession” (1). More importantly, Childs suggests that Forster’s text has been criticized widely because of the nature of the themes it covers:

A Passage to India is the most controversial of Forster’s novels . . . partly because the book has proven highly responsive to so many approaches. Despite literary criticism’s changing focus points over the decades . . . it has always kept *A Passage to India* firmly in its sights because Forster’s novel offers fertile ground for the broadest range of analytical and theoretical perspectives. (1)

It is the novel’s many themes that make it susceptible to trends in scholarship, specifically n regard the mystery surrounding the cave, Mishra says:

Many people saw as the annoyingly unsolved central mystery of *A Passage to India*—namely, what happens to Adela Quested in the Marabar caves—was neither central nor much of a mystery to Forster. It was only part of the strangely unsettled quality of life in India, which often oppressed first-time visitors to the country and brought out unexpected sides of their personalities. (xxvii)

Mishra goes on to assert that he agrees with Forster on a personal level about India’s ability to disorient people. He says in a tone that indicates a rebuttal to critics who have accused Forster of perpetuating the exotic, sexualized representation of the other, “Anything, Forster seems to say, could have happened to Adela quested in the caves—hallucination, collision with flying bats, perhaps, even rape—and this Indian reader at least has no trouble accepting this” (xxvii).

Child’s discusses several contradictory critical interpretations of the mysterious cave. He begins with Sara Suleri, “The use of metaphoric geography, the West’s Others most often appear as (dark) holes beyond civilization, divinity or morality, such that European narrative’s most

compelling and durable image of the East is a hollow or indeed a cave” (4). Then Childs describes an opposing critical view that seems closer to the ambiguous, yet open-minded attitude with which Forster viewed India. Child’s continues, “Where Suleri argues that the centre of the book is the vacancy of the Marabar Caves, Brenda Silver believes that at its heart is the ‘unspeakable’ colonial trope of rape . . . and that Aziz ‘reduced to his sexuality, becomes simultaneously rapist and object of rape’” (4). Peter Moray explores the criticism of Homi Bhabha in “Postcolonial Forster” (2007). He states:

Bhabha argues that the operation of colonial power is far more ambivalent...for Bhabha this is illustrated in the moments of doubt scattered across *Passage* and symbolized by the Marabar Caves, where the confident programme of imperial power and knowledge is disturbed by what he call, ‘the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences’, a threat which ‘breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside.’ (6)

The various critical perspectives on the novel only reinforce Childs’s belief in the responsiveness of the text. Timothy Christensen’s article, "Bearing the White Man's Burden: Misrecognition and Cultural Difference in E. M. Foster's *A Passage to India*," (2006) argues that Forster’s representation of Indians and Britons goes beyond the scope of politics and race:

portrayal of the difference between English and Indians within the novel has a much more radical potential than would be the case had Forster chosen to represent these differences as purely political--in other words, had Forster restricted his critique of Anglo-India to the symbolic realm and therefore ignored the ideological determinants of colonial politics. Such a strategy would have foreclosed the possibility of the intricate dissection of British colonial ideology

that Forster in fact presents. By examining the fantasmatic support of reality in colonial India, Forster is able to engage in a pointed ideological critique that shows race to be both historically contingent and absolutely fundamental to the production and reproduction of British colonial power. (1)

Nevertheless, *Passage* deviated from the work of his contemporaries because in it he creates British characters with obvious flaws. John Plotz comments on Forster's willingness to portray the British with a searing level of realism:

E. M. Forster offers a stark binary between English conformists (the subaltern Ronnie Heaslop) and rebels (the defiant teacher Fielding). The meek and the mindless among the English sing the anthem and attend productions of banal London comedies, while Anglo-Indian rebels hold themselves firmly aloof, seeking out Indian conversation and moonlit mosques. (666)

These British characters are not one-dimensional, pro-imperial mouthpieces. Nor does Forster depict them as all bring their racism with them from London; Forster is not hesitant to illustrate that some British came to India with open minds, but were quickly pressured by Anglo-Indians to keep the colonial hegemony in place. Baker comments on the novel's Ronny, who is engaged to marry Adela, "Ronny realizes the illegitimacy of the British presence in India. Yet, to retain his privileges and to remain an accepted as well as respected part of the colony, he tries hard to convince himself and others of the legitimacy of the British presence in India" (74-75). Through this character's inner turmoil, Forster addresses Britain's struggle to maintain colonial power as new British travelers arrive in India. This element of the plot effectively undermines the myth of British superiority.

How does an author move from a text filled with typical social class and personal relationship struggles, as depicted in *Howard's End* (1910), to the pessimistic, anti-imperialistic representation in *A Passage to India* (1924)? The shift in his focus begins with his travels outside of England.

His first trip to India was a brief one year stay and was arranged by the Indian aristocrat, Syed Ross Masood. The visit left Forster feeling disoriented. In the Penguin Classics edition of *A Passage*, Pankaj Mishra writes in his Introduction, "India at first sight was a more daunting jumble—or *muddle*, his preferred word—than he had imagined. Both the landscape and people seemed to defy familiar categories of description. Other countries contained 'mysteries or muddles', but they managed to 'draw rings around them'" (x). In Forster's essay, "Three Countries," from Elizabeth Heine and Edward Arnold's book, *The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings* (1983), Forster reflects on this first visit to India, "mixed up with the pleasure and fun was much pain. The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me. It is not a tourist's outing, and the impression it left was deep" (297). After visiting India in 1912-1913, the First World War began, and he went to Egypt to serve in the Red Cross. It was in Egypt that he met his lover, Mohammed el Adl. (Introduction xiv). While in Egypt, he wrote about his disgust with nationalism and saw it as a dynamic that breeds the objectification of cultures into the other. Mishra quotes a letter Forster wrote to G.L. Dickinson, "Only by believing in a Germany have we become patriotic . . . just as we remained religious only so long as we could believe in the Devil" (xv). In Egypt he became increasingly critical of British imperialism. Mishra states:

He seems to have been more concerned with British imperialism, which he observed closely in Egypt, than the war. Back in England in 1919, he received with shock the news of the massacre by an over-zealous British officer of over

four hundred unarmed Indians in the Northern Indian city of Amristar. He denounced British conduct in Egypt, he was appalled to discover that his former lover, Mohammed, had been unjustly imprisoned by the British. (xv)

It should be understood that Forster started to question Britain's imperialist agenda before he wrote *A Passage*. He had always been quietly anti-establishment, but became even more so after his travels in Egypt and India. Mishra says, "Forster was instinctively against authority of any sort; and he did not take well to the pompous and racially aloof British administrators he often met during his travels to India" (xii).

In 1921 he returned to India at the request of the Maharajah of Dewas, where he was to be the Maharajh's personal secretary in the predominantly Hindu state of Dewas. Forster developed a close friendship with the Maharajah and observed several Hindu celebrations. He and the Maharajah discussed religion and politics. In an essay from *The Hill of Devi*, he reflects on a Hindu festival and the dancing of its devotees, "There is no dignity, no taste, no form...I don't think one ought to be irritated with Idolatry because one can see from the faces of the people that it touches something very deep in their hearts" (64). Also from an essay in *The Hill of Devi* he tries to articulate his jumbled perceptions of India: "Every thing that happens is said to be one thing and proves to be another, and as it is further said in an unknown tongue I live in a haze . . . It is an indescribable and unimaginable—really wonderful experience, for it is at the fag end of a vanished civilization. But my brain seems as messy as its surroundings, and I cannot realize it at all" (38-40). Additionally, Forster was disturbed by the increasingly heated political scene in India in 1921. Gandhi was leading protests and many Muslims were angry at England for undermining the Ottoman Empire (Introduction xv). In an essay in *The Nation and the Athenaeum* (1922), Forster attempts to explain why Muslims saw British imperialism as a

Crusade, “Islam is more than a religion, and both its opponents and supporters have wronged it by their hard legalistic insistence on the Faith. It is an attitude towards life which has produced durable and exquisite civilizations, an attitude threatened by Europe’s remorseless crusade today” (844). Forster’s ambivalence is obvious and is one of the dominant characteristics of his thoughts and writing at this point in his career.

After Forster returned to England in 1922, he started writing *A Passage to India*. Mishra says that Forster struggled with how to synthesize the vast amount of feelings and experiences he brought back from India, though his frustration with the British view of India is decidedly clear. Discussing Forster’s time in India, Mishra states:

It had made him examine his old assumptions. As he wrote to a British friend in India, he had begun to wonder if he ‘had moved at all’, since his time at King’s College, Cambridge. At King’s College, he had discovered the value of personal relationships, but he felt now, after his experience of the subject countries of India and Egypt, that the ‘King’s view oversimplified people’: ‘We are more complicated, also richer than it knew, and affection grows more difficult than it used to, and also more glorious. (xviii).

This period of self-evaluation led to *A Passage to India*.

Forster wanted to write a novel about India but struggled with what direction to take with the text. He was keenly interested in the Hindu legend that says there is a third, invisible river that joins the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna and wanted to write a novel that represented the mystery of India, which the notion of a third river represents (Introduction xiii). On his frustration on writing a novel about India, “The only book I have in my head is too like Howard’s End to interest me . . . I want something beyond the field of action and behavior: the

water of the river Ganges and the Jumna where they join. India is full of such wonders, but she can't give them to me" (xiii). His difficulty writing *A Passage* continued as he tried to incorporate religious, sexual, and political themes and still utilize a simple plot.

The novel begins with two women visiting India, the elderly Mrs. Moore and her soon to be daughter-in-law, Miss Quested. The women have traveled from England to see Mrs. Moore's son, Ronny Heaslop, a city magistrate. The plot is set during the 1920s, with palpable tensions among the British and the colonized Indians. Forster creates an unexpected friendship between Dr. Aziz, a local Muslim physician, and the British headmaster of a college for Indians, Cyril Fielding. The two men signify the hope of a relationship between their countries based on equality and respect.

Early in the text, Dr. Aziz discusses with his Muslim friends whether or not it is possible to be friends with the English. Aziz says:

Mahmoud Ali argued that it was not, Hamidullah disagreed, but with so many reservations that there was no friction between them . . . 'I only contend that it is possible in England,' replied Hamidullah, who had been to that country long ago, before the big rush, and had received a cordial welcome at Cambridge. (8-9)

Hamidullah goes on to reminisce about her time in England and the inevitable influence of the colonial British, or Anglo-Indians:

the Reverend and Mrs. Bannister, whose goodness to me in England I shall never forget or describe. They were like father and mother to me, I talked to them as I do now. In the vacations their rectory became my home. They entrusted all their children to me—I often carried little Hugh about . . . I learn now that this boy is in business as a leather merchant at Cawnpore. Imagine how I long to see him . . .

but it is useless. The other Anglo-Indians will have got hold of him long ago. He will probably think that I want something. (10)

Hamidullah expresses the ambiguity felt by colonized Indians as they navigated tenuous relationships with the British, particularly British women. The three friends turn their discussion to the rudeness of British women and can only recall a few exceptions. Of Aziz's opinion, Forster says, "He too generalized from his disappointments—it is difficult for members of a subject race to do otherwise. Granted the exceptions, he agreed that all Englishwomen are haughty and venal" (11). Ironically, Aziz soon meets Mrs. Moore, a British woman that he finds to be neither haughty nor venal.

After being snubbed by a local British civil surgeon, Aziz is walking home and stops to rest at a mosque and thinks:

A mosque by winning his approval let loose his imagination. The temple of another creed, Hindu, Christian, or Greek, would have bored him and failed to awaken his sense of beauty. Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle-cry, more, much more . . . Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and thoughts found their home. (16)

Forster makes it a point to include this beautiful passage of Aziz's love for Islam early in the text because later in the novel, he is excited by anger toward other religions more so than by love for his own. While he rests peacefully, he is startled by an English woman walking in the mosque. He is angry and chastised her for being in the holy place. He finds that she has taken her shoes off, as is appropriate. Astonished that she knew to take them off, and even more astonished that she bothered when no one was there to see that she did, he asks her name. She tells him that she is Mrs. Moore and steps closer, "Advancing, he found that she was old. A fabric bigger than the

mosque fell to pieces, and he did not know whether he was glad or sorry. She was older than Hamidullah Begum, with a red face and white hair. Her voice had deceived him” (18). The two discuss their families and find that they both dislike the civil surgeon who snubbed Aziz. Aziz is taken aback, “She had proved her sympathy by criticizing her fellow country-woman to him, but even earlier he had known. The flame that not even beauty can nourish was springing up, and though his words were querulous his heart began to glow secretly” (20). He tells Mrs. Moore that she understands what he feels and in that manner, she is an “Oriental.” This meeting is immensely central to the plot: the ensuing friendship between Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz leads to a visit to the Marabar caves where existing racial tensions erupt. Additionally, this exchange symbolizes Forster’s belief that it is possible for people from vastly different cultural and religious backgrounds to have a deep connection. Though later in the plot their friendship dissolves, this passage is a deviation from British novels influenced by colonial travel at the time. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad does not create characters that interact across the colonial divide with respect and mutual admiration. There is no equivalent to Mrs. Moore and Dr. Aziz in Conrad’s story.

Soon, a trip to the Marabar caves is arranged by Dr. Aziz for Mrs. Moore and her son’s fiancée, Miss Quested. After feeling overcome by hearing a mystical echo in the caves, Mrs. Moore stops to rest while Dr. Aziz and Miss Quested continue on. What happens next is somewhat of a mystery. Miss Quested becomes confused by experiencing an echo in a cave and claims to have been sexually assaulted by Dr. Aziz. The ensuing trial exacerbates the existing hostility felt by both the British and the Indians. Mishra explains:

Adela, who has developed doubts about her impending marriage with Ronny, imagines that she has been sexually assaulted . . . The British officials arrest Aziz,

enraging, and temporarily uniting, the Muslim and Hindu communities, which hire an expensive Indian lawyer to defend him. The English retreat within a miasma of racial distrust and fear, and they despise Fielding even more as he defends Aziz. (xviii-xix).

Miss Quested shocks everyone by saying that she was mistaken in accusing Dr. Aziz and eventually returns to England. Dr. Aziz is left feeling bitter toward all British, even his friend Fielding. Aziz leaves the area for the Hindu state, Mau. Two years after the trial, Fielding attempts to reconnect with Aziz in Mau. The men talk but are not able to cross their political and national differences. Mishra describes the changed men:

both Fielding and Aziz have ‘hardened since Chandrapore’. Aziz’s nationalism is more rhetorical than before. ‘We may hate one another, but we hate you most.’ Fielding, dulled by marriage and respectability, feels ‘surprise at his past heroism. Would he today defy all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian?’ The British Empire ‘really can’t be abolished because it is rude,’ he thinks. ‘Away from us,’ he tells Aziz, ‘Indians go to seed at once.’ (xxiii)

This is the quagmire of complicated allegiances and injustices that existed in India at the time. Forster does not shy away from depicting them realistically. Although his novel ends without a harmonious, active relationship between Dr. Aziz and Fielding, Forster expresses his belief that individuals of different nationalities are often capable of genuine friendship, but not within the Dr. Aziz and Fielding have spent a significant amount of time together, yielding a breakdown of racial prejudice in both men. Yet their differences are real. Mishra discusses Forster’s deeply felt conviction that differences of religion and politics be overcome, “The bits about Indian religion in *A Passage to India* . . . convey Forster’s growing skepticism in wake of the First

World War about modern civilization's ability to solve on its own the immense new problems it had created . . . for instance, the heavily armed nation-states and empires that fought each other" (xxv), yet, it is the current political situation that imposes an impassable breach between them.

Early to mid-twentieth century British travel writing was the landscape period and usually perpetuated British imperial expansion. Novels of this period depicted the colonized as simple-minded people in need of Britain's civilizing influence (Carr 71), as exemplified by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *A Passage to India*, on the other hand, portrays the colonized as complex individuals, with all of the contradictions, weaknesses, and strengths that are part of being fully human, which is the anti-thesis of representing the colonized as other.

CHAPTER 5 TRAVEL WRITING SCHOLARSHIP: NEW DIRECTIONS

Fanny Parkes and E.M. Forster had different experiences in India, and yet they both wrote outside of the conventions and modes of their time. They were both essentially outsiders: Parkes was an eccentric feminist, and Forster was a homosexual. Neither fit into the social customs of England at the time. Interestingly, Parkes is a relatively obscure writer who has only come to the fore recently through the research of William Dalrymple. Her travelogue rightly joins a body of study relevant to travel writing scholars, as well as feminist and post-colonial studies. Forster, however, was an author by profession, with a successful career as a novelist, essayist, and critic. His works have been studied for many years by scholars in various fields. The point of interest where their works intersect is what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “contact zone.” Parkes’s travelogue and Forster’s novel, *A Passage to India*, were each the direct result of interactions between a British subject travelling in colonial India. There is an increasing interest in studying works of this nature, these contact zones. Scholars desire to demystify the belief that travelogues and novels influenced by travel during Britain’s colonial period were all a form of hegemonic propaganda. In his introduction to Parkes’s book, William Dalrymple asserts, “There sometimes seems to be an assumption at work in academia—especially in the US—that all writings of the colonial period exhibit the same sets of prejudices: a monolithic, modern, academic Occidentalism which seems to match uncannily the monolithic stereotypes perceived in the original *Orientalism*” (xxii). It is accepted that Said’s *Orientalism* created a new framework from which to evaluate texts, especially past texts. Though Dalrymple’s point is legitimate, Pratt argues that colonial and post-colonial scholars, as well as the academia in general, is far from where it should be in terms of purging its own hegemonic perspective. She argues in her preface:

intense institutional struggles now underway in most American universities . . . struggles, precisely, over the legacy Euroimperialism, androcentrism, and white supremacy in education and official culture . . . Intellectuals are called upon to define, or redefine, their relation to the structures of knowledge and power that they produce, and that produces them. (*Imperial Eyes* xi)

Pratt advocates a genuine self-evaluation of the manner in which scholars, particularly literary scholars, approach the study of the colonial period.

There are scholars who articulate concerns of a different nature, such as Duncan and Gregory in the introduction to their book, *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (1999), “There is a sense in which all travel writing, as a process of inscription and appropriation, spins webs of colonizing power, but to locate travel writing within the discursive formation also involves plotting the play of fantasy and desire, and the possibility of transgression” (3). They go on to suggest an approach that would improve study in this genre:

Too often, we think, journals, letters and published writings are assigned to literary scholars and historians; sketches, water-colours and paintings to art historians; and photographs and postcards to historians of photography. We suggest that the alternative strategy of attending to the physicality of representation imposes the obligation to read these different media together and, in so doing, to attend to their different valences and silences. (4)

Duncan and Gregory make an important point; much of the travel writing produced during the colonial period was done in conjunction with visual representations, which are often overlooked when studying an author’s work. Fanny Parkes, for example, made countless sketches and paintings, and yet Dalrymple does not include them in his publication of her work. It may be

that those works are lost, yet it is odd that most republished colonial travelogues do not include supplemental visual works when many authors originally included them. Procuring a sampling of an author's letters, postcards, and visual artistic representations should certainly be a priority when studying a travel writer's text.

But what of current texts? What influence do "rule-breaking" colonial texts have on contemporary travel writers? Scholars in the field note new trends, which are really old trends dressed in new clothes. Debbie Lisle explains this dynamic in her book, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (2006):

In depicting foreign space as *past* and domestic space as both *present* and *forward looking*, contemporary travel writers are able to replay the adventures of colonial exploration that the forces of globalization have nullified. In other words, travel writers use strategies of temporalisation to perpetuate the myth that certain places are 'stuck' in the past and untouched by modernity. (209)

Lisle's assessment is important if contemporary travel writers are concerned with the larger impact of their writing; familiarity with the modes and themes of past travel writing may be helpful in shaping the field.

A deeper study of texts yields a more complex picture: not all colonial travel writing was an act of imperialism. Dalrymple goes on to quote Colin Thubron, "To define the genre [of travel writing] as an act of domination—rather than of understanding, respect or even catharsis—is simplistic. If even the attempt to understand is seen as aggression or appropriation, then all human contact declines into paranoia" (xxii). Certain texts are clearly more representative of colonial travel authors who did attempt to understand. There is much to gain in searching out

and studying such texts: Parkes and Forster's works are counter-colonial, and as such, are a compelling place to begin a more balanced study of the genre.

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