ENGLAND RE-ORIENTED

What does the love between British imperialists and their Asian male partners reveal about orientalism's social origins? To answer this question, Humberto Garcia focuses on westward-bound Central and South Asian travel writers who have long been forgotten or dismissed by scholars. This bias has obscured how Joseph Emin, Sake Dean Mahomet, Shaykh I'tesamuddin, Abu Talib Khan, Abul Hassan Khan, Yusuf Khan Kambalposh, and Lutfullah Khan found in their conviviality with Englishwomen and men a strategy for inhabiting a critical agency that appropriated various media to make Europe commensurate with Asia. Drama, dance, masquerades, visual art, museum exhibits, music, postal letters, and newsprint inspired these genteel men to recalibrate Persianate ways of behaving and knowing. Their cosmopolitanisms offer a unique window on an enchanted third space between empires in which Europe was peripheral to Islamic Indo-Eurasia. Encrypted in their mediated homosocial intimacies is a queer history of orientalist mimic men under the spell of a powerful Persian manhood.

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ENGLAND RE-ORIENTED

How Central and South Asian Travelers Imagined the West, 1750–1857

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To my wife, Shimy

Love is a stranger with a strange language,
like an Arab in Persia. I have brought a story;
it is strange, like the one who tells it.

Jalal al-Din Rumi

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this book has been a long disorienting journey. In 2011, I aspired to reframe the social history of British imperialism between 1750 and 1857 from the perspective of westward-bound Central and South Asian travel writers who have received scant attention in eighteenth-century studies. My hope was that such a provincializing approach would yield a prehistory of modern occidentalism as a counterweight to the orientalism that was in formation circa 1800, as argued by the late Edward Said. Little did I then foresee that these travelers' marginalized writings had the potential to reposition Britain's imperial history as marginal to the Persian-speaking world in greater Indo-Eurasia, and that the metropolitan encounter with the so-called Orient in this period was the impetus for the re-gendering and re-sexing of an English and Irish national body receptive to Persian, Arabian, and Indic influences. Only after I reoriented myself toward Persian and South Asian studies, beyond my disciplinary home in British eighteenth-century and Romantic literature and culture, did I discover that there was no occidentalism to write about. And what I thought was a dominating orientalist discourse turned out to be a by-product of an insecure queer orientation implicit in the strong friendships between British male imperialists and the Asian male partners who wielded masculine authority over them. My thesis crystalized in June 2019 as I, like my featured travelers, visited London for the first time and was awestruck by its touristic, theatrical, and artistic wonders. Against the backdrop of mounting tensions between the United States, United Kingdom, and Islamic Republic of Iran during that summer and against the "Londonistan" decried by Islamophobes, the hospitable English cosmopolis described in this book took form.

This broad historical perspective is brought to bear on the conceptual vocabulary that I deploy loosely and interchangeably. In this book, "English, "British," "Irish," "Indian," "Armenian," "Hindustani," "Iranian," "Persian," "European," and "Asian" are fungible referents – kept in scare quotes – for imagined communities in transit rather than closed containers for a definable nation, ethnicity, or geography that did not yet exist. My occasional preference for non-standard English spellings of Persian and Arabic terms is faithful to the semantic fluidity of that time. These choices reflect the twofold intellectual challenge involved in writing this anomalous book: first, how to connect histories of empire and gender by working across siloed disciplines in the humanities that still operate under the shadow of the nation-state paradigm, and, second,

how to conceptualize these connections without possessing proficiency in Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. Even as seasoned scholars warned me about the perils of dabbling in other disciplines as a non-specialist and even in moments of self-doubt, I persevered in completing this book under the conviction that specialists in these languages would never do so. These academic and linguistic hurdles were great indeed, but my gratitude for the people who helped me to overcome these hurdles is greater.

I thank Kathleen Wilson, Mrinalini Sinha, and Catherine Hall, the editors who found a home for this book in their interdisciplinary Cambridge series. The press's executive publisher, Michael Watson, was also helpful in overseeing the book's publication. The generosity of my colleagues at the University of California, Merced is commendable. Susan D. Amussen, Jayson Beaster-Jones, and Katherine Steele Brokaw were unwavering in their support from the moment I first arrived at this new institution in 2015, especially when I temporarily lost my bearings while writing the book. Sholeh A. Quinn was patient in answering my persistent questions about Persian terms and in directing me to crucial resources. I am forever indebted to her. Library staff at my home institution also proved indispensable in my archival research, as were staff at the Huntington and British Libraries. Equally important was the support of former Vanderbilt University colleagues, especially Jonathan Lamb, Bridget Orr, and Jay Clayton. They commented on chapter drafts in addition to providing wholesome advice. I also thank Daniel O'Quinn, Robert Markley, Michael H. Fisher, Mana Kia, Bernadette Andrea, Misty G. Anderson, Nile Green, Donna Landry, and Maryam Ala Amjadi for their guidance. Waqar A. Khan, the founder of the Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies, was extremely generous in sharing his unpublished essay on the Swinton family. I am grateful to the press readers who helped turn the manuscript into a readable monograph. And I could not have written it without Ehsan Siahpoush and Amin Azad Sadr. They translated into English the Persian texts cited herein and those in Appendices A and B, which have been reproduced with the kind permission of the University of California. Though I consider all of these folks as my virtual travel companions, any errors in translation and conception are my own.

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Finally, I thank my parents and my wife, Shimy, for their emotional support.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For Persian, Arabic, and Urdu words, I have followed the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* with few exceptions. To make the book accessible to non-specialists, diacritic marks have been preserved in-text only for *ʿayn* and *hamza*, marked as a single opening quotation mark and a single closing quotation mark, respectively. To facilitate research, diacritic marks are fully transliterated for the applicable names and titles listed in Appendices A and B. For historical accuracy, non-technical terms in Persian, Arabic, and Urdu are spelled in English according to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British usages.