

BOOK REVIEW

Ballaster, Ros. *Fabulous Orientals: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785.* Oxford: OUP, 2005. Pp. xiii + 408. £25 Hb.

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For students of English literary Orientalism and other readers interested in this area, *Fabulous Orientals* is a good starting point. Ballaster covers the most comprehensive scope of research on the oriental and pseudo-oriental tales in England from 1662 to 1785, perhaps since M. P. Conant published *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century* in 1908. The book explores writings relating to four oriental territories (Persia, Turkey, China and India), providing detailed synopses, sources, analogues, contemporaneous commentaries and overviews of recent studies, and analyzing their intertextuality. Ballaster argues against Edward Said's *Orientalism* by illustrating these writings' sympathetic engagement with the Orient. She observes that the Orientalists regard the Other as human beings like themselves, and she sees in these oriental tales a disinvestment of the English self rather than a confident expression of British colonial ambition. Thus China, for instance, "a manufactured product of the Western imagination," is generated "not for imperial political ends but rather for domestic narcissism or critique" (253). Ballaster's assertion, however, is only partially accurate, for some of the writings she discusses, such as *The Orphan of China*, demonstrate not only the English self-perception of the home nation, but also English cultural supremacy over China and implicitly France, though less to consolidate imperial dominance over the Orient than to reinforce English self-confidence in resisting French colonial invasion.

In the fourth chapter on China, Ballaster compares the adaptations of *The Orphan of Zhao* by Hatchett, Murphy and Voltaire (208-218). There may be some confusion for the student reader here between drama and narrative fiction, as she fails to examine Murphy's and Voltaire's plays as theatrical performances in terms of their production and reception, though Hatchett's play may have never been performed. She tends to overlook the fact that, whereas in narrative the Other can be depicted through a dominant authorial view, visual encounters on stage enable Otherness to appeal to the spectator directly, offering greater opportunity for self-expression and subversion. Although Ballaster rightly notes that "Murphy seems to be presenting private domestic virtue and loyalty as displayed by women as at odds with a patriarchalism he identifies as symptomatic of Chinese culture and politics" (217), she does not further explore this dramatic conflict or relate it to her discussion of Voltaire's Orientalism.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to some minor points in the chapter on China. Ballaster asserts that the Chinese play may have appeal in England especially because of similarities in plot and theme to *Hamlet* and other plays, for the story partly concerns "a son's revenge on behalf of his dead father" (209). In fact, the Chinese play primarily concerns the orphan's revenge in a broader scale—on the deaths of the three hundred of his family members and friends. The orphan's mother hangs herself, not "to avoid torture" (210), but to assure the Physician that she will never reveal the secret that he rescued the orphan. In Voltaire's play, Gengis-Khan is not "previously raised at the court in Peking" (212), but is a Tartar fugitive seeking protection from the Chinese court. Voltaire only renders Zamti as a mandarin, not "mandarin and priest" (212), the latter

being the alteration made by the 1756 English translator of Voltaire's play. It is not "Murphy's preface" (214) that declares the play concerned with "a patriot zealous in a monarch's cause"; it is the Prologue to Murphy's play, written by William Whitehead. The orphan in *The Orphan of Zhao* is not "a young heir to the Chinese throne" (55), but the grandson of the Prime Minister. When Mandane complains: "What are the scepter'd rulers?" she does not accuse both "Timurkan and Zamti" (215); she is only accusing Zamti of his insistence on the divinity of kingship, which Timurkan disapproves of. Ballaster claims that Murphy's play "offers a critique of 'patriot' sentiment by presenting it as driven by the masculinist values of war and conflict" (216). In addition to its critique of patriarchal patriotism, however, Murphy's play also commends the Chinese patriots' struggle for national freedom from colonialist oppression. Despite these minor discrepancies, Ballaster's book provides useful background information and commentaries for studies in eighteenth-century English Orientalism.