

## *Introduction: Dramatizing Enlightenment*

In the first half of the eighteenth century, English theatres staged large numbers of plays that dramatized the most important issues of the early Enlightenment. These contentious topics included the advocacy of religious tolerance, indigenous critiques of colonialism and plebeian attacks on social hierarchy and political corruption. These arguments were frequently presented in new dramatic genres such as sentimental comedy and domestic tragedy, ballad and later comic opera, and they made novel appeals to audiences by establishing sympathetic identification with protagonists of relatively modest social standing. In the midst of a burgeoning commercial theatre, the masonic affiliations of a plurality of performers and many other theatre professionals ranging from prompters and theatre managers to dramatists ensured that the preoccupations of ‘the shock troops of the Enlightenment’, as Margaret Jacob has called them, shaped both the repertory and the dramaturgy of the Georgian playhouse – in England and in her colonies.<sup>1</sup>

While the subversive and oppositional dimensions of John Gay’s and Henry Fielding’s theatrical writing have long been recognized, much of the radicalism of England’s late Stuart and early Georgian theatre has been occluded by the tendency to read the drama’s politics in narrow partisan terms as well as the long-standing refusal to recognize that there was such a thing as an English Enlightenment. Postmodernist, postcolonial and *marxisant* suspicion of the Enlightenment has generated suspicion of any claims to a progressive politics in this era, certainly as far as the culture of sentiment is concerned. But the recent intensification of research into the performative history of the period, notably by Felicity Nussbaum and Joseph Roach, has led to a new understanding of the extraordinary power of Georgian theatrical celebrities and the importance of theatre in the

<sup>1</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

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culture at large.<sup>2</sup> Revived interest in performance has put pressure on the long-standing tendency to dismiss eighteenth-century dramaturgy as degraded, uninteresting and ineffective in comparison with new developments in acting, production and scenography. Lisa Freeman's *Character's Theater* (2002), a compelling account of the central cultural role of generic innovation in Georgian theatre, has been especially important in reframing our conceptions of eighteenth-century dramaturgy. Without denying the central role of celebrity performance in creating theatrical success, the revisionist focus on playwriting helps explain why innovative texts like Aaron Hill's *Zara* (1735), Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1721), George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) and Robert Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737) not only were star vehicles but stayed in the repertory for decades.

Clearly, not all early eighteenth-century theatre can be seen as 'enlightened', in intention or effect. The theatres were commercial institutions, vulnerable to financial imperatives as well as sites of continuing controversy over their moral and political consequences. Governmental control was asserted in the Licensing Act of 1737, creating an onerous censorship regime that took dexterity to circumvent and to which plays fell victim. Theatrical apologists and defenders were by no means radicals, arguing for a national stage that would unify and uplift the fractious and newly united kingdom, celebrating both British identity and her expanding empire. But the substantial, cross-party support for religious toleration, and public hostility to absolutism, created ideological space for plays in which distinctly subversive and utopian visions of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and social and political justice, could and would be written and performed.

### The Enlightenment Stage in a Universal Frame

In 1749 veteran Drury Lane prompter and probable freemason William Chetwood published *A General History of the Stage*. The book has long been recognized as an invaluable source of information about the early Georgian British and Irish stages, but Chetwood's text was original as well as informative. Like other defenders of the theatre, Chetwood made the Greek invention of and Roman support for the stage central to his

<sup>2</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

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recuperation of the institution as a patriotic nursery of virtue, before citing the Elizabethan and early Stuart efflorescence of dramatic talent. But prior to proceeding to a history of the British stage that gives novel prominence to Irish theatres and performers, Chetwood supplements his argument from the ancients with a highly unusual invocation of Chinese theatre. Moving from contemporary European instances of theatrical grandeur, he cites East Asian practice:

I saw, in my youth, a *Chinese* performance at *Canton*, where the *Scenes*, *Machines*, and *Habits*, were surprising and magnificent . . . Tavernier in his *Travels to the East-Indies* informs us, that Theatres have been Many Ages the Diversion of the *Chinese*, and more magnificent than those of *Europe*. He relates a long description of them; and the more to illustrate the Account, gives you the *Plan* and *Picture* of one engrav'd, with the *Scenes* and *Machines*.<sup>3</sup>

Chetwood is less impressed with Chinese dramaturgy, suggesting that Du Halde's translations of 'Chinese Dramatic Authors . . . seem plann'd mostly like – A Prince secreted in his youth by an Evil Minister and counterplotted by a Good one' (14). But his account stresses the antiquity, splendour and patriotic purposes of Chinese theatre, identifying the same functions that justified ancient and contemporary European drama in the culture of a great contemporary Asian state. Pursuing this comparativist argument from the old world to the new, Chetwood remarks that 'the People of *America* had their *Theatre*, according to *Acosta*' (15). In an extended footnote dedicated to that American theatre, he amplifies the report:

*Acosta*, the *Spaniard*, that wrote the *History of the West Indies*, before *Cortez* had conquered it all, says, the *Amantas*, or *Indian Philosophers*, were also Poets, and invented *Comedies* and *Tragedies*, which were acted in their Festivals before the King, the Royal Family, and the Court; the Actors being the Noblemen and great officers of the Army. The Subject of their *Tragedies* were the Victories and great Actions of their Ancestors, which seemed to be the best means they had of preserving the Memory of what was past. In their *Comedies*, their Husbandry, their Household Affairs and Commerce were represented, and the most remarkable Follies in Life expos'd. The Poets taught them what they had to say, not by Writing, but by Memory; for Orthography was not known among the *Indians* until after the Conquest. (15)

And he goes on to explain that 'according to *Lopez de Vega*, the Christian Religion was propagated among the *Americans* by the Theatre' (15).

<sup>3</sup> William Rufus Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage from Its Origin in Greece Down to the Present Time* (London: W. Owen, 1749), 13–14.

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As with the account of Chinese drama, Chetwood is at pains to suggest the high moral purpose, longevity and courtly associations of new world theatre, characterizing the stage as an institution in which the very genres of tragedy and comedy appear to be as universal as its noble avatars, allowing his complacent conclusion ‘that polite Nations allow the *Theatre* a wise and instructive Amusement’ (15).

Chetwood’s claims for the usefulness of the stage are in no way unusual, but his use of Asian and American evidence to universalize his arguments is striking. Writing in the wake of the Anglophone publication of Jean-Frederic Bernard’s and Bernard Picart’s groundbreaking tolerationist analyses of global religions, and a year after the appearance of Montesquieu’s initiation of comparative political anthropology in *L’esprit des lois* (1748), Chetwood’s gestures towards non-European parallels for the theatre may seem banal.<sup>4</sup> But in the context of British stage history, in which writers from John Dryden through Thomas Rymer, Charles Gildon, John Dennis, Colley Cibber, Thomas Wilkes, Benjamin Victor, Francis Gentleman, William Guthrie and Samuel Foote are uniformly concerned to legitimate and celebrate English achievement within a competitively European framework of ancient and modern antecedents, Chetwood’s invocation of Asian and American parallels stands out.<sup>5</sup> It suggests that the redefinition of the classical world proposed by Sir William Temple, in which knowledge of Near Eastern, Greek and Roman antiquity should be extended to include the histories of China, Peru, Scythia and Arabia, could become a presumption for theatre practitioners as well as cultural historians and critics. For Temple, the restriction of ‘the stage’ of heroic virtue to Assyria, Persia,

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Picart, *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World*, 7 vols. (London: William Jackson, 1733). For recent commentary on the cosmopolitanism and cultural relativism of ‘the book that changed Europe’, see Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.), *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles: Getty Institute, 2010). For feminist and postcolonial critiques of the way Montesquieu’s innovative universalist history helped justify control over non-European peoples by claiming to emancipate them from oppressive governmental and gender regimes, see Felicity Nussbaum’s *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and chap. 5 in Betty Joseph’s *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Dryden’s patriotic championing of English drama against ancient and contemporary European rivals in his ‘Essay of Dramatick Poesy’ continued in eighteenth-century commentary. See John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg Jr. et al., 19 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 17:63. See, for example, Samuel Foote, *The Roman and English Comedy Consider’d and Compar’d with Remarks upon the Suspicious Husband* (Dublin: A. Reilly, 1747) and William Guthrie, *An Essay upon English Tragedy* (London, 1757). There are various recurring tropes: in Charles Gildon’s *A Comparison between the Two Stages* (London, 1702) English ‘Life’ and ‘Spirit’ are contrasted with the respectful decorum of French, Spanish and Italian drama and Shakespeare’s violations of neoclassic rules became a topos for England’s aesthetic and political liberty (122).

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Greece and Rome provided ‘but a limited compass of earth that leaves out many vast regions of the world, the which, though accounted barbarous and little taken notice of in story or by any celebrated authors, yet have a right to come in for their voice, in agreeing upon the laws of nature and nations (for aught I know) as well as the rest that have arrogated it wholly to themselves’.<sup>6</sup> Temple’s enlightened curiosity about societies neglected by the ancients and moderns venerated in his own culture extended to an unusual respect for orature, doubt as to ‘whether [books] are necessary for learning or no’, given that ‘in Mexico and Peru, before the least use or mention of letters, there was remaining among them the knowledge of what had passed in those mighty nations and governments for many ages’ (433).

Contemptuous of the restricted knowledge gained of these great states by modern nations preoccupied by the pursuit of ‘endless gains and wealth’ (456) whose ‘most penetrating Genii’ have been ‘overwhelmed in the abyss of disputes about matters of religion’ (465–466), the deist Temple famously provided his own potted panegyrics to the neglected empires in his essay ‘Of Heroic Virtue’. As Samuel Monk points out, his views are legible in a broad range of early eighteenth-century essays and criticism, notably those of Addison and Steele (xxxiii). But this new kind of ‘universal classicism’ is even more visible, indeed spectacularly so, in the expanded choice of settings for serious drama.<sup>7</sup> While dramatists continued to write plays set in the familiar terrain of the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Egypt, North Africa, Greece and Rome, successful playwrights including John Hughes, James Thomson, Aaron Hill, Henry Brooke and Arthur Murphy, among others, produced tragedies set in Syria, China, Arabia and the Inca Empire – ‘from China to Peru’, as Samuel Johnson put it in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. In choosing these settings for tragic actions, dramatists implicitly granted these societies a kind of cultural equivalence to the noble, if archaic, Graeco-Roman past that the British claimed for themselves.<sup>8</sup> But the settings were also intended to inform spectators about cultures and histories about which they might be

<sup>6</sup> Sir William Temple, ‘Of Heroic Virtue’, in *Five Miscellaneous Essays by Sir William Temple*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 105–106.

<sup>7</sup> For a lapidary treatment of ‘the burgeoning interest in human universality amidst contact with other peoples’ in the late seventeenth century, see Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1–18.

<sup>8</sup> Early eighteenth-century British attitudes to the Romans in particular are contested: for an emphasis on negative perspectives, see Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia’s Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), with a contrasting view in Phillip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge:

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ignorant, for while most of the more educated members of the audiences would be recognize the passages of Ottoman or Roman history dramatized in David Mallet's *Mustapha* (1739) Samuel Johnson's *Irene* (1749) or Addison's *Cato* (1713), they would be far less familiar with the Incan, Chinese and Arabian histories invoked by Temple that now appeared on the London stage. Arguing for the utility of theatre a few years after Chetwood, Thomas Wilkes quotes Aaron Hill on the culturally enlightening effects of tragedy: "We are humanized," says Aaron Hill, "without suffering; we become acquainted with the manners of nations, acquire a fine polish without travelling; and without the trouble of studying, imbibe the most pleasing, the most useful lessons."<sup>9</sup> Although he had limited success in practice, Hill argued that stage scenery and costume should reinforce the ethnographic information conveyed by the dramatic action, imaginatively anticipating the creation of 'vicarious voyages' generally associated with de Louthembourg's scenography in the last decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Like Voltaire, he wanted the customs and manners of the exotic locales he was dramatizing to be given sartorial and scenic specificity in performance: 'An old Roman could never with any propriety be made to look like a modern Frenchman; nor a Dutch burgomaster's wife like the Queen of Great Britain.'<sup>11</sup>

The extended eighteenth-century dramatization of East Asian, Arabian and new world empires was inflected by new economic and intellectual engagements, as trade expanded and challenges to Christian doxa (such as biblical chronology) emerged in the light of Egyptian and Chinese

Cambridge University Press, 1997). Unlike Persia, Syria and Latin America, China's role in the eighteenth-century English imaginary has recently attracted scholarly attention, in studies that include analysis of versions of Du Halde's 'Chinese tragedy, call'd Chau shi ku eul, or the little orphan of the family of Chau' published in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary, Together with the Kingdoms of Korea, and Tibet*, 2 vols., trans. Emanuel Bowen (London, 1738, 1741), 1, 248. For an early perspective, see Chen Shouyi, 'The Chinese Orphan: A Yuan Play: Its Influence on European Drama of the Eighteenth Century', in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Adrian Hsia (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 359–382; and for more recent accounts, see Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 208–218, and Chi-Ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660–1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 148–183.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Wilkes, *The History of the Theatres of London and Dublin*, 2 vols. (Dublin: G. Faulkner and J. Exshaw, 1761), 4.

<sup>10</sup> For a recent survey of this issue, see Kathryn R. Barush, 'Painting the Scene', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737–1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 265–285.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron Hill, *The Prompter (1734–1736)*, ed. William W. Appleton and Kalmain A. Burmin (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1966), 22, 26.

antiquity. Oriental dramas of state, as Ros Ballaster calls them, retained their ancient capacity to allegorize contemporary politics and to present fascinating forms of alterity, constructing versions of Confucian or Islamic states that were both recognizable and exotic, if not referentially plausible.<sup>12</sup> The natural religion of the Incas, the enthusiastic monotheism of early Islam and the sophisticated Confucianism of the Chinese could all be dramatically rendered in terms that exploit fascinating difference but ultimately reveal similitudes. Still awaiting analysis, however, are those dramatic texts that use the novel settings and actions they present to make challenging arguments for religious and cultural toleration, while attacking imperial aggression. Such texts and productions stand as evidence that the late Stuart and early Georgian theatre was not just the scene of narrowly partisan political debate and thrusting commercial novelties but also an institution in which radical as well as moderate Enlightenment ideas were presented, debated and circulated.

### English Enlightenment

Folding theatrical development into the universalist accounts of ‘the science of man’ is rare, but it has long been understood that the theatre was a privileged site for Enlightenment debate in France and Germany, if only because of the massive presences of Voltaire and Lessing.<sup>13</sup> Christopher Balme has recently made a claim for theatre to be seen as an important aspect of the public sphere, and Gillian Russell has contested Habermas’s diminution of its role in social, political and cultural debate in the later Georgian era.<sup>14</sup> Generally, however, histories of English Enlightenment (itself a term until recently considered almost oxymoronic) have almost never included the theatre. The ideological contours of English Enlightenment are contested: influentially, J. G. A. Pocock has described a conservative, Anglican Enlightenment, one developed through connections to continental Protestants and conducted by academics, clerics and

<sup>12</sup> See Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient*, 208–217.

<sup>13</sup> For the authoritative overview of Voltaire’s relation to Enlightenment theatre, see Marvin Carlson, *Voltaire and the Theater of the Eighteenth-Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998); for a recent argument for Lessing’s continuing contribution to interfaith toleration, see Eva Urban, ‘Lessing’s Nathan the Wise: From the Enlightenment to the Berliner Ensemble’, *New Theatre Quarterly* 30.2 (May 2014): 183–196.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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intellectual politicians.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, John Robertson argues for a more unified account of the Enlightenment, despite richly particular manifestations in places as distinct as Naples and Scotland, in an overview in which England fares rather poorly.<sup>16</sup> Roy Porter's *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (2000) argues for a nativist version, rooted in late seventeenth-century scientific and political revolutions, while B. W. Young focuses on the liberal, scientifically informed late Latitudinarians who promoted freedom of conscience and reason over dogma and church authority.<sup>17</sup> In assessing these characterizations, Karen O'Brien suggests that the English Enlightenment encompassed 'a fruitful, if sometimes unstable, mixture of Anglicanism and Dissent, Whiggism and radicalism'.<sup>18</sup>

Other accounts of English Enlightenment that have stressed the radical dimensions of the phenomenon include John Marshall's demonstration of the emergence of toleration as a central value in the late seventeenth-century 'Republic of Letters' in France, Piedmont, England, Ireland and the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> In these contexts, he argues, religious toleration intersected with arguments for and against political tyranny (1–3). Exploring specifically English radicalism, Justine Chapman has demonstrated the extent of freethinker John Toland's influence in the years leading up to the South Sea Bubble, in order to argue against the notion of English Enlightenment as underpowered and conservative.<sup>20</sup> Although her work includes England in a broadly comparativist perspective, Margaret Jacob provides more evidence of Britain's radical Enlightenment in her account of freemasonry understood as a constitutionalist, democratic, ecumenical and ethnically inclusive institution, modelling a modern, broadly egalitarian and tolerant society.<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* (2001)

<sup>15</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, 'Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England', in *L'età dei lumi: Studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, 2 vols., ed. Raffaele Ajello et al. (Naples, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London, 2000) and Brian Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>19</sup> John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early English Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1–6.

<sup>21</sup> Among other publications, see Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*.



seeks to revise what he sees as an excessive stress on the role of Locke and Newton in the formation of the early Enlightenment thought, redirecting attention to the pervasiveness of Spinoza's European influence in Europe generally and in the work of English deists Blount, Temple, Toland, Collins and Tindal in particular.<sup>22</sup>

Although the word scarcely appears in his book, Steven Pincus's *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (2009) reminds us why late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Europeans – including, most famously, Voltaire – thought Britain was in fact the model for the contemporary Enlightened state. Pincus argues that the Glorious Revolution was neither an oligarchical conspiracy nor an invasion but a broad-based event generated by those who believed that England's future lay in encouraging political participation rather than absolutism, religious toleration rather than Catholicism and manufacturing rather than landed empire.<sup>23</sup> For Pincus, much of the groundwork of the Revolution can be found in the sophisticated communications networks and media formations that informed and extended the political nation and those out of doors, as people in far-flung provinces consumed up-to-date and opinionated print reports of current events at home and abroad and discussed them in coffeehouses (78–81).

Pincus's stress on the importance of England's unique newspaper and coffeehouse culture (whose origins he locates in the late seventeenth century, rather earlier than Habermas) takes us to another critical aspect of Enlightenment culture, that of print.<sup>24</sup> For many recent scholars, the expansion of print in new forms such as the periodical essay and the novel is as central to Enlightenment culture as conjectural history and the science of man.<sup>25</sup> Though dispersed temporally and spatially, the 'postal principle' allowed disparate readers of fiction, newspapers and philosophical critique to experience new forms of subjectivity, interiority and community.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 515–527 and 599–623.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 3–10.

<sup>24</sup> In many ways Habermas's depiction of the Enlightenment as a model for disinterested political debate by citizens in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Fredrick Lawrence (1962; repr., Boston: MIT Press, 1991) galvanized Anglophone scholarly interest in the phenomenon. See John Bender, *Ends of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3–11.

<sup>25</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, places particular stress on the importance of learned journals: see 142–156.

<sup>26</sup> See John Guillory, 'Enlightening Mediation', in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 37–63.

For Benedict Anderson, these forms of dispersed ‘imagined community’ would be the necessary precondition for establishing the modern nation.<sup>27</sup> Print’s role in creating modern national communities sits uneasily aside the Enlightenment’s famously cosmopolitan ‘Republic of Letters.’ Until recently Enlightenment learning, although universalist in scope, has been understood as peculiarly and specifically European, indeed sinisterly so in the critique proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), the former argue that the categorizing, universalizing principles and techniques at work in Enlightenment discourse manifest a dominating relation to the world and its peoples that resulted, notoriously, in the catastrophes of the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup> This account of the Enlightenment is vigorously contested, notably by Jürgen Habermas, who famously identified the growth of coffeehouses, print culture and salons in early eighteenth-century England as scenes of the first public sphere, in which citizens could participate in principled discussion of political, cultural and social issues in open and egalitarian contexts.<sup>29</sup> Other scholars who openly identify with the liberal inheritance of the Enlightenment include Anthony Pagden, whose broad-ranging survey stresses the extent to which the values of humanity, universal rights, democracy, religious tolerance and critique are Enlightenment inheritances.<sup>30</sup> Dennis C. Rasmussen offers a more focused analysis of what he calls the ‘pragmatic Enlightenment’ thought of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu and Voltaire, and which he characterizes as nonfoundational and comparativist, committed to limited government, religious tolerance, commerce and humane criminal laws.<sup>31</sup>

Recent historians of early eighteenth-century English culture tend now to be thoroughly sceptical of a public sphere constituted by rational and disinterested actors capable of transcending partial interests for the greater good; as Lisa Freeman comments, ‘The discursive culture of the day was one in which even rhetorical claims to civility and politeness could be read

<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944; repr., London: Continuum, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (New York: Random House, 2013), preface, ix–xviii.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Pragmatic Enlightenment: Recovering the Liberalism of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu and Voltaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).