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Women, Nationalism And The Romantic Stage: Theatre And Politics In Britain, 1780-1800

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CHAPTER SIX

The balance of power: Hannah Cowley's Day in Turkey

On the third of December 1791, Hannah Cowley's eleventh play, a mixed drama entitled *A Day in Turkey; or the Russian Slaves*, was first produced at Covent Garden. The piece did reasonably well, receiving fourteen performances between December 3rd, 1791 and May 25th, 1792; it was published early in 1792. Yet the advertisement to the printed play begins by complaining of a public injustice:

[ADVERTISEMENT]

HINTS have been thrown out, and the idea industriously circulated, that the following comedy is tainted with POLITICS. I protest I know nothing about politics; – will Miss Wollstonecraft forgive me – whose book contains such a body of mind as I hardly ever met with – if I say that politics are *unfeminine*? I never in my life could attend to their discussion.¹

Rife with contradictions, this advertisement mingles (dis)ingenuousness with commercial ingenuity. Cowley records the social and economic forces demanding a disavowal of political interest on the same page that provides that disavowal: “The illiberal and *false* suggestions concerning the politics of the comedy I could frankly forgive, had they not deprived it of the honour of a COMMAND.” She distinguishes herself from the political Mary Wollstonecraft by asserting her inability to “attend” to political discussion – yet she has read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* closely enough to remark somewhat ambiguously on its “body of mind.”² On the face of it, Cowley's remark rebuts Wollstonecraft's claim that women's intellect should not be constrained by “sexual prejudices”: the dramatist reinserts the pamphleteer's mind back into her scandalously female body. Yet the remark could also be read – out of the context of this advertisement – as a compliment to Wollstonecraft's persistent articulation of those prejudices which limit women's development and power: the prejudices which constrain other women's bodies *and* minds. The drama which follows this ambiguous advertisement will seem at different times to underwrite each of these two contradictory readings. Overall, however, the

contradictions of the advertisement present the female playwright as slightly too knowing: she understands enough of politics to know it is supposed to be unfeminine, *and* to know that an apolitical female has no business reading Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Cowley's public (and political) disavowal of politics in the advertisement to *A Day in Turkey* seems in retrospect to have been simultaneously unbelievable and unexceptionable. Parliamentary debates in the spring of 1791 had argued at length over the dubious political wisdom of supporting Turkey against Russia in their hotly contested claims to Oczakow, a barren but important military base. Portraying the tribulations of Russian captives under the power of a Turkish Bassa (or pasha), Cowley's play seems to side with the Russians. Yet Cowley also contextualized the questions of slavery and of European politics by invoking related events: debates over the slave trade in Britain, and the early aftermath of the French revolution. The most immediately objectionable politics in the play seem to have been those expressed by *A la Greque*, a French *valet de chambre* to a noble Russian prisoner. Cowley claimed poetic license as a means of distancing herself from the views he expressed:

How then could I, pretending to be a comic poet, bring an emigrant Frenchman before the public at this day, and not make him hint at the events which had just passed, or were then passing in his native country? A character so written would have been anomalous – the critics ought to have had no mercy on me. It is *A LA GREQUE* who speaks, not *I*; nor can I be accountable for *his* sentiments. *Such* is my idea of tracing CHARACTER; and were I to continue to write for the stage, I should always govern myself by it.

Cowley could, however, be held accountable for choosing to introduce a French character in a drama concerning Russians and Turks – yet her contemporaries seem to have been willing to let her rather aggressive claim to political innocence pass without challenge.

In fact, Cowley's insistence on her political innocence worked to distract attention from other flaws within the play. The reviewer "Aesopus," for instance, gave the dramatist a good drubbing, but politics was the last and apparently least of his concerns:

From the pen of Mrs. COWLEY, judging from her other performances, we had to expect something less fearful of criticism, and more deserving of praise than the present Operatical Tragi-Comedy. Without entering into an invidious recital of defects, we shall only say, that the language is in parts inflated, in others it is replete with trite sayings, strained witticisms, and broad vulgarity. The similes are ill selected, and worse applied. The songs are unconnected with

the drama, and absurdly introduced for the amusement of a parcel of unfeeling eunuchs. The poetry of the songs, of which we subjoin a specimen, has not a single recommendation – are only admissible on a comparison with the *music!* The Authoress has hazarded the introduction of numberless political allusions, many of which were violently resisted by the audience.³

Vigorously engaging the charge of political meddling, Cowley ignored the literary and dramatic complaints of her critics, as if a disavowal of politics would also protect the play from charges of farcical vulgarity and insignificance. If by the end of the eighteenth century the form of farce suggested political commentary, the converse might be made to seem true: freedom from politics would mean eschewing the degraded theatre of farce.

The gender politics of female innocence and purity which mark out the borders of the play operate within the dramatic narrative as well. Cowley shows the arbitrary power of a Turkish bashaw overcome by the sentimental force of romantic love and the ideal of female chastity; this exploration of gendered power can be seen as a response both to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and to the gendering of politics which accompanied political discussion and popular representations of the Russian empress, Catherine II. While Cowley's support for Russian slaves rather than Turkish barbarity seems clear and somewhat conventional, her gender politics remain distinctly ambivalent – and persistently disruptive. In parliamentary debates and the mixed drama alike, gender norms were invoked to stabilize an uncomfortable indeterminacy of political relations – yet in practice the performance of gender repeatedly restaged the indeterminacy it was meant to resolve.

“THE TAMING OF THE SHREW”

In “Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre,” Barbara Freedman argues that “traditional Western theatre offers us only two stages, comic and tragic, upon which are always playing some version of *Oedipus* or its sister play, *The Taming of the Shrew*.” With such limited choices, Freedman argues, “a set-up is therefore always being staged as well,” since the spectators of these plays “‘cannot choose’ but accept the interpellation or hailing that indoctrinates the subject into a confusing and limiting identity, a *méconnaissance*, a delusion.” That delusion is specifically gendered: *The Taming of the Shrew* identifies civilization “with male control over a disordered female sexuality” and thus “not only record[s] but promulgate[s] the values of a repressive patriarchal culture.”⁴ In 1791, however, James

Gillray invoked this old comedy of patriarchal power to register a perceived threat to the basis of that power: the Russian empress's threat to Turkish sovereignty and thus to the balance of power in Europe.

On March 28, 1791, William Pitt read to the House of Commons a message from the king announcing that attempts to persuade Russia to negotiate a favorable settlement with Turkey had failed, and that armament was felt to be necessary as a further step of persuasion and possible force. The message was an implicit request for funding: when members of the Whig opposition suggested that time was required to deliberate the issue, Pitt invoked parliamentary precedent, arguing that it was standard procedure to wait no more than one day to respond to a message from the king. The prime minister managed to push through a vote of support and funding the next day – only to have the opposition return to the issue repeatedly over the next few weeks, gathering strength in the process. The threat of war, and opposition resistance to that threat, brought together a complicated set of issues. Pitt presented the funding for arms as a necessary step to maintain the balance of power in Europe – but the armament was also seen by the opposition as an example of the imbalance of power in British government. Discussions of the armament presented parliamentary politics mirroring European politics, but in partial, confusing, and contradictory ways. Gender seems to have been invoked by parliamentary debates and caricatures alike as a means of stabilizing the cross-patterns of identification, of providing a basis for critique or action. At least half the time, however, the question of gender further complicated the issue at hand.

Gillray's caricature, "Taming of the Shrew: Katharine & Petruchio; The Modern Quixotte, or what you will" (April 20, 1791) called up (at least) two contradictory plots to capture some of the doubled (or multiple) vision at work in the parliamentary debates (plate 16). *The Taming of the Shrew* plot, for instance, seems to show Russia as the empress easily vanquished. Confronted with Pitt as Petruchio and his allies (Prussia and Holland) mounted on good King George, she surrenders in the terms of Kate's final speech:

I see my Lances are but straws;
My strength is weak, my weakness past compare;
And am asham'd that Women are so simple
To offer War when they should kneel for Peace.

Brought to her senses with a little show of force, Russia as the tamed shrew suggests the wisdom of Pitt's policy – or at least, she embodies the

narrative of Russian repentance and submission that Pitt and his ministers were hoping to see develop. Yet Petruchio in the *Shrew* is known for his arbitrary, whimsical, and often abusive assertion of authority over Kate: his command that she throw off her cap is presented explicitly as a mark of his absolute authority over her, and her performance of complete submission. Casting Pitt as Petruchio thus offered a double-edged reading of the former's international strategies. So too reference to Shakespeare's Katherine revised parliamentary portraits of Russia's Catherine: where the former emphasizes the generic frailty of all women ("our lances are but straws"), Gillray's Catherine II applied specifically to herself the lesson of an earlier shrew. Gillray took his lines out of context and out of sequence, ostensibly or perhaps ostentatiously avoiding the specifically contractual relationship that Katherine invokes:

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war, where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey. (5.2.161–65)

In the *Shrew*, Katherine's acceptance of female subordination is based on a contract whereby the woman's husband serves both as sovereign and protector, one who "commits his body / To painful labour both by sea and land" (5.2.148–49) to support and protect her. Yet as Burke had noted, no such contract existed between England and Russia, nor was one proposed. Rather, "England had declared that Russia shall be dependent, and still unprotected."⁵

Gillray represented Pitt not only as Petruchio but also as Don Quixote, for whom King George is but a scrawny Rosinante: in this version of the story, Pitt's authority over the king of England became a central issue. By forcing armament on parliament in the king's name, Pitt was seen as having usurped the royal prerogative: from this perspective, George III served merely as the minister's beast of burden. But Don Quixote is also an infamous dreamer, consistently misreading reality. Dreaming of Catherine's subservience, he may well have chosen to apply the wrong plot (i.e., *The Taming of the Shrew*) to the current political situation. Part of the inspiration for this print seems to have come from Grey's long speech on April 11 attacking the military build-up. Grey claimed that "the balance of power" had been originally a Whig concern, linked to the defensive strategy of making war only in cases of self-defense. Pointing out that the Tories had applied "the epithets of wild and romantic" to this general system, Grey

thought that those who had been so loud in talking of the romantic idea of the balance of power, would have explained their own system. He had watched them closely, and he believed that he had seen some of the workings of conviction in their minds. They had changed their sentiments, and had now confessed that the balance of power in Europe was no longer a romance. (106)

Yet Gillray's caricature suggested that the balance of power in Europe remained a romance, a fantasy which only the knight of La Mancha would engage to defend – and that a drubbing may await Pitt and his allies outside the imaginary boundaries of a plot in which the shrew is tamed. A Major Maitland posed this perspective on the ministers' position most succinctly: "Why, then, did they enter into the war? . . . It was to support a balance of power never before heard of; an ideal balance of power, which was never before entertained, and which was never supposed to have any relation to the politics of Europe, nor any connection with its political safety or existence" (112). Gillray's final title for the print, however, refuses to settle for either of these readings, suggesting that any version of the political story underway might have equal validity: call it "what you will." Fox's objection to a Tory speaker on the 29th of March invoked theatre to emphasize a similar indeterminacy: "His [Steele's] speech resembled the specimen of the paragraph writer in the play about Russia, Prussia, Turkey, and what not, of which the person to whom it was shewn pronounced that it was well done, for it was finely confused, and very alarming" (42).

The same complaint might be made of the debates more generally, though Gillray's doubled plot of *Don Quixote* and *The Taming of the Shrew* roughly encapsulates (while inverting) the antagonistic histories of the armament presented by opposition members and ministerial supporters. The opposition's portrait of a patient, civilized, and long-suffering Russia might well be compared (cynically) to Don Quixote's vision of Dulcinea as a fine court lady – though of course this comparison undercuts the realism of that portrait. Supporters of the ministry for their part painted Russia as the shrew, inclined beyond the call of reason to act against Britain and British interests – yet in supporting the armament these speakers sketch a shrew almost impossible to tame.

For the opposition, Russia rather than Turkey seemed Britain's natural ally: an important trading partner provoked to war by Turkey, but nonetheless willing to return many of the lands it had conquered; a Christian nation and imperial power.⁶ Indeed, the opposition repeatedly cast Russia not only as a trading partner but as a sister empire, mirroring Britain's rapid imperial growth. Various speakers mentioned their

discomfort with Britain presuming to dictate to Russia which imperial conquests “she” might keep and which “she” must resign; several drew the analogy to Britain’s Indian empire quite explicitly. Of course, for the Tories, Russia’s imperial expansion constituted much of her threat to Britain’s welfare – the Whigs, looking back to recent British history, applied the imperial analogy in another direction. In 1791, the loss of America remained a vivid memory; the Whig Whitbread suggested that Russia’s “empire, by extension, became more unwieldy, and less to be dreaded” and that the best course of action was “to suffer her to pursue her schemes to the South; to suffer her to fight, and weaken herself” (137). The Oczakow debates show imperial rather than colonial narcissism at work: it seems to have been impossible for members of parliament to speak of Russia’s imperial fortunes without seeing their own reflected back to them. Yet once again narcissism and paranoia are intermingled: if Russia appears to the Whigs as a sister empire, worthy of respect and support, to the Tories she appears a ravaging, voracious monster, threatening to destroy Britain’s power and very way of life.

Dulcinea or Katherine the Shrew? Gillray’s doubled vision cut to the heart of the parliamentary debates, as gender – and a gendered definition of political roles – became a touchstone of the discussion. The convention of using the female pronoun for nations contributes to the feminizing of Russia, yet Turkey’s actions are rarely discussed in feminine terms, and it may be worth noting that the female figure of Britannia does *not* appear in the armament debates or associated caricatures. Within the gendered terms of the debate, ministerial supporters concentrated on destroying the image of Russia as a mirror to Britain, or as a trading partner with claims on British gallantry, by emphasizing “her” barbarism and rapacity. A Mr. Pybus, for instance, worked to redefine Russia’s national character through “her obvious schemes of conquest and dominion” (119) and through the bloody fall of Ismael, a city on the banks of the Danube: “the capture of that place had been attended with such acts of carnage and barbarity, as could not be thought of without horror, and were a disgrace to humanity” (120). In Pybus’s rhetoric, Turkey remained “the enemy” rather than a friend or ally, but while Whitbread had suggested Russia’s imperial expansion mirrored Britain’s past, Pybus insisted that Britain’s future was reflected in the threat to Turkey: “the time might not be very remote, when the fleets of Russia would triumph in the Mediterranean, an object to the whole world, of her activity, adroitness, and power, and of our supineness, impotence, and disgrace” (120–21). Her power, our impotence: the

terms of conflict begin to be sexually coded, as Russia's military force threatens to emasculate Britain's international reputation.

The Tory J. T. Stanley echoed the imperial paranoia of Pybus's warning, using still more extravagant hyperbole:

Let gentlemen but consider the character of the Sovereign, who refuses to accept our unenforced proffers of mediation, from the day she was seated on the throne of the Russias; did she not discover an insatiable thirst of power, and an unlimited desire of extending her territories, immense as they were, to still more distant boundaries? Was it not evident her ambition aimed at no less than the title of Empress of the East, and that she wished to be saluted as such on the ancient throne of the Eastern Emperors, while her ambition, unsatisfied with this object, still would lead her to be the directress of every cabinet and every council in the western division of the ancient world? (130)

Britain as well as Russia might be said to aim at the title of "Empress of the East" – and at the moment, Britain rather than Russia was attempting to direct the cabinets of other western nations: specifically, Britain was trying to dictate to Russia the terms of an acceptable peace treaty with Turkey.⁷ Thus Stanley's hyperbolic account of Russia's imperial appetites works to ward off similarities between the two empires by shifting gender midstream:

But should a war ensue in consequence of these armaments; should the obstinacy of the Empress force the Minister to an opinion that a war was necessary, are we so much to dread it? Are there no reasons why Russia should not remain unmolested and mistress of *her* own will, in what concerns materially the interests of the great republics of Europe? Are there no reasons why we should not force *him* to listen to us, and to insist on *his* paying some attention to our negotiation? (128; my italics)

Britain's use of force would in this case only be a response to the "force" of Russia's obstinacy, framed as an offensive power, capable of constraining the minister's opinion and choice. But in a debate where gallantry has been invoked, the image of Britain "molesting" a Russia no longer "mistress of her own will" could not be left unrevised: Russia must undergo a sudden sex change in order to justify Britain's own use of force to insist on "his" attention.

Sheridan finally turned the sexualization of Russia back on the ministry's supporters by involving the speakers themselves in the sexual excess they charted. Speaking after Sir William Young had described Russia's territories and conquests at length, Sheridan insisted that no one opposing Grey's motions had offered any substantial argument to support their position:

Not even any argument had been offered by the honourable Baronet who spoke last, and who had traversed over all Europe, traced the history of the navigation and commerce of Russia, from the earliest times; described her back frontiers, and all parts of her dominions, and expatiated with as much familiarity concerning the Dnieper and the Danube, as if he had been talking of the *Worcestershire* canal, and pictured the Empress as a female Colossus, standing with one foot on the banks of the Black Sea, and the other on the coast of the Baltic. (143)

Sheridan's phrasing cast doubt on the propriety of Young's familiarity with Russia's "back frontiers," but the prurient interest attributed to Young does not result in Russia's vulnerability to (sexual) penetration – rather, Sheridan encapsulated the gendered alarmism of his opponents in the mock-heroic figure of the *female* Colossus. The echo of *Julius Caesar* here salaciously reframed Young's investigations:

Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves. (1.2.135–38)

The thought of what Young might have been "peeping at," walking around under the empress's huge legs, dishonors him; so too the opposition argued that the war would lead to (dishonorable) deaths for British sailors and soldiers.

Sheridan's echo of *Julius Caesar* not only encapsulated Tory tendencies to exaggerate Russia's imperial threat by presenting her as a voracious and enormous female figure – it also (somewhat ambivalently) staged the Whig position that the balance of power most at risk in these deliberations was the balance of parliamentary power.⁸ Throughout discussion of the armament, Tories repeatedly called for "confidence in ministers": i.e., support for Pitt's policies *without* a detailed account of the reasoning behind those policies. Pitt insisted that all specific information must remain confidential if negotiations with Russia were to proceed; Whigs saw this call for confidence as a thin excuse for ministerial conquest of parliamentary power and privilege. Behind the figure of the female Colossus (Russia) stood the more serious threat of Pitt's colossal ambitions. The irony seems all the more pointed, given that the last British figure to be caricatured as Colossus was Walpole, whose enormous power as prime minister sometimes seemed the goal of Pitt the younger. And concerns over this internal balance of power, rhetorically mirroring discussions of the balance of power in Europe, raised questions about Pitt's (and by extension, Britain's) own gender identity.

Sheridan's mockery of Tory rhetoric attacked the implicit transfer of power thus proposed by attacking the vainglory of Pitt's pretensions. Having invoked the image of the (female) Colossus, Sheridan went on to dismiss Pitt's claim to be acting as a peacemaker:

Let us call it any thing but a system of peace; let us say it is a system of ambition, of vain glory, to see the offspring of the immortal Chatham, intriguing in all the courts of Europe, and setting himself up as the great posture-master of the balance of power, as possessing an exclusive right to be the umpire of all, and to weigh out in patent scales of his own, the quantity of dominion that each power shall possess. (150)

Sheridan's wit worked by recombining images already put forth by other members of parliament. Grey had already implicitly cast Pitt as "offspring of the immortal Chatham," contrasting Pitt the younger's rash and warlike quest for power with the restraint practiced by his father under similar circumstances thirty years earlier (108). So too the Tory Stanley had earlier spoken for Pitt, insisting that the minister "asks for the exercise, in this *delicate posture of affairs*, of a discretionary power which the constitution allows to the executive Government" (128; my italics). Turning Pitt into the posture-master of Europe, Sheridan's sarcasm combined the rhetoric of both sides.

Encapsulating the relationship between domestic and international power relations, the image of the posture-master and that of the female Colossus were the most widely repeated and memorable of the entire debate: especially after James Gillray turned each into a caricature. The first, "A Female Colossus," emphasizes the monstrous size of the empress; the second, "The Balance of Power," implicitly brings Pitt's sexuality into play as he balances the sultan and the empress on a pole he swears to hold indifferently level between them (plate 17). This balance of power acts differently upon the empress and the sultan: Pitt's pole can be seen as penetrating the empress's back frontiers. But Isaac Cruikshank's "The Treaty of Peace; or, Satisfaction for all Parties" (May 3, 1791) offers perhaps the final word on the subject as it develops a carefully gendered compromise to the troubled balance of power (plate 18). Cruikshank's "Treaty of Peace" is accomplished in a Turkish harem, subordinating Catherine of Russia to the sultan of Turkey – yet all the men present in the harem are shown subordinated in turn to the sexual or physical power of women. The men all emphasize their sexual prowess, but the women's repeated questioning of that prowess takes its toll on all. If we read the print from left to right, as I think we are invited to do, the first figure presented is George III, paired with a black woman:

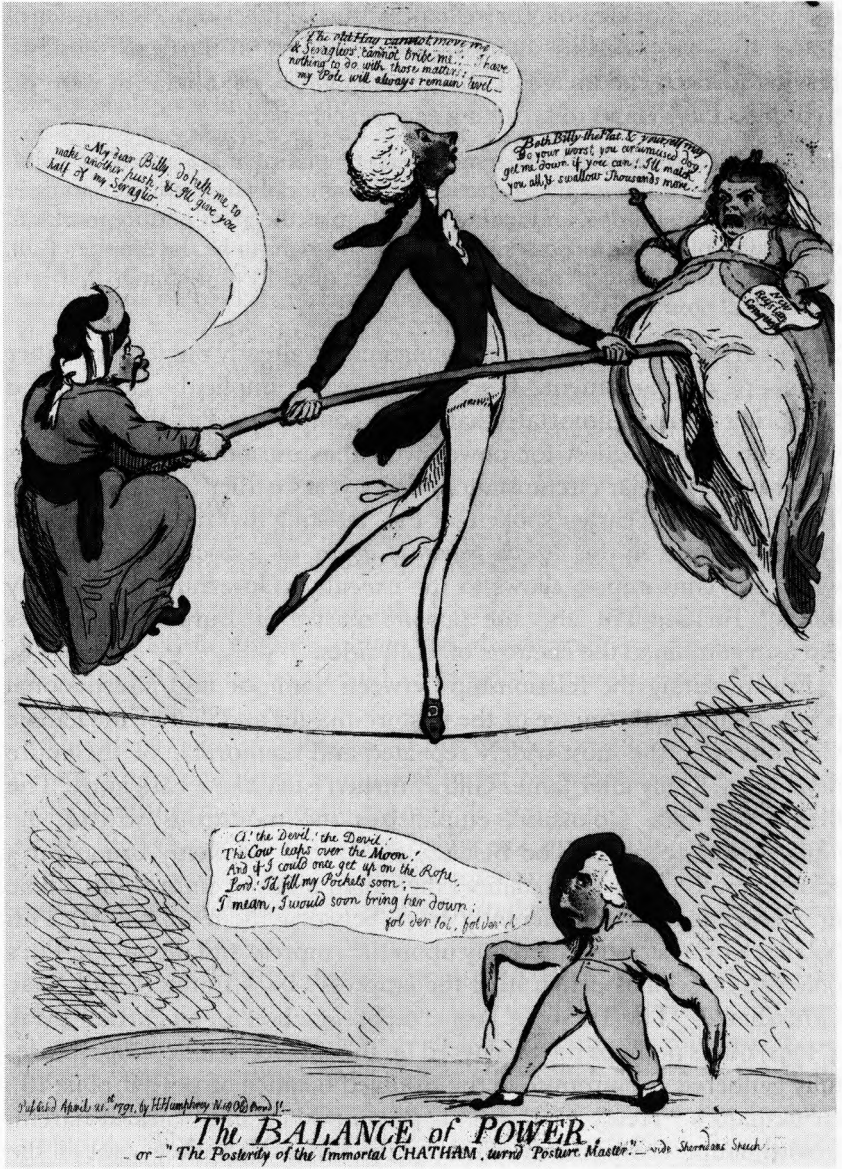


Plate 17 James Gillray, "The Balance of Power." April 21, 1791.



Plate 18 [P. Cruikshank], "The Treaty of Peace; or Satisfaction for all Parties." May 3, 1791.

she remains silent in the print, but his response (“Yes yes yes very large very large!”) gives her unwritten question away. To their right, Thurlow fondles another woman’s breast while she tests the weight of the mace, his sign of office: “I dare say this thing of yours is very heavy?” she asks, and he responds complacently, “Dam-ned heavy my dear little Deary too heavy for you I fear.” But her grasp of him and the mace together suggests that the latter may be too heavy for Thurlow. In the center of the print, Catherine II overwhelms the sultan, telling him to “Kick all those little Husseys out my dear boy I’ll do your business for you.” The sultan’s response encapsulates the ambivalent sexual politics of the print as a whole: “Vat a fine large Girl as a Bear I fear she will be too much for me.” Holland is interrogated more forthrightly by his companion: “Oh dear what large Breaches got anything in them.” Like the king and Thurlow he too insists on his potency: “vel filld vel filld.” But on the far right of the print, Pitt takes a drubbing from two women who tell him “We’ll give it you for serving the pretty Ladies in England as you did & laying so much upon them.” Pitt’s response breaks in before the second woman can finish the complaint (“and for taxing their things”) in order to play off the sexual sense of laying: “Indeed I never did lay too much upon them.” The feminized Pitt, threatening to faint, is aligned with the sultan as the only other man unwilling or unable to assert his masculine sufficiency.

Gillray’s and Cruikshank’s prints suggest the extent to which Pitt and the empress could be linked through their similar military and political ambitions – and by their equally unnatural though very dissimilar sexual tendencies. If Catherine’s sexual predations seemed monstrously transgressive, Pitt’s rather aggressive chastity could be seen as equally unnatural, comically emasculating. Within a code of male gallantry, modesty, and humanity, neither Pitt nor the empress could appear a proper figure of political and military power. The fact that each held *immense* political and military power posed an ideological contradiction intensified by fears that the power of each might remain unchecked. In debates and caricatures, Russia was made female in order that she might be tamed, taught to underwrite Britain’s more properly masculine power – but her insubordination could also be presented as an essentially female characteristic. The ambivalence of gender in the armament debates developed perhaps most clearly from the antagonism between Whig and Tory policies. To the proposed armament, the opposition party could be seen as posing a series of rhetorical questions linking Britain with Russia. The first question: what distinguishes one expanding maritime empire from

another? The Tories responded by emphasizing the disorderly passions of the empress, but the Whigs – and the caricaturists responding to the debate – maintained their point by reframing the question: what distinguishes a militaristic, sexually voracious old woman from a militaristic, sexually abstemious young man? Answer (as Sheridan might have put it): not enough.

THE POWER OF LOVE

Hannah Cowley's "mixed drama," written during 1791 and performed both before and after a treaty of peace between Russia and Turkey was finally signed in January 1792, disrupted the gendered imagery of the published parliamentary debates as it played on public sympathies for Christian Russia against "her" Muslim enemy. Burke had claimed that aiding Turkey would reduce Christian nations "to the yoke of the infidels, and make them the miserable victims to these inhuman savages"; Cowley dramatized this scenario, but transformed both the misery of the Russian slaves and the inhumanity of their Turkish captors through the power of love. Countering the machismo of the parliamentary debates, Cowley's play replaced the voracious oversexed Russian empress with the chaste and beautiful Alexina, a Russian noblewoman under the "infidel yoke." Disputing the visual and verbal rhetoric which emphasized the monstrosity of women's supremacy, Cowley developed a benign and idealized empire of love, in which Russia and Italy combine to civilize Turkey through sentimental romance. Ostensibly developing in strictly local terms the sexualized power relations between male tyrants and female captives, however, Cowley's drama also engaged the global political issues of war, revolution, and slavery. The Oczakow parliamentary debates demonstrate the general analogy existing between sexual and imperial politics: in parliament and on the London stage alike, discussions of international politics could be inflected and informed by a rhetorical appeal to sexual norms. At the same time, members of parliament and female dramatists could each claim with impunity that the two interwoven topics had nothing to do with each other.

Cowley's *Day in Turkey* approached the conflict between nations through a mixed drama which offered a decidedly mixed view of politics. The sentimental plot of the comedy worked to reestablish clear gender roles, to set men and women back in their proper places: thus the play veers away from the oversexed empress and undersexed minister to

focus on the relation between sex and politics in the harem of a Turkish pasha or "Bassa." Pointing toward a rather less bawdy treaty of peace and form of "satisfaction for all parties," Cowley rewrote *The Taming of the Shrew* as the *Taming of the Sultan*. Her revisions worked to raise the tone of political discussion, to erase the vulgarity of the debates. As Cowley's sentimental heroine rather awkwardly demanded, "Where shall honor be honor'd, if the mouth of woman casts on it contempt?" (39). While demonstrating respect for chastity and honor, however, Cowley's sentimental storyline also dramatized women's supremacy over men through the power of love and courtship (or, as Cruikshank would have it, sex). While Cowley insisted on distinguishing her politics from those of Wollstonecraft, Rousseau's anxieties about women gaining social power through the stage example of sentimental romance might seem prophetic here.

A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves tells the story of a sentimental heroine, Alexina, captured by Turkish raiders immediately after her wedding to the Russian noble Orloff. Though the raiders take her immediately to the Bassa's harem, the newly-wed (whose wedding remains unconsummated) is temporarily reprieved by her new master's absence in battle. The play begins a few weeks later, with the capture of a family of Russian peasants, the simultaneous capture of Orloff with his French *valet de chambre*, A la Greque, and the return of the Bassa Ibrahim to his harem. The plot alternates between the plight of Alexina, who would rather die than submit to Ibrahim, and the disruptions created by A la Greque, who refuses to recognize either the social or physical boundaries limiting his new existence. Lauretta, an Italian inmate of the harem, unites comedy and sentiment to save Alexina: first by teaching the Bassa to submit to the power of female chastity, then by presenting him with the peasant Paulina rather than Alexina as the object of his passion. Conquered by the force of love, the Bassa frees Alexina and Orloff and marries Paulina.

Countering the tone developed by the armament debates and caricatures, *A Day in Turkey* responded more loosely to the political issues at work. In performance, *The Russian Slaves* would have belittled Turkey and sided with Russia: to an English audience, the Turkish Bassa may have seemed admirably open to the civilizing force of western sentimentality, but in structural terms, he remains the butt of Lauretta's comic plotting. By contrast, the Russian nobility are consistently characterized by their honorable restraint. More generally, Cowley shows the conflict between nations resolved without English intervention: the play begins

with Russian characters enslaved; it ends with a Turkish Bassa marrying a Russian peasant. Disruptive comic characters like the French A la Greque and the Italian Lauretta help produce the political inversions of the play, again suggesting the superfluity of English involvement. Morally rather than politically, France and Italy mediate between the extremes of the Orient (Turkey) and the ostensible virtues of the North (England and Russia). Still, the political implications persist: if a European balance of power exists, England need not, or perhaps could not, provide its point of leverage.

In keeping with the political complexities of the Oczakow dispute and Cowley's authorial stance, the relationship between sentiment and farce in *A Day in Turkey* seems unusually convoluted. Within the play, sentiment does the work performed by military action and international diplomacy in the "real world": it subordinates Turkey to Russia. Moments of farce undercut that sentimental subordination by exposing its despotic and erotic underpinnings. Yet in the play as a whole farce remains explicitly subordinate to sentiment: even the farcically plotting Lauretta "mean[s] to serve" the sentimental heroine Alexina (39). Conversely, however, discussions and enactments of sentiment throughout the play elaborate a farcical plotline: showing a Turkish despot erotically subdued by a Russian peasant he mistakes for a chaste aristocrat, the play produces itself as an extended orientalist joke. Operating both at the level of overall narrative structure and in particular episodes, farce remains unusually central to Cowley's mixed drama. Perhaps as a result, farce's political double edge shows itself with unusual clarity in this play: the farcical deployment of national stereotypes produces an orientalist narrative of civilized subordination even as farcical accounts of sentiment and of international affairs unravel the myth of western civilization.

The reading which follows moves among three different versions of the play: the Larpent manuscript submitted to the censor; the first edition of 1792; and the revised edition of 1813, printed in Cowley's collected works. Responding to the play's first performance, "Aesopus" had suggested that "if those parts were expunged which were apparently rejected by the audience, to those who are fond of stage pageantry, the Russian slaves might still prove acceptable."⁹ Cowley's on-going revision of the play clarified the demure pageantry of sentimental femininity: the version of *A Day in Turkey* which was printed in 1792 offers a slightly modified acting script; her collected works, published in 1813, present a substantially altered *reading* version of the drama – one which works to articulate the play's orientalism and sentimental ideology more fully and

more cautiously, even as it obscures the gender politics and topical references of the earlier edition.¹⁰ Cowley's revisions shift the balance of power from farce toward sentiment and from South and East to the North, especially in the figure of Zilia, a Georgian woman who replaces the Italian Lauretta. Those revisions also underscore, however, the structural relationship between farce and sentiment, East and West, in this mixed drama.

In each version of the play, for instance, the largely sentimental plot of *A Day in Turkey* is based on an orientalist, classist joke more in keeping with farce than with sentiment. The Turkish Bassa, sentimentally captivated by a Russian peasant, frees both his Russian slaves and his entire seraglio in order to marry her. A more fully sentimental play would have made Paulina, like Richardson's Pamela, morally worthy of her social elevation, but Cowley's Paulina has to be bullied into playing a properly sentimental role. After emphasizing to Ibrahim the power of sentimental chastity, Lauretta/Zilia is repeatedly forced to school Paulina to stern and distant behavior with the Bassa. Having gone through three lovers, the pretty peasant is happy enough to bow to the desire of a man she believes is the Bassa's servant; only her indignation upon being told he might behead on his master's orders provides her with sufficient pique and disdain to keep the masquerade in motion. Paulina's lack of innate chastity does not seem to trouble the sentimental resolution of the plot: Ibrahim, thoroughly reformed by his experience of western love, is so relieved to find her unmarried that he makes no objection to her social status, and neglects to inquire into her previous life. While the play thus reaffirms class and national prejudices – i.e., lower-class women are naturally unchaste, but they can be palmed off on a Turk who knows no better – it also raises troubling questions about the performing and performative nature of sentimental love.

The mixed drama obscures these questions, however, by the parallels and oppositions it establishes. The performance of sentiment, for instance, is naturalized as class-specific within the play: Alexina “naturally” acts the part of a sentimental heroine; Paulina plays this role imperfectly at best, and only with much coaching; Lauretta, the outsider, refuses to *perform* sentiment, but directs the performances of Paulina and Ibrahim. The opposition established between Alexina and Paulina returns in the play's closing scene. *A Day in Turkey* ends by juxtaposing two couples: the proper, sentimental Orloff and Alexina and the farcical, inverted couple of Paulina and the Bassa. The sentimental heroine Alexina remains properly subordinated to her loving husband, while the

once despotic Bassa is comically, improperly subordinated to his farcical wife-to-be. The relationships established at the beginning of the play further undermine the Bassa's position here, for Paulina, a vassal of Alexina's father, remains subordinate to Alexina and the men linked through her. If *A la Greque* at the beginning of the play finds himself "valet de chambre to a slave!" (3), Ibrahim at the end finds himself sentimentally enslaved to a member of the servant class. While Cowley's first farce asked the audience to decide *Who's the Dupe?*, her late mixed drama presents the Bassa duped through the machinations of his female slave, Lauretta.

Indeed, in an uncanny move, the Turkish seraglio becomes an unlikely "School for Sentiment" in which the instruction in and articulation of sentiment are both left to the unsentimental figure of Lauretta. Sentiment may rely, as Goldsmith suggested, on a performance of sincerity, but *A Day in Turkey* shows that sincerity inculcated by a cynical and self-interested figure. In 1792, the canny Lauretta operates as a figure for the female playwright, promising to "weave a web of amusement to crack the sides of half a dozen gloomy Harams with laughter – Mercy! what a sleepy life would our valiant Bassa & his Damsels live, but for my Talents at Invention" (1792: 21). The claims of chastity and sentiment are difficult to distinguish from Lauretta's imaginative inventions, her larger "web of amusement." In 1813, Zilia presents her sentimental instruction of the Bassa explicitly as a ploy to achieve freedom for herself and her female companions. In the midst of proclaiming to Ibrahim the power of beauty over male authority, she remarks in an aside to the female slaves, "– Hark ye! if I can tinge his mind with such feelings, real Love will take possession of it – he will determine on Marriage, and we shall escape from Slavery!" (1813: 258). Rebuked by Alexina for her lack of sentimental restraint, Zilia once again asserts her intention to win free of slavery through her comic plots. The ideals of sentimental courtship and female chastity are subordinated to an only partially covert struggle for greater freedom and self-determination.

Even more pointedly, the sentimental ideology presented by Lauretta and Zilia both replicates and inverts the master-slave relations of the seraglio. In 1792, the frivolous Italian Lauretta was presented as an expert in love on the basis of her nationality; this expert witness had assured the Bassa, "you must become the slave of your captive, if you ever mean to taste the sublime excesses of a mutual passion" (1792: 15). The compressed logic of mutual slavery and mutual passion was greatly expanded in the later version of the play. In the 1813 text, Lauretta

becomes the independent Georgian Zilia, whose advice is still more cosmopolitan – and orientalist: “Remember, Sir, she is no Asiatic slave, but an European, born beyond the boundaries of Turkey and the region of our manners!” (1813: 257). Zilia sets the love plot in motion by suggesting to Ibrahim the danger of falling in love with Alexina: “if she should find you in love with her, and should ever condescend to listen to a sentence from you, she will deem herself intitled to treat you as she pleases, and, instead of being *herself* a Slave, will assume unbounded authority over *you!*” (257–58). When Ibrahim dismisses the possibility of such indifference to his power, Zilia rebukes him, “You are thinking now of your own power, when you should be sensible only of her’s! You are powerful, and she is pretty, your empire is less absolute than her’s – beware of substituting Reproach for supplications! . . . Dominion and love are very different things” (258).

Dominion and love may indeed be separate things, but Zilia seems able to describe romantic love only in terms of domination. She insists that love overrides class distinctions, setting monarchs and peasants on an equal plane, but as Ibrahim points out, “under such a System, the Men must be the Slaves, and the empire of Love be transferred to the Women!” (259). The doubled domination of Zilia’s sentimental rhetoric nonetheless catches Ibrahim’s imagination: even as he exclaims against the male slavery of this “empire of love” he pictures himself able to conquer within that realm. He rejects sentiment on the basis of its inadequacy, not his own: “– Away with every thing so exotic! I’ll waste no time in mean conquest over female Caprice – victory over the Enemy is alone worthy my Ambition!” But Zilia conquers his resistance through the simple expedient of laughing at him, mocking his provincialism and suggesting his heroic insufficiency: “Ha! ha! – there, now you are Turkish again! – Sagacious Sir! if you would really be heroic as a Conqueror – you must begin by being romantic in Love!” (259). Even as it challenges masculine self-sufficiency, this last claim reinserts women’s power over men within a convention of separate spheres: male subordination to women at home will simply make them more heroic, more successful, more masculine in their conquests out of doors. A few scenes later, Ibrahim shows that he has internalized Zilia’s promise of superiority through submission: “If I am distinguished amongst men, that which best distinguishes man – refined love – ought in my breast to be more tender, more powerful, than in the breast of others” (266). From this perspective, sentimental masculinity merely offers a new arena for the development of male prowess and distinction.

In both versions of the play, Cowley invoked orientalist and anti-Turkish tropes and sentiments to make her tale of women's romantic ascendancy more palatable to British audiences. In 1813, for instance, Zilia expanded on the faults of both eastern and western cultures, but she handled the follies of eastern manners much more harshly. "Ceremonious and uncommunicative," the men lack ideas of their own, and "[n]ever having known the advantages of elegant society, of Women they speak but as Slave-merchants." Similarly "excluded from rational society with men, and unrespected by them," eastern women's "Minds are uninformed, and their Manners ungraceful." Established as a cultural authority by her travels, Zilia concluded that "in the follies abroad there is a play of Mind that renders them interesting; your follies here – create but listlessness and Disgust!" (263–64). In taking the bait of romantic love, Ibrahim adopts the disdain toward eastern women expressed by Lauretta/Zilia – but the play's orientalism is undercut as its apparent distinction between bad sensuality and good sensibility comes unraveled. Told of Alexina's resistance to his summons, Ibrahim responds unexpectedly with respect for her honor, rejoicing (in 1792) that "at length I shall taste the joy of overcoming RESISTANCE." He goes on to describe the fatigue produced by the unremitting sexual submission the play attributes to eastern women; he turns the delay of sexual satisfaction into a new source of "satisfaction for all parties":

I am satiated, I am tired, with the dull acquiescence of our eastern slaves, and rejoice that I have at length found one, who will teach me to hope, and to *despair* . . . There is a transport which I have never yet experienced but which my soul longs to possess – yes, my heart languishes to remove the timid veil of coyness – to soften, by sweet degrees, the ice of chastity, and to see, for once, reserve sacrificed at the altar of desire; *these*, cruel Love, are luxuries thou hast never yet bestowed on me. (1792: 19)

The 1813 *A Day in Turkey* offers a heightened version of this opening claim: Ibrahim is now "disgusted with the abject submission of our Eastern Captives." Only a western European woman, he suggests, can teach him about love rather than lust. Yet the language of this passage reinstalls lust within love, sexuality within the hallowed precincts of sentimental courtship. As Ibrahim begins to contemplate with pleasure the prospect of becoming "the slave of his captive," he anticipates a lingering deferral of pleasure – and a series of luxuries cast in terms of sexualized, largely gothic imagery: veils he may remove, ice his passion will soften, reserve that will be sacrificed not on the altar of love, but on that of desire.

Indeed, Cowley's *Day in Turkey* shows the (western) romantic ideal of sentimental chastity constructed out of bits and pieces of oriental luxury and sexual domination. Even Alexina's stalwart refusal of sex can be seen in a sexual light. The heroine announces to Lauretta/Zilia that Ibrahim has sent for her, but vows, "I will first rush into the arms of death." In 1792, Lauretta laughs at her resolve, even as she reaffirms the sexualized orientalism of the play: "Rather rush into the arms of death, than into the arms of a handsome lover! the notion is exotic – it is an ice-plant of the North" (39–40). The notion *is* exotic (i.e., sexually perverse): Alexina sexualizes death (unconsciously, one presumes); Lauretta merely makes explicit the implied comparison between honorable and dishonorable lovers. In the process, however, western chastity becomes a phantasmatic, ghostly version of eastern sexuality.

The sado-masochistic elements of sentiment and sensibility have long been recognized in the work of Richardson, Rousseau, and other sentimental writers; yet for a female dramatist to draw the analogy quite so explicitly may have seemed somewhat scandalous. Both editions of the play allow Alexina a stinging rebuke of her companion. In 1792, for instance, Alexina asks scornfully, "Are you the friend who was to soothe my sorrows? Alas! where shall honor be honor'd, if the mouth of woman casts on it contempt?" Though Lauretta humbly begs pardon, Alexina continues to insist on the difference between them through a markedly insulting speech: "In you, the contented inhabitant of a seraglio, such profanation may be pardon'd; but alas! in the world, the grace of chastity is scarcely longer acknowledged! . . . Alas! so miserable is my situation, that I am obliged to accept services from those whom the feelings of my heart wou'd impel me to shun" (39–40). The 1813 edition retains Alexina's vow, but cuts Lauretta/Zilia's comparison of lovers. In its place, a rather wordy apology for cultural relativism develops into a paean to marital bliss:

- ALEXINA. All allowance made for the force of Custom, in those who are ignorant of better, still you have elsewhere witnessed a happier System.
- ZILIA. True I have, where the qualities of a Woman's MIND render her the object of Affection, where she is beloved as the participator in all the Interests of her husband's life, and is respected whilst she is beloved.
- ALEXINA. Connubial love, Zilia, is the affection of a heart – all virtue. Its foundation is nobleness of mind; and, opening to a woman a more extended field for exercising all the charities of her nature, instead of degrading her in her society with a man, it gifts her with the loftiest Dignity, and throws a Grace around all her actions in life. (282–83)

In this exchange, the Georgian Zilia, a character raised as it were on the Russian borders, enters with Alexina into a joint performance of sentiment: a duet which the Italian Lauretta would surely have shunned. Here the noble Russian and her Georgian shadow agree that western marriage, rather than constraining women, offers a more extended field of endeavor, and a version of equality through participation in their husbands' interests. Yet Cowley was canny enough to make such a claim in a play designed to be read rather than performed: Alexina's last speech in particular seems not only overwritten but unstageable – too pompous to survive in a play as ideologically flippant as *A Day in Turkey* so often seems.

If the play's sentimental ideology is somewhat destabilized by its farcical framing, however, the real humor and subversive possibilities of *The Russian Slaves* exist in the middle ground created by the play's mixed characters. Against the sentimental pairing of Alexina and Orloff and the farcical coupling of Ibrahim and Paulina, we might set two other unromantic and unsentimental pairs of characters: Azim and Mustapha; and A la Greque and Lauretta. At once slaves of Ibrahim and masters of the seraglio, Azim and Mustapha take up a mixed-class position within the world of the play. Middlemen in the play's economy of slavery, they are quick to link the apparently divergent topics of sexism, racism, religious dissent, and trade. Their quips reveal fundamental similarities between the East and the West on points where differences are usually emphasized: slavery, religion, the treatment of women. Within Cowley's racist nationalism, meanwhile, the French A la Greque and the Italian Lauretta take up a mixed-race position – neither northern European nor oriental – and their speech and actions disrupt the relationships of class and subordination within the play. A la Greque's verbal enthusiasm for embracing slavery is matched only by his irrepressible egalitarianism of action, while Lauretta, choosing to serve Alexina rather than Ibrahim, inverts the gender politics of the seraglio and its rulers. Both of these comic pairs relate through competition rather than sentimental cooperation: Azim and Mustapha vie for power within the seraglio; A la Greque and Lauretta hold opposing views on women's rights. Together, however, both pairs bridge the ostensible gap between oriental barbarism and western civilization, showing the injustices underlying both social systems.

Within the pairing of Azim and Mustapha, Mustapha seems dominant, a comic in relation to whom both Russian women and Turkish eunuchs become straight men. When Alexina begs Mustapha to intercede with Ibrahim for her, for instance, he protests that he himself is also a slave; she breaks into a highly sentimental song to move him to action:

Thus, tho' a Slave, thy Soul's high State
 Shall prove it's origin divine
 Soar far above thy wretched fate,
 And o'er thy Chains sublimely shine!

Yet Mustapha, generally subdued by Alexina's noble virtue, responds in 1792 with marked flippancy: "Why, as to chastity and all that which you make an orthodox article of, sweet one, we Turks are a sort of dissenters – A woman's virtue with us, is to CHARM, & her religion should be LOVE. – Ah, Ah! here comes Ibrahim & his whole haram – *His* creed is love, and there is not a more orthodox man in the country" (1792: 10–11). While Mustapha consistently tries to protect Alexina from the Bassa, his humor refuses to value her standards of virtue over those of his master. At the same time, the religious trappings of his joke, seen from an English perspective, align Islamic orthodoxy with the sexual excesses attributed to Methodism and dissenting sects, and thus suggest that dissenters and heathens alike confuse religion with sex. Admittedly, however, the implications of the joke remain fairly subtle; meanwhile, its blatant sexist emphasis on female charms aligns his stance with mainstream British culture rather than with the side eddies of dissent.

Mustapha's quips also cap the humorous financial observations of the Russian peasant Paulina. Captured with her family at the beginning of the play, Paulina is struck by the paradoxical improvement in their material circumstances: "So, we are made slaves to ride in our own carriage" (8). Having been purchased by Mustapha as a Russian companion for Alexina, however, Paulina is quick to protest her objectification: "Buy! buy! Why, you talk of buying us, as though we were baskets of eggs, or bales of cotton." Mustapha ignores her critique while granting its premise: "Yes, it is the mode here – Every country has its fancies, and we are so fond of liberty, that we always buy it up as a rarity" (35). This brazen contradiction between the political ideal of liberty and the commercial action of a slave trade reflects more soberly on England than on Turkey, for England alone proclaimed its fondness for liberty loud and long. Unobtrusively yet repeatedly, the play highlights the rarity of freedom: a quality which it begins to suggest can be experienced only by white, wealthy, northern men.

Still, the most thorough critique of English liberty comes in a three-way conversation among Alexina, Azim, and Mustapha, in which the Russian woman again provides merely the occasion for reflexive, oriental humor. When Alexina weeps at her captivity, the unsympathetic Azim ridicules her “wailing about freedom & liberty! Why the christians in one of the northern isles have established a slave trade, and have proved by act of parliament that freedom is no blessing at all.” Mustapha objects to this wholesale dismissal of English liberty, but only to note the racist limitations of the act: “No, no – they have only proved that it does not suit dark complexions” (1792: 9). Remaining in character, he quickly links this racism to a familiar and supposedly flattering form of sexism: “To such a pretty creature as this, they’d think it a blessing to *give* every freedom, and *take* every freedom” (1792: 9). Sexual intimacies replace civil liberties for women: their bodies and beauties disqualify them for independent action, as dark complexions remain “unsuited” to freedom. Meanwhile, Alexina – or rather an English actress wailing about freedom and liberty on an English stage – is momentarily silenced. Costumed as oriental eunuchs, Azim and Mustapha would have embodied visible difference on the stage: Alexina, dressed as a westerner, would have seemed more purely English. Only humor, and the political critique it enables, underwrite the momentary moral subordination of this western woman to her eastern guards.

Neither eastern nor western, Laretta and A la Greque allow Cowley to mediate more subtly between Russia and Turkey. While Cowley’s *Belle’s Stratagem* had presented France and Italy as purely antagonistic to England’s native virtues, *A Day in Turkey* develops French and Italian characters as a middle ground between northern Europe and the Orient. The play’s racism is unabashed but eminently comparative. On the first page, for instance, Paulina’s father laments, “I shall see thee in a vile Turk’s seraglio, no better as it were than the handmaid of a Jew” (1792: 1). Turk or Jew, French or Italian, Russian or English: the play operates through a series of racialized national analogies. In this context, Cowley’s French and Italian characters register a certain social mobility derived from their racial indeterminacy. Neither oriental nor properly northern, they at once mediate between and disrupt these opposing worlds.

The figure of A la Greque, for instance, disrupts both the English ideal of liberty and the Turkish system of slavery by mingling an extravagant freedom of speech and action with an equally extravagant

submission to authority. Freedom becomes as frivolous as dancing, and this (typically French) frivolity leads inevitably to the fact of enslavement. A la Greque claims that he “travell’d into Russia to polish the brutes a little, and to give them some ideas of the general equality of man,” but his labor was lost: “Finding they would not learn liberty, I would have taught them dancing; but they seem’d as incapable of one blessing as the other – so now *I* am led a dance by this gentleman into your chains, in which, however, if I can but dance myself into your favour, I shall think it the best step I ever took” (1792: 18–19). A la Greque’s shameless flattery of the Bassa undercuts all his vaunted rhetoric of equality, yet his actions on stage – in particular, pulling his Russian master Orloff back to exit ahead of him, and later invading the seraglio – speak still more powerfully of a leveling approach to social divisions.

In defending *A Day in Turkey* from the imputation of politics, Cowley singled out A la Greque as the source of the play’s politics, yet insisted on her dramatic right to have a Frenchman speak of the revolution which must be at the forefront of his mind. A la Greque’s exchange with the Bassa suggests some of the complexity of this political mediation. When Ibrahim tells A la Greque, “The freedom of thy speech does not displease me,” the Frenchman responds again with abject submission, but that submission holds an edge: “Dear Sir, I am your most obedient humble slave, ready to bow my head to your sandals, & to lick the dust from your beautiful feet – (Ça ira!)” (Larpent, 17–18). The call to violent revolution (“Ça ira!”) makes A la Greque’s parody of submission ever so slightly threatening. Cowley’s revisions of this line record her responses to the vicissitudes of the French revolution. To the published edition of 1792, she added the reflection that “chains were as natural t’other day to *Frenchmen* as mother’s milk” (18); in 1813, by contrast, A la Greque asserts, “Chains! they wont weigh a rush with me! – *ils sont toujours à la mode à Paris!* I shall foot it to their clink, and feel myself at home again!” (266). In 1791, one could still believe that the revolution would put an end to absolute power in France; in 1813, after Napoleon’s ravages, Cowley was less willing to subscribe to a model of French liberty.

Still, A la Greque seems so much the classic stage Frenchman, reconfirming the stereotypes of cowardice, bawdiness, and a terminal lack of seriousness, that his political views could hardly be seen as a challenge to conservative British politics. Even within the play, his attempt to convert the Russians to the doctrine of equality fails; his account of that failure (“they still continue to believe that a prince is more than a porter, & that a lord is a better gentleman than his slave – O, had they but been

with me at Versailles, when I help'd to turn those things topsey-turvy there!" [18]) does not invite British sympathy. And in the 1792 script, Cowley used *A la Greque* to flatter her English audience. When Orloff tries to silence him with the command, "Peace!," *A la Greque* responds, "Peace! That's a bold demand! Your Empress can't find it at the head of one hundred thousand men, & the most sublime Grand Signior is obliged to put on his night-cap without it, tho' he has a million of these pretty Gentlemen to assist him – Besides, England has engrossed the commodity" (1792: 5–6). In 1813, this last line was cut: England's command of peace was rather less assured.

A la Greque on his own could hardly pose a political threat: protests about the play's politics seem more likely to have developed out of the intersection of the plotting Lauretta and the irrepressible *A la Greque*. These two together represent the intersection of two revolutions: the political revolution in France and the REVOLUTION IN MANNERS presented by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. *A la Greque* himself dramatizes the need for women's rights within a revolutionary context. Inserting himself into the harem and attempting to seduce the women there, he betrays his own failure to keep confidence with the indignant question, "Do you think that I, Madam, am a man to betray a lady's favours? I, who have been well receiv'd by duchesses and marchionesses?" When he is asked what duchesses and marchionesses are, he responds "in his usual tone" (in other words, carelessly): "They were a sort of female creatures, my dear, who once infested Paris . . . Now, my sweet charmer, there is not one in the country, I mean of native growth; and if the neighbouring nations do not now and then send them one for a sample, a duchess will be as rare an animal in France, as a crocodile" (67). Written before the Terror, his callousness to these women's fates nonetheless marks his irredeemable resistance to sentiment – and to women's claim to respect. At the same time, these lines feed English audiences' sense of superiority to the French, both before the revolution (when a duchess would sleep with a *valet de chambre*) and after (when the French threaten to extirpate duchesses altogether).

A la Greque is hardly a feminist, yet as a figure of the French revolution, he nonetheless holds out to women an important model of liberation. As Azim bursts into the harem in search of *A la Greque*, for instance, he warns the women to hide themselves from a man loose in the harem. Lauretta has already hidden *A la Greque* by sitting on him; she refuses to leave and engages Azim in a dialogue which bases the rights of women upon the rights of man asserted by the revolutionaries.

Once again, Cowley's revisions record the shifting politics of the play's reception and the dramatist's thinking over time. The Larpent manuscript of the play offers the most radical version of the exchange:

LAURA. And what are we to fly for? Is a man a tyger that we should be so scared? Who is he?

AZIM. The new French slave. Frenchmen, there is no being guarded against. They make free everywhere.

LAURA. At least they have made themselves free, ~~and all the nations of the Earth shall bless them for it.~~ Who knows, but at last, the spirit they have raised, may reach, even to a Turkish harem, and the rights of women be declared, as well as those of men.

AZIM. Don't talk to me of the rights of women; you would do right to go and conceal yourselves as I order'd ye . . . Rise up, and give me your Seat.

LAURA. I wonder at your impertinence. Surely we have not so entirely forfeited the rights of women, but we may keep our Seats, tho' we have lost our liberty. (59/72)

The words struck out of the manuscript were presumably cut by the censor: they do seem a little too explicitly (and objectionably) political, nor do they appear in the published version of the play. Indeed, the 1792 edition is milder on both French and feminist politics: the crossed out line reads simply, "they have made themselves free AT HOME," and the second reference to women's rights has also been cut so that the closing line reads, "Surely we may keep our Seats, tho' we have lost our liberty." The 1813 revisions were far more sweeping. To Zilia's question "Who is he?" Azim responds, "The new French slave. Frenchmen there is no being guarded against – at other's cost they make *themselves* free everywhere." All reference to women's rights and to the potential benefits of the French revolution have vanished. Yet in each edition of the play, the plotting female of the seraglio literally seats herself upon the debased figure of the French revolution: emblematically, this action speaks louder than many words could do.

Cowley's progressive retreat from the explicitly political claims on which the play originally turned does not erase the more pervasive gender politics of her mixed comedy – or the breadth of impact the playwright attributed to the comedy of women's private influence. *A Day in Turkey* responds to the unnatural images of male and female sexuality used to debate the wisdom of going to war with Russia by reestablishing proper gender roles for both men and women – but only under the rubric of performance. Alexina presents on stage a pure and highly moral Russian noblewoman, whose mere presence counters the

sexually degrading popular images of Catherine II. But Lauretta and later Zilia, the true power behind the throne, remains like the Russian empress a woman whose passions do not blind her to her own interests. Lauretta/Zilia's crafty manipulation of the codes of sentiment work somewhat half-heartedly to blind the male audience (on stage and off) to her interests in the rights of women: Cowley's 1792 advertisement and 1813 revisions attempt to achieve a more extended conceptual blackout.

The parliamentary debates of 1791, when seen through Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves* (1791), suggest that the balance of power in turn-of-the-century Britain was maintained by various forms of negation, of knowledge disavowed. The political debates deny the relevance of sex and gender to the political issues under discussion – but members of both sides use sexually coded images and rhetoric to inflect their own arguments, to imply what they do not want to say directly, or to cast doubt on the probity of their opponents. Hannah Cowley's advertisement to *A Day in Turkey* similarly denied any involvement in politics for both the play and the playwright, yet the comedy intervened in a wide range of political debates – in part through its disavowal of public interests. While these overlapping modes of negation produced an odd double vision of sentimental and political romance, politicians and playwrights alike could profit from the juxtaposition of similar though ostensibly different categories. Disavowing politics while displaying political knowledge, Cowley's advertisement to *A Day in Turkey* might best be read in the French sense of a “warning” (*avertissement*) about the duplicity of Romantic politics and gender. Certainly the mixed drama thus advertised relies on the duplicity of farce to subordinate Turkey to Russia, the East to the West, while simultaneously making a mockery of the cultural differences summoned to justify that subordination. *A Day in Turkey* shows East and West equally seduced by erotic fantasies of conquest and absolute dominion, equally engaged in slave trading, equally culpable except perhaps in their treatment of women. Yet while Cowley shows Lauretta/Zilia able to manipulate the cult of sentiment on women's behalf, she also shows sentiment producing Alexina's passivity. Cowley's mixed drama suggests that in the disparate settings of an oriental seraglio, an English political debate, and a London theatre, a single warning holds true: a woman's best hope for freedom relies on the mimic plotting of the practiced farceuse.

- 31 Hannah Cowley, prologue to *Who's the Dupe?* in *The Works of Mrs. Cowley; Dramas and Poems*, 3 vols. (London, Wilkie and Robinson, 1813), vol. I, n.p.
- 32 John Dryden, preface to *An Evening's Love*, p. 204.
- 33 "Theatrical Intelligence," *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, no. 3558, Wednesday, July 7, 1784. The play being reviewed is Inchbald's *A Mogul Tale*.
- 34 See Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, pp. 29–31.
- 35 Ellison, "Politics of Fancy," p. 229.
- 36 See for instance Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 37 Williams, *Long Revolution*, pp. 260–1.
- 38 Christopher Newfield in *The Emerson Effect* sketches a tension between individualism and submission that offers a more structured analogy for the deflections of sentiment. In Newfield's reading, submission remains the hidden center of Emersonian individuality; in much the same way, I want to argue that deflection and conservation constitute the hidden center of sentimental calls for reform. See Newfield, *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 39 Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave," p. 594.
- 40 Choudhury, "Gazing at His Seraglio," p. 486.
- 41 Samuel Foote, *The Nabob* in *The Works of Samuel Foote, Esq.*, 3 vols., ed. Jon Bee, Esq. (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1830), vol. III, pp. 213–14.
- 42 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. V, pp. 403–4.
- 43 *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 292–93.
- 44 Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine: Interview" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 74.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 46 Elizabeth Inchbald, *Lover's Vows* in *The British Theatre: or, A Collection of Plays*, 35 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), vol. XXIII, p. 5.
- 47 See William Cobbett's *The Porcupine and Anti-Gallican Monitor*, September 7, 1801 for a sharply critical review of *Lover's Vows*: "Amelia, notwithstanding the pains which Mrs. Inchbald, the adapter of the play, has taken to polish her, still remains coarse, forward, and disgusting, and, we trust, will never be imitated by the British fair."
- 48 Quoted in Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. x. I have not been able to place this citation in Santayana's work.

6 THE BALANCE OF POWER: HANNAH COWLEY'S *DAY IN TURKEY*

- 1 Hannah Cowley, *A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1792), n.p.
- 2 The editor of her collected work will point out Cowley's similar inability to "attend" to her own plays in production, asserting that she rarely attended

- opening nights, and in general stayed away from the theatre. See *Works of Mrs. Cowley*, vol. 1, n.p.
- 3 *Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, no. 5808, Monday, December 5, 1791.
 - 4 Barbara Freedman, "Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre" in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 58.
 - 5 *The Parliamentary Register; or History of the proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons; containing an account of The most interesting Speeches and Motions; accurate Copies of the most remarkable Letters and Papers; of the most material Evidence, Petitions, &c. laid before and offered to the House, during the First Session of the Seventeenth Parliament of Great Britain* (London: J. Debrett, 1791), vol. xxix, p. 50. Cited henceforth by page number; unless otherwise noted, all references are to volume xxix.
 - 6 Appealing to the British cult of commerce, Grey insisted that "trade with Russia was the most advantageous of any to Great Britain; it furnished materials for our manufactures, and proved an excellent nursery for seamen. Our exports to Russia amounted annually to about two millions sterling; and our imports to the amount of one million" (107–8). War would interrupt this trade, at great expense to English merchants.
 - 7 Stanley's reference to Russia's western ambitions gestured to an earlier attempt to create an alliance with Baltic nations against Britain, as well as "her more late attempts to govern the two Courts of Sweden and of Denmark" and "her intrigues in the kingdom of Poland" (130).
 - 8 The problem of course is that the image of the Colossus comes in a speech made by Cassius to Brutus, as he tries to persuade the latter to conspire against Caesar's life.
 - 9 *Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, no. 5808, Monday, December 5, 1791.
 - 10 See *Works of Mrs. Cowley*, vol. II.

7 THE FARCE OF SUBJECTION: ELIZABETH INCHBALD

- 1 Elizabeth Inchbald, *Wives as They Were, Maids as They Are* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Browne, 1797), p. 57.
- 2 Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, vol. 1, p. 185.
- 3 *Public Advertiser*, no. 15636, Wednesday, July 7, 1784.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Quoted in George Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784–1858* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 15.
- 6 Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale, or, The descent of the balloon: a farce* (London: Printed for F. Powell, 1796), p. 14.
- 7 Elizabeth Inchbald, *Such Things Are: a play, in five acts. As performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Printed under the authority of the managers from the prompt book. With remarks by the author* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), p. 5.
- 8 Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to his Son*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), vol. 1, p. 151.