

EMPIRE ON
THE ENGLISH STAGE
1660–1714

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CHAPTER 1

New Habits on the Stage

REHEARSING CULTURES?

On October 18, 1666, John Evelyn approvingly recorded the adoption of a new fashion at the Carolean court:

18 To Lond: Star-Chamber: thence to Court, it being the first time of his Majesties putting himselfe solemnly into the Eastern fashion of Vest, changing doublet, stiff Collar, bands and Cloake etc: into a comely Vest, after the Persian mode with girdle or shash, and Shoe strings and Garters, into bouckles, of which some were set with precious stones, resolving never to alter it, and to leave the French mode, which had hitherto obtained to our greate expense and reproch: upon which divers Courtiers and Gent: gave his Ma[jesty] gold, by way of Wager, that he would not persist in this resolution: I had some time before indeede presented an In-vec-tique against that unconstancy, and our so much affecting the french fashion, to his Majestie in which [I] tooke occasion to describe the Comel-nesse and usefullnesse of the Persian clothing in the very same manner, his Majestie clad himselfe; This Pamphlet I intituled *Tyrannus* or the mode, and gave it his Majestie to reade; I do not impute the change which soone happn'd to this discourse, but it was an identitie, that I could not but take notice of: This night was acted my Lord Brahals Tragedy cal'd *Mustapha* before their Majesties etc: at Court.¹

The pamphlet to which Evelyn refers was published in 1661 and seems likely to have less to do with Charles II's decision to put on "the Eastern fashion of Vest" than the concurrent staging of the spectacular Oriental drama, Orrery's *Mustapha* (1665), to which he also alludes. Indeed, given the valorization of native costume in "Tyrannus", which signifies political independence, and the stigmatizing of the slavish adoption of foreign fashions, the diarist's self-satisfaction at seeing the King dressed in Persian garb is somewhat surprising: "'Tis not a triviall Remark (which I have somewhere met with) that when a nation is able to impose, and give laws to

the habits of another (as the late *Tartars* in China) it has (like that of Language) prov'd a Fore-runner to the spreading of their Conquests there."² Nathaniel Lee will make the point several years later in *The Rival Queens* (1677), in a scene in which Alexander's loyal commander Clytus refuses to give up his Macedonian dress to wear clothing he sees as emblematic of Eastern decadence:

Away, I will not wear these Persian robes;
Nor ought the King be angry for the reverence
I owe my country. Sacred are her customs,
Which honest Clytus shall preserve to death.
O let me rot in *Macedonian* rags
Rather than shine in fashions of the East.³

Although Evelyn's hostility to the assumption of fashions derived from the absolute, Catholic court of Louis XIV is not surprising, this enthusiasm for the adoption of costume from the infidel and despotic Persians seems to require explanation.

Evelyn's response can be accounted for quite simply by tradition; as S. C. Chew demonstrated in *The Crescent and the Rose*, the courtly practice of wearing Eastern dress both informally, and in the performance of pageants, processions, masques and even mock sea-battles, had been in place since the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴ Attempting to interpret other such "rehearsals" of exotic cultures in the early modern period, Steven Mullaney has suggested that the performance of aspects of alien cultures may be accounted for by the impulse to establish a stronger sense of European selfhood against a clearly defined cultural other.⁵ In this schema, rather than comparing and assimilating other "nations" through the discovery of similitudes, as was the practice in previous periods, the temporary adoption of alien ways on stage or in masques and pageants underlined the irreducible difference of exotics. European culture extended its boundaries by first consuming and then reforming and/or expelling the other through representation.

Mullaney's characterization of dramatic performances as reformatory projects intended to strengthen national identity is suggestive in the context of Restoration drama. Many of the serious plays of the last half of the seventeenth century, the heroic drama especially, narrativized episodes from imperial history, whether that of the Romans, the Ottomans, the Spanish or the Portuguese. The

comedy of the period was much more narrowly focused on London life but even in the comedy, a concern with the definition of a civil, national identity clearly separable from the French in particular, is manifest. Those comic or tragi-comic plays which thematize life abroad in the colonies, in the Indies, among pirates and in utopias satirize the novel social types produced by colonial expansion and settlement.

This pervasive concern with the staging of cultural contact and conflict is unsurprising given the huge expansion of colonial activity in this period but it has only rarely been addressed by literary historians, although the rise of new historicism in Renaissance studies has rendered such interpretations common in the preceding period. Critics have traditionally read through the exoticism of the Restoration heroic drama, to locate a local political meaning allegorized. In the fullest recent study of the Carolean heroic play, Nancy Klein Maguire argues that the tragi-comedies produced by Davenant, Orrery and Dryden between 1658 and 1671 repetitively enacted a drama of rebellion against, usurpation of and restoration of royal power in an attempt to negotiate and perhaps exorcise the traumas of recent political history.⁶ As earlier critics have noted, however, these plays are about “empire” as well as sovereignty and subjecthood. Anne Barbeau argued in 1970 that Dryden’s heroic plays encoded a theory of history which celebrated the gradual triumph of Christianity, an account developed by John Loftis who suggested that the representations of conflicts between Europeans and American Indians and Moors illustrated “the historical process as conceived to embody a widening territorial expansion of Christendom.”⁷ More recently, David Kramer has analysed Dryden’s construction of an “imperial” literary persona in the context of the Restoration literary and military rivalry with France.⁸ None of these critics, however, attempted to relate their analysis of the imperial theme in the heroic drama to Restoration debates over empire, nor extended their account beyond Dryden’s texts to encompass the genre as a whole. Yet much of the heroic plays’ significance in the two decades of the genre’s emergence turns on its role in representing theatrically those processes of imperial expansion and decline, the *translatio imperii* and the clash between Christian European and pagan non-European societies which were central topics in political as well as cultural debate in this period. The genre’s utility in negotiating issues of empire is

equally apparent in the decades following the Glorious Revolution, when the mode, never fully moribund, was revived. In heroic plays of the 1690s and the early 1700s, female dramatists used the genre to figure the enslavement of women in exotic despotisms, Tory playwrights criticized an overtly mercantilist colonial state and Dennis represented a specifically Whig theory of empire.

It is less surprising that commentary on the comic drama has been unconcerned with questions of national identity and colonialism, given the plays' pervasive focus on local social and sexual conflict. Yet even in the most metropolitan of comedies, such as *The Man of Mode*, the definition of national as well as class-based manners is at stake. The colonies themselves are occasionally the site of comic representation, as in *The Widdow Ranter* (1689); emergent types such as the nabob make their appearance (in *Sir Courtly Nice* [1685]) and emigration and piracy serve as subjects in *Cuckolds-Haven* (1685) and *A Commonwealth of Women* (1686). Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* has a nautical protagonist whose excoriating analysis of city manners uses the Indies as a benchmark of savagery, in a comparison by which London gains nothing; and in the comic-operatic redaction of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, serious issues of sovereignty and settlement and the possibility of European degeneration into savagery in new plantations are canvassed.

It is, however, in the serious drama that issues of empire are most evident. Historical scholarship which can help explain this imperial dimension of the plays has emerged only recently. The current literary historical emphasis on the heroic plays' allegorization of domestic politics reflects the dominant trends of historical research, which has stressed that in the years following the Restoration, the political classes of England were preoccupied with local and, at most, national concerns rather than questions of foreign policy.⁹ Recent scholarship has begun to modify this view considerably. Developing a theme explored earlier by John Miller,¹⁰ Jonathan Scott has argued that the interconnected anxieties over popery and arbitrary government which fueled the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution reflected English awareness that Protestantism was under threat all across Europe during the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹¹ In his study of London politics from 1688 to 1715, Gary De Krey identifies a split along the emergent Whig/Tory axis within the mercantile community from the late 1670s on, as

dissatisfaction grew among those debarred from participation in the lucrative commerce with the Levant, Russia, Africa and the East Indies, by the monopolistic and restrictive companies authorized by the Crown, which jealously guarded its prerogative in regulating trade. In the 1690s, he notes, “the transformation of the City’s trading and financial institutions . . . signalled the rise of a new Whig mercantile and financial oligarchy,” much resented by City Tories and the landed interest.¹² More generally, Paul Seaward suggests that, although the English were consumed by domestic concerns in 1660, Cromwellian military successes had greatly increased national confidence in foreign affairs and that, over time, European politics were recognized as central to events at home.¹³

The strongest challenge to the previous consensus has come, however, from Steven Pincus, who has argued that the period 1650–68 saw the ideological changes in England which allowed for the transformations in the state necessary for an imperial power after 1688, detailed by John Brewer in *The Sinews of Power* (1989).¹⁴ Arguing that while the first Dutch War was driven by the Rump’s disgust at the perceived backsliding of their once idealized republican coreligionists, and a strongly Providentialist conviction of their own rectitude, Pincus suggests the second conflict saw a transformation in the discourse of patriotism, as religious rhetoric was replaced by a more secular conception of the national interest which included, but was certainly not entirely defined by, trade. During these years, Pincus demonstrates, the English came to believe that “they were defending their religious and political liberties against a universal monarch.”¹⁵ The usual distinction between foreign and domestic concerns, he argues, has obscured the extent to which the English, both elite and populace, understood their own polity in a European, as much as a local, context. When they went to war with the Dutch or the French, therefore, they were not simply concerned with narrow commercial advantage (as economic and diplomatic historians have suggested) but with their proper and traditional role in preventing universal monarchy. Along with the transformation in notions of the national interest, the concept of universal monarchy was itself undergoing revision in a period which saw maritime and commercial power challenge traditional assumptions about the territorial and institutional bases of imperial authority.

Whether the focus is on the role of internal or external competition over foreign and colonial trade; or on the increasing anxiety

over the perceived threat of expansionist Catholic absolutism (to which I would be inclined to add the fears attendant on a resurgent Ottoman empire, finally brought to terms only in 1699¹⁶), recent historical work placing issues of colonial expansion and empire squarely at the centre of Restoration political discourse has important implications for the literary historical interpretation of this period.¹⁷ With the exception of Michael McKeon's analysis of *Annus Mirabilis* in terms attentive to its imbrication in Anglo-Dutch colonial rivalry, Thale's and Kramer's accounts of the patriotic dimension of Dryden's *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* and the considerable recent literature on Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widdow Ranter*, very little attention has been directed to the nationalist and colonialist dimensions of literary culture in the Restoration.¹⁸ Yet discussion over English poetry from Dryden through Rymer to Dennis is conducted with precisely that competitive and nationalist awareness of a European context which Pincus emphasizes also informed political debate: the concern over the *translatio imperii* was matched by an equally acute interest in the *translatio studii*. Poetic and political power, politeness and greatness, were regarded as interdependent. The most famous example is doubtless what Thale has described as Dryden's "patriotic frame" for the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* in which an argument over the superiority of French or English drama is conducted on "that memorable day, in the first Summer of the late War, when our Navy ingag'd the *Dutch*: a Day wherein the two most mighty and best-appointed Fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the Globe, the commerce of Nations, and the riches of the Universe."¹⁹ The linkage of poetry and inter-state rivalry is persistent, with Dennis arguing some thirty-five years later in the *Epistle* dedicating his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* to the Earl of Mulgrave in 1701, that the cultivation of criticism and the "Poeticall art" in France in the seventeenth century was "very instrumental in . . . raising the esteem of their Nation to that degree, that it naturally prepar'd the Way for their Intrigues of State, and facilitated the Execution of their vast Designs."²⁰ As an "encourager of Arts, and a great States-man," he suggests that Mulgrave "knows that the bare Endeavour to advance an Art among us, is an Effort to augment the Learning, and consequently the Reputation, and consequently the Power, of a Great People" (1,207). It is no accident that Dryden's invocation in the *Essay* of that peculiarly English form of

military power, the navy, recurs in later major discussions of British literary superiority. In Rymer's "Short View of Tragedy" (1692), the critic celebrates Waller's "To the King, on his Navy" (1632) as evidence of his contention that "Since the decay of the Roman Empire this Island, peradventure has been more fortunate in matters of Poetry, than any of our Neighbours."²¹ Just as Waller's verses suggest that the "Navy Royal might well give (the King) pre-eminence in power, above *Achilles*" (127), Rymer claims that Waller's "Poetry distinguish'd him from all his contemporaries, both in *England* and in other Nations; And from all before him upwards to *Horace* and *Virgil*" (127). When Dennis picks up the citation of Waller in the third dialogue of *The Impartial Critick*, his 1693 response to Rymer, the choice of poem recalls (in a complimentary fashion) the naval frame of Dryden's *Essay*. It also underlines, however, the importance of Waller's role as celebrant of English naval power, not just in the "Verses on the Fleet" and the "Instructions to a Painter" but in "Of a War with Spain, and a Fight at Sea" and the three poems written to celebrate the defeat of the Turks in the 1680s.

The navy's prominence in literary debate reflects the crucial role of the fleet in Restoration economic, military and political affairs (as well as the dislike for armies documented by Lois Schwoerer).²² By 1660, Spanish ambitions to be "Masters of the Universe," in the period's resonant phrase, were widely regarded as dead. "The vast increase in power by land and sea which other nations have made upon them since Queen Elizabeth's time," wrote the English Ambassador to Spain Sir Richard Fanshawe in 1662, "hath so altered the balance that Spain must no more pretend to universal monarchy."²³ In English analyses, the defeat of the Armada (significantly, of course, a failure at sea) symbolized the failure of an empire which had neglected to cultivate the population, the commerce, the industry and the agriculture necessary to maintain a powerful state. The control of trade and power at sea was now understood to be crucial to aspirants to imperial power: "To pretend to *Universal Monarchy* without *Fleets* was long looked on as a *Political Chymaera*" argued John Evelyn in his 1674 account of *Navigation and Commerce*.²⁴ English speculation about the new aspirants to empire centered first on the Dutch, possessors of a formidable navy and colonial power in the East Indies, and, increasingly, on the French. Suspicion of the aggressively Catholic and absolute Louis XIV was fostered by his energy and ambition but assumed particular

relevance in England as Charles' predilection for Gallic culture, mistresses, funding and alliance became obvious.

The English were direct rivals of the Dutch in terms of trade and sea-power but the most frequent articulation of their position within the European theatre was a claim that they held the balance of power, rather than a direct expression of ambition for empire. As Charles Davenant put it in 1701, "For many years we have pretended to hold the Ballance of Europe and the Body of the People will neither think it Consistent with our Honour nor our Safety to quit that Post."²⁵ David Armitage's account of a specifically republican ideology of empire, developed under Cromwell but resurgent at various points through the eighteenth century, is equally emphatic in disavowing claims to the absolute power implied in the term universal monarchy, or "imperium." Armitage argues that the Commonwealth ideologues of empire drew on the Roman notion of *patrocinium*, which implied a federation of autonomous states rather than a single political unit with a centralized government.²⁶ The notion of confederation was also attractive to Andrew Fletcher, Scottish patriot and neo-Machiavellian whose *Account of a Conversation* of 1703, written in the shadow of Williamite ambition to a universal monarchy of trade, argues for the value of a Europe in which states in geographical proximity and sharing a common language could be grouped together after the fashion of the Achaian League.²⁷

The frequent English disavowal of claims to empire reflected the dawning suspicion that imperial states were bound, inexorably, to a process of expansion followed just as inexorably by decline; that they were despotic and, in all previous forms, hostile to commerce, the new engine of social and political change. The disavowal, however, was as factitious, ultimately, as Sir John Seeley's claim that the British Empire was acquired in a fit of absence of mind. The Republican tradition provided an alternative model to universal monarchy through its invocation of *patrocinium* but all the later Stuarts showed considerable enthusiasm in pursuing dominion over the seas. Further, Charles and James showed no signs of wanting to loosen control over their North American plantation colonies or the trading companies and their factories in the Levant, Africa and the East Indies and, however great popular revulsion from France became, Louis XIV's centralized model of national and colonial control was alluring to English monarchs. Assessments of

Charles's and James's foreign policy are disputed but tend to suggest they failed to maintain the authority commanded by Cromwell on the European stage, whether through ineptitude or preoccupation with domestic affairs.²⁸ It is incontrovertible, however, that, following the passing of the Navigation Acts, foreign and colonial trade grew enormously, with customs revenues contributing substantially to the Crown's relative fiscal well-being in the 1680s and laying the foundations for the extended period of warfare after 1688.²⁹ James had a particular interest in the navy and was a substantial investor in the Royal African Company and both brothers pursued policies of "royalization and centralization" in the American colonies in the 1680s.³⁰

Jealous of their prerogative in foreign and colonial affairs, both Charles and James Stuart maintained a strong grasp over policy in this area.³¹ The visions of expansion presented in the heroic plays, in particular, presumably appealed to the monarchy insofar as they focused on precisely those foreign and colonial arenas in which their authority was less open to local dispute.³² The dramatists whom they patronized are also notable for their involvement in colonial policy: Orrery, for example, who wrote so many of the early, successful examples of the genre at Charles's behest, was "The Man of Munster," the dominant magnate of Northern Ireland. *Altemera* (1661), sometimes described as the first heroic play, had its initial production in Dublin. William Davenant, who was known for his poem *Madagascar*, dedicated to the Lord High Admiral Prince Rupert, later wrote propagandistic celebrations of English expansionism for Cromwell as well as *The Siege of Rhodes*, and was on his way to take up the Governorship of Maryland when he was halted by Parliamentary troops in 1642. Dryden had no personal experience in colonial administration but his Yorkist affiliations informed his poetic as well as dramatic praise of English naval power in *Astraea Redux*, *Annus Mirabilis* and the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie*. Aphra Behn famously claimed the authority of her own experience in Surinam as the basis for her novella *Oroonoko*, successfully dramatized by Southerne.

There was also, as noted above, considerable ambivalence about aspirations to empire, a skepticism more apparent before 1688 in figures like Shadwell than enthusiastic royalists like Orrery. Consistently scornful of colonial adventuring conceived of primarily as commercial, and degenerationist in his assumptions, as the

Stuart regimes ran deeper into crisis, Dryden gradually abandoned the idealized representation of empire as Christian expansionism. After 1688, dramatists with past or continuing Tory affiliations, such as Behn and Southerne, criticized the emergent empire of trade, even as Rowe and Dennis hymned William's achievements as Protestant Liberator. Literary debates play out the contradictions between the appetite for a cultural dominance understood to be the accompaniment of great power and the assertion of liberty as the central political and hence cultural characteristic of the English. As Tim Harris has shown, a concern for "liberty" was claimed by all sides in the political conflicts of Charles's reign and it continued to be a disputed category after the Glorious Revolution.³³ The nature and status of the serious drama, whose traditional role was that of staging and glorifying the nation's past, provided a significant context for this continuing dispute over liberty as well as the increasingly important issue of the relation between liberty and greatness.³⁴

My account of relations between empire and the stage in the Restoration thus begins with a discussion of literary debates over the drama, from 1660 to 1714, followed by an account of the imperial ambition encoded in authorial personae, generic assumptions and the thematics of the heroic plays in particular. A crucial aspect of their effect was their spectacular scenic presentation of exotic locales, custom and costume and the tension created between the plays' heroic elevation and the violence and historical "irregularity" they display. In a chapter devoted to representations of Spanish and Portuguese empire, I examine the process by which the English elites witnessed heightened but critical accounts of the foremost European empire, as dramatists presented the Peninsular states in expansion, corruption and decline. In chapters on Levant and Asian plays, I discuss the representation of Oriental, especially Ottoman, empire, the other main contemporary instance of aspiration to universal monarchy. The heroic plays deploy an emergent Orientalist discourse of despotism, irreligion and sexual license, against which England could be defined as civil politically, religiously and sexually. In the utopian and Amazonian plays of the period, the questioning of conventional European assumptions about the ordering of the gender and political order, provoked by the discovery of new societies, is analyzed. In a chapter on comic and tragi-comic representations of metropolitan manners,

colonies, colonials and emigration, I examine the establishment of a sense of a specifically English notion of genteel manners, against which foreigners, provincials, creoles and savages are measured and found lacking. The eighth chapter discusses the ways in which the serious drama allowed the English elite to draw on, and distinguish themselves from, the great imperial model of Rome. In a final coda, I discuss Dennis's celebration in *Liberty Asserted* (1704) and Southerne's critique, in *Oroonoko* (1696), of the emergent universal monarchy of trade fashioned by William.

Nevertheless, while empire, national identity and exotic cultures were all demonstrably important in Restoration drama, it would be a mistake to see these subjects as separate from more obviously domestic concerns. Plays with exotic settings contributed to the refashioning of metropolitan selves by providing an implicit or explicit contrast with planters, Indians, Moors, Spaniards and Ottomans but it is clear that they also provided a useful context for the consideration of such urgent topics as usurpation, revolution, succession, tyranny and the ruler's enthrallment by luxury. Although it is the neglected surface of these texts which reveals the fascination with empire, attention to that surface does not displace the importance of their political subtexts, or parallels. Contemporary audiences expected heroic poems to be allegorical, offering several layers of meaning, and could be expected to recognize that such texts had multiple significations. The double-jointedness in the plays' effects, the process by which exotic differences are exploited at the same time that another culture offers a screen for the projection of local anxieties, is also a common feature of what is called colonial discourse. Non-European locales, especially those of the great Asian states which provided the most obvious alternative to Western politics and cultures, offered the opportunity for comparison as well as disguise. Thus the problems of succession which haunted England in the Restoration could be explored through representing the fraternal strife in the Turkish empire, where polygamy and the lack of primogeniture provided a very different but equally uncertain set of conditions for the transfer of power. In a play such as Orrery's *Mustapha*, an English audience could detect parallels between the situations of the Ottomans and the Stuarts but would also be shown that the fratricidal conflicts caused by Oriental practices were crueller and more productive of division than their own.

“DIFFERENCE” IN THE RESTORATION

The intellectual, political and economic history of empire offers one set of frames for understanding the cultural significance of the theatrical representation of colonial expansion in this period and the history of anthropology provides another. Literary historians have generally agreed that Restoration critics such as Dryden, Rymer, Dennis and Temple shared a universalist belief in the uniformity of human nature which was increasingly tempered by awareness of the importance of national and historical circumstances in cultural production.³⁵ This gradually relativizing “foundationalism” is literalized on the Restoration stage, where widely different polities are shown wracked by conflicts familiar to the English audience, yet also marked in certain crucial ways as different culturally, religiously and politically. The logics which governed the masquerade of ethnic difference, at court and on stage, thus had certain similarities. The Carolean court’s assumption of Persian dress can be read as an attempt, of the kind Mullaney describes, to clarify and assert the superiority of English identity, in that adopting the Persians’ “fantastical . . . apparel” constituted an assertion of sartorial independence from the tyranny of France (“We need no French inventions for the *Stage*, or for the Back”³⁶), while borrowing something of the imperial *gloire* of the Shah. The latter ruled over what was described by Chardin, the acknowledged seventeenth-century authority on Persia, as “the most Civilised people of the *East*.”³⁷ They were, Heylyn reported, “addicted to *hospitality*, magnificent in expense, lordly in their compliments, fantastical in their apparel, maintainers of *nobility*, and desirous of peace.”³⁸ These were all characteristics that could serve as welcome signifiers of aristocratic difference from the French, whose aspirations to universal monarchy were reinforced by the authority of their fashions, their letters and their language.

The utility of this costume drama in bolstering English identity is, however, doubtful, given that Louis had the last laugh by putting his footmen in Persian clothing. Further, Mullaney’s claim that such performances turned on an increasing sense of an absolute difference between alien and domestic cultures is open to question. Evelyn’s account is striking for its ready acceptance of an implicit symbolic equivalence between French and Persian dress, an equivalence rendered explicit in the pamphlet on “Mode,” where

comparisons between the habits of Chinese, “Negroes,” Mexicans and Europeans mingle indiscriminately.³⁹ This suggests that in some contexts at least, an older series of epistemological assumptions held sway. Outlining a seventeenth-century view of cultural difference which seems akin to the universalism of Dryden, historical anthropologist James Boon argues that:

The Enlightenment fabricated a geographically and “naturally” remote *other* as exotic antithesis to itself. The pre-Enlightenment argued both the best and worst – the perfect and the damned – wherever the sectarian brethren and enemies were perceived, exotically or intimately: Patagonian or pope. . . . Moreover, sectarian divisions meant that a clear and exclusivistic dichotomy between the European and the exotic was not formulated until religious reformism had been transformed into nationalism and Enlightenment secularism.⁴⁰

W. D. Jordan puts it more simply: “Until the emergence of nation-states in Europe, by far the most important category of strangers was the non-Christian.”⁴¹ Michael Ryan claims that far from presenting a serious threat to European identity, during the Renaissance newly discovered exotics were readily assimilated by classically trained humanists, through the familiar category of paganism.⁴² Margaret Hodgen’s magisterial survey of the origins of anthropology provides abundant evidence of the tendency to account for the alien in terms of “similarities, similitudes, correspondences, agreements, conformities, parallels” but locates a shift in these practices in the later seventeenth century as skepticism and empiricism gained ground.⁴³ And the formulation offered by Anthony Pagden in a much more recent study, *The Fall of Natural Man*, is very similar, as he suggests cultural difference in the early modern period was understood (and absorbed) through a principle of assimilation.⁴⁴

Boon accepts Hodgen’s empirically argued location of a break between, in Foucauldian terms, an episteme governed by the “element of resemblance” and an order determined by “identity and difference,” but he is critical of her endorsement of the truth claims of the disciplines that developed in the Enlightenment.⁴⁵ In a provocative reading of Jacobean ethnography, he tries to show that pre-Enlightenment ethnographic procedures provided a less coercive, more avowedly interpretive model of cultural description. Specifically, he suggests that *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625) “simultaneously dis-covers from the writings of exploration an Indic

royal symbology, a composite of Sumatran, Javanese and ultimately Mogul varieties”⁴⁶ whose likeness to the Stuart monarchy, and difference from societies stigmatized as vagrant, Purchas’s volumes celebrate. The complementary relations of symbolic reciprocity Boon discovers in these tomes are, however, doomed to be incomplete and transitory, for in avoiding intermarriage at the top, the “capstone of any totalised alliance in Jacobean and Mausean signs,”⁴⁷ Purchas’s symbology foreshadowed the eventual dominance of an exploitative mercantilism, with an accompanying shift to taxonomizing representational strategies in East–West relations and narration.

With Boon’s claims in mind, I want to return to another scene of cultural encounter, Evelyn’s account of the reception of Moroccans at the Carolean court. In January 1682, Charles received an Embassy from Morocco, where the English fort of Tangier, acquired through the King’s Portuguese marriage and surrendered in 1683, was under constant attack by the Arabs.

[1682. January] II To Lond: Saw the *Audience* of the *Morroco Ambassador*: his retinue not numerous, was receivd in the Banqueting-house both their Majesties present: he came up to the Throne without making any sort of Reverence, bowing so much as his head or body: he spake by a *Renegado English* man, for whose safe returne there was a promise: They were all Clad in the *Moorish* habite Cassocks of Colourd Cloth or silk with buttons & loopes, over this an *Alhaga* or white wollan mantle, so large as to wrap both head & body, a shash or small *Turban*, naked leg’d and arm’d, but with lether socks like the *Turks*, rich *Symeters*, large Calico sleev’d shirts etc: The Ambassador had a string of Pearls odly woven in his Turbant; I fancy the old Roman habite was little different as to the Mantle and naked limbs: The Ambassador was an handsom person, well featur’d, & of a wise looke, subtile, and extreemely Civile: Their Presents were *Lions & Estridges* etc: Their Errant, about a Peace at Tangire etc: But the Concourse and Tumult of the People was intollerable, so as the Officers could keepe no order; which they were astonish’d at at first; There being nothing so regular exact & perform’d with such silence etc, as in all these publike occasions of their Country, and indeede over all the Turkish dominions.⁴⁸

Two weeks later, he observed the Moors at closer quarters:

[24] This Evening I was at the Entertainment of the *Morrocco [Ambassador]* at the Dut: of *Portsmouths* glorious Appartment at W.hall, where was a greate banquet of *Sweetemeates*, and *Musique* etc but at which both the *Ambassador & Retinue* behaved themselves with extraordinary Moderation & modestie, though placed about a long Table a Lady betweene two

Moore: viz: a Moore, then a Woman, then a Moore etc: and most of these were the Kings natural Children, viz: the Lady Lichfield, Sussex, DD of *Portsmouth*, *Nelly* etc: Concubines, and catell of that sort, as splendid as Jewells, and Excesse of bravery could make them: The Moores neither admiring or seeming to regard any thing, furniture or the like with any earnestnesse; and but decently tasting of the banquet: They dranke a little Milk and Water, but not a drop of Wine, also they drank of a sorbett and Jacolatte: did not looke about nor stare on the Ladys, or express the least of surprize, but with a Courtly negligence in pace, Countenance, and whole behaviour, answering onely to such questions as were asked, with a greate deale of Wit and Gallantrie, and so gravely tooke leave, with this Compliment That *God* would blesse the D: of P: and the Prince her sonn, meaning the little Duke of Richmond: The *King* came in at the latter end, just as the Ambassador was going away: In this manner was this Slave (for he was no more at home) entertained by most of the Nobility in Towne;) . . . In a word, the *Russian Ambassador* still at Court behaved himselfe like a Clowne, compar'd to this Civil *Heathen*.⁴⁹

Evelyn's account is marked by a series of Orientalist assumptions reversed. Far from being "clownish," the ambassador's only deviation from Court protocol (a matter of considerable complexity and potential conflict) is his failure to make any bodily gesture of "reverence" to the King, an independence of manner Evelyn finds surprising in one who, the diarist is at pains to emphasize, is a "slave" from a culture in which "all these publique occasions" are performed with regular exactitude.⁵⁰ More arresting, however, is the account of the Moroccans' behavior at a reception which appears to have been designed to encourage them to display the lustful debauchery with which they were popularly credited. In a scene which at least mimes the possibility of a sexual exchange ("the capstone of any totalised alliance"), the Moroccans are placed between the Kings' mistresses and bastards: "a Moore, then a Woman, then a Moore etc." The tantalizing possibility of erotic interchange is, however, foreclosed by the visitors, who behaved with "extraordinary Moderation & Modestie." The presumably unintended effect of the passage is to emphasize Charles II's rather than the visitors' qualities of sensual autocracy, expressed here by an experiment with the Moroccans' erotic propensities.

In this text, Moors are figures who provoke curiosity, but no unambiguous sense of superiority. The glamorous peculiarities of their clothing remind Evelyn of "the old Roman habite," an implicit ascription of nobility and martial prowess underlined by a later description of their horsemanship. And in the background lies the

purpose of the visit: an attempt to come to terms in a military conflict in which the Arabs could not be defeated. Although Evelyn's text is generated by Orientalist tropes either affirmed or displaced, this account does not describe a clash between utterly polarized cultures, but rather represents a ritualized exchange between elite representatives (although "the Tumult of the People was intollerable") of two highly stratified societies, whose different protocols are brought into relation without great difficulty. Tellingly, the Moors' color is never mentioned; their difference is constructed around binary notions quite specifically other than those of black (or even "tawniness") and white, to wit: clownishness and civility, slavishness and freedom, Christian or "heathnick" religious affiliation. The Moroccan diplomats may be damned but like the pagan Romans, to whom they are compared, they appear civil, and though their polity may be despotic, it is admirably ordered, wealthy and powerful. This seems to exemplify that discovery of symbolic reciprocity which Boon locates in Purchas's celebration of royal complementarity.

Such an account of an Indic royal symbology also provides a highly suggestive way of understanding Dryden's presentation of the Mughal court in *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) and Killigrew's, Tate's and Motteux's staging of an East Indian court in their various redactions of Fletcher's *The Island Princess*. These "Indic" courts were easily seen as parallels to the Stuarts' but, like Purchas's representations, they also answered to a pervasive curiosity about the Asian states where the English had significant trade interests. Moreover, just as Boon locates the collapse of visions of symbolic complementarity in the emergence of mercantilism, so too these plays and their sources reflect the way colonial trade will alter interpretive and material relations. The various redactions of *The Island Princess* become more and more focused on the economic advantages gained by successful European intervention in the affairs of "Tedore," and the cultural and religious difference of Indians and Portuguese also becomes much more important to plot and characterization between 1668 and 1699. Dryden's likely source for *Aureng-Zebe*, Bernier's *History of the Late Revolution in the Empire of the Great Mogol* (1671), employs a theatrical rhetoric to shape the narrative, describing the Mughal Princesses, for instance, as "the most considerable Actors in the Tragedy."⁵¹ The tragedy or romance (Bernier uses both terms to describe the political narrative), however, is

followed by an appendix which provided the classic European mercantilist analysis of the economic weakness of despotic states, blaming India's under-development on the lack of safeguards for private property. The text thus incorporates two modes of discourse: one which familiarizes the Mughals through their casting as actors in a tragic romance and another which differentiates India as a polity and culture by means of a mercantilist analysis which defines the country negatively against Europe. Just such a conjunction of conflicting elements shapes representations of exotic states on the stage.

Finally, Boon's description of Purchas's accounts of "Scenical History" as "ethnological word drama or rather masque"⁵² draws attention to the centrality of performative or theatrical modes, which, it has been argued, governed both the production and presentation of the self and communal practices such as diplomatic protocols in early modern England.⁵³ The latter occasions, which stage the confrontation of local and foreign elites with great symbolic elaboration, provide a rich source for the analysis of the terms in which the nature of nations were perceived. Less ephemeral, because scripted, are those articulations of an English ideology of empire, in such performances as the pageants at the Lord Mayors' Shows (which praised the triumphs of trade) and masques performed for the Court, as well as the theatre itself. In this context, the heroic plays' role in the representation of empire seems over-determined; its generic role as epic *in parvo* was to celebrate national and imperial greatness and its staging drew on the masque, in which the imperial theme was always central. Davenant and Dryden were producers both of masques and of heroic plays and there was also a crossover between dramatists and pageant-producers, with Settle and Crowne both producing popular shows which celebrated England's overseas trade. Courtly, public and popular celebrations of trade and empire in masque, theatre and pageant were distinct but there were unifying strands of spectacle and ideology which bound these different stagings of traffic and ambition together.

ARGUMENTS FROM COMPLEXION

Boon argues that the later seventeenth century saw a shift away from relations governed by symbolic complementarity to a more marked sense of cultural difference, identifying intellectual changes such as

the growth of a skeptical empiricism and the effect of mercantilism as the causes of this change. In contrast to Mullaney, for whom the late Renaissance (1550–1650) is the era during which relations of symbolic reciprocity made possible by the dominance of the “element of resemblance” are contested by the emergence of discourses of difference, I agree with Boon’s view that such developments are more notable in the later seventeenth century. One of the obvious issues at stake here is the question of “race” in the Restoration theatre. It seems to me difficult to demonstrate that racial difference functions in recognizably modern terms in drama produced during this period, although cultural alterity is of absorbing interest. This claim may seem unconvincing in the light of recent work analyzing Elizabethan and Jacobean literary texts as colonial discourse; my point is not that it is inappropriate to read *Othello*, *The Tempest* or *The Faerie Queene* as discourses of colonialism but that the way in which “race” figures in such arguments is often over-simplified.⁵⁴ In a wide variety of texts including travel accounts, histories, poetic and dramatic narratives about non-Europeans produced in the Restoration, skin color simply does not appear as the crucial marker of identity it is now.

A. G. Barthelemy’s wide-ranging study of the representation of Africans in the seventeenth-century English theatre exemplifies the problem created by a static notion of race.⁵⁵ Guided by Jordan’s *White over Black* Barthelemy’s introductory chapter marshals the abundant evidence from classical, patristic and early modern sources which identifies blackness with stereotypical elements such as devilry, concupiscence and disorderliness, and then proceeds to identify instances of this homogeneous image of black villainy in plays “from Shakespeare to Southerne.” The analysis is reductive, producing a consolidated stereotype of the “Moor” and then reading the dramatic texts as simple reflections of that image. The problems this produces are illustrated by Barthelemy’s discussion of Settle:

A brief mention of one of Dryden’s rivals, the successful playwright Elkanah Settle, is warranted here before closing this chapter. In two of his plays, *The Empress of Morocco* and *The Heir of Morocco* (1682), Settle also writes about white Moors. These plays are quite different from any plays I have discussed thus far; they are the only plays I have found in

which there are no white Christian Europeans to serve as exemplars of moral and spiritual perfection. What we find instead is a society much like the Italian society in *The White Devil*. In Settle's Morocco plays there are virtuous and evil Moors, forthright and duplicitous Moors. Settle's Morocco plays present the range of humans we generally expect to find in drama.⁵⁶

There are in fact numerous examples of Restoration plays, including such famous texts as *The Indian Queen* (1664), *Aureng-Zebe* and *The Royal Mischief* (1696), which contain no "white Christian Europeans" but do include the usual avatars of heroic virtue. Moreover, Barthelemy's comparison of the "Morocco" plays to *The White Devil* occludes the negative associations of Italian corruption on which Webster's text depends, thus repeating the kind of ethnocentric critical gesture he generally criticizes. Most tellingly, though, he cannot explain why Settle's Moors are "white" at all; his explanatory model is too unremittingly negative. In engravings which accompanied the first publication of the play text, and presumably reflect production practice, the only characters in black-face or black-stockings are the Masquers.⁵⁷ As in Orrery's and Dryden's exotic heroic dramas, the aristocratic status of the characters appears here to have overridden an ethnic or racial categorization in both script and performance. The dramatist's invocation of Orientalist tropes notwithstanding, these plays can also plausibly be read as participating in the harmonization of exotic and domestic kingship which Boon locates in Purchas's "masques."

The pressure of England's aggressively mercantilist policies, however, and in particular her growing involvement in the African slave trade and the establishment of the Atlantic triangle, provided conditions in which the assumptions which generated heroicizing representations of Indic and Mughal monarchy were increasingly contested.⁵⁸ Ethnographic description, then consisting of geographies, travel accounts, advertising company reports and prospectuses for new territories, was being produced in greater and greater quantities and more frequently by secular writers actively involved in colonial trade. This writing was shot through with inherited assumptions from the usual classical and patristic sources, but tended to base truth claims on original observation rather than the authority of the ancients. Clerics like Purchas who had produced such writing previously operated with theological assumptions such

as the unity of mankind, notions put into question as philological, philosophical and biological speculation produced theories of Egyptian linguistic primacy, polygenetic human origins and evolutionary models of human development.⁵⁹

The complex inter-relation of the slave trade, the old colonial system, the development of mercantilism and new modes of ethnographic description rendered in taxonomical terms was remarked on by contemporaries. In 1680, the Barbadian evangelist Morgan Godwyn produced a pamphlet entitled *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, in which he imputed his opponents' denial of human status to "Negroes" to "the inducement and instigation of our Planters' chief Deity, *Profit*."⁶⁰

another no less disingenuous and unmanly *Position* hath been formed . . . which is this, That the *Negro's*, though in their Figure they carry some resemblances of Manhood, yet are Indeede *No Men*. A conceit like unto which I have read, was some time since invented by the *Spaniards*, to justify *their murdering the Americans*. But for this here, I may say, that if *Atheism* and *Irreligion* were the true Parents who gave it Life, surely *Sloth* and *Avarice* hath been no unhandy Instruments and Assistants to midwife it into the world . . . The issue whereof is, that as in the *Negro's all pretence to Religion* is cut off, so their *Owners* are hereby set at Liberty and freed from those importunate Scruples which conscience and better advice might at any time happen to inject in to their unsteadie Minds.⁶¹

Godwyn's traditionalist argument draws on Hale's recently published refutation of polygenetic theories, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (1679), and on evidence of man's barbarity in England itself to assert the full humanity of the Negro. He contests the investment of skin pigmentation as a crucial signifier of Negro brutishness, by drawing on a well-established Christian tradition that the variety of color in humanity "simply demonstrated the divine patterns of order and accident, of unity and diversity"⁶² and appeals to various historical precedents to suggest the "Ancient Britons who . . . were clad with skins and did paint their bodies" were more brutish than Africans.⁶³ Although G. W. Stocking and A. J. Barker disagree, the latter contending that throughout the eighteenth century "The predominance of monogenesis and environmentalism effectively undermined the commonest intellectual device employed by the racialists, the concept of gradation," Hodgen and Davis concur in arguing that the emergence of progressivist