

Imperial Fantasies: Mourning the Loss of Empire in the Novels of Penelope Lively and Ruth Praver Jhabvala

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Will the British Empire ever be over, or are we destined to witness its eternal return in the form of [literary] nostalgia masquerading as history? (Burton, “India, Inc.?” 217)

We need to be rigorously critical of the histories of feminism—those cheery, triumphant narratives. (Burton, *Burdens of History* 23)

Feminism must produce a discourse that interrogates its own histories, particularly if it aspires to be something more than politics as usual. (Burton, *Burdens of History* 24)

Historian Antoinette Burton expresses postcolonial impatience with literary nostalgia in regard to the British Empire, particularly as evidenced by Tom Stoppard’s drama *Indian Ink*, which she claims “pretend[s] to rehearse [the British Empire’s] relentless end” (“India, Inc.?” 217). Burton chastises Stoppard for his infinite rehearsal that concentrates on the imperial relationship between a supposedly liberated, modern British woman and an Indian male artist, a relationship that transgresses the gender, racial, and sexual hierarchies prescribed by empire. While one may take issue with Burton’s reading of Stoppard’s drama since Stoppard’s play focuses on a relationship that attempts to forge mutual artistic regard between a woman poet and a male painter, her criticism recognizes the ubiquity of a continuous, never-ending empire that, like a ghostly shadow, haunts contemporary British literature.

Stoppard is not the only contemporary British writer who infinitely rehearses the British Empire’s “relentless end.” Penelope Lively and Ruth Praver Jhabvala also create novelistic worlds steeped in imperial nos-

talgia. Lively's *Moon Tiger* (1987) and Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) can certainly be read in this imperial context, yet previous readings have generally focused on the feminism within the novels¹ while ignoring the imperialism inherent within the texts. Such readings do not acknowledge the ways in which the novels continue the legacy of imperialism, or imperialism's influence on the development of feminism. Both novels meditate on and at times mourn the loss of empire. They create imperial fantasies that continue to represent and codify colonial relationships in the post-imperial era. Phyllis Lassner argues that colonial British women writers such as Olivia Manning, Elspeth Huxley, and Phyllis Shand Allfrey produced work that blatantly critiques the British Empire as it scrutinizes the Third Reich and calls for the elimination of all empires. Lively's and Jhabvala's novels, in contrast, romanticize the grandeur of empire even as they portray robust female characters who sometimes bristle against patriarchy and imperialism. Like the nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminists who, in Burton's view, plead their case for suffrage while upholding imperial designs and whose rhetoric was shaped by the British Empire, Lively's and Jhabvala's novels inscribe, to borrow a term coined by Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, a type of "imperial feminism" (Burton, *Burdens of History* 2).² These fictions paradoxically underscore women's need for sovereignty even while fantasizing about empire.

Burton argues that Western feminism emerged and matured during the apex of the imperial era and that, although British feminist and imperial discourses are thought to be antithetical to one another, Victorian and Edwardian feminisms were generally shaped by imperialist rhetoric. Indeed, British feminists in these eras "collaborat[ed] in its [the Empire's] ideological work" (2). Noting the hierarchical racial discourse inherent in imperialism's supposedly civilizing mission, Burton focuses on the relationship between British suffragettes and Indian women and argues that the suffragettes positioned themselves in relation to their supposedly powerless, subjugated Indian counterparts. These sisters were cast as "foils to the progress of Western imperial women" (18). Burton underscores the commonality between imperial feminism and its need to save Indian women and the rhetoric of contemporary global sisterhood.

She also argues that “rematerializing Western feminism’s imperial history means taking responsibility for its legacies to and relationships with the present” (24), suggesting that imperial tendencies still prevail in the post-imperial era. Burton suggests that imperial feminism lingers on in the postcolonial era, a view that Amos and Parmar share. This lingering, imperial feminism, as depicted in these novels, is the subject of this essay.

While Lively’s novel might be read as a meditation on mortality and a reflection on British women’s lives in the liberated twentieth century, it is important to recognize the extent to which the text’s protagonist, Claudia H, benefits from advantages garnered by first-wave feminists who forged their rhetoric during the Victorian and Edwardian imperial eras. As such, Claudia, who advocates women’s equality but does not acknowledge feminism, also views the world through “imperial” eyes; she creates imperial fantasies about the Middle East and continually casts a backward glance on all empires, whether ancient or modern, while noting the vanishing civilizations that continue to linger even in a postcolonial era. In contrast, Jhabvala’s novel meditates specifically on the fall of the British Empire, highlighting women’s roles in this loss, while decrying the reversal in power that transpires as a result of the fall. The juxtaposition of the two novels forces the reader to examine not only the history and continuing legacy of imperialism but the history of Western feminism in the ways that Burton suggests. Rather than “cheery, triumphant narratives” of Western feminism (Burton, *Burdens of History* 23), these novels can be scrutinized within the discourse of imperial feminism, allowing readers to “interrogate the history of feminism.” This approach complicates British imperial history and the history of Western feminism and attempts to come to terms with their complex and problematic relationship.

Creating Imperial Fantasies

When the times are out of joint it is brought uncomfortably home to you that history is true and that unfortunately you are a part of it. One has this tendency to think oneself immune. This is one of the points when the immunity is shown up as fantasy. I’d rather like to go back to fantasising. (Lively 103)

Tom Southern, the protagonist, Claudia H.'s, true love in *Moon Tiger*, expresses both a truth about World War II and the tendency to create fantasies wherein life is made both stable and ideal. Tom's preference for fantasy suggests an attempt to withdraw emotionally and psychologically from the horrors of both war and history; he indicates the need for fantasy as a coping mechanism for witnessing and participating in brutal acts of destruction. Yet Tom also speaks to Claudia of a mirage he and another British soldier observed: "an entire oasis village—palms, mud huts, camels, people walking about," a "mirror place going about its business" juxtaposed with carnage in the desert (102). The "mirror world, a vanishing oasis" (104) is an ideal world exempt from brutality. Although Tom's fantasy concerns war, his vision can also be read in relation to the end of empire and a desire to meditate on and maintain the British Empire as it wanes. Tom's pronouncement is emblematic of Claudia's approach to empire throughout the novel. Like Tom, Claudia would rather ignore the reality of the present moment in which the British Empire is on the verge of collapse, preferring instead to fantasize about empire and its "ideal" state in which all prescribed hierarchies are in place. As an imperial feminist whose lifespan has straddled the twentieth century and the World Wars that contribute to the eventual loss of empire, Claudia can be seen as a representative of the withering, dying, and incestuous empire that, in its narcissism, created Little Englands around the globe. While Claudia rarely speaks overtly of the British Empire, she spends considerable time reflecting on empire in general and creating imperial fantasies in which all social and political relationships are made right and ideal and the "natural" hierarchy is maintained.

Critical positions vary in regard to whether Claudia is cast as a feminist in the novel. Margareta Jolly describes Claudia as a "pre-feminist heroine" (60) and *Moon Tiger* as "an elegant study in proto-feminism" (70),³ while Mary Moran maintains that the novel represents a "subversive feminist outlook" ("A Feminist History of the World" 90) and that, as a historian, Claudia inserts women and the personal into male-dominated history. Moran implies that Claudia's life reflects the trajectory of some women's lives in the twentieth century as they "made it in a man's world" (89). Moran seems to congratulate Claudia, who

“spars” with her brother Gordon and enters the male dominated world of history and journalism and “conquer[s] them” (89). Moran argues that Claudia’s “refusal to conform to the restrictive domestic pattern of most women’s lives took the form of traveling widely, enjoying sexual freedom, choosing not to marry the father of her child, and pursuing her career relentlessly” (89). While it is true that Claudia “refuses to conform” and that her non-conformity places her in a feminist category, she acts as though feminism has not yet emerged. She quips and then brags, “If feminism had been around then I’d have taken it up, I suppose; it would have needed me” (Lively 14). Surprisingly, she knows little of the history of feminism despite her work as a historian. Feminism had been “around” in Britain at least since the Enlightenment, in particular in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft who advocated a type of feminism based on individual rights. The character and contemporary academic critics seem oblivious to the fact that Claudia’s individual “feminism” has a long history and that it matured during the imperial era, that second-wave feminism does not constitute the whole of feminism, and that the history of feminism is complicated by the ideologies it interacted with and was influenced by. As Burton argues and I mention above, “feminism in Britain emerged in the context of Victorian and Edwardian imperialism” (*Burdens of History* 1) and, therefore, early and mid-twentieth-century feminism in Britain was shaped by imperial ideologies of national and racial superiority and the right to rule supposedly inferior peoples. At the same time, successive generations of women born after the imperial heyday “had to be aware of the tenuousness of British imperial supremacy after 1918, despite the fact that Britain emerged a victor from the European war” (Burton, *Burdens of History* 4). Claudia, as a traveler,⁴ or, to borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s phrase, a “planetary” explorer (15), is the beneficiary of feminism’s early twentieth-century triumphs. She is also a woman born after the height of empire who necessarily should be aware of the impending loss of empire. As a somewhat liberated woman, she can travel and enter the world, inserting herself, as does Gordon, within imperial outposts. In a sense, she and Gordon, living in Egypt and India, respectively, insert themselves into history⁵ and arrange themselves across the globe as they

cling to the waning empire that is attempting to defeat the German Empire. In doing so, Claudia unknowingly acts the imperial feminist as she writes her deathbed history of the world alongside her reflections on ancient empires in the Middle East and her recollections of her own encounters in that region.⁶

Debrah Raschke notes that in referring to herself as “I, Claudia,” Claudia “echo[es] Robert Graves’s *I, Claudius*” (116). Yet Raschke does not draw out the full implication of Claudia’s statement and claims that the history Claudia writes is a “subversive” one (116). In referring to herself as “I, Claudia,” Claudia mimics an imperial pose as if she were the Emperor Claudius. Assuming this title, she gives herself an imperial vantage point from which to relate her far from subversive version of the world; indeed, Claudia often dwells on conquest and valorizes conquerors, including Hernando Cortez. In discussing the book she wrote about Mexico, Claudia states:

Hernando Cortez cannot be true. There cannot have been a human being so brave, charismatic, obstinate and apparently indestructible. How could anyone be so greedy, fanatical, and unimaginative as to lead a few hundred men into an alien continent of whose topography he was ignorant, swarming with a race devoted to the slaughter and sacrifice of strangers, in order to take prisoner their leader in his own capital city? And succeed. (Lively 154)

Claudia is also “addicted” to what she calls “innocent” “arrivals” of conquerors and explorers, such as those of Julius Caesar and Captain Cook (Lively 28). Such arrivals are never innocent; they forever alter indigenous populations. She also acknowledges her affinity for “exploiters of historical circumstance. Political adventurers—Tito, Napoleon. Medieval popes; crusaders; colonizers” (144).

Claudia also demonstrates an imperial attitude when she announces to her caretakers in the nursing home that she is “writing a history of the world. . . . The works, this time. The whole triumphant murderous unstoppable chute” and adds that “[t]here are plenty who would point to it as a typical presumption to align my own life with the history of

the world” (1–2).⁷ The nurse attending her asks “[w]as she [Claudia] someone?” (1), implying that this old woman could not have been someone important. Yet if Claudia’s character is viewed as representative of a withering, dying empire, the entire history of the world that she writes, presumptuous as it is, can be read as a reflection on empire, one that does not address the British Empire directly but instead indirectly reflects on empire as a way to continue its legacy.

We can discern Claudia’s imperial stance in several key relationships: her adult relationship with her lover Jasper, who is a “fusion of Russian aristocracy and English gentry” (9), and her childhood and adolescent relationship with Gordon. In a pivotal scene with Jasper, which is rendered, as many scenes in the text are, in several alternative ways, Claudia and Jasper are in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford when she announces that she is pregnant. As she does so, she and Jasper stand in front of “a dragon on a Chinese dish” (9). In the second telling of the scene, which is recounted in the third person, the narrator relates that “[t]here are two dragons, in fact, blue spotted dragons confronting one another, teeth bared, their serpentine bodies and limbs wonderfully disposed around the dish. . . . Claudia stares into the case, seeing her own face and Jasper’s superimposed upon the plates” (10–11). Within Chinese history and myth, the dragon is a symbol of the emperor. In noting the superimposition of their faces on the imperial dragon plates, the narrator acknowledges that both Claudia and Jasper have “inherited” empire either through their genetic code or through the historical circumstances of their lives and that all empires compete with one another, “baring” their teeth and posturing to assure their own supremacy. Although Claudia refuses to marry and make an alliance with Jasper, she allows him, with his imperial legacy, to be the father of her child when she decides to continue the pregnancy.

While Claudia’s relationship with Jasper strongly suggests the continuation of empire, her relationship with Gordon, a bond based on mutual narcissism, more forcefully foregrounds empire. Late in the novel we learn that Claudia and Gordon had an incestuous relationship as adolescents. Even before we learn of the incest (which the novel codes as a kind of self-love), the reader understands that Claudia is an extremely

egocentric character; in fact, reviewers have noted that “Claudia can be annoyingly brash, egocentric, and insensitive” (Moran, *Penelope Lively* 116). Such unpleasant characteristics epitomize the worst attributes of the “ugly” imperialist and are also reflected in Gordon’s character. The adult Claudia reveals that Claudia and Gordon see themselves reflected in one another: his “face always mirrored, eerily, mine” (Lively 20). “We confronted each other like mirrors, flinging back reflections in endless recession. . . . We were an aristocracy of two” (Lively 137). Claudia asserts that “[i]ncest is closely related to narcissism. When Gordon and I were at our most self-conscious—afire with the sexuality and egotism of late adolescence—we looked at one another and saw ourselves translated” (136–37). As such, they narcissistically make love with one another but in their self-love seemingly make love to themselves, much in the way that empire through its narcissism replicated itself across the globe.⁸ This type of imperial self-love is confirmed when Claudia is in Egypt and sees a representation of the Pharaoh and his sister who, like Gordon and Claudia, are “forever coupled” (74).

The narcissism by which empire reproduces itself is reflected in Claudia’s account of her time in Egypt as a war correspondent during World War II, hammering out her bylines on her “portable Imperial” typewriter (68). While the majority of the section focuses on Claudia’s affair with Tom Southern, the narrator also considers the ways in which England replicates itself in this imperial outpost. The narrator notes that “[t]here is a garden party . . . and a Choral Evensong at the Cathedral” in Cairo and that “Groppi’s serves afternoon tea and Shepherd’s an English Sunday lunch. The Club offers a race meeting or a polo match” (109). The narrator suggests that the empire, as it did elsewhere, attempted to create what George Lamming terms “Little Englands” (35).

Creating a Little England required discernible boundaries between peoples; the British needed to maintain proper distance, and Claudia notes that in her world “there was no social intercourse between the English and Egyptians” (Lively 116). She also never bothers to learn Arabic beyond “commands or insults” (110), suggesting that the breach between the British and the Egyptians was maintained partially

through the creation of social barriers and the use of derogatory language. Although we discern that Claudia is somewhat different from her “French” neighbor Madame Charlot who is in reality Lebanese, who “festered [her] days away in an . . . under-aired room full of empire chairs and sofas” (94) and who “disdain[ed] . . . Arabs” (116), we sense that Claudia feels superior to the Egyptians and maintains a hegemonic relationship with them.

Yet despite this distance, Tom insists that he wants to see the real Egypt or what is left of it before it vanishes, and he and Claudia visit the pyramids, the Colossus, and other historic sites. During one of their excursions, a tour guide points out the layering of “history” present in the sites; at the top of a picture of Rameses the Second “making a sacrifice to the gods,” graffiti has been added by Victorians (89), indicating British imperial desecration of Egyptian antiquities. Although Tom wants to get close to Egypt before it “vanishes,” Claudia realizes that she and other British people in Egypt “never did . . . notice this place. See it for itself. For [them] it was nothing but a backdrop” to their own history (72). Ironically, in their excursions to see Egyptian antiquities, Tom and Claudia continue to view Egyptian history as a “backdrop” to British history. Over the course of the narrator’s history of the world, Claudia begins to contemplate ancient Egypt and its place in world history; this rumination can be seen as a mode of thinking about the decline of the British Empire. Claudia does not care about Egyptian history per se but only uses it metaphorically to contemplate the fall of the British Empire.

The most telling example of this contemplation occurs when the elderly Claudia returns to Egypt in the 1980s. She muses about the great city of Memphis:

There was once a city in Egypt called Memphis. . . . In pharaonic times Memphis was a sprawling acreage of houses, temples, workshops[,] . . . Washington, Paris and Rome all rolled together on the banks of the Nile[,] . . . the hub of an intelligent complex society completely out of step with the rest of the world, constructing ashlar buildings when Europe was living in caves. (113–14)

Despite its grandeur and its superior advancement in relation to other societies, Memphis fell. The narrator asks, “[a]nd what is Memphis now? A series of barely discernible irregularities in the cultivation and an immense prone statue of Rameses the Second. How indeed are the mighty fallen” (114). Such contemplation of the decline and fall of mighty, impervious Egypt, a civilization that stood above all others, recalls a similar relationship between the British Empire and its imperial peers. At the close of the twentieth century, after the chaos of two World Wars, the British Empire had largely been disbanded and replaced by the Commonwealth. Claudia contemplates Egypt and its fall as a way to muse about the fate of the British Empire. In meditating on ancient Egypt, Claudia implies that all empires pass, despite their grandeur and suggests that this course of events is the natural progression for Great Britain as well. Yet in this musing, there is a sense of mourning this great and monumental past that continues to live on in the strata of the landscape. As if refusing to give up on the grandeur of empire, Claudia insists that in her “history of the world,” “Egypt will have its proper place, as the complacent indestructible force that has perpetuated itself in the form of enough carved stone . . . and fragments . . . to fill the museums of the world” (80). Likewise, the reader discerns that in Claudia’s imperial fantasy, the British Empire will, despite its fall from grace, live on in its monuments and landscapes.

While Lively’s novel meditates on and mourns the loss of British Empire in an indirect way, Jhabvala’s *Heat and Dust* focuses directly on the fall of the British Empire. *Heat and Dust* considers women’s roles in this fall, while decrying the reversal in power that transpires as a result of it. In contrast to Claudia, who fantasizes about the stability of imperial relationships and the grandeur of empire itself, Jhabvala’s imperial feminist characters unknowingly contribute to the Empire’s demise as they inscribe and re-inscribe imperial relationships. In particular, they codify imperial relationships as they view Indian women as the white woman’s “burden” (Burton 8).

Losing the Empire

“It’s a well-known saying that the women lost us the Empire. It’s true,” stated Sir David Lean in 1985, repeating a sentiment found in scholarly works. . . . If [women] are mentioned [in histories of empire] at all, their arrival is seen to have contributed to the deterioration of the relationship between the European administrator and those he governed. (Strobel 1)

David Lean’s comment, based on scholarly opinions, appears to blame British women for the loss of empire. Margaret Strobel elaborates on this misguided and simplistic analysis as she notes the argument for women’s culpability in imperial decline and loss. First, it was commonly thought by nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians that the presence of British women would provoke the “alleged sexual appetites of indigenous men” (1), thus unsettling the necessary sexual divisions between the British female and the indigenous man. Second, when British wives made their passages to imperial outposts, their husbands were unable to retain indigenous mistresses from whom they “learned much about colonial society and culture” (Strobel 1). Although the practice of concubinage was disapproved of by the 1860s, Strobel’s analysis points out how patriarchal British culture was exempt from society’s blame in the loss of empire; at least for a time, it was acceptable for British males to intermingle sexually and socially with indigenous females because the relationship could be used to learn about indigenous culture, thus paving the way for further inroads into maintaining empire. However, if a British woman crossed the sexual and social barriers between herself and an indigenous male, she was condemned by British society. Strobel relates that the “occasional intermarriage between an indigenous man and a European woman proved extremely distressing” and cites as evidence the 1893 marriage between the Maharaja of Patiala and Miss Florry Bryan, a marital alliance which “unsettled Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India” (4). Laurie Sucher corroborates this when she quotes James Ivory, Jhabvala’s colleague in her film work for Merchant-Ivory Productions. Ivory, in his *Autobiography of a Princess*, writes about British women who crossed this line and lived with Indian men, in particular Maharajas:

Any European woman who lived with a Maharaja was asking for trouble sooner or later. She got it from his wives and old female relatives, who schemed for her removal. She got it from the official British, who snubbed and despised her, and tended to regard her as an unsettling influence, a threat to stability in the state. (qtd. in Sucher 99)

As Sucher asserts, Olivia Rivers, one of the protagonists in Jhabvala's novel, "ask[s] for trouble" when she enters a forbidden emotional and sexual relationship with the Nawab of Khatm. I argue that Olivia confuses the prescribed imperial relationship and, to a certain extent, contributes to the loss of empire through her naïve attempt to cross prohibited barriers and understand "exotic" culture, much in the way that Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* seeks to be a modern woman and collapse social barriers. While many critics, including Sucher, locate parallels between Forster's and Jhabvala's novels, I am less concerned with comparing them. Instead, I will describe how both the 1923 pre-Indian independence Olivia and the 1970s post-independence narrator either contribute to or meditate on the loss of empire and how both view themselves as either apologists for Indian women's condition or as social critics of customs prescribed for Indian women. Imperial feminism informs both of the main characters' views.

Olivia's liaison with the Nawab is partially the result of what Ralph Crane terms the "stifling role of the Anglo-Indian memsahib," a role that Olivia, as a modern woman, refuses to play (qtd. in Sucher 82). As a progressive, free-thinking individual, she finds the distinctions between the British and Indian royalty to be arbitrary, continually noting the Nawab's modernity and his English title (Jhabvala 106). Despite Olivia's "modernity," however, she clings to the trappings of empire and is drawn to the Nawab because of his royal presence. She wants to associate herself with wealth and luxury, something that she is beginning to find lacking in the Anglo-Indian world. The narrator notes that, from Olivia's point of view, "Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Minnies [wore] dowdy frocks more suitable to the English watering place to which they would one day retire than to this royal dining table" (15–16). Olivia

endeavors mightily to keep out the “heat and dust” of the ordinary, non-royal Indian world from her home and her world (14). She sees the Nawab’s modernity and royalty as coequal with the British Empire, which she seems to understand is on the wane. Although she does not appear cognizant of the politics of the time, she worries, as does her husband, Douglas, about what will happen if Mohandas Gandhi helps India achieve independence and forces the British out. Douglas assures her that “they’ll need us a while longer” (89). In addition, Olivia seems drawn to the Nawab because she senses that his masculinity is superior to her husband’s; she thinks that the Nawab can impregnate her, unlike her husband. All of this muddles the British imperial relationship with Indian royalty and contributes to a decline in British influence.

Despite the fact that Olivia’s husband, Douglas, does not want her to socialize with the Nawab, she does so because of her attraction to his exotic masculinity. However, Olivia is a poor judge of the Nawab’s motivations for having a relationship with her; she also misunderstands his antagonistic relationship with Britain. Because of her lack of insight into the Nawab’s motivations, she contributes to the loss of empire by muddying the finely-drawn social relationships between Indians and the British. While Olivia relishes the Nawab’s royalty, she fails to discern that he likens himself to his ancestor, Amanullah Khan, who took advantage of the competition between the “Moghuls, Afghans, Maharattas and the East India Company” (45). Khan was a “freebooter riding around the country with his own brand of desperadoes to find what pickings they could in the free-for-all between” the various contesting groups (45). According to the Nawab, his ancestor “never forgot friend or foe” (45); “[w]here there was a score to be settled for good or bad, he did not forget” (45). Like his ancestor, the Nawab does not forget wrongdoing against himself or other Indians; although he exhibits friendliness toward the British, he ultimately attempts to enact a power reversal between himself and his British foes.

When the Nawab takes Olivia to the grove to visit the shrine dedicated to his ancestor Amamullah Khan, he expresses his genuine feelings about the British and their power over him. He questions Major Minnie’s authority and indicates that Minnie does not understand the

Nawab's position or his importance to the region and its history. He asks Olivia:

Who is Major Minnies that he should say to me don't do this, and don't do that, who has given him the right to say this to me? To *me!* . . . To the Nawab Sahib of Khatm. Do you know how we got our title? It was in 1817. My ancestor, Amanullah Khan, had been fighting for many, many years. Sometimes he fought the Mahrattas, sometimes the Rajputs or the Moghuls or the British. Those were very disturbed times. . . . I envy him.

His name was feared by everyone—including the British! When they saw they could not subdue him by any means, then they wanted him for their ally. . . . They offered him the lands and revenues of Khatm and also the title of Nawab. . . . But I think you can get tired also sitting in a palace. Then you feel it would be better not to have anything but to fight your enemies and kill them. (135–36)

This speech indicates the Nawab's dissatisfaction with sitting in his palace and with his relationship with the British and their authority over him. Rather than speaking purely about his ancestor, he appears to be speaking about himself. He is not a British ally and will use his access to Olivia and Harry, his British "friends," to fight his enemies and attempt to reverse the colonial power structure.

Harry has been living as a source of amusement for the Nawab in his palace for three years and is, in a sense, the Nawab's captive. He tries to return home to England to his ill mother, but the Nawab intervenes and prevents him from doing so. Harry warns Olivia that the Nawab "is a very strong person. Very manly and strong. When he wants something, nothing must stand in his way. Never; ever. . . . One moment you think: Yes he cares—but the next moment you might as well be some object" (34–35). Shortly after this, the Nawab arrives at Olivia's house and insists that she picnic with him at the shrine dedicated to his ancestor's benefactor. The narrator states that "he could not—would not—be refused" (41). The Nawab begins to lay the grounds for capturing Olivia, as he did with Harry before her.

Both Olivia and the narrator, who tells her own story of her journey to India, to a greater or lesser extent “go native.” In crossing over into the Nawab’s realm and becoming his lover, Olivia becomes partially Indian and gives up her British identity. The narrator in the after-empire era goes much farther in her adoption of Indian customs. When she first arrives in India, she meets a European missionary who has lived in India for decades. Described as a “ghost” (4), the European missionary seems to represent an imperial ghost, one that decries intermingling with Indians. In particular, the missionary is appalled by the young Europeans who live among the Indians and exhibit what she perceives to be Indians’ worst attributes as they live “[e]ight, nine of them to a room. . . . [T]hey just sleep on the street. They beg from each other and steal from each other” (5). While the narrator does not become “derelict” as some of these Europeans do, she becomes Indian in a positive sense and “lives among them, no longer apart[,] . . . eating their food and often wearing Indian clothes” (9). She seems to love India and perhaps loves it too much because India changes British identity. As Major Minnies writes in his monograph, which the narrator reads:

[O]ne has to be very determined to withstand—to stand up—to India. And the most vulnerable are those who love her best. . . . [India is] dangerous for the European who allows himself to love too much. . . . One should never, he warned, allow oneself to become softened (like Indians) by an excess of feeling; because the moment that happens—the moment one exceeds one’s measure—one is in danger of being dragged over to the other side. (170–71)

Minnies’s “warning” can be applied to both Olivia and the narrator, who appear to abandon their stolid British identities and their sense of measure when they allow themselves to “feel” and become, according to this way of thinking, Indian. Yet even if they exhibit emotion and become Indian, both retain their imperial feminist outlooks as they encounter and attempt to either defend the Hindu custom of suttee (or widow burning) or to save their less fortunate Indian sisters.

Olivia becomes an apologist for suttee when she learns of the custom, even though the Nawab as a Muslim has called the Hindu custom “barbaric” (56). When discussing suttee while at a dinner party with Anglo-Indians, Olivia attempts to align herself with the women she considers her Indian sisters, whom she believes nobly allow themselves to be burned alive on their husbands’ funeral pyres. She defends the practice first on the basis of non-interference with Indian customs and then oddly defends the practice because she sees it as “a *noble* idea. . . . I mean, to want to go with the person you care for most in the world. Not to want to be alive any more if he wasn’t” (59). While this defense does not fit with the usual way that British feminists approached the issue of suttee, which was to make the prohibition of suttee along with child marriage and the treatment of widows one of their main causes (Burton, *Burdens of History* 10), it indicates that Olivia attempts to view suttee from a “liberal” or non-judgmental position. Her defense of the practice attempts to defend women who cannot speak for themselves, which does fit with a typical imperial feminist approach that “represented [Indian women] almost invariably as . . . helpless” (Burton, *Burdens of History* 8).

The narrator also exhibits imperial feminist tendencies when she encounters Indian women, in particular daughters-in-law, whom she describes as “heavily veiled and silent with the downcast eyes of prisoners under guard” (Jhabvala 54). Likewise, Inder Lal, the narrator’s friend and eventual lover, has a wife, Ritu, who seems her mother-in-law’s prisoner. The narrator attempts to intervene when Ritu “wails” in the night and the mother-in-law tries to “heal” her by pouring rice over her head and “muttering incantations” (53). Unlike Olivia, who defends “native” customs, the narrator suggests that Ritu needs psychiatric care and that Inder Lal should find a way to provide it. In addition, the narrator seeks to intervene on behalf of a dying widow who has been forced to become a beggar. Considered unclean or “polluted,” the widow is ignored by all who walk past her. At first, the narrator fears touching her because the old woman is covered with excrement and the narrator “realize[s] that [she, the narrator] was changing, becoming more like everyone else” (113). Despite this fear, she becomes involved, stating, “What I under-

stood best was that the problem of the beggar woman, if I wished to undertake it, was now mine. . . . I would have to lift her by myself, for I could not expect anyone else to take the risk of touching her" (112). The narrator does not, in the end, touch the woman; however, she seeks help on behalf of the old woman and enlists the aide of Maji, a local midwife, who defies the prohibition against touching the "contaminated" widow and comforts her as she dies (114). Such intervention by both women is, of course, the ethical thing to do, yet one cannot ignore the ways in which Indian womanhood is often cast as "backward" and degraded in the text and how it is the British woman who must either defend customs or attempt to rectify injustice against Indian women.

Interestingly, the novel is set in Satipur, which is translated as the place of suttee (Sucher 100). This location says something about both Olivia's condition and the narrator's at the end of their respective narratives. While Sucher views Olivia's condition following the abortion of her child at the hands of Indian women as a condition of exile, where she chooses to abandon her homeland, I view her crossing over into the Nawab's world as a type of suttee. She severs all connections with family and friends and the Nawab humiliates her. He uses her as a pawn in his attempt to reverse power relations with the British, and she does not understand this. Her ascent into the Himalayas at the end of the novel is not a spiritual quest but a retreat from the world. In aligning herself with the Nawab, who seemingly controls her life, she becomes dead to the world. Likewise, the narrator, in attempting to reenact and understand Olivia's life, gives up her Englishness and tries to supersede Olivia's experience as she ascends into the Himalayas. There, however, the narrator finds only the remnants of Olivia's world, the decayed home in which Olivia was sequestered. Neither fantasy results in a return to empire, but both, in various ways, contribute to the decline and loss of the British Empire.

Lively's and Jhabvala's novels inscribe a type of imperial feminism as they mourn the loss of the British Empire. While Lively's novel meditates on ancient civilizations and fallen empires as an oblique and indirect method of musing about the demise of the British Empire, Jhabvala's text directly addresses the fall of the British Empire and the reversal

in power relationships that accompanied its fall. In both cases, imperial feminism is at work; characters meditate on and mourn the loss of the British Empire even as they attempt to increase women's agency in the world. The juxtaposition of the novels and the appearance of imperial feminism in each underscore the complicated relationships between empire-making and the rise of Western feminism. Rather than being at odds with one another, Western Victorian and Edwardian feminism and the British Empire were, at times, unlikely partners in attempting to maintain British dominance in the world. Moreover, although British women were often blamed for contributing to the loss of empire, *Moon Tiger* and *Heat and Dust* create imperial fantasies in which the British Empire is not forgotten or neglected. The novels sing an elegy to empire; in doing so, they rehearse empire's end as they re-inscribe colonialist relationships that perpetuate an imperial worldview.

Notes

- 1 Moran reads *Moon Tiger* as a "feminist history of the world," and Sucher interprets *Heat and Dust* from a feminist perspective.
- 2 Amos's and Parmar's notion of "imperial feminism" links contemporary Western feminism with its imperial roots, noting that "contemporary feminist demands have remained the same as those of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminists who in the main were pro-imperialist" (13).
- 3 Jolly suggests that feminism entails collective action and finds it problematic that Raschke and Moran "have seen this as a particularly feminist novel" (71). While it is true that many define feminism only in terms of women joining together to attain rights, individual feminists from the Enlightenment on have expressed the need for full educational, social, and political rights and have done so without creating or joining a collective movement.
- 4 In some ways, we can compare Claudia's account of her travels to those of Victorian women travelers, such as Isabella Bird or Mary Kingsley. Strobel argues that many of these female travelers, despite their efforts to enter the public realm and experience the world, were "ambivalent at best about feminism" (39). This may not be true of Bird, yet Strobel's claim that "most female travelers accepted the imperial framework; all expressed the cultural arrogance that imperialism spawned" (39) does seem applicable here. Like these earlier women travelers, Claudia too conveys "cultural arrogance" (39).
- 5 This insertion into history is markedly contrasted with Claudia's account of her mother as "retir[ing] from history" when her husband was killed in the Battle of the Somme during the Great War (Lively 6).

- 6 It is difficult to decide whether Lively is critical of her character and I do not want to venture into considering intentionality. However, I would note that, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Lively commented on her character stating: “I never felt very close to her, although I admire her. I like women like that, upfront and aggressive” (Crown n.p.)
- 7 In an effort that is somewhat similar to Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, Claudia defines the world’s history in a subjective and disjointed way. Although not as satiric as Barnes’s short story collection, Claudia’s version of the world, even when creating alternate histories, is predicated on the notion that history is told mainly by the victors.
- 8 Jamaica Kincaid’s short story “Ovando,” an allegory about empire, casts Frey Nicholas de Ovando, the first person to bring slavery to the Caribbean, as a narcissist who continually looks at himself in the mirror. Eventually, the mirror shatters and Ovando is scattered across the globe. He is broken apart.

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