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The Secret History of *Adventures of Eovaai*:

Concealing Social and Political Critiques Within an Oriental Mystique

The oriental “Other”—places, commodities, and stories from places such as China, India, and Turkey—enchanted eighteenth-century occidental audiences. The allure of these foreign lands and the mysticism of the unknown tantalized consumers as oriental tales and imported commodities allowed Western audiences to engage with different cultures and ideals. The aim of this paper is to analyze Eliza Haywood’s oriental tale *Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo* within the context of the author’s political and social moment. Haywood projects Western models of political philosophies onto an oriental landscape in the novel, exploring contemporary subjects like corruption and questions of sovereignty by appropriating oriental elements of mysticism as an avenue to explore these in an exoticized space. The author uses her villain Ochihatou as a thinly veiled critique of the notorious English politician, Prime Minister Robert Walpole, obscuring her criticism safely within a foreign imaginary to detract any retribution. This paper seeks to further consider the marriage between the Western political spheres Haywood examines and her use of oriental mysticism, magical objects, and spaces to obscure these philosophies within a foreign imaginary.

Eighteenth-century Britain held a certain fascination with foreign cultures especially those deemed oriental. The Orient was considered by the West to consist of virtually all Eastern and North African places including but not limited to the Ottoman Empire and China. In order to gain more knowledge and therefore more influence over these powerful oriental places, the British government asked many otherwise ordinary travelers to essentially act as unofficial spies or spectators in the foreign nations they visited by observing and reporting on those places’ “government, manners, agriculture, commerce, ports, and military installations” (Bannet 149). To so do effectively required the “spy” to assume the “language, dress, and manners” of the countries they visited in order to “blend into whatever scene they entered and appear to belong” (152). These otherwise ordinary travelers were able to bring back intelligence not only to the government but also to their friends and family as well. It can be assumed that those who had the means to travel to these exotic locales had money and enough social capital to be able stoke the fascination with the Orient, particularly among the upper class. This most likely contributed to an increased interest in an “exotic” aesthetic that was further encouraged by the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century and the ramping up of capitalism across Europe.

The appropriation of oriental culture prompted a wave of interest in art and literature mimicking the styles of the Orient. One particular form of art that rose in popularity was the oriental tale, a fictional narrative that places the story in foreign locales strictly or loosely based on oriental nations or cities and makes use of fantastical elements such as mystical telescopes and genii. Many authors, such as Clara Reeves, Eliza Haywood, John Hawkesworth, and Maria Edgeworth, capitalized on this kind of literature which held a “cosmopolitan currency” and appealed to the same kind of aesthetic sensibility that drew the British upper-class to foreign commodities (Aravamudan 10). Many authors used the foreignness of the oriental space and objects to obscure commentary on contemporary issues or moral lessons. Another literary trend in eighteenth-century Europe was the secret history that sought to comment upon politicians and corruption in government. Secret histories, also known as scandal chronicles, were generally personal and confessional in tone, typically narrated by “whistleblowers”: fictional “insider[s] publicizing what had befallen them personally and documenting what they knew” (Bannet 155). Modern examples of secret histories include publications such as Omarosa Manigault’s *Unhinged* and Michael Wolff’s *Fire and Fury*. Because of the popularity of scandal chronicles, eighteenth-century authors began to write their own criticisms of crooked politicians, nefarious legislation, and rotten governmental practices obscured by fictional narratives and often alternative settings. Writers of fictional secret histories often used omniscient third-person narrators as a kind of literary spy with the ability to report on characters’ thoughts and motives—especially behind political decisions—as well as their actions. Eliza Haywood combined two of the biggest literary trends—the oriental tale and the secret history—in *Adventures of Eovaai*.

Haywood was no stranger to the scandal chronicle and was able to further obscure her political commentary by reorienting her criticisms within a foreign space; she was so successful in this endeavor that literary critics still debate whether or not Haywood intended *Adventures of Eovaai* as a secret history. However, “her […] engagement with the genre of secret history” is a “consistent thread across Haywood’s career, one that is noticeable in her less obviously political novels as well as in her more overtly political pamphlets and periodicals” (Carnell 102). One of the major arguments for *Adventures of Eovaai* being a secret history is the dedication to Dowager Duchess of Marlough at the beginning of the novel as the Duchess was very politically active in her opposition against Robert Walpole as Prime Minister (Carnell 114). The dedication hinted towards political undercurrents and obscured commentary in the novel, much of which is believed to a criticism of Walpole.

Because *Adventures of Eovaai* is set in a non-Western sphere of mysticism and exoticism, Haywood could hide criticisms of the government even more cleverly. The narrative is driven by colorful, vivid characters who interact with magical objects and engage with one another in a simultaneously political and sexual landscape. The novel’s audience is not only invited to spy into a new world but also new people which allows for deeper understandings of “the passions, ploys, and machinations at work in social intercourse” within the Orient-inspired space. Haywood argued that in order to dismantle this kind of systematic and institutional hypocrisy, one had to “enter into [people’s] lives to discover what was really going on and to be in a position to provide readers with correct intelligence about the persons and motives involved,” a mission that could only be achieved by enticing readers into a story in which they become invested in the characters (Bannet 151, 156). Doing so grants savvier readers the skills necessary to recognize similar schemes and political maneuvers in their own personal lives and perhaps even in their own society.

Haywood’s projection of Western political philosophy and its supposed superiority onto an oriental setting continues when Eojeau gives Eovaai a magical object before his death: a priceless jewel. The dying king explains that the talisman was “made by the Hands of the divine *Aiou*, the Patron of our Family, and the most powerful and beneficent of all the *Genii*” (55). Eojeau offers no other explanation of the carcanet’s significance to his daughter other than to command her to keep it safe at all costs. Readers—and Eovaai—know that the jewel must be important based on Eojeau’s description, but there is a mystery in both its use and signification: there is no evidence to support that it is anything other than a just a beautiful ornamentation. Shortly after her father’s death, Eovaai questions Eojeau’s authority on the talisman, using the principles of her royal education to do so. Following Locke’s philosophy, she uses her senses to study the carcanet and finds curious symbols on it; however, when she works to decipher the meaning of the symbols, the jewel suddenly falls from the gold casing and is swept away by a small bird. The young queen’s desire to question her father’s vague explanation of the jewel is essentially the catalyst to the downfall of her reign. Eovaai challenges the jewel’s power by questioning it and her father’s proclamations thereof, setting off a series of events that threaten the entire kingdom. The weather changes for the first time in history, bringing into *Ijaveo* unfamiliar dark clouds, thunder, and lightning. In a footnote, Haywood explains that it is “the first Thunder and Lightning that had ever been known in *Ijaveo*, or perhaps in the World…in the first Ages, none of the Elements had transgressed the Bounds set to them at the Creation” (Haywood 58, n1). Though the jewel had been taken from Eovaai, her people attributed this loss to their once beloved monarch’s apparent irresponsibility and incompetency and the kingdom erupts into chaos and essentially civil war (60). Loar argues that Eovaai’s curiosity and the chaos that ensues is symbolic of what happens when a person—especially one in a newfound position of power—questions “the settled forms of authority” and their commands; this also begs the question: did no other monarch of *Ijaveo* question the jewel’s authority before Eovaai? (572). If true, then *Ijaeveo*’s constitutional monarchy was based on “a static and pointedly romantic understanding of kingship” that disallowed for confrontation with the political norm (Loar 570).

Perhaps early feminist Haywood was attempting to look at this within a gendered context in which she was alluding that the patriarchal monarchs before Eovaai were not interested in challenging the norm that they benefited from, but in the context of secret history, this seems to be more of a political statement than a feminist one. Eovaai does not have to be held to the political pattern set by her father and her forefathers before him: she has the agency as queen to closely examine the long-held traditions held by her kingdom and, if she finds them inadequate, to change them. This assertion falls neatly in line with the idea that Haywood was performing her own close analysis and critique on British political institutions and politicians within the safe space of an oriental landscape.

Before I begin a more in-depth analysis of the specific political concerns Haywood seems to be addressing in the novel, I wish to address the concept of *genii* and its significance within Haywood’s secret history. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a *genius* (singular of *genii*) is a supernatural being and “guardian spirit associated with a place, institution, thing, etc.” (“Genius,” n1a). The *genii* is referenced in multiple places in the novel, with the *genii Aiou* as the creator of the talisman gifted to Eovaai. The definitions of the word from Haywood’s footnote and the Oxford English Dictionary draw heavily from the word’s origins in Oriental mysticism and mythology, further defining the novel as an oriental tale, and are each significant to the theory that *Adventures of Eovaai* utilizes secret history narratology. Because the jewel is being passed down from king to ascending queen and from father to daughter, I argue that the object is an heirloom reserved for the royal family of *Ijaveo* that protects the monarchial institution. Haywood defines *genii* as an “Intercession of Beings, of a middle state” between mere mortals and the “Supream [sic] Beings” and “to whom they believed the Government of Stars had been committed” (Haywood 68, n1). Both of these explanations of the entity define *genii* as mediator of sorts between person and institution; in the oriental mythology Haywood uses, this arguably refers more to a religious or monarchial institution. If one considers the *genii* within the context of occidental, particularly British, political philosophy, the entity can be thought of as symbolic of Parliament and the Prime Minister that act as an intercession between the monarch and his or her people. This is significant, especially in the result of the loss of the jewel, because without the object representative of arbitration and the institutions of intercession, the relationship with Eovaai and her people breaks down. It also stresses the importance of a good, or at least non-corrupt, intermediary to keep a kingdom stable, neither of which was happening during eighteenth-century Britain or the fictional *Ijaveo*. The relationship between British Parliament, the Prime Minister, and *genii* makes the criticism and satirization of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minster at the time Haywood penned *Adventures of Eovaai*, more apparent throughout the novel.

Joining the myriad of authors who also sought to take aim at the corrupt Sir Walpole, Haywood uses the novel’s antagonist Ochihatou as a mirror of the Prime Minister in his deceit, overwhelming unpopularity, and unseemly physical appearance. Like Ochihatou, Robert Walpole “[embezzled] national funds, [built] residences for wives and mistresses, [raised] taxes to finance his prolificacy, and [manipulated] his sovereign” (Aravamudan 23). Similarly to the English Prime Minister, Ochihatou used cunning to advance his political position, eventually gaining the seat of his kingdom’s viceregency, a powerful station that would allow him to perform administrative functions in government as well as act and speak on behalf of the king as an intermediary between sovereign and citizens. Walpole came into power through more traditional means than Ochihatou, who used magical enchantments, but both used their seats for sinister endeavors dependent upon their people to not examine them nor their actions too closely. Walpole was so notoriously sensitive to disapproval that “politicians, journalists, novelists, or playwrights had to be cautious that everything [critical], from press articles and plays and fictions, be carefully veiled under disguises” which is arguably exactly what Haywood did when writing the character Ochihatou (Teglaş 158).

Haywood continues her critique of Walpole later in the novel when an ancient of Oozoff explains the differences between absolute and constitutional monarchies and republicanism. While discussing republicanism, Eovaai muses that

She received frequent Visits from the Heads of the Common-wealth, and found them Men of such profound Wisdom, Virtue, and Probity, as made it not seem strange to her, that the State under their Direction shou’d acquire so high a Reputation; but in spite of the great Qualities she observed in those who had the care of publick Business, the prodigious Respect paid to them by the Ambassadors of the greatest Kings, the Weight of their Voices had in foreign Councils, and the Advantages they made from every little Incident that happened in the World, for the aggrandizing their own Country, the Prejudice of Education which most People imbibe for that kind of Government underwhich they are born, made her think there wanted something to compleat the Grandeur of this Nation, and that it was pity someone of those noble Personages, so august in every Action, shou’d not be dignified with the Name of King (110).

Haywood places a footnote at “Name of the King” in which she says that “since my abode in England, I have seen some Mock-Monarchs on the stage” (110, n1). The author is referring to Walpole, a man who has the King’s ear as Prime Minister and uses the privilege for sinister and corrupt purposes. It is a significant point in the novel due to this very note: Haywood abandons subtlety and all but names Sir Walpole as a false monarch, the hand that drives the king’s. This shifts the dynamic of the novel to more of a scandal chronicle, a daring move for any writer but especially for a woman.

Haywood’s use of Eastern mystical elements successfully obscures her social and political commentary in two ways: first in that she grants herself plausible deniability that her novel has anything to do with current politics and secondly in that she does so in such a way that her more politically-savvier readers could pick up on her hints. These elements delight the readers’ interest in the Oriental and the oriental tale while troubling the very use of them in a secret history.

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