Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures

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What Is World Literature?

In the current revival of the concept of world literature, something of considerable importance appears to be largely missing: the question of Orientalism. Despite the reputation of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as a sort of foundational text for concern with cultural relations on a planetary scale, the specifics of that book’s conceptual armature or the archive with which it engages do not seem to play a significant role in this renewed discussion and intensification of interest in the effort to comprehend literature as a planet wide reality.

This is the case for instance with Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters*, which presents an argument about the emergence of international literary space in Europe in the early modern era and its expansion across the continent and beyond over the last four centuries. The overall armature of the book rests on the identification of three key moments in the development of this international literary space and seems to follow fairly closely the chronology established by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. The first, its moment of origin, so to speak, is the extended and uneven process of vernacularization in the emerging European states from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The next turning point and period of massive expansion comes, she argues, again following Anderson’s periodization, in the “philological-lexigraphic revolution” starting in the late eighteenth century and the widely dispersed invention
of national traditions that ensued. Casanova argues that the new practice of literature to emerge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, linked to a new conception of language and its relationship to its community of speakers, emerged within and as a modality of a massive shift and expansion in European world literary space. The third and, for Casanova, ongoing, period in the expansion of this world literary space is linked to the historical “event” of decolonization in the post-World War II era.

My point of entry into this formulation is what I take to be its most consequential misconception: for Casanova, non-Western literary cultures make their first effective appearance in world literary space in the era of decolonization in the middle of the twentieth century. Casanova thus fails to comprehend the real nature of the expansion and rearrangement of this until then largely European space in the course of the philological revolution. It is through the philological knowledge revolution—the “discovery” of the classical languages of the East, the invention of the linguistic family tree whose basic form is still with us today, the translation and absorption into the Western languages of more and more works from Persian, Arabic, and the Indian languages, among others—that non-Western textual traditions made their first entry as literature, sacred and secular, into the international literary space that had emerged in early modern times in Europe as a structure of rivalries between the emerging vernacular traditions, transforming the scope and structure of that space forever. This moment, which she reads almost entirely through Herder, is mistaken by Casanova for a redrawing of the internal cultural map of Europe rather than as a reorganization that is planetary in nature, in the sense that this emerging constellation of philological knowledge, perhaps best known to us now from Said’s reading of it in Orientalism, posits nothing less than the languages and cultures of the entire world as its object in the final instance. As is well known, in his writings of the 1770s, including the Treatise on the Origin of Language, Herder began to mark a break with conceptions of the origin of language that had been dominant in the eigh-

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teenth century, which viewed the origin and development of language as such as part of the history of humanity; we need only think here of the well-known works of such contemporaries of Herder’s as Rousseau, Condillac, and Mendelssohn. He argued instead that human intelligence always took a historical form and could only be exercised in language, in particular languages in particular places at particular times. The consequences of the rise and acceptance of some of these ideas about the boundedness of thought in language, from the emergence of secular methodologies of interpretation of the scriptures ultimately to romantic notions about the imagination and history, and even, over a century later, in the forms of cultural relativism that are foundational to British and American anthropology—both Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski had received the German Herderian heritage as part of their intellectual formations—are too well known to require rehearsing here.\(^3\) My point here is a more circumscribed one: the nearly exclusive focus on Herder’s writings of the early 1770s, which predate the infusion into the European intellectual-literary sphere of the properly Orientalist ideas of linguistic and cultural diversity, allows Casanova to formulate her argument about the transformation of (European) world literary space without reference to the gestalt shift made possible by the assimilation of the Oriental exempla that became increasingly available to European reading publics in large numbers for the first time from the 1770s gradually onward.\(^4\) (I return shortly to the history and modalities of this dissemination.)

Because Casanova misses this initial charting of non-Western traditions of writing on the emerging map of the literary world (as in fact in many of the recent discussions about transnational literary relations), such figures as Kateb Yacine, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie and the psychology of assimilation into metropolitan languages and cultures typify the non-Western writer (as they all do for Casanova). Such models of cultural change as creolization and métissage consequently become the privileged mode of understanding literatures originating outside the metropolis, and the far more complex and elusive tensions and contradictions involved in the emergence of the modern non-Western literatures disappear from view altogether. In other words, I propose we take seriously what would

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appear to be a rather obvious historical claim but one that has not been rigorously present in a great deal of contemporary critical discussion, namely, that the deep encounter between English and the other Western languages and the languages of the global periphery as media of literary expression did not take place for the first time in the postcolonial era, let alone in the supposedly transnational transactions of the period of high globalization but, especially, at the dawn of the modern era itself and fundamentally transformed both cultural formations involved in the encounter.

The effects of the reorganization of culture and knowledge in the course of the philological revolution were far-reaching, not just for the European intelligentsia, but for those very colonized and semicolonized societies, and more specifically the textual traditions, that were now brought under the purview of these new knowledge practices. In order to comprehend the structure of literary relations that is now a planet-wide reality, we need to grasp the role that philological Orientalism played in producing and establishing a method and a system for classifying and evaluating diverse forms of textuality, now all processed and codified uniformly as literature. As Vinay Dharwadker has argued in a pioneering essay, the forms taken by “British and European representations of literary India . . . lie not so much in the ‘nature’ of the Indian materials as in the intellectual contexts of European literary thought.”5 The (now universal) category of literature, with its particular Latinate etymology and genealogy, marks this process of assimilation of diverse cultures of writing, a process only partially concealed by the use of such vernacular terms as ’adab (Arabic, Persian, Urdu) and sāhitya (Hindi and a number of the Indian vernaculars) to signify the new literariness.

In this essay, I attempt to suggest ways of thinking critically about the profound consequences of these new structures of knowledge for language, literature, and culture, and more broadly for the politics of identity, in the Indian subcontinent in the course of the nineteenth century. Such a project is a response to suggestions in Orient(al)ism—as I read it, against a great deal of contemporary Said reception, I might add—that the critique of Orientalism must ultimately take us to the Orientalized spaces themselves. For Orientalism in Said’s sense consists of those Western knowledge practices in the modern era whose emergence made possible for the first time the notion of a single world as a space populated by distinct civilizational complexes, each in possession of its own tradition, the

unique expression of its own forms of national "genius." A precise, aphoristic formulation of this question comes in one brief sentence in Said’s luminous essay on the late works of Jean Genet: “Imperialism is the export of identity.” Orientalism is for Said the name for the vast cultural (and, more specifically, philological) machinery in modern Western imperialism for the establishment of identitarian truth-claims around the world. Said’s critique of Orientalism is thus directed as much toward “readers in the so-called Third World” as anyone else, and for them “this study proposes itself as a step towards an understanding not so much of Western politics and of the non-Western world in those politics as of the strength of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or ‘superstructural.’ My hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others.” Recalling Gramsci’s assertion, in the Prison Notebooks, of the “imperative” to produce an “inventory” of the “infinity of traces” that the historical process has left upon the critical subject itself, Said concludes that in “many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, an Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals.” Thus, far from ignoring the possibility of historically autonomous action on the part of the colonized, and far from viewing Orientalism as a totalizing and absolute system of representation, as careless readers have sometimes suggested over the years, Said’s critique of Orientalism amounts to a call to precisely such action, an invitation to historical self-transformation in the very process of the “critical elaboration” of the self.

Said places the rise of modern Orientalism within the general process of secularization of Western culture in the early modern era. His account of this process is of some interest to us here:

Modern Orientalism derives from secularizing elements in eighteenth-century European culture. . . . But if these interconnected elements represent a secularizing tendency, this is not to say that the old religious patterns of human history and destiny and “the existential para-

6. For an early, in fact pioneering, study along these lines, which seeks to identify the northern European, phil-Hellenic reinvention of Greece as a colonial event, and which is influential for me here, see Stathis Gourgouris, Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece (Stanford, Calif., 1996).
“digms” were simply removed. Far from it: they were reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in the secular frameworks just enumerated. For anyone who studied the Orient a secular vocabulary in keeping with these frameworks was required. Yet if Orientalism provided the vocabulary, the conceptual repertoire, the techniques—for this is what, from the end of the eighteenth century on, Orientalism did and what Orientalism was—it also retained, as an undislodged current in its discourse, a reconstructed religious impulse, a naturalized supernaturalism. [O, p. 121; emphasis added]

Said’s critique of Orientalism is thus in essence a criticism of its “naturalized supernaturalism,” of its remapping of humanity in terms of supposedly secular cultural logics whose Manichean modalities with respect to human collectivities, and in particular those societies that are Christianity’s traditional antagonists, can only be understood as a “reconstructed religious impulse.” In this sense, Orientalism may be said to offer an account of the cultural logic of (Western) bourgeois society in its global or outward orientation, in its encounter with and reorganization of human societies on a planetary scale. Against this, as it were, false appearance of the secular in history and its attendant antagonisms—a fundamentally localized (that is, Western) emergence that simultaneously carries the force of the universal in history—Said points not so much to a utopian and distant future without those, as it were, theological antagonisms as to the possibility in the historical present of “surviving the consequences” of these structures and logics “humanly” (O, p. 45). Said conceives of this antiidentitarian imperative as the classically secular critical task, concerned with the here and now, attentive to the dense and ultimately unassimilable fabric of society—which would barely require repeating, were it not for some remarkably fanciful characterizations of his project current today. It is no accident that “Secular Criticism” is the main conceptual essay of the first book that follows Orientalism, for it may in some important ways be read as a methodological reflection on the critical project of the latter. As I have noted elsewhere, the figure of Erich Auerbach exiled in Istanbul that provides a sort of running leitmotif in that essay is an exemplary figure for secular criticism in Said’s terms precisely because, as a figure of displacement and dispossession, it marks a certain distance and fissure from the transcendentalization of cultural authority, forms of reckoning cultural transmission and descent that are based, as it were, on the “quasi-religious authority of being comfortably at home among one’s people.”

tique of Orientalism (and of imperialism more broadly) is inseparable for Said from criticism of the religious as such, understood as all those cultural forms, both the traditionally religious and the conventionally secular, whose appeal to authority is placed outside the fabric of social interest and the possibility of historical transformation. Secular criticism is in that sense a radically historical practice, opposed in concrete and detailed ways to metaphysical grounding and authorization of culture, both secular and religious, constantly unearthing its social filiations and affiliations and identifying the “human” costs of failing to subject to such criticism the process of critical thinking itself. This basic aspect of Said’s project is lost on those of his current readers who have found their way to the emerging orthodoxy of the “postsecular” in the humanistic disciplines and yet cannot quite let go of the radical cachet of this eviscerating book even as they take more and more conservative positions, producing self-interested and spectacular (even gymnastic) contortions, with the Saidian text marshaled in the interest of projects and purposes far removed from its own explicit and implicit commitments and affiliations.10 Taking up once again this foundational concern of Orientalism, I am concerned here ultimately with the significance of historical Orientalism for the fabrication, in non-Western societies in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of forms of cultural authority tied to the claim to authenticity of (religious, cultural, and national) “tradition”—turāth, rivāyat, or paramparā in some of the languages that will concern us here—and thus for the emergence of the kinds of social fissure that have often accompanied such transitions. In this sense both religious and secular traditions in the modern era—the Arab tradition and Islamic orthodoxy, for instance, or Indian civilization and Hinduism—are products of the Orientalist conjuncture and, far from excluding the religious, the secular complexes have themselves been produced by their anchoring in religious elements configured in majoritarian terms.

This, I want to suggest, is the suppressed element in the concept of world literature from its inception, namely, the far-reaching refashioning

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10. See, for instance, Gil Anidjar, “Secularism,” Critical Inquiry 33 (Autumn 2006): 52–77. Modesty is not among the many weaknesses of this somewhat careless essay. Anidjar sets himself the task of instructing Said in the real significance of his critique in Orientalism, regretting that Said failed to realize that, following the logic of his own argument in that book, he should have been a postsecularist. It is really too bad (I have sometimes thought since reading it) that this instruction was not undertaken while Said was alive.
of the cultures and societies of the world in the new phase of colonial expansion that accompanied and followed from the Industrial Revolution. By the time Goethe coins the term world literature in the last years of his life in the late 1820s—his first reported use of it is in the context of his having recently read a “Chinese novel”—it represents a retrospective look, with the global shifts in the structures of “literary” knowledge it is intended to reference having already been a long established reality, including of course in the life of the poet himself, who, as is well known, was deeply affected in 1791 on reading a translation of Kalidasa’s Śākuntalā—well before his better known encounter with the verse of Hafiz in the second decade of the next century, to which I return below. And by the time the term is resurrected by Marx and Engels more than a decade after the publication of the Conversations with Eckermann, which had reported its earliest use by Goethe, it is relatively speaking an old story indeed, appearing within a historical account of the rise and growth of the bourgeoisie as a global social force.\textsuperscript{11} It is the effects of these shifts on the colonized societies themselves, which constitute the objects, properly speaking, of the Orientalists’ endeavors, that I am concerned with here. Whether we view world literature (with Franco Moretti) as a conceptual organization rather than a body of literary texts or (with David Damrosch) as a special kind of literature, that which circulates beyond its “culture of origin”—and this tension is inherent in and as old as the term itself—we cannot ignore the global relations of force that the concept simultaneously puts in play and hides from view.\textsuperscript{12}

And, finally, taking seriously these scenarios of domination that emerged in the era of the birth of modern Orientalism will require some fairly dramatic revisioning of the model of national competition proposed by Casanova for what she calls the world republic of letters. The ongoing discussion about world literature, in the singular and plural, is both hugely encompassing and strangely timid; it seems unaware of the enormous role played by the institution of literature in the emergence of the hierarchies


and identities that structure relations between societies in the modern world. The integration of widely dispersed and heterogeneous sociocultural formations into a global ensemble has taken place, especially at the most decisive periods in this historical process, disproportionately on and through this terrain. The concept and practices of world literature, far from representing the superseding of national forms of identification of language, literature, and culture, thus emerged for the first time precisely alongside the forms of thinking in the contemporary Western world that elsewhere I have referred to as nation-thinking—that is, those emergent modes of thinking in the West that are associated with the nationalization of social and cultural life and point toward the nation-state as the horizon of culture and society.13 Our larger task is to comprehend the precise nature of this extended literary-philological moment, in which often-overlapping bodies of writing came to acquire, through a process of historicization, distinct personalities as literature along national lines. The institution of literature, which has not received as much scholarly attention in colonial studies as such practices as the census and ethnography, is chiefly significant for the historical role it played in the formation of the new colonial-national intelligentsias, formed in many colonized societies through the destruction of heterogeneous and ancient cultures of reading and writing.14

**Orientalism and the Institution of Indian Literature**

The role of the new Orientalist studies in the emergence of intellectual and literary cultures of a romantic bent in the West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and in the emergence of literature as such in the romantic and modern sense is not a developed subject of investigation today, but this has not always been the case, and in fact the role can hardly be overestimated. The influence is by no means limited to those famous (and numerous) romantic works—from *Vathek* (1786/1787) to *Kubla Khan* (1797?), *Lalla Rookh* (1817), the *West-Ostlicher Divan* (1819/1827), *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), *Don Juan* (1819–24), and beyond—that explicitly adopt Oriental themes, locales, or forms as their own but may be equated with the emergence of an entire cultural horizon, which

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Raymond Schwab famously conceived of as nothing less than a second, “Oriental” Renaissance in the West. The arrival in Europe and into the European languages of works originating in the classical languages of Asia and the Middle East had far-reaching effects on generations of writers in the West. Starting in the mid-1780s, Sanskrit works were added to the Persian and Arabic, soon superseding both in their ability to cause a “mania” among literary publics across Europe. Schwab, whose *La Renaissance orientale* (1950) remains to date the most detailed mapping of the emergence and development of this cultural horizon from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, went so far as to view the rise of romanticism as little more than the extended “literary repercussions” of the Orientalist knowledge revolution.15 And M. H. Abrams noted a few years after Schwab in his classic study of romantic aesthetics that the first systematic statement of what he called the emerging “expressive theory of poetry,” seeking to establish lyric verse as the poetic norm, was penned by William Jones and appended to his first published collection of poetry, *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages* (1772). This understanding of the origins of romanticism in the Orientalist conjuncture, routinely expressed by many of the writers themselves and restated at key moments in the history of romanticism studies, by such key figures as Schwab and Abrams, is with few exceptions the great forgotten of the discipline in our own times.16

Jones, whose enormous influence in the nineteenth century on several generations of writers and intellectuals on several continents is also largely forgotten today, played an almost unique role in both phases of the early development of modern Orientalism, first with his “imitations,” in *Poems*, from classical Arabic, Persian, and Turkish poetry—most famous among them a *ghazal* of Hafiz—then with his Persian grammar and the *Histoire de Nader Chah*, his French translation of a contemporary Persian history of the marauding eighteenth-century Iranian ruler, and finally of course as the leading figure of the new Sanskrit studies to emerge from Calcutta after his arrival there in 1784. *Asiatick Researches*, the chief organ of the Calcutta Orientalists (launched by Jones in 1788), was republished and translated repeatedly in Europe, its diverse contents further disseminated through

numerous reprintings and summaries in the popular press, and became
the vehicle of their soaring celebrity. As Said put it memorably in his essay
on Schwab, “the job of displacement was apportioned to the great capitals:
Calcutta provided, London distributed, Paris filtered and generalized.”
A huge range of writers in Europe and America, most famously Goethe,
absorbed both these Orientalist waves, if not always in the chronological
order of their unfolding. In Germany alone, during the so-called Indo-
mania of the 1790s, triggered by Georg Foster’s translation of Śakuntalā
(1791) from Jones’s English translation (1789), this icon of the new knowl-
edge found its way into the work of Herder, Goethe, Schlegel, and Novalis,
among numerous others, leading Schwab to refer to the entire age as a
“Śakuntalā era.”

The fabrication of Kalidasa as the “Indian Shakespeare,”
which took place first of all in Germany, marks perhaps the first assimila-
tion of Sanskrit textual materials to the new category of literature and was
to become instrumental in the nineteenth century in the repatriation, so to
speak, of Śakuntalā to the emerging colonial-nationalist intelligentsia in
India as “their” greatest contribution to world literature.

An unelabo-
rated notion, if not always an explicitly formulated concept, of world lit-
erature itself became a feature of nationalist culture from the late
nineteenth century onward. World literature was seen as the stage for the
reconciliation of all that is specifically Indian with universal and human
values as such—as suggested for instance by Rabindranath Tagore in
“World Literature” (“Biśwasāḥitya”), a well-known lecture first delivered
in 1907.

And when Tagore extolled the greatness of the play, comparing it
to The Tempest, he did so in part on the authority of Goethe.

In fact, since
its appearance in the Orientalist canon Śakuntalā has been a cornerstone of
that powerful and persistent modern narrative concerning the Oriental-

Renaissance, pp. 52–57.
and Dorothy Matilda Figueira, Translating the Orient: The Reception of Śākuntalā in Nineteenth-
19. See David Kopf, British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian
Modernization, 1773–1835 (Berkeley, 1969). The earliest articulation of this notion that I can
identify is in a letter of Jones’s, written during the process of mastering the Sanskrit text in 1787.
and Cannon, The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the Father of Modern
20. See Rabindranath Tagore, “World Literature,” in Selected Writings on Literature and
Amit Ray, Negotiating the Modern: Orientalism and Indianness in the Anglophone World (New
York, 2007).
ists’ great “gift” to the Indian people of their own past and tradition—a narrative featured not merely in the official historiography of Orientalism into our own times but also in a wide range of nationalist writing in India itself, including, most famously perhaps, Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India*: “To Jones and to the many other European scholars India owes a deep debt of gratitude for the rediscovery of her past literature.” And the early role played by Germany in this process should help us understand Orientalism itself as a pan-European system of relays that cannot be reduced to an unmediated logic of colonial *raison d’état*, a position that Said’s critics have sometimes incorrectly attributed to him.

The precise historical context for the birth of the new Orientalism in Calcutta, however, is more clearly colonial in an immediate sense, namely, in the ascendancy of British rule in India in the second half of the eighteenth century and the conquest of Bengal in particular. With the victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British found themselves for the first time in possession of a large contiguous territory populated by an expanse of agriculturalists and, having seized the revenues of Bengal in 1765, felt the need for systematic knowledge of Indian society, whose economic dimension was described over forty years ago by Ranajit Guha in his *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, a pioneering study of knowledge forms and their role in the transformation of colonized societies. On his appointment as the first governor-general of India, Warren Hastings, whom Edmund Burke was to help impeach more than two decades later, began to create the first official and institutional context for the new Indological studies to emerge. Hastings is the first great patron and facilitator of this new philology.


23. See Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, pp. 21–22. For Said’s anticipation and refutation of such arguments, precisely with reference to Germany’s nonimperial relationship to India, see *O*, pp. 18–19. For a useful collection of historical studies of German Indology, see *Sanskrit and “Orientalism.”* Suzanne Marchand’s much-awaited study of German Orientalism will doubtless alter our understanding of it in significant ways.

24. See Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963; Durham, N.C., 1996). It is a remarkable but hardly noted fact that this book, written at least fifteen years before the publication of Said’s *Orientalism*, anticipates elements of its argument in rather uncanny ways. So far as I know, Said was not familiar with the existence of Guha’s study when he wrote his own book in the 1970s, which had largely disappeared even from Indian debates after its initial publication by Mouton in 1963, though of course in *Culture and Imperialism* it provides one of the main instances of the latest phase of the global anticolonial “culture of resistance,” the phase Said refers to as “the voyage in” (*Said, Culture and Imperialism* [New York, 1993], p. 216).
emerging from Calcutta, and Jones, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Henry Thomas Colebrook, and Charles Wilkins were all officials of the East India Company under his administration.  

These early forays into the world of Sanskrit textuality betray anxieties about what was at least initially a near-blind reliance on the native practitioners and specialists of what appeared to the emerging Orientalists to be an ocean of indigenous learning. The “secretiveness” of the Brahmins is a constant anxiety in Jones’s private correspondence, and the story of his gradual entry into the Sanskrit universe is often told as one of his winning over their trust and even love.  

The relationship between the European scholar-administrator and his pundits, as they came to be called, constitutes the core institution of this early Indology, an institution that survived to some extent the great shift of the 1820s. Already by the first decade of the century, Indian philology had begun to acquire a more firmly textual basis in Europe itself. In the 1780s Jones and Wilkins could have acquired Sanskrit only in India; in 1803 Schlegel did so in Paris. Through the 1770s, the linguistic focus of the new research in Calcutta had remained on Persian, the language through which the British had largely come to know the history of India. It is only gradually in these decades that these early scholars became acquainted with Sanskrit textual traditions, whose very existence had largely been a matter of rumor and sometimes of wild speculation until then.  

What this early generation of Orientalists encountered on the subcontinent was not one single culture of writing but rather a loose articulation of different, sometimes overlapping but often mutually exclusive, systems.

25. It is one of the smaller ironies of this historical moment that one of the sources Burke relied upon for the ideas about Indian legal reform that made their way into Fox’s ill-fated India Bill in 1783, which proved to be only the first salvo in the attack on the practices of the East India Company that was to culminate in the trial of Hastings, was none other than Jones, who may well have been the author of the early drafts of some of the sections of the bill that are attributed to Burke. See Cannon, “Sir William Jones and Edmund Burke,” *Modern Philology* 54 (Feb. 1957): 165–86. On the Hastings trial and Burke’s role in it, see Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). Amit Ray provides a fine narrative of these scholarly, administrative developments in Calcutta under the tutelage of Hastings; see Ray, *Negotiating the Modern*, pp. 29–53.


27. Some of the translations from this period whose ultimate source is a Sanskrit text or set of texts, such as Halhed’s well-known compilation *The Laws of the Gentoos*, were translated from Persian versions of the Sanskrit originals, themselves often at more than one remove. Halhed’s Persian original is itself thought to have been a written translation of an oral account given by a Brahmin in Bengali. See Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones*, p. 231, and Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, p. 28.

based variously in Persian, Sanskrit, and a large number of the vernaculars, often more than one in a single language, properly speaking. Their writings reveal both a sense of elation as well as apprehensions at this encounter with an unknown of almost sublime proportions. I think we may speak here of a sort of philological sublime, a structure of encounter with a linguistic and cultural complexity of infinitesimal and dynamic differentiations and of seemingly infinite proportions. Sympathetic chroniclers of these intellectual developments, even into the twentieth century, cannot resist the language of incalculability. “He stood,” writes Cannon of Jones at the threshold of his study of Sanskrit, “the pioneer and orienter, before a huge, unexplored knowledge.” Jones’s famous third-anniversary address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1786, in which he broached for the first time the claim for a genetic “affinity” between Sanskrit and Greek and Latin—the germ of the idea of the Indo-European family of languages—was itself intended as the first of five annual discourses that would elaborate a vast comparative anthropology of, as Cannon puts it, “titanic scope” to encompass the ancient continent:

The five principal nations, who have in different ages divided among themselves, as a kind of inheritance, the vast continent of Asia, with the many islands depending on it, are the Indians, the Chinese, the Tartars, the Arabs, and the Persians: who they severally were, whence, and when they came, where they are now settled, and what advantage a more perfect knowledge of them may bring to our European world, will be shown, I trust, in five distinct essays; the last of which will demonstrate the connection or diversity among them, and solve the great problem, whether they had any common origin, and whether that origin was the same, which we generally ascribe to them.

The famous prospectus of research that Jones had already penned during his passage to India is similarly expansive, covering such fields as flora and fauna, astronomy, geography, numismatics, and archeology. And in these early records of his Eastern discoveries, at least, it is not simply “India” that is referenced, but India, Asia, and the East more broadly, in a series of synecdochal enlargements. It is only in later decades that the idea

29. On knowledge systems in precolonial India, see “Forms of Knowledge in Early-Modern South Asia,” a special issue of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East 24, no. 2 (2004), edited by Sheldon Pollock.
of Indo-European affinity came to function explicitly as part of the cultural apparatus of colonial governance, mutating in the course of the nineteenth century into the full-blown theory of the Aryan conquest, in which race, language, and culture became indistinguishably fused.33

In her now classic study, *The Rhetoric of English India*, Sara Suleri has spoken of Burke’s famous involvement with the impeachment of Hastings as the occasion for an elaboration of what she calls the Indian sublime. Implicit in the workings of the sublime in colonial culture, Suleri writes, is an “overdetermined fearfulness that the colonial imagination must experience in relation to its Indian novelty.” To reduce experience to a list or itinerary thus becomes the “driving desire” of Anglo-Indian narrative, such forms of the “catalog” becoming the modality of “colonial self-protection” in the face of the sublime. Suleri calls attention to Burke’s insistence on the failure of colonial description, to “the colonizer’s pained confrontation with an object to which his cultural and interpretative tools must be inadequate.”34 The various philological “projects” (to borrow a term from Said) of the long nineteenth century that emerged from these early excavations of Jones and his contemporaries, through the linguistic inventions of the College of Fort William, to which I return shortly, and culminating in the monumental cultural cartography of G. A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1898–1928) are linked by their participation in the philological version of this overdetermined sublime and mark a variety of attempts to grapple with the unrepresentability of the sociocultural reality of the subcontinent in the terms of contemporary Western intellectual systems at various points in the history of its subsumption into the imperial domain.

It is in the new Orientalist studies and in their wider reception that the subcontinent is first conceived of in the modern era as a single cultural entity, a unique civilization with its roots in the Sanskrit and more particularly Vedic texts of the Aryans. It is in the new Indology that the contemporary Western frames of thought that I have referred to as nation-thinking are first brought to bear upon culture and society in the subcontinent. I cannot put it more starkly than this: the idea that India is a unique national civilization is first postulated on the terrain of literature, that is, in the very

33. See Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1997). For a collection of studies of the Aryan thesis into our own times, where it has become entangled in the politics of right-wing Hindu nationalism, see *The Aryan Debate*, ed. Trautmann (Delhi, 2005). Unfortunately, and in marked contrast with such historians of ancient India as Romila Thapar, Trautmann remains apologetic and equivocal in face of the Hindutva politicization of historical and archeological evidence and claims.

invention of the idea of Indian literature in the course of the philological revolution. The dissemination throughout the European intellectual world of the new researches that began to emerge from Calcutta in the 1780s therefore constitutes the first significant dissemination anywhere of the Indian national idea. This invocation of an “Indian” tradition of sublime appearance and proportions consisting of both sacred and secular elements—this invention of the sacred-secular Indic complex as such—functioned as a massive, collective act of interpellation, calling up into existence a specifically Indian intelligentsia for the first time and assuring its inculcation in the procedures and methods of nation-thinking. That this particular historical consciousness, this emergent understanding of language, culture, society, and history, did eventually take hold, as it were, within certain elite sectors of society in India itself later in the century is an extremely complex story, being reconstructed in bits and pieces by literally dozens of scholars across several disciplines but still best understood in the formation of a new literary culture among the Bengali Hindu bhadralok, the first properly colonial and thus first modern intellectual culture in India and perhaps Asia, which came eventually to refer to itself as the Bengal Renaissance.

The role of Orientalist knowledge in the fabrication of this colonial elite and the first, properly speaking, Indian intelligentsia in the subcontinent is copiously documented but understood largely in terms of the historiographic category of influence. The narrative that lurks close to the surface in most of these accounts, as I have already noted, represents this cultural transaction as a selfless gift, from colonizer to colonized, of the latter’s past conceived as History. Two generations of scholars of modern Hinduism—such as Partha Chatterjee, Tapan Raychaudhuri, and more recently Brian K. Pennington, Srinivas Aravamudan, Amit Ray, and Anustup Basu—attempting precisely to break free of this profoundly colonial narrative, have shown in recent years that the most famous products of the translation labors of the Calcutta Orientalists, such as Wilkins’s Bhagvat-Geeta, or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon (1785) and Jones’s Sacontalà; or, the Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama and the Institutes of Hindu Law, or the Ordinances of Menu (1794), were acts of invention with far-reaching consequences of a different sort for the colonized society.35 They acquired a prominence and uniqueness within its conception and practices of the Indian “tradition”

that had little or nothing in common with their authority and place in precolonial cultures in the subcontinent, in Bengal or elsewhere. This is true equally of forms of writing now deemed sacred as of those deemed secular. And the process reveals the mutual interdependence between emergent secular-national and Hindu-religious formations. The conception of the Gita as a distinct and core scriptural text of the Hindus, for instance—a conception that allowed Gandhi even to juxtapose it to the scriptures of the monotheistic religions in his publicly ostentatious practice of religious ecumenicism—cannot be understood outside this, precisely speaking, Orientalist process of its extraction from its textual and social contexts and reconstitution at the core of a newly fashioned Indian national tradition. More broadly speaking, Orientalism placed selected Brahmanical texts and practices at the core of the civilization of the subcontinent as a whole, establishing hierarchies between not merely diverse textual traditions but between these various elite forms of textual authority and a vast range of lived religious forms—hierarchies that continue to help reproduce elements of the colonial social order in postcolonial times. The founders of modern savarna (literally, “same color”) or upper-caste Hinduism—figures such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, and Keshub Chander Sen—were enthusiastic readers and devotees of the European Orientalists. 36 The awe and even reverence in which these early “moderns” in the subcontinent held such late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European codifiers of this “Indian” tradition as Jones, Wilkins, Colebrooke, and Max Müller is an index of the Orientalists’ invention of Indian literature and its insertion into an expanded and transformed world literary space. We might even say that the acquisition of this structure of feeling—a sense of awe and reverence for the labors of the Orientalists—is what it meant to be modern for the first time in different regions and languages of the subcontinent at different times in the course of the nineteenth century.

Thus when it began gradually to emerge in different parts of the country from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the colonial-nationalist intelligentsia found fully formed a body of writing understood

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36. See, among numerous other works, Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World; Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India (Delhi, 1995); Chaudhuri, The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (London, 1951) and Scholar Extraordinary; Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered; and Kopf, British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance.
as Indian literature and a body of knowledge and cultural system for configuring language, literature, and culture in national terms. Put differently, this emergent intelligentsia was in a strong sense schooled in Orientalism, which constituted for it the very horizon of modern, Western, humanistic knowledge. The nineteenth century in India can thus be conceived of in cultural and intellectual terms as the period of the long emergence of the category of the indigenous and its installation at the core of a new middle-class intellectual culture of increasingly pan-subcontinental scope. Both the secular and the religious types of nationalism in modern times share this ground of the indigenous as facilitator of the authenticity of tradition (paramparā), the shared ground that explains the ease of movement over the modern era from the one to the other political and cultural formation—from the religious to the secular in the early decades of the twentieth century and in the opposite direction in our own times. The notion of world literature itself came to have a significant place in this culture of nationalism, stressed to varying degrees by different writers and thinkers, as that universal space to which India may be said to have made, in the form of its ancient Sanskritic culture, a distinct national contribution, as I have already noted with respect to Tagore.

But my larger interest here, to which I return in more detail below, is that this mode of insertion of the colony into the space of world literature, this distinctly nationalist resolution of the question of literature and culture, set the stage for the elaboration of contradictions between national and nonnational social imaginaries in the subcontinent, in particular between the Indic complex and the Indo-Persian ecumene, of which the “Urdu” version of the northern vernacular (as opposed to its “Hindi” version) may be said to carry the most visible linguistic trace in modern times. Let us briefly consider the case of Payām-e mashriq (Message of the East, 1924), the great response in Persian to Goethe’s Divan produced by Muhammad Iqbal, Tagore’s approximate contemporary, in which “the East” as a whole is produced above all as a transnational Islamicate sphere. If Goethe’s Divan of 1819 may be said, in its detailed and close engagement with the (fourteenth century) dīvān of Hafiz, to be the instantiating gesture of the emerging European practice of world literature, taking the “national” literary complex of “Persia” to be a synecdoche for the “East” more broadly, Iqbal’s collection returns the gesture by placing an Indo-Persian (and by implication, Indo-Muslim) literary and theosophical complex, in whose elaboration he himself had played a key role for some two decades already, at the center of this “message” in response. 

In this practice of

37. On Goethe and Hafiz, see Einboden, “The Genesis of Weltliteratur.”
world literature on Indian soil, the tradition (rīvāyat) of the Indo-Muslim poet leads back to the Persian Hafiz—a fundamentally nonnationalist resolution—and the “indigenous” cultural materials of the Indian-national literary complex certainly make an appearance from time to time, but as a framed (rather than framing) element.

Later in this essay, I shall return at length to the question of the divided vernacular of the North, that is, Hindi-Urdu, whose history is a record of a series of effects of the emerging logic of indigenization in the nineteenth century. But let us turn first to an Anglophone context for the early elaboration of the topos of the nation and consider briefly the case of Henry Derozio, the poet and famously charismatic teacher of literature at Hindu College in Calcutta. A young “half-caste” of mixed English, Portuguese, and Indian parentage, Derozio got caught up in the late 1820s in one of the first controversies in colonial India concerning the effects of Western-style education and will perhaps forever remain associated with the image of his students, the sons of upper-caste Hindu families, allegedly consuming liquor and meat openly and ostentatiously in the marketplace. It is conventional to regard Derozio as a leading member of the generation known as Young Bengal and as the first Indian to write poetry in English. Hindu College itself was an early attempt to negotiate between Hindu orthodoxy and the new education. But this new culture of reading and writing became immediately associated with the scandal of iconoclasm and the breaking of caste rules. The new practice of reading literature is in tension here with fealty to a textually authorized religious orthodoxy. A mere four decades later, as Partha Chatterjee has shown in his reading of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, this seemingly insurmountable tension would become, for certain classes of people in certain places in colonial India, a distant memory; for Chatterjee, Bankim is both the leading figure of the new Bengali literature that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and among the founders of a modern Hindu neoorthodoxy.38

The classical references of Derozio’s English models are reproduced in his poems of the 1820s, but they become subject here to a fundamental ambiguity. Are the “barbarous hordes” in “Thermopylae” the Persians knocking on Europe’s door or Europeans who have come to subjugate Persia’s ancient neighbor? Are “Sparta’s sons” defending Europe against the Asiatic horde or a model for Asia’s sons themselves that shows them how “liberty in death is won”? Is the “patriot sword” in “Freedom to the Slave” a gift of the English language or lifted against it? But more important for our purposes perhaps is the appearance in Derozio’s verse of language

38. See Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, chap. 3.
that is in keeping with the Orientalist conventions available to contemporary literature, conventions that, for instance, Jones’s Indian verse, especially the hymns to the figures of the Hindu pantheon—which appeared in several editions of his collected poems in the quarter century from 1799 on—had helped to popularize. Derozio repeatedly invokes an Indian Golden Age. This is, for instance, the case with “To India—My Native Land”:

My country! In thy day of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?
. . . Well, let me dive into the depths of time,
And bring from out the Ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,
Which human eye may never more behold.39

Indian national sentiment arises out of a Western and in fact English literary model here, which in itself is the product of an encounter between literature in the new sense and the Orientalists’ philological labors. And a constitutive ambiguity is already at work in this very early, properly speaking, nationalist text, revealing the ambiguous and ambivalent reliance of nationalist culture on the structures of colonial knowledge—how could “India” appear to one of its “native” sons as an ocean full of “wrecks sublime”?

The historical trajectory I am interested in here, leading from the birth of the new Orientalism in the late eighteenth century to the fitful and regionally uneven emergence of a colonial-nationalist intelligentsia in the course of the nineteenth, is far from being a linear or unidirectional one and cannot be said to conform to any notion of historical necessity. And it unfolded across a social field marked by contradictions at various levels. Most importantly, this process of acculturation to indigenizing notions and practices was directed ultimately at a small class constituted mostly from the precolonial social elites rather than the subaltern mass of the people, turning the latter into the popular object of their project of national elaboration. And this intelligentsia came eventually to turn this national complex, including the myth of a lost Indian golden age we have just

encountered in Derozio’s verse, against colonial rule. The imperial overlords, furthermore, remained as a whole highly ambivalent about these cultural developments, split in the late nineteenth century, for instance, between the posture of selfless tutelage and savage disdain of these “chattering” classes, both of which we encounter, for instance, in Rudyard Kipling’s writings. But the fact that nationalist intellectuals appropriated the work of the Orientalists selectively and in effect ironically, or with a view to their own perceived interests, does not in any way lessen the significance of a distinctly Orientalist pedagogy in their very emergence as a pan-subcontinental, “Indian” class.

The logic of indigenization, first put to work as I am arguing here in the assembling of the Sanskrit-centered Indic complex, had far-reaching effects across the cultural and social field that came into being under the impact of colonial rule and across a range of contemporary vernacular formations. But Orientalism’s linguistic and literary invention of India has in fact to be understood as a complex two-part, nonsynchronous process: the assembling of the Indic complex (Jones and his contemporaries and the wider discourse initiated by their work) and then, following the first significant transition in the history of this early Indology, the invention of the modern vernaculars through an enormous and multipronged project. This second phase of Orientalism’s Indian “project” involved in these early years such colonial institutions as the College of Fort William in Calcutta (about which more below), the College of Fort St. George in Madras, and the Baptist mission at Serampore in Bengal—the latter undertaking a massive printing project in a large number of the Indian vernaculars, inventing movable type for the first time for several of the languages and dialects of India. One tectonic impact of this dual process of indigenization in colonial culture—the Sanskritization of tradition, on the one hand, and the invention of the modern vernaculars, on the other—was the rapid decline and disappearance of Indo-Persian civilization, whose forms of cosmopolitanism, once the culture of vast segments of the literate classes in the subcontinent across the lines of religious affiliation, could now only appear under the sign of the nonindigenous, the elite, and thus alien.

By far the most dramatic instance of this process of indigenization on the terrain of language, not surprisingly, is the effort to produce a linguistic and literary center for the emerging nation space—the invention of modern śuddha (“purified”) Hindi as the language of the nation precisely under the sign of the indigenous. And if modern Urdu may be described for

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our purposes as the version of the northern vernacular that most visibly carries traces of the now-disappeared Indo-Persian culture, then the concept of indigenization helps clarify for us the distinct situation of Urdu since the middle of the nineteenth century as a set of linguistic, literary, and social practices at odds with the emerging practices of the nation. The larger issue here is not simply that the fabrication of an Indian tradition was anchored by a (modern) Hindu religio-political identity but rather that these shifts in the contours of knowledge, language, and culture produced two increasingly distinct social groups and social imaginaries among the new, urban middle classes across the subcontinent, each marked by a newly standardized religious identity, one of which came to see itself as being in possession, in a strong sense, of that classical Sanskrit and more broadly “Indic” heritage, and the other, because it could not replicate that strong claim to possession, came to see itself, and of course was seen by others, as not quite Indian. The emergence of polarized religio-political identities in India in modern times, and of the two distinct and rival forms of the north Indian vernacular associated with them, that is, modern Hindi and Urdu, itself is decisive for the course of the larger processes that precipitated the final partition of India in the middle of the twentieth century along religious lines and is thus in a strong sense a colonial development. This is a historical judgment that must not be confused with the more popular, and distinctly nationalist, habit of assigning the “blame” for the political split to British policies of divide and rule. But the precise unfolding of these processes of partition across the cultural, social, and political fields cannot be understood without reference to the conditions of colonial rule in the subcontinent. The entire dialectic of the indigenous and the alien, Hindu and Muslim, that is so defining of the cultural history of the second half of the nineteenth century is put into motion for the first time in the slow and massive realignment of the gears of knowledge and culture at its beginning.

**Orientalism and “the Language of Hindoostan”**

At least two levels of interaction are significant here, if we may return for a moment to the terms of analysis introduced by Casanova: first, this linguistic and cultural conflict may be viewed as evidence of a struggle to achieve preeminence in an emerging national literary space in the subcontinent in the course of the nineteenth century, a literary space whose (evolving) political milieu is provided by the development of the structures of the colonial state; and, second, the emergence of this national space itself is inseparable from the process of its insertion into the international literary space in the period of the latter’s massive expansion across
the globe. Of course, to a large extent this process in India parallels developments in language and literature in Europe since the middle of the eighteenth century, from the ubiquitous collections of folktales across the continent to the recovery of “bardic” traditions. And a celebrated “forgery” scandal like the Macpherson-Ossian controversy in fact reveals the inventive nature of all philological fabrications of national traditions. But the paradox of the Indian situation is this: the process of vernacularization that we know to be inseparable from modernization—and, outside of Europe, we may think of such language revolutions as the May 4th movement in China, genbun ichi in Japan, the nahda in Egypt and Greater Syria—produced in India not one but two claimants to the status of lingua franca. To put it more precisely, it produced two versions of the same language complex, the northern Indian vernacular—and in fact two lexically different versions of the same kharī bōli (“upright speech”) morphological subset of the vernacular of Western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Punjab, which the armies and Sufis of the Mughal sphere had helped to establish as the northern Indian lingua franca—in conflict and rivalry with each other over claims to social reach and social distinction in the emerging national literary space. There is no name for this more encompassing and contradictory linguistic formation—whether Hindi, Urdu, or Hindustani—that is not subject to the terms of the conflict itself. To acquire one or the other of these supposedly distinct languages is therefore not simply to learn a language as such. It is to learn ways of participating in a language field constituted as a polemic.

Urdu cannot be conceived of as just another Indian language among others, as it were, since part of its historical reality over the last two hundred years has been precisely that it creates difficulties of a particular sort for the very terms in which the Indianness of language and literature have come to be conceived, difficulties that have repeatedly produced an embittered response in those committed to the production of a philology or literary history of a nationalist orientation. In this connection, we may consider briefly the history of Urdu’s relationship as a cluster of language practices and a textual corpus in the northern vernacular to the mārga/dēśī polarity (literally, “the way”/“of the place, local”) operative in nationalist philology and literary history. A feature of Sanskrit culture since its rise to hegemonic status as the cosmopolitan cultural order in the subcontinent early in the first millennium of the Common Era, this polarity ac-

42. For a characteristic argument about Urdu as a conscious rejection of the indigenous, see Amrit Rai, A House Divided: The Origins and Development of Hindi-Urdu (Delhi, 1984).
quired a radically new valence and functionality in colonial-nationalist culture. Sheldon Pollock, the leading scholar of the Sanskrit world in our time, has translated this polarity into English as “cosmopolitan/vernacular” and analyzed with brilliant clarity its ability to give an account of the relation between Sanskrit and the rise of the vernaculars toward the end of the first millennium.\(^{43}\) Since the early nineteenth century, however, this conceptual binary has been subject to the logic of indigenization I have been attempting to describe here and played a central role in Orientalist-nationalist philology. In the foundational work of such figures as Suniti Kumar Chatterji, for instance, it functions entirely within the terms of the Hindi-Urdu polemic, with both the “cosmopolitan” and “vernacular” functions and orientations (read “Sanskrit” and the “New Indo-Aryan languages” like Hindi respectively) now carrying the force of the indigenous as against the hybrid and alien forms of Urdu and the Indo-Persian cultural sphere more broadly. Any attempt to conceptualize linguistic-literary relations between different cultural formations in contemporary South Asia in terms of the conceptual structure of \(mārgal/dēśī\), as in G. N. Devy’s \textit{After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism}, which is a pioneering and brilliant attempt to envision a practice of literary criticism that is capable of thinking against and beyond what he calls the “epistemological stumbling block” of colonial culture, finds its own stumbling block in the forms of anomaly that from the perspective of nationalism seem to coalesce in Urdu.\(^{44}\)

The single most important institutional setting for an understanding of the inventiveness of Orientalism in its second, “vernacular” phase is the College of Fort William, which embodied this first transition in the history of Calcutta Orientalism from the decade of Jones and deserves a closer look from our discipline than it has gotten. (From Said’s account of the developments in Calcutta, it is missing entirely; see \textit{O}, pp. 77–79.) The college was formed in 1800 as the first formal institutional attempt to train the future officers of the East India Company. If Governor-General Hastings is the patron of the first, that is, Sanskritic, phase of Orientalism, Wellesley is that of the second, vernacular one. In the course of a few years at the beginning of the century, a small group of European lexicographers and translators, including John Gilchrist, Edward Warring, and the Baptist missionary William Carey, along with their teams of native assistants, in-


cluding Mir Amman, Mir Sher Ali Afsos, Lalluji Lal, and Ramram Basu, produced the models for standardized prose in several of the vernacular languages of India.45 The very organizational structure of the college, which grouped its personnel into European “professors” and “teachers,” on the one hand, and native munshis (“scribes”), on the other, was thus an articulation of vastly different intellectual cultures, subjectivities, and social temporalities—as European intellectuals with the most “advanced” contemporary forms of Western humanistic education from such institutions as Oxford supervised the work of munshis of various sorts, who were trained in the traditional manner of the late Mughal Empire, in the first formal institution of “modern” education in India.46

The effects of the college’s work for language and literature in north India in particular were far-reaching. Under the explicit instructions of Gilchrist, appointed Professor of Hindostani in 1800, these individuals produced, for use as textbooks in the linguistic education of the young British recruits of the East India Company, a handful of prose works in two distinct forms of the north Indian vernacular, to be called Hindi and Hindostani respectively, which Gilchrist viewed as separate Hindu and Muslim languages, the one with an emphasis on Sanskrit as lexical source and the other on Persian and Arabic.47 In aligning religion, language, and literature in this manner Gilchrist was simply reproducing the terms of a wider Anglo-Indian discourse since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. In these early decades, the British often used the word Moor to refer to Muslims in India and Moor’s for their purported language. Jones himself, in his 1786 address, distinguished between the “Hindostani” language and the “Bhasha,” and the Serampore missionaries, among them Carey, who joined the college as teacher of Sanskrit and Bengali, had already begun to highlight in their publications two distinct variants of the northern vernacular. The Fort William College narratives are thus the first instance anywhere of the standardization of the vernacular in two distinct forms marked by religious difference. And the fact that these works were published with native individuals identified as authors of the works is already an indication of the at least minimal inroads toward the installation

47. See Sadiqur-Rahman Kidwai, Gilchrist and the “Language of Hindoostan” (New Delhi, 1972). Gilchrist was a member of the Asiatic Society; he arrived in Calcutta in 1783, a year before Jones’s arrival and founding of the society, and he is listed as a member of the society in the first volume of Asiatick Researches (1788).
of a specifically literary space in India—a far cry from the anonymous “pundits” of Jones and his contemporaries when they started out a mere twenty years earlier. The Fort William College project thus represents one attempt to impose order of a particular sort, in line with the methods of nation-thinking, on the “infinitely varied common tongue” of north India, as Alok Rai has put it quite memorably. A critical reception history of the “Hindi” and “Hindostani” narratives produced at the college, which comprehends the modes by which these profoundly colonial texts entered and shaped the emerging vernacular literary cultures in northern India—their entry into school and college curricula, their canonization in the works of the new literary history—still remains to be written, as does a careful comparative philology that seeks to place these early colonial linguistic-literary projects—the Serampore and Fort William College texts above all—alongside the range of contemporary literary practices at various degrees of remove from colonial institutions.

As Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has shown, the term Hindustani had no such fixed currency within the indigenous culture itself, with the poets and tazkira (biographical anthology) writers of the period using a range of designations—including rēkhta (“scattered” or “mixed”), zabān-e urdū-e mu’āllā (“speech of the exalted camp/court”), Hindavi or Hindui, and even simply Hindi—to designate the language of their compositions, which was seen to be in varying ways distant from or proximate to a number of dialects and registers—Braj-bhasha (or bakha), Avadhi, and Bhojpuri among numerous others. Let us consider briefly the case of Inshallah Khan Insha’s Kahaṇi Rāṇī Kētāki aur Kuṅvar Uday Bhaṅṅī (The Tale of Queen Ketaki and Prince Uday Bhan; 1803?), for instance, a text whose probable period of composition makes it a contemporary of the Fort William College narratives but whose social milieu lay at a relative distance from the social orbit and temporalities of the emerging colonial state and that played a not negligible role in the production of the self-conception of Hindi nationalism in the twentieth century as having arisen out of a long indigenous tradition. This Hindi canonization of Insha’s tale is at the very least paradoxical, since he is widely regarded as one of the great codifiers of the Urdu tradition, above all in his Persian-language prose work, Daryā-e la ṭafat (The Ocean of Refinement; 1808), which, in its very effort to establish rules of bon usage in the northern vernacular, constitutes perhaps the most fecund source for an understanding of the range and emerg-

ing hierarchy of linguistic practice in north India in the early nineteenth century. This latter text of Insha’s has been subject to repeated excoriation in Hindi literary history as evidence of the tangential nature of Urdu to the mainstream linguistic development of north India. But in the story Insha appears to have proceeded with the opposite intention: to purge writing in the vernacular, as a sort of feat of linguistic prowess, of all “foreign” vocabulary originating in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic. It is of course this linguistic conceit that makes it available for later appropriation by Hindi nationalism: “it occurred to me one day to tell a story in which besides Hindavi no mixture of another way of speaking [bōḷ] should be encountered…. Neither any foreign speech [bāhar kī bōḷī] nor the rustic [gaṇvārī] should be present in it.” But what is meant by the “rustic” here is itself quite revealing, as we are told that a respectable older acquaintance of the author’s had expressed his skepticism about the plausibility of such a linguistic adventure, in which “Hindavi-ness [Hindavi-pan] would not be removed”—that is, by “foreign” lexical elements—“but the bākhā would not come bursting in.” In this text written at a certain remove from the workings of the properly colonial logic of indigenization (in Lucknow, outside formal British sovereignty, at the turn of the century), a very different sort of cultural logic seems to be at work. The danger inherent in the quest for “Hindavi-ness,” that is, for a lexically de-Persianized and de-Arabicized practice of the kharī bōḷī form of the vernacular, “as spoken formerly [pahle] by the best people [achchho sē achchhē] amongst themselves,” is this eruption of the bākhā, coded as “rustic” speech. (And Insha’s boastful response of course is that he is equal to the challenge of overcoming this peril.) In other words, the register we now identify as Urdu is the guarantor here of the purity and social prestige of kharī bōḷī as such and is on a continuum with the register that is characterized here by “Hindavi-ness,” both forms needing to be vigilant about the popular and “rustic” forms identified collectively here as the bākhā. The properly colonial logic of indigenization (and alienization) at work in the contemporary Fort William College project is nowhere to be seen in Insha’s text, which is shaped instead by the tussle between the refined and the rustic or vulgar. Taking a longer historical view, we might say that the Fort William College project shatters this linguistic continuum by positing, with the certainty inherent in the state-Orientalist truth-claim, the existence of distinct and


vastly different, indigenous and alien, traditions of spoken and written language marked by religious difference. The later retroactive Hindi assimilation of Insha’s text under the sign of the indigenous and popular, as part of a continuous historical development that also seamlessly includes the Fort William College narratives, thus misconstrues the fractures of this historical moment entirely, papering over the still vast gulf separating the indigenizing logic of the colonial state from the precolonial logics of linguistic and cultural differentiation and stratification operating in vast segments of society in the subcontinent.

Modern Hindi thus emerged in conflict and competition, on the one hand, with Urdu, which, under the sign of the nonindigenous, it wished to eject from the space of the nation, but also, on the other, with a range of other forms of the northern vernacular about which it remained instead fundamentally ambivalent, wishing to incorporate them into its own prehistory, but as premodern and thus superseded forms of the indigenous vernacular, inadequate to the linguistic and aesthetic demands of the modern world. This is the case above all with Braj, which was, along with Urdu, one of the two dominant literary traditions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the northern language zone, but which now could only appear in Hindi nationalist culture under the sign of a premodern and popular “sweetness” of expression (miṭṭha) whose temporality is incommensurable with the, properly speaking, historical time of the nation.52 This inability of early Hindi nationalists to see anything but khaṛī bōli as the appropriate idiom—more precisely, as the only appropriate and authentic morphological base—for the speech of the nation in its modernity is thus in large measure the result, ironically, to say the least, of the already established and officially canonized modernity of khaṛī bōli in its Urdu version, which was from 1837 a language of the colonial state in its function as the language of the law courts in north India. Put differently, because modern Hindi occupied the same morphological ground as Urdu it replicated the morphological hierarchy of bon usage codified in the earlier emergence of Urdu in the late Mughal eighteenth century and in its standardization in the nineteenth as a language of the colonial state, reproducing Urdu’s classification of Braj as primitive and rustic speech. We might even say, in other words, that at its moment of emergence “Hindi” is “Urdu” in the process of being indigenized.

The process of linguistic differentiation and realignment was thus a gradual and laborious one and by no means linear. This fact may be judged

52. I owe this latter point to Rashmi Bhatnagar’s superb presentation at MLA 2008 and to our subsequent conversations.
in an anecdotal way from a small event from 1847 reported by a historian of the language conflict. A group of Hindu students at Benares College—which a mere four decades later would emerge as one of the centers of the Hindi movement—responded to the linguistic admonishments of their exasperated British educator by noting that because there were numerous forms of the spoken language, they did not understand what he meant by pure Hindi and that in order to know which words to expunge in an effort to purify their language as he was requiring them to do they would have to learn Arabic and Persian. Even if it were apocryphal, this story would be enormously useful for understanding the logic of linguistic indigenization; for the native speaker, the route to the discovery of that which is meant to be properly one’s own is a circuitous one, leading through precisely that which is to be rendered foreign and alien. The overall process of the emergence of Urdu and Hindi as rival linguistic and literary registers identified with distinct and mutually conflicted religious identities represents a massive rearrangement of a layered, performatively contingent, and dynamic linguistic reality into a structure of binary oppositions.

It is only quite late in the nineteenth century—as the notion of a lexically Sanskritized version of the northern vernacular, built on the same *kharī bōlī* morphological ground as Urdu, gradually gained ground among a segment of the intelligentsia as the only legitimate lingua franca—that the terms *Hindi* and *Urdu* came to acquire their present differentiations and meanings. A post-colonial philology of this literary and linguistic complex can never adequately claim to be produced from a position uncontaminated by the language polemic that now constitutes it and can only proceed by working through its terms.

Finally, any attempt to give an account of the contemporary social situation of Urdu and Hindi as literary languages must confront the paradoxical fact that no literary history, properly speaking, can fail to locate their modern origins in the Fort William College narratives, written expressly not for an Indian reading public but rather for the linguistic and cultural training of young British officers of the East India Company. There was a lag of several decades after their initial publication before they became available to “Urdu” and “Hindi” reading publics. Even some three decades later, the ornate language of Rajab Ali Beg Suroor’s *Fasāna-e...*
'aja’ib (1831?) was intended precisely as a repudiation of the purportedly conversational and pedestrian Fort William College style. The very foundational acts of historicization that sought to produce for the first time the terms of distinct and independent histories for these two traditions—I am thinking here of such late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century figures as Muhammad Husain Azad (Urdu) and Ramchandra Shukla (Hindi)—thus represent at the same time their anchoring in this colonial and Orientalist logic.\(^{54}\) In a very real sense, then, prose traditions in the languages we have come to read and write as “our own”—I am speaking here as a person formed in the Hindi-Urdu polemic as a “native” speaker of “Urdu”—were invented for the purpose of colonial governance, and the task of criticism today is at the very least the untangling and rearranging of the various elements presently congealed into seemingly distinct and autonomous objects of divergent literary histories. The critical task of overcoming the colonial logics persistently at work in the formation of literary and linguistic identities today is thus indistinguishable from the task of pushing against the multiple identitarian assumptions, colonial and Orientalist in nature, of Hindi and Urdu’s mutual, religiously marked distinctness and autonomy.

This secular-critical task, furthermore, corresponds not simply to some image of a heterogeneous past but to the contradictory contemporary situation of language and literature itself. For, the laborious historical process of creating two distinct language identities—a historical labor undertaken, as I have tried to show, first by Orientalists and then by Indian nationalists (and Muslim separatists)—still remains ongoing and incomplete. Despite the countless efforts at differentiation and countless applications of identitarian pressure across the linguistic and literary field in this enormous cultural zone in the subcontinent for well over a century, Urdu and Hindi remain intimately proximate and available to each other in a whole range of media and forms—in spoken language forms, in the so-called “Hindi” films of Bollywood cinema, but above all in literary writing itself. A desire for Urdu—coded as refined and cosmopolitan—is inherent to modern Hindi, and a desire for Hindi—coded as popular and vernacular—is inherent to modern Urdu itself. That this encounter takes place through a haze of misconceptions—after all, in Pakistan, at least, the institutionalization of Urdu as the national language has been achieved by

sundering nearly all its former associations with the mannered *ashrāf* elite, and modern standard Hindi can hardly be equated with any genuinely popular form of the spoken language—does not diminish the fact that it takes place daily. In this sense, Hindi-Urdu remain articulated as the elements of a single formation in contradiction, and the more the contradiction is heightened—by a myriad of nationalizing processes operative at numerous social locations—the more the singularity (in contradiction) is affirmed and renewed, even though at yet one further level of remove from the phenomenal levels of social experience.

In sum, then, Orientalism may be understood as a set of processes for the reorganization of language, literature, and culture on a planetary scale, which effected the assimilation of heterogeneous and dispersed bodies of writing onto the plane of equivalence and evaluable that is literature, fundamentally transforming in the process their internal distribution and coherence, their modes of authorization, and their relationship to the larger social order and social imaginaries in their places of origin. In its historically received forms, therefore, world literature is fundamentally a concept of exchange (and, as Marx and Engels understood, a concept of bourgeois society)—that is, a concept that recodes an opaque and unequal process of appropriation as a transparent one of supposedly free and equal interchange and communication. And the Latinate term *literature*, and the set of its cognates in the Western languages, together with a number of calques (or loan translations) in the languages of the global South, now provide the dominant, universalizing, *but by no means absolute* vocabulary for the comprehension of verbal-textual expression worldwide. As my analysis of the Orientalizing process in India, and in the specific case of Hindi-Urdu, has attempted to show, this is an ongoing and open-ended process, a determinate logic of the late capitalist world, so that the critique of Orientalism too is best understood as open-ended and ongoing rather than engaged in and accomplished once and for all.

**Global English and the Vernaculars**

While the Hindi-Urdu conflict I have been examining here represents at many levels a fairly particular, if not exactly unique, historical trajectory, the broader historical situation of the Indian vernaculars outlined above, and their relation to English as literary language and cultural system, reflects a larger and now planet wide reality. (Some of this applies to lesser and varying degrees to a number of the other Western languages, above all French, but I am bracketing off that question here entirely in order to focus on English.) Having consigned the languages of the global South, including formerly extensive and dispersed cultures of writing, to narrowly
conceived ethnonational spheres, English now assumes the mantle of exclusive medium of cosmopolitan exchange. The many signs of this dramatic shift—and I have charted some others in detail in the foregoing pages—can be found in patterns of circulation and access to literary works beyond their immediate societies of origin. To take one concrete example, a hundred years ago at least some intelligentsias in the vast stretch of societies from the eastern Balkans, through Anatolia and Persia proper, including swathes of Central Asia and Afghanistan, and stretching across the northern belt of the subcontinent, may have encountered their textual creations in the original and directly—that is, in Persian, Arabic, or Ottoman Turkish. Today, readers in India, Pakistan, Iran, or Turkey will typically encounter each other’s literatures only in translation in English (or in further translation from English), thus only if the works have received that metropolitan recognition. (The overwhelming majority of translations of world literature into the Indian languages, for instance, are actually translations from the English.) Naguib Mahfouz’s Nobel Prize and the spate of translations that followed certainly did help introduce modern Arabic literature to many Western readers for the first time, but this is also true of readers in many societies formerly part of the Perso-Arabic sphere as well, in which modern literariness has been instituted precisely through the sundering of the erstwhile link to Persian and/or Arabic—most dramatically perhaps in modern standard Hindi and the Turkish that emerged from the Kemalist language “reforms” in the early decades of the republic. (Both of these languages have been instituted in large measure through a nationalistic de-Persianization of an existing linguistic formation.) Iqbal, who is generally regarded as the founder of the Pakistan idea, wrote much of his poetic output in Persian in the first half of the twentieth century, a far cry from the situation today, where writers in Pakistan, to say nothing of the larger reading public, may well have encountered Reading Lolita in Tehran in the original or in Urdu translation but are almost entirely unaware of contemporary Iranian literature in Persian. But these are largely surface phenomena that indicate the deeper tectonic shifts in language, literature, and culture I have been concerned with here and that are the long legacy of the colonial empires and their logics of Orientalization. As I have argued at some length, this entire question of the expansion of the Western European languages or, more accurately, of the question of their assimilation of non-Western cultures of writing—a process I have identified here as Orientalism—is largely ignored in contemporary accounts.

55. The term is Gayatri Spivak’s. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Death of a Discipline (New York, 2003).
(such as Casanova’s) of the emergence and expansion of world literary space and in such frameworks for the consideration of literary and linguistic diversity as Anglophone literatures or global English.

With respect to English and the Indian vernaculars, a now-notorious statement published some years ago by Salman Rushdie might inadvertently offer us some further clarity about the contemporary situation. In the introduction to an anthology of postindependence Indian fiction, Rushdie offered his readers his considered opinion that the only contemporary Indian literature of significant worth was being written in English: “prose writing . . . by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages’ . . . and, indeed, this new, still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.” At least a dozen of these vernaculars happen of course to be major literary cultures, some of them with traditions of writing up to a millennium old, of none of which Rushdie could be entirely unaware. Rushdie’s remarks came clothed in a mood of sincerity frustrated; the editor of a projected anthology, having searched exhaustively, was forced to admit in the end that there was nothing in these literary languages that was worth including in the volume. The one exception to this general rule, Rushdie informed his readers, was the Urdu short story Tōbā Tēk Siṅgh,” by Saadat Hasan Manto, a translation of which was consequently included in the collection—not exactly an original selection, nor the result of particularly strenuous deliberation, given the story’s mass popularity in the subcontinent and the fact that it had been produced as a short film and shown on Channel Four in Britain a decade earlier for the fortieth anniversary of the Partition.

Rushdie’s is not, if we are to be precise, an Orientalist statement, but rather an Anglicist one, to use the terms of the great imperial debate in the early nineteenth century about colonial governance and education. If there are echoes of Macaulay here, this is far from being accidental. Macaulay’s famous judgment of 1835 about the relative merits of Occidental over Oriental literatures had expressed the distinctly colonial logic inherent in Europe’s encounter with its Asiatic possessions. Critical as it was of the Orientalists’ case for continuing the natives’ education in Asiatic languages and traditions of writing, it had nevertheless relied on and repro-

duced precisely the terms of the Orientalist reinvention of the world literary system and the placing of the “literatures of the East” within it: “I am quite ready,” Macaulay writes in his well known “Minute on Indian Education,” “to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves.” Macaulay’s formulation stated precisely the relative hierarchy and discrepancy of power in the colonial era between, on the one hand, the European languages and above all English and, on the other, the major languages of Asia and the Middle East so that “the whole native literature of India and Arabia” could be judged in terms of and therefore assimilated into “a single shelf of a good European library.”

In Rushdie’s comments, Macaulay’s judgment is updated for the twenty-first century—in a precise sense, giving expression to the now global logic through which the Indo-English novel has come to be represented to the outside world in recent years as the authentic and authenticating literature of India. Rushdie, whose *Midnight’s Children* first introduced world audiences to the global ambitions of the Anglophone Indian bourgeoisie at the threshold of the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian economy, establishes the proper relationship in the world literary system between English and the Indian vernaculars as medium of Indian literary expression. The Indo-English novel has become in recent decades a global form and tradition with a vast accumulation of cultural capital, with British and American editors descending routinely on the major Indian cities in a frenzied search for the next big first novel, the next *God of Small Things*, a process that is now a routine part of the lives of aspiring young Anglophone writers, affecting in all kinds of concrete ways the writing that gets produced. Remarks such as Rushdie’s represent the naturalization of the asymmetrical situations, the vastly different symbolic resources, of English and the vernaculars of the subcontinent—including Hindi and Urdu, the putative national languages, respectively, of India and Pakistan—not just globally but within South Asia itself.

58. Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), in *From the East India Company to the Suez Canal*, vol. 1 of *Archives of Empire*, ed. Mia Carter and Barbara Harlow (Durham, N.C., 2003), p. 230: “I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic.—But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

59. For a superb analysis of some of these asymmetries, see Francesca Orsini, “India in the Mirror of World Fiction,” in *Debating World Literature*, pp. 319–33.
one precisely through the circulation of its cultural products in *world* literary space (Rushdie’s “world of books”).

Significantly, the remarks are an attempt at disavowing the heterogeneity of the Anglophone novel’s own linguistic environment in places such as India (and, we might add, Africa)—English (or for that matter French) in Asia and Africa never exists out of hearing range of a number of its linguistic others—a heterogeneity that often gets packaged within the form itself as one of its supposedly exotic pleasures, most famously in Rushdie’s own works, whose characteristically “Indianized” English stages the presence of modes of speech that the author and the novels themselves repeatedly characterize as the street Hindustani of Bombay.60 This mode of appearance of the vernaculars within the discourse of the Anglophone novel marks an attempt to manage linguistic (and social) heterogeneity through ethnicized assimilation. But it gets packaged as linguistic diversity in the interests of a global cultural system in which the Anglophone elite now wishes to participate on equal terms and is an asymmetrical process unimaginable in reverse; that is, it is impossible to imagine a similarly instrumental assimilation of English into the discourses of vernacular fiction. Anglicism (Macaulay et alia) and Orientalism (Jones et alia), which are viewed historically as antagonists in the great imperial debate, in fact represent two moments in the unfolding of the same colonial logic. This logic has been reinscribed in our own postcolonial times, at one level, in the argument (of unequals) about the respective rights, representativeness, and value of English and the vernaculars, an argument that now gets staged globally, not just within the nation-states of the subcontinent.61 On the one hand, Anglophone literary expression, the end product of an epochal historical process of assimilation, is packaged in the world literary system—including in departments of English in the West—as an instance of pure diversity; on the other, Indian languages, especially in the nationalized forms of Urdu and Hindi, stake their claim to authentic national expression against the alien presence of English. In fact neither end of this polarity can do the work it is marshaled to do within the globalizing cultural logics of the late-capitalist world. Neither framework allows an understanding of the Indian vernaculars themselves as “conscripts of modernity,” conscripted into the cul-


61. Indeed, Amit Chaudhuri responded to Rushdie’s proclamations with an anthology of his own, expanding its range to include precisely the vernacular literatures Rushdie had so summarily left out. See *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, ed. Amit Chaudhuri (London, 2001).
tural system of English and the other culturally dominant European languages. While exilic and dislocated subjectivity is much touted by Rushdie as the great problematic of the Anglophone novel, it is in fact no less pertinent (and poignant), perhaps more so, for our understanding of the vernacular literary traditions themselves.

How then do we revisit the concept of world literature today, given these disjunctions and relations of force, at various levels of world literary space, between the global metropolitan languages and the languages of the global South? We have to move beyond appeals to diversity here because, if we are to take seriously the historical constellation of Orientalism—which made possible, as I have argued, the appearance of the latter group of languages and textual traditions for the first time within the structures and terms of the former—what would be needed is a concept of world literature (and practices of teaching it) that works to reveal the ways in which “diversity” itself—national, religious, civilizational, continental—is a colonial and Orientalist problematic, though one that emerges precisely on the plane of equivalence that is literature. What we have to teach when we teach world literature is precisely the history of these relations of force and powers of assimilation. The universalism that is inherent in the task of rethinking the concept of world literature and its usefulness (or not) in our own times—and I believe that question remains still an open one—thus has to be confronted with linguistic heterogeneity and the concept itself uncoupled from the effects of standardization and homogenization both within and across languages and cultures that come masked as diversity. That such a critical project cannot take the form exclusively of the “distant reading” Moretti proposes should be clear, but neither can it take the form of close reading for its own sake. What is needed is better close reading, attentive to the worldliness of language and text at various levels of social reality, from the highly localized to the planetary as such. In this sense Said’s project at least from Orientalism onward implies not a rejection but rather a radicalization of philology—that is, it calls for a radically historical understanding of language and the forms of its institution in literature, culture, and society. Philology in this sense is thus an indispensable element of the practice of secular criticism as Said conceives of it. An elaboration of this philology after Orientalism, if I may call it that, is one of the core and most urgent tasks of the critical humanities in our time.

62. I borrow the phrase from David Scott from a somewhat different context. See David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment (Durham, N.C., 2004).