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Discursive Migrations: Romantic Aesthetics and Imperial History in the Black Hole of Calcutta

THE SURVIVOR NARRATIVES THAT EMERGED out of the Black Hole of Calcutta incident preemptively mobilized and strategically deployed several feeling-based aesthetic tropes of European Romanticism, such as sympathy and sincerity, in order to persuade their readership about British entitlement following the event that threatened British power in India. These survivor narratives generated and intersected with other accounts that eventually consolidated personal memoir as history, discursive and material. The narratives tell the unconfirmed story of the night of June 20, 1756, in Calcutta when, during the course of an attack on Fort William by Siraj-ud-daula, the Nawab of Bengal, 146 British people were imprisoned in a small airless room. The next morning only 23 people walked out of this room. Following this horrifying night, the British lost Fort William to Siraj-ud-daula and did not regain it till they won the Battle of Palashi (Plassey in British writing) on June 23, 1757. The survivors told their tales of suffering, but, as the historian Samuel Charles Hill points out, "no formal official account was sent" and there was never any official recompense for the twin traumas of the siege of Calcutta and the Black Hole (1:xcviii, ci). The British victory in the Battle of Palashi, however, is now unambiguously regarded as the retributive action for British humiliation in the Black Hole of Calcutta event; it was also the putative origin of British territorial imperialism in India. According to Caroline Elkins, the British victory in the Battle of Palashi "firmly placed Britain's imperial stake into the ground" (38). The inscription on the Black Hole monument in Calcutta corroborates the causality linking the incident of the Black Hole with the Battle of Palashi. It states: "This Horrid Act of Violence was as Amply as deservedly revenged on Surajud Dowla, by his Majesty's Arms, under the Conduct of Vice Admiral Watson and Coll. Clive Anno, 1757" (Busteed 41). The inscription emphasizes the horror of the event, calls on the British

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viewer's sympathy, and places the event in a causal relation to imperial conquest that seems completely justified in view of the "Horrid Act of Violence."

Tales of Trauma

Immediately following the incident of the Black Hole, many survivor narratives emerged that provided accounts of the suffering of the imprisoned British in strongly emotional language. The survivors gave graphic accounts of their misery with the twin goal of persuading their readers about the brutality of the Indians as well as of British entitlement following the Black Hole event that threatened British power in India. Chief among these survivor narratives was John Zephaniah Holwell's *A Genuine Narrative* (1757), which the author described as "a simple detail of a most melancholy event, delivered in the genuine language of sincere concern" (iii). This very intentional description, with its emphasis on melancholy, genuineness, and sincerity, aligns the *Genuine Narrative* with the core values of Romanticism, which privileges a feeling-based aesthetic in documents such as the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).[1] Other survivor narratives also preempt the tropes of Romanticism, such as overpowering feeling and the sincerity of the writer. These tropes, such as the preeminence of sincerity, spontaneity, and overpowering feelings, define the profound shift in attitudes toward art and poetic creation brought about by Romanticism; the narratives proactively deploy them.

As I examine these proliferating accounts, I ask: What was the role of the many accounts of the events on the night of June 20, 1756? For whom were they written and to what purpose? My tentative response to these questions is that the accounts were circulated among the British, and they used the postures of Romanticism such as sincerity and affect in order to garner sympathy for the conqueror while relegating the conquered to a status of savage barbarity. This impassioned appeal of the survivor narratives potentially binds together the readers of these narratives into a national community united both by attitudes about themselves and the unruly Natives whom they feel an ethical prerogative to subdue, emotionally and materially. Imperial success eventually emerges through the work of Robert Orme, a civil servant and official historian of the East India Company, who based his military decisions and official histories on these accounts transforming the affective tone and content into a larger argument about Britain's imperial right. The sympathetic textual engagement demanded by the survivor narratives migrates into Orme's official history and also enables his decision to attack Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, as retribution for the Black Hole of Calcutta incident. Orme's success in causing these tales of terror to enter into the official record of British imperial history is evident a century later as accounts of the incident, granting it a retrospective validity, surfaced as the next crisis of the colonial British administration in India erupted in 1857. In his *History of the Indian Mutiny* (1858), chronicler and historian

[1] Walter Jackson Bate's *From Classic to Romantic* (1946) and M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) are the locus classicus for an understanding of the major forms and tropes of Romanticism. Both works trace the evolution of Romantic aesthetics and its focus on interiority, sincerity, authenticity, and emotion. Several works by Harold Bloom, such as *The Visionary Company* (1961), *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), *Romanticism and Consciousness* (1970), and *The Ringers in the Tower* (1971), are also invaluable for an understanding of the defining aesthetic values of Romanticism.

Charles Ball quotes Thomas Babington Macaulay who describes the event of the Black Hole of Calcutta thus:

> Then was committed that great crime, memorable for the tremendous retribution for which it was followed. The English captives were left to the mercy of the guards, and the guards determined to secure them for the night in the prison of the garrison, a chamber known by the fearful name of the "Black Hole." Even for a single European malefactor, that dungeon would, in such a climate, have been too close and narrow. The space was only twenty feet square. The air-holes were small and obstructed. It was the summer solstice, the season when the fierce heat of Bengal can scarcely be rendered tolerable to natives of England by lofty halls and the constant waving of fans. The number of the prisoners was 146. . . . The captives were driven into the cell at the point of the sword, and the door was instantly shut and locked upon them. Nothing in history, or fiction . . . approaches the horrors which were recounted by the few survivors of that night. . . . Holwell, who even in that extremity retained some presence of mind, offered large bribes to the goalers. But the answer was, that nothing could be done. . . . The prisoners went mad with despair. . . . The goalers in the meantime held lights to the bars, and shouted with laughter at the frantic struggles of their victims. At length the tumult died away in low gaspings and moanings. The day broke. . . . But it was sometime before the soldiers could make a lane for the survivors piling up on each side of the heaps of corpses on which the burning climate had already begun to do its loathsome work. When at length a passage was made, twenty-three ghastly figures, such as their own mothers would not have known staggered one by one out of the charnel-house. (26–27)

The first line of this passage names the event as a crime against the English and calls for retribution; it, however, clinches its argument for retribution by centralizing the personal trauma of the imprisoned men. Despite being an official record, this passage eschews formal language deploying instead the language of anger, pathos, and outrage on behalf of the individuals who suffered. This language migrates into the official record from the survivor narratives; it plays on the feelings of British readers who have been nurtured on the throughline of affect-based literature from the literature of sensibility of the mid-seventeenth century, through Romanticism, and to the early Victorian period. The emphasis on emotion in Macaulay's passage reflects the dominant aesthetic tendencies of his time and ensures the sympathetic engagement of his British readers, who read in concert with the original readers who encountered the testimonial accounts circulated in the aftermath of the event. Both sets of readers are bound by the same emotions of outrage that echo through the century that spans between the survivor narratives and Charles Ball's history.

Diverse readers respond in the same way to retellings of this story because the story seems changeless in its essentials. For example, Holwell's statement that the British "were all without distinction, directed by the guard over us, to collect ourselves into one body, and sit down quietly under the arched Veranda or piazza, to the west of the Black-Hole prison, and the barracks to the left of the court of guard" (Holwell 256) echoes Lindsay's narrative (*HM* 35), which mentions the phrase "without distinction," and Cooke's narrative (*HM* 429), which mentions a piazza.[2] These verbal repetitions reinforce the shared physical experience of encountering

[2] In addition to historical narratives by Orme, Macaulay, and Ball, there were several other accounts of the event. Brijen K. Gupta's *Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company, 1756–1757* lists fourteen separate accounts of the Black Hole incident (72–73). Additionally, the National Archives of India in New Delhi houses the collection of narratives about the loss of Calcutta that is bound together as volume 66 of the *Home Miscellaneous* series, containing "Copies of the Documents obtained from the India Office, referring to the Troubles of 1756," which is cited in the running text here and throughout as *HM*. A great many, but not all, of the narratives collected in this volume are from *Causes of the Loss of Calcutta 1756*, National Archives of India, O.V. 19. Further, Samuel Charles Hill's three-volume edition of *Bengal in 1756–1757:*

the Black Hole and create the sense of a single text repeating itself with minor variations in each telling by the various tellers. Many of the survivor narratives mostly agree on the broad outlines of the events, leading their readers to similar conclusions about the necessity of retaliation by the British on account of Native depravity. This conclusion is enabled by the circuit of sympathy set up between the teller and the reader. One of the more substantial communications comes from William Lindsay to Robert Orme (*HM* 19–47). In a letter written in July 1756, Lindsay says, "It is hardly possible for me to sit down and express with what concern I . . . write you this letter the subject of which being nothing less than to give you a short account of such a scene of destruction and desolation as makes me tremble when I think of the consequences it will be attended with not only to every private Gentleman in India but to the English Nation in General" (*HM* 19). This hyped-up patriotism conceals the fact that Lindsay was not actually present in the Black Hole during the traumatic event. He was selected to update Messrs. Massingham and Frankland about "the situation of affairs in the Factory" and for that purpose he was "let out at the back gate" (*HM* 29). His posture of excessive emotion, however, conceals that fact and aligns his narrative with the dovetailing discourses of Romanticism and patriotism that permit him to claim silence on account of overwhelming emotion and outrage. Lindsay's statement also takes sentiment and language from the arena of the private gentlemen to the space of the nation at large, taking its reader from Romantic aesthetics to history. Lindsay's eventual concern is not only for the well-being of the private gentlemen but for the security of the "English Nation in General." Significantly, Lindsay does not specify the territorial designation of the English Nation. The phrase could refer to Britain, but it could also refer to the English in India who synecdochically represent the British nation and who must avenge a national affront.

The move to vengeance is driven by the transformation in the status of the colonizer from the victim of the incident to the avenger of the injustice heaped upon him in several of the survivor narratives. This shift in the status of the colonizer is also traceable in the subsequent textual migrations of this tale. We see, for example, that Holwell's description of "a simple detail of a most melancholy event, delivered in the genuine language of sincere concern" emerges as a call for "tremendous retribution" in Charles Ball's telling. This change is very substantially enabled by the use of affective tropes that invite the sympathetic participation of readers like Robert Orme and Robert Clive, first British governor of Bengal Presidency, and enable these readers to retell the tale framing it as a narrative of retaliation and conquest. Thus, the discursive positioning of the Battle of Palashi as the consequence of the emotionally distressing behavior of the Indians during the Black Hole event on the Black Hole monument, quoted at the start of this article (Busteed 41), migrates through various textual iterations and reveals the political success of the affective rhetoric of Romanticism.

A Selection of Public and Private Papers Dealing with the Affairs of the British in Bengal during the Reign of Siraj-Uddaula (1905) brings together selected reprints from the larger colonial archive that focus attention on this approximately thirteen-month period. There is also Noel Barber's dramatic reconstruction of the loss of Calcutta in his *Black Hole of Calcutta: A Reconstruction* (1965) approximately two centuries after the event. Finally, Michael Edwardes's *Plassey: The Founding of an Empire* (1969) documents the centrality of this event and the war it led to.

Sympathetic Readers

John Zephaniah Holwell, the mayor and zemindar of the British settlement in Calcutta, wrote one of the more detailed of the survivor narratives.[3] In his narrative, he aligns himself with the literary culture of sentimental writing in place in Britain in the 1750s, which he then manipulates possibly to veil himself from official scrutiny by the colonial administration. Holwell starts his narrative by addressing his British reader in terms that reflect what were to become the central literary values of Romanticism. He calls his narrative "a simple detail of a most melancholy event, delivered in the genuine language of sincere concern" (iii). The simplicity, melancholia, genuineness, and sincerity of Holwell's tale align it with Romantic aesthetics already visible on England's cultural horizon as stated earlier.[4] Anticipating Romanticism, Holwell also mentions the value of reflection that has led him to write the narrative (iii–iv) and calls upon his reader to excuse his excessive emotion that has produced a diffuse and incomplete narrative. This kind of apology for a fragmentary narrative written in the grip of strong emotion became very familiar to British readers in very short order, as is clear from examples such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786). Partha Chatterjee, however, argues that Holwell used the trope of the loss of language to "protect himself from charges of inaccuracy and inconsistency" (25). Holwell's use of this trope certainly deflects official attention from the fact that he may not have chosen to stay at the fort on the night of the Black Hole incident but was compelled to do so because, as Lindsay says, "two Gentlemen . . . carried away the Budgerow he had waiting for him" (*HM* 33). This detail tarnishes Holwell's sense of his own heroism and raises the possibility that the lacuna in his text, which he attributes to excessive sensibility, may well be the symptom of political expediency. At any event, Holwell's textual reticence, sanctioned by excessive emotion, eludes exactitude and enables the textual migration of the narrative to Orme's history, where his heroism is unambiguously articulated.

The migration of memoir to history, however, undercuts Holwell's claim that the incident was a private calamity. Indeed, the other narrators wrote of the Black Hole incident as an event with national importance, and some of them even portrayed Holwell as a national hero. According to British novelist and journalist Noel Barber, who contrasts the *Genuine Narrative* to other accounts of this event written by Holwell, in the "Black Hole letter . . . Holwell is plainly deeply and inextricably re-experiencing the dreadful Calvary of that terrible night" (207). Barber's configuration of Holwell in a Christlike Passion is striking in view of Holwell's point about biblical simplicity in writing as the truth of this event is an "affecting" one that "stands little in need of ornament, and appears to more advantage, the less it is assisted by the arts of writing" (Holwell 253). Readers of canonical Romanticism

[3] Throughout this essay I prefer the archaic spelling in the originals—thus *zemindar*, as used by the original authors, instead of the now more common *zamindar*.

[4] Kate Teltscher also aligns Holwell's narrative with the tradition of sentimental literature, which she finds grafted onto "survival literature," to use Mary Louise Pratt's phrase, such that the hero of his narrative "combines manly fortitude in the face of extreme horror with a feminized helplessness and sensibility" (Teltscher 32).

will inevitably be reminded of William Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in which Wordsworth famously espouses the cause of unembellished language as the fit vehicle of poetic truth. In addition to this echo, Holwell also depends on the didactic nature of affect, mentioning the need to write in order to "disburthen his thoughts of that load of affliction, which would have been as intolerable as the misfortune itself," as also the desire to communicate "lessons to mankind" so that "a door of hope, and of confidence may be opened, to such as may hereafter fall under like tryals by giving them an instance . . . that we ought never to despair, when innocence and duty have been the causes of our distress" (v). These reasons for writing enable us to add catharsis and moral instruction to the other literary values with which Holwell frames his narrative. Despite all this, Holwell does not frame this narrative as a narrative of national glory, even when the Black Hole incident and the ensuing Battle of Palashi came to be read in that way by historians such as Robert Orme, Noel Barber, and Michael Edwardes. Why not? Why does Holwell narrate the events as a personal memoir, and how does this memoir become history?

The simple reason why Holwell narrates the events as a personal memoir is because it buys him credibility. His narrative is constructed as a letter to Mr. William Davis, and it thereby preserves the tone of an intimate exchange with a friend who would not demand credentials from the writer. This strategy reflects the structure and assumptions of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, in which Robert Lovelace writes to his friend John Belford about his dastardly acts with perfect transparency expecting his friend's understanding based on the bedrock of friendship and the persuasive power of what he calls his "ungovernable" passions (L279). Terry Eagleton argues that the emphasis on feeling in Richardson's novel modifies "the barbarous values of militarism, naked dominance and male *hauteur*" (15). Eagleton's claims about *Clarissa* are applicable to Holwell's memoir with one major difference: Lovelace presupposes the universality of passion asking Belford "is not passion an universally allowed extenuator of violence?" (L279), but Holwell is unable to make a similar allowance for the Indians because he is limited by race-based nationalistic binaries that code passion differently across the imperial divide. It is also possible that, in his view, the Indians and their passions are ineducable. This possibility brings up a defining contradiction in the civilizing mission of empire and also points to another literary intertext in the consideration of Holwell's memoir, which is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). Rousseau's sentimental novel not only emphasizes the importance of the passions but insists on the education of the passions. Julie and Saint-Preux have to "triumph over passions" in order to find virtue (pt. 4, letter 12). Thus in order for passion to be properly persuasive, it must be directed, ordered, and organized. Siraj-ud-daula and his compatriots lack this power over passion, and so the only option is for the British to subdue men who cannot subdue their murderous passions.

Holwell, therefore, arms himself with just emotion and, assuming sympathetic British readers by virtue of genre and tone, lays bare his heart. With this posture he anticipates Romanticism's dynamic of personal communication, which brings together the persuasive modes of ethos and pathos from classical rhetoric. Employing both rhetorical strategies, Holwell begins the narrative by taking his British reader straight to the crisis of the loss of Calcutta and the imprisonment of "one

hundred and forty-six prisoners, [of whom] one hundred and twenty-three were smothered in the Black-Hole prison, in the night of the 20th of June, 1756" (1–2). This artless beginning with the troubling heart of the matter attracts the emotions of the British reader and ensures a continuing connection. Holwell goes on to claim that, since few survived this incident and those that did were incapable of providing details of the night, there is a silence that shrouds the night. He himself, he says, has often struggled to find language appropriate to this trauma, and so he calls upon the imagination of his British reader to supply the lack in his text. By thus engaging the interiority of his British reader, of whose compassion and political sympathies he is assured, Holwell forgoes an objective description of the event in favor of its psychological impact on the reader. This rhetorical move mirrors the aesthetic moment in the first half of the eighteenth century, described by Peter de Bolla, who argues, "In the early decades of the century sublime sensation might be explained in terms of the qualities inhering in the object. . . . [But] towards the end of the century such explanations would be phrased in terms of the interior workings of the human mind, through recourse to vocabulary of the passions, sentiment or imagination" (33). While Peter de Bolla's comment reminds us that Holwell's literary postures about the inadequacy of language and the reliance on the imaginative participation of the reader are entirely commonplace within Romantic aesthetics and early proto-Romantic texts, we also note that Holwell's linguistic reticence has political reasons as noted above and his suggestive manner of writing has political purpose. In any event, Holwell's claim about silence is surprising given the long list of commentaries and accounts on the Black Hole incident. It, however, does the important work of inviting his readers' imaginative supplementation, and it posits a potential communal and collaborative authorship for the narrative of the Black Hole. The positing of this authorship is precisely the method and the moment by which personal memoir migrates into official history. At Holwell's invitation, his British readers who are culturally bound to read with sympathy—for aesthetic and national reasons—now feel an ethical prerogative to subdue the unruly Natives as they collectively honor the sincere and melancholy experience of a noble Englishman.

Holwell continues his address to his British readers, whom he takes to the place of distress as he frames his tale with information regarding Siraj-ud-daula and their exchanges before the crisis of the night. He tells his reader that the Nawab had given him his word as a soldier that no harm would come to the English company, but, clearly, all that changed and as soon as it got dark, when the English "were all without distinction, directed by the guard over us, to collect ourselves into one body, and sit down quietly under the arched Veranda or piazza, to the west of the Black-Hole prison, and the barracks to the left of the court of guard" (Holwell 4–5). Holwell's narrative at this point echoes Lindsay's narrative (*HM* 35), as discussed earlier, which has the phrase "without distinction" and Cooke's narrative (*HM* 429), which mentions a piazza. These echoes are probably not incidental, and they certainly attest to Brijen Kishore Gupta's claim that all the Black Hole narratives "can be traced to Holwell, Grey and Mills" and Caroline Elkins's doubts about the incident and its accounts (Gupta 73; Elkins 38). Even beyond this particular list of names and the precise echoes that Gupta tracks down, the Black Hole narratives are traceable to a much larger group of consenting British readers and writers if we

allow Holwell success in inviting these readers to supplement his account and we follow the afterlives of his narrative in official histories as well as after the fact reconstructions. The larger authorship of the narratives would seem to belong to those who assent to the premises of the narratives and participate in the consequences of these textual constructions such as Orme, Ball, and Macaulay. As such the success, circulation, and dissemination of these narratives blur the boundaries between reading and writing in ways that are similar to the exchanges across communities of readers and writers within Romanticism. For example, in the ninth stanza of his poem "Simon Lee," Wordsworth forsakes the narrative contract set up in the earlier stanzas which lead the reader to expect Simon Lee's story, saying instead:

> O Reader! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle Reader! you would find
> A tale in everything.
> What more I have to say is short,
> And you must kindly take it:
> It is no tale; but, *should you think,*
> *Perhaps a tale you'll make it.*
>
> (emphasis added)

In this stanza Wordsworth hands over textual authority to the reader, whom he invites to close the gap in the story. Similarly, Coleridge calls upon the reader of his "Christabel" to "Behold! her bosom and half her side— / A sight to dream, *not to tell*!" (lines 252–53; emphasis added). Keats does much the same in his "La Belle Dame sans Merci," which he closes with a non sequitur:

> And this is why I sojourn here,
> Alone and palely loitering,
> Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
> And no birds sing.

In this stanza, the Knight does not quite answer the Interlocutor's opening question in the first stanza about why he "sojourns" by the lake's side, but he appears to do so by using the language of causality. We see that the

> inability of the Knight to explain his circumstances to the Interlocutor leads the reader to the conclusion that the story is in some way irreducible to interpretation. . . . The only response to any questions about meaning, born out of a desire for explanation, can be interminable repetitions of the story. The . . . ending brings us back to the beginning [and foregrounds] . . . the collaborative nature of . . . [textual] production. (Narayan 154)

The Black Hole narratives preempt this kind of textuality that embraces lacunae and repetition, leading their intended British readers to an emotional climax that binds them in a communal echo and resonates with the feelings of sympathy for the British and abhorrence for the brutish Indians.

Taking his British reader inside the Black Hole, Holwell shares with this entirely reliable reader the "unmerited distress" that he and the 123 who perished in the Black Hole suffered. He also recounts his leadership role in working to curb the "violence of passions" that had begun to overtake his fellow prisoners (11), thus presenting himself as a Christlike leader. Apparently, despite Holwell's best efforts to keep everyone calm, violent passions were incited when the prisoners who were overcome by thirst saw water almost within their reach. He records the "violent

struggles" (17) that he saw between his fellow prisoners when the Indian guards brought water to the bars of the window. He finds it almost impossible to tell of "the cries and ravings of those in the remoter parts of the prison, who could not entertain a probable hope of obtaining a drop, yet could not divest themselves of expectation" (18). What was worse to him than the sufferings of the prisoners was the undignified spectacle that the Europeans presented to the Indian guards outside the Black Hole. According to Chatterjee, the "dominant theme" of the narrative is "the descent of a crowd of ordinary Europeans, placed in a situation of ordinary adversity, into mindless disorder" (21). Holwell's great discomfort arises from the fact that this descent is viewed by the Native guards. As he says, "Can it gain belief, that this scene of misery proved entertainment to the brutal wretches without? But so it was; and they took care to keep us supplied with water, that they might have the satisfaction of seeing us fight for it, as they phrased it, and held up lights to the bars, that they might lose no part of the inhuman diversion" (19). As Chatterjee points out, in this description the brutality passes to the onlooker so that the spectacle itself is sanitized and preserved as human in contrast to the inhumanity of the spectator (23).[5] Holwell reconfigures the ethics of the two spaces—inside the Black Hole and outside the Black Hole—as the spaces of legitimacy and illegitimacy. In his view, the detained Europeans are the ethical victims of the unethical and depraved politics of the Indians, who are on the outside of the prison. In contrast to the Indian spectators whose unrefined passions have compromised their humanity, Holwell describes the struggle of his compatriots to be humane and ethical: "In a few moments my pain, palpitation, and difficulty of breathing ceased; but my thirst continued intolerable. I called aloud for 'WATER FOR GOD'S SAKE:' [I] had been concluded dead; but as soon as they heard me amongst them, they had still the respect and tenderness for me, to cry out, 'GIVE HIM WATER, GIVE HIM WATER!' nor would one of them at the window attempt to touch it until I had drank" (23). In this account, Holwell shows the British suffering with grace in the face of grave provocation. According to Holwell, the nobility of the British under grave duress is as praiseworthy as the violent passions of the Indians are abhorrent. At the head of this imperiled group sits Holwell himself, who, despite his fortitude, pays the tribute of tears to his dead companions once again, representing sanitized European emotion in contrast to the frenzied Indian fervor (33).

Eventually, Holwell and his fellow survivors were taken by boat to Fort Hoogly and then to Murshidabad. A part of this journey had to be accomplished on foot, and Holwell recounts that he begged his captors to release him from his fetters. They refused, and Holwell says, "I might as well have petitioned tygers, or made supplication to the wind" (42). With the explicit comparison of the Indians to the nonhuman elements of nature, the notion of the Nawab's tyranny discursively combines with the nonhumanness of the captors to reinforce the point about the absence of ethical humanity in the Indians and the necessarily unethical nature of their politics as evidenced by their subhuman emotions. The chief metric that measures this difference is the nature of the feelings and sentiments on both sides of the imperial/racial divide. The Indians are consistently aligned with animals,

[5] See also Teltscher's discussion of the Black Hole as the space where European identity dissolves as a result of the disorder produced by the emotional traumatic (43).

reminding us of Carl Linnaeus's classification system. This is a rhetorically and ideologically important move for Holwell to make because, by means of this move, he is able to reverse the idea of the undignified Europeans who had been put in place by their desperate behavior in the throes of heat and thirst. The conclusive events of the *Genuine Narrative* finish the work initiated by this rhetorical move and reinstate European superiority and establish a hierarchical difference between Europeans and Indians who now appear to be relegated to acts of savagery and brutality in keeping with European taxonomies of race such as the one by Linnaeus and others by Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1855). Holwell's account migrates to Orme's historical narrative, which builds on the morally freighted separations between the Indians and the English and widens the cleavage between the former and the English Nation on the basis of emotions that are or are not subject to control by the subject who feels. This understanding of race-based difference, which is biased against the non-European races, is very substantially based on the notion that the non-European races are not able to control their emotions and so are closer to animals than to civilized humans.

Refined English Sensibility versus Brutal Native Passions

The survivor narratives and their subsequent textual echoes approach sentiment or passion through the lens of race; the European race is privileged to experience sanitized and refined emotion, and the Indians are doomed to be in the grip of ungoverned delirium. For example, Lindsay's account centralizes personal affront and national revenge by means of a racialized hierarchy between the British and the Indians that is underwritten by legitimate sensibility, on the one hand, and illegitimate mania, on the other. In Lindsay's account, the Indians appear to have brutish passions in comparison to the British, who are marked by refined feelings. In setting up this hierarchy, he upsets the moral freighting of the notion of the noble savage initiated by Michel de Montaigne in his "Of Cannibals" (1580), developed by John Dryden in his *Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1672), sentimentalized by Aphra Behn in *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688), and celebrated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men* (1754). In this well-established textual tradition, philosophical bias operates in favor of the non-Western other who is presumed to be uncontaminated by the ill effects of the civilized world. Lindsay tells a somewhat different story as he maps a different moral valence onto racial difference via a difference in emotions. He tells of the Nawab's emissary, who arrived with

> a flag of Truce and told them the Nabob would cease firing and desired they would as he has proposals to make for an accommodation which they readily embraced and most of them retired from the Bastions to take some refreshments of which they were in great want, about half an hour after this the Moors scaled the walls on all quarters in a manner almost incredible to Europeans. Now the Gentlemen looked upon their situation as the most desperate. Lieutenant Blagg defended the Bastion he was upon till he and his men were cut to pieces. This Officer behaved with the greatest bravery. (*HM* 33)

In this account, the contrast between the Moor and the English officer is striking inasmuch as the Moor's movements appear to be animalistic as he scales the wall on all quarters while Lieutenant Blagg acquits himself with the utmost bravery. Here we see that the Englishman is defined by his "bravery"; he has noble feelings while

the Indian's unguarded emotions overwrite his body and align him with animals. The courage of Lieutenant Blagg figures as the civilized antidote to the savagery of the animalistic Moor and resurfaces in the early twentieth century in the accounts of James H. Little, a member of the Indian Education Service, and of Noel Barber. It also emerges in Orme's official history of the Mughal Empire in which he calls Indians "The Moors" (*Historical* 274). This embedded narrative of Moorishness is an example of the project of racial demonization that Priya Satia discusses in *Time's Monster* (2020). Writing of the Afghan war of 1842 and the Indian Uprising of 1857, Satia writes of "racial stereotypes . . . [that] were mobilized . . . to enable Britons to tolerate the otherwise inexcusable violence they were committing and steel them for a new kind of imperial mission" (108). The colonizer's tendency to preemptively excuse his own material violence by engaging in linguistic violence such as the use of heavily loaded racial stereotypes is well in place in the early years of the East India Company. The racist language also participates in Enlightenment taxonomies of race such as Carl Linnaeus's influential grouping of the dominant types of humans. In Linnaeus's system, the Asiatic race is "sooty, melancholy, rigid," and it is "governed by opinions," unlike the European race, which is "governed by laws" (Linné 9).[6] The term *Moorish* echoes these attributes, functions as a metonym for a race of people whose passions and feelings have no guardrails, and proliferates in the colonial archive, completely and effectively vacating the notion of nobility in the non-Western other.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists two major usages of the term *Moorish* as an adjective used to describe South Asian culture in 1763 that are roughly contemporaneous with the usages of the British in India discussed above.[7] One is *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the Year 1745*, by Robert Orme himself, and the second is *Selections from the Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784[–1832] Showing the Political Social Condition of the English in India*, by W. S. Seton-Karr. Both these usages of the term *Moorish* serve to indicate cultural difference and exoticism. There is, however, another use of the term *Moorish* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *The Plot Discovered* (1795) that encodes notions of brutish power. Most significantly, Coleridge uses this term to describe the "wanton and brutish" culture of surveillance perpetrated in Britain in order to keep rebellion and revolution at bay. According to Lucyle Werkmeister, the pamphlet attests to Coleridge's "detestation of tyranny" (263). Coleridge's usage, which postdates Lindsay's usage, is symptomatic of a liberal culture of dissent in the metropole that is systematically and discursively betrayed in the colony. While Coleridge uses the term to decry the power of the British against themselves in a betrayal of the norms of civil society, Lindsay, James H. Little, Noel Barber, and Orme all use the term to decry the power of the Indian against the British.[8]

[6] After his 1761 ennoblement, Linnaeus published as Carl von Linné. My reliance on Linnaeus's ideas should not suggest that Linnaeus was in any way exclusive in his thinking about taxonomies of race. I refer to him because he provides a clarifying frame. Several other Enlightenment thinkers, such as Buffon, Burke, Hegel, Hume, and Kant, echo and expand on ideas that present themselves aptly in Linnaeus's classification.

[7] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Moor."

[8] See also the discussion of race as a category of difference in British references to Hindus in Peter Robb's chapter "South Asia and the Concept of Race" as well as Susan Bayly's chapter "Caste and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, edited by Peter Robb.

The greatest contrast, however, between the barbaric Indians and the civilized British crystallizes as the rest of the brave gentlemen come face to face with the so-called duplicitousness of the Nawab and his zemindars who are already tainted with "Moorishness." In Lindsay's account, the zemindars arrive with what seems like an offer of a truce. They tell the English officers that

> they should not be hurt if they would lay down their arms, the soldiers immediately grounded theirs and the Gentlemen were obliged to do the same. . . . At first they used the Gentlemen pretty well but some of the soldiers getting drunk they were all ordered into the Black Hole without distinction to the number of about two hundred. This prison was not large enough to hold one fourth part of the number there, they were pent up from nine at night till six in the morning without anything to drink and the windows so small that there was hardly any air; when the door was opened there was not more than twenty or twenty five alive the rest being stifled. (*HM* 35)

According to this account, the duplicitous behavior of the zemindars forced the English officers to lay down their arms. What is most unsettling, however, is the arbitrary manner in which the mood changes from the point when "the Gentlemen [are used] pretty well" to the point when the English are ordered into the Black Hole. Samuel Charles Hill offers a possible transition from one moment of the narrative to another, saying that there was a sudden change in mood on account of the drunkenness of the Europeans who assaulted "the natives," who then complained to Siraj-ud-daula, who, in turn, asked "where the Europeans were accustomed to confine soldiers who misbehaved in any way. He was told in the Black Hole. . . . The native officers . . . applied this order to all the prisoners without distinction" (1:xc). The drunkenness of the soldiers does not seem to be a sufficient explanation for the incarceration of 146 British people, leaving this seminal event without an anchoring causality. As this event migrates into Orme's account, however, the historian fills the logical vacuum, provides a reason—"the disorderly brain of Surajah Dowlah"—and builds on Lindsay's causally unstable narrative (*History* 83). We note that the "disorderly brain of Surajah Dowlah" is closely allied to the brutish Moors, whose passions are unchecked, unlike the Europeans who exhibit refined sensibility. This iteration deals another blow to the possible nobility of the so-called savage.

Lindsay's account also forges textual connections with other affect-based discourses such as Burkean aesthetics and the gothic novel. In addition to his undercutting of the notion of the noble savage, Lindsay's linking of the Nawab's unrefined passions with Moorishness mobilizes the sensory experiences of pathos and terror in his representation of the Europeans and Indians: "There is no reliance upon his word and to live under a Moor's Government death is preferable" (*HM* 41). His use of this binary is a clear reiteration of the Burkean categories of beauty and sublimity that were being codified even as the events and consequences of the Black Hole incident were playing out in 1756–57. As the events and the discourse of history unfold, however, the pathos of the British mutates into their sublime power and the terror of the Nawab is partially effaced, with the discursive construction of the Nawab as an evil worthy of eradication similar to a tyrannical patriarch in a gothic novel. This representation of the Nawab is amplified by Orme, who

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Of particular interest is the emergence of the notion of Aryan superiority in contrast to notions of Bengali effeminacy in Susan Bayly's chapter as well as in Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta's chapter "The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the concept of Race in Colonial Bengal." On the issue of the "effeminate Bengali," see also Sinha.

emphasizes Lindsay's projection. For his part, Lindsay extends his image of the dire situation of the British, who are, according to him, without hearth and home in Calcutta and utterly dependent on a vicious Oriental despot, very like women in gothic fiction such as Hippolyta, Matilda, and Isabella are subject to Manfred's arbitrary power in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Several entries after Lindsay's letter in the NAI collection we find Cooke's narrative (*HM* 387–431), which succeeds in establishing the Nawab as random, arbitrary, cruel, and a threat to the collective British presence, echoing gothic notions of patriarchal villains who show unencumbered passions, such as Walpole's Manfred and the titular Monk in Matthew Lewis's novel. The textual alliance between the Indian ruler and the villainous characters of gothic novels creates an equivalence that reinforces the central opposition of refined European sensibilities and brutish Indian passions, which is at odds with the tradition of the noble savage.

National Pain

Orme's history records and calcifies these attitudes in his account of the manner in which the British came to be imprisoned in the Black Hole around October 27, 1756. He writes as the authoritative transmitter of Holwell's account. Orme is generous in his account of Holwell's heroism, calling him "the gallant defender of the Fort and the asserter of the reputation of the Nation" (*HM* 213). As we see the term *Nation* defining Holwell's gallantry in Orme's account, we realize that memoir has migrated into official history and the personal suffering of a Christlike man has become a national narrative of trauma about British suffering in an alien land. Orme sets up his account by taking his reader methodically through an evaluative description of the land and the people that he is concerned with. In the opening pages of his *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* (1805), Orme describes the geography of India and then moves to a description of the people of Bengal, of whom he says that the advantages of the land have

> concurred with the langour peculiar to the unelastic atmosphere of the climate, to debase all the essential qualities of the human race, and notwithstanding the general effeminacy of character which is visible in all the Indians throughout the empire, the natives of Bengal are still of weaker frame and more enervated disposition than those of any other province: bodily strength, courage, and fortitude are unknown: even the labour of the common people is totally void of energy; and they are of a stupidity which neither wishes nor seems to be capable of extending its operations into any variety of mechanical dexterity. (5)

Overabundance of bodily senses allied with incapacity of mind mark the Indians in Orme's narrative. Indeed, one could say that he finds stupidity embodied in the Indians. In Orme's account of India and Indians we see the text stabilize stereotypes and normalize prejudice by producing the Hindus as weak and the British as the inheritors of Muslim might. In book 2 of his posthumously published *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes, and of the English Concerns in Indostan*, Orme finds that the Hindus or Gentoos are marked by "effeminacy and resignation of spirit not to be paralleled in the world" since they remain "subjected to masters whom they outnumber ten to one" (*Historical* 421). Embedded in Orme's analysis is the idea that the Hindus are a subject race because they lack robust spirits, having instead weak minds. This account of a people with weak emotional and psychological profiles recalls Linnaeus's categorization of the Asiatic race as "sooty, melancholy, [and] rigid" (Linné 9). The biological destiny

embedded in this and other Enlightenment taxonomies allows the Indians no recourse other than to be governed by their European rulers, who can educate their emotions under the aegis of a civilizing mission that veils the more brutal project of territorial conquest.

Orme's general characterization of Indians as emotionally stunted takes a more specific direction in his description of Siraj-ud-daula. According to Orme, the loss of Calcutta was precipitated by the delusional and overemotional Indian ruler. This view is pernicious because it consolidates and extends the prevalent stereotype of an unfit Indian potentate, not just because he may be tyrannical but because he may be overemotional.[9] Orme says of Siraj-ud-daula,

> There always reigned so much confusion in his mind, that he rarely carried his ideas beyond the present appearance of things; and soothed by the compliments of his courtiers into a belief that the reduction of Calcutta was the most glorious and heroic atchievement [*sic*] that had been performed in Indostan since the days of Tamerlane, he imagined that the English nation would never dare to appear again in arms in his country; and having written letters full of these commendations of himself to Delhi, he neglected to pursue the fugitives and determined to avail himself of the terror of his arms against his rival and relation, the Phousdar of Purneah. (*History* 79–80)

In this description, Siraj-ud-daula emerges not so much as an Oriental tyrant but as a man of unhealthily profuse emotions, reminding us, once again, of Carl Linnaeus's categorization of the Asiatic who is "governed by opinions," unlike the European race, which is "governed by laws" (Linné 9). He also appears as profoundly unable to read events and understand his adversary. This makes him an easy target of British derision at first and conquest later. Orme goes on to say of Siraj-ud-daula that "the disorderly brain of Surajah Dowlah . . . and other vices of his own mind" make him an unfit ruler (*History* 83–84). Orme's ad hominem attack against Siraj-ud-daula is not directed toward the military or administrative ability of the Indian ruler but against his "disorderly brain," which is characterized by his gross and unchecked sensibility. Orme's construction of Siraj-ud-daula also seeks to discursively reverse the loss of Calcutta by the English company as he imprisons and subdues his enemy in fighting words just as Holwell had done. These ideas migrate into Samuel Charles Hill's description of Siraj-ud-daula: "The naturally evil effects of the education then given in Bengal to the children of Muhammadan nobles was intensified in the case of Siraj-uddaula by his grandfather's folly, with the result that he indulged himself in every caprice" (1:xxviii). Hill's focus on the Nawab's vices brings up the issue of bodily infirmity and overt sensuality. One of his vices was intemperance with regard to alcohol. Hill reports that his grandfather "during his last illness exacted from Siraj-uddaula an oath on the Koran to abstain from drink. To this promise Siraj-uddaula is said to have rigidly adhered, but it was too late—his mind was already affected" (1:xxviii). Hill also argues that of "the particular reasons which animated Siraj-uddaula against the British . . . were his vanity and his avarice," asserting that the overpowering presence of negative passions in the Indian was not tamed by reason, serenity, and intellect (1:liii).

More strategically, Orme considers the problems created for the English company by the loss of Calcutta and says,

[9] Teltscher and Chatterjee both discuss Macaulay's construction of Siraj-ud-daula as an Oriental tyrant (Teltscher 43–44; Chatterjee 162–67).

a privation of the Bengal investments for three years would ruin the English company; and if the settlements there were not immediately recovered, the French upon the arrival of their armament would urge and assist Surajah Dowlah against any future attempts of the English to re-establish themselves in his dominions; in which case, an expedition to recover them would require a large and special armament from England; where, perhaps, the national exigencies in other parts of the world might not allow a force adequate to this service. . . . At the same time the national honour required immediate reparation, and the horrors of the dungeon cried aloud for exemplary vengeance. (*History* 86)

In this extraordinary statement, Orme knits together economic, military, and emotional/psychological reasons for an attack on Siraj-ud-daula. The clinching argument is the argument about national honor and the rhetorically effective reason that closes the paragraph is the imprisonment of the British in the Black Hole. The tone and tenor of the writing changes as Orme moves from the quantitative reason of economic benefit to Britain to his final point about the Black Hole. This point abandons rational economic logic; it mimics the language of a gothic novel in which honor is at stake and the horrors of the dungeon must be avenged.[10]

Sinharaja Tammita Delgoda makes the important point that Orme was "crucial in choosing the expedition's commander. Robert Clive he argued, was clearly the best soldier the Company had" (368). Clive, thus, becomes the effective counterpart to the delusional Siraj-ud-daula, and Orme not only records history but has a hand in creating it as he chooses Clive to lead the British against the delusional Siraj-ud-daula. Orme (and Clive) had to overcome the disagreements and debates between the Calcutta Council and the Madras Council, as Brijen K. Gupta points out (93), but despite this acrimonious exchange, on April 23, 1757, "the select committee of the Fort William council finally adopted a *coup d'etat* against the nawab as its official policy" (117) and Clive emerged as the victor of Bengal, which "paved the way for the subsequent establishment of the British empire in India" (135). Orme, who had been Clive's supporter but had not been able to find a significant place for himself in the company hierarchy, had finally shaped the success of empire even as he created an early record of its transactions and its history. The dovetailing of influential writing and material power in Orme's work—both administrative and authorial—exhibits the power of language translated into imperial power in practice.

The survivor narratives of the Black Hole of Calcutta incident continue to exert textual pressure on Orme's account of Siraj-ud-daula, with the migration of the virtuous and villainous binaries from the earlier accounts to the official history. As the texts intersect, the Nawab's character continues to be shaped by his delusions, as in the encounter between Clive's deputies and the Nawab and his courtiers, of whom he says, "[They] bore the greatest marks of ferocity in their countenances, had likewise been selected to attend on this occasion; who, to appear still more terrible, were dressed in thick stuffed garments, with enormous turbans, and *during the audience sat scowling at the deputies, as if they only waited the signal to murder them*" (Orme, *History* 130; emphasis added). Orme, in this account of the meeting between the English deputies and the Nawab, describes the Indians as animalistic having "marks of ferocity in their countenances" and scowls on their faces. This description recalls the discussion of the Indians as "Moors" in the survivor narratives of the Black Hole

[10] For extensive discussions of the gothic mode, see Williams; Hogle.

incident. In those narratives the term Moor had functioned as a short hand for a category of people who were defined by their unbridled passions. These attributes reappear in Orme's description here and are given as the "the signal [made by the Indians] to [the British to] murder them."

Versions of the Oriental, defined by uncensored anger, migrate to and multiply in Oriental tales such as Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) and Robert Southey's *Curse of Kehama* (1810). Southey is explicit in his creation of Arvalan, whose hellishness is portrayed in visual terms. Arvalan terrifies Kailyal, the female victim of his spurned desire, with his "infernal gaze, which like a spell / Bound her" in volume 1 (43) and again in volume 2 (151). Kehama's evil power, however, is evident mostly through his impact on the other characters in the poem. Ironically, the first visual description of him emphasizes his misery at the death of his son, a misery that he turns into vengeance as the poem unfolds. This is exactly the textual arc that the British follow in their survivor narratives of the Black Hole incident, with the crucial difference that Kehama is the evil Indian ruler taking over territory illegitimately. He "scaled high Heaven, triumphant like a God" at the end of volume 1 (130). After conquering Heaven he makes his descent "like a thunderbolt" (194), and once again his power is evident through the effect that he has on those around him:

> In wrath he came, a bickering flame
> Flashed from his eyes which made the moonlight dim
> And passion forcing way from every limb,
> Like furnace-smoke with terrors wrapt him round.
> (194)

In these lines we see Kehama's extreme and specifically embodied passion, which resonates with the British representation of Siraj-ud-Daulah in the survivor narratives as well as in Orme's history. As we bring the two texts together, literature seems to offer a gloss on history by providing a cautionary tale about rulers with unruly passions. Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* features a similar villain in the character of Mokanna, who trades in obscurity veiling terror behind his silver veil. When Mokanna raises his veil for his victim, Zelica, she shrieks and faints, while Moore withholds description of the fiend. Zelica later tells Azim that she has seen in Mokanna's face "What angels know not of" (55), reminding us of Holwell's rectitude in describing the horrors of his night of Calvary and Peter de Bolla's description of the circulation and modification of the Longinian sublime in the early parts of the eighteenth century (de Bolla 33). When Mokanna unveils in public, his followers all see "features horribler than Hell e'er traced / on its own brood" (Moore 75). In all these pivotal moments, Moore refuses visual details in favor of providing the affective result of the sight seen by the character and imaginatively recreated by the reader. Both of these villainous characters created by Southey and Moore are eventually defeated as virtue and morality are restored. The same textual arc defines the British documentation of their trauma and triumph in the survivor narratives as well as Orme's history, both of which feature the emotionally overwrought Indians and the virtuous British who prevail. Only Byron's *Giaour* provides a variation on the theme of the tyrannical Oriental villain. His Hassan is portrayed, thus, by the eponymous Giaour:

> I gazed upon him where he lay,
> And watched his spirit ebb away:
> Though pierced like pard by hunter's steel,
> He felt not half that now I feel.

> I searched, but vainly searched, to find
> The workings of a wounded mind;
> Each feature of that sullen corse
> Betrayed his rage, but no remorse
> (lines 1085–92)

The Giaour's confidence that Hassan is unable to feel any of the finer emotions that he has the privilege to feel mirrors the description of the scowling Indians with "marks of ferocity in their countenances." Byron's poetic structure, however, which features multiple points of view refuses narrative authority to any of the many speakers of his poem; this structure prevents the Giaour's view from being the dominant one. The multiplicity of texts in the case of the survivor narratives and Orme's history, however, do not provide a plurality of views. The survivor narratives seem to coalesce around a singular voice and a unified perspective, as is evident from the fragments of language and the authorial tonality that are shared by the narratives. In the case of Orme's history, material power and textual dominance lie with a singular authorial voice that has the force of imperial and national consensus behind it. This is the reason why Orme is able to make the decision to have Robert Clive lead the military expedition that expands empire.

Orme argues that the British conquest of India will be a benefit to the weak Hindus because it will protect them from the warlike Muslims. In discussing the degradation of the Moors in India, Orme lists their many vices as follows:

> A domineering insolence towards all who are in subjection to them, ungovernable wilfulness, inhumanity, cruelty, murders and assassinations, deliberated with the same calmness and subtlety as the rest of their politics, an *insensibility to remorse* for their crimes, which are scarcely considered otherwise than as necessary accidents in the course of life, *sensual excesses* which revolt against nature, unbounded thirst of power and an expaciousness of wealth equal to the extravagance of his propensities and vices—this is the character of the Indian Moor, who is of consequence sufficient to have any character at all. (*Historical* 423; emphasis added)

This amazing catalog of vices, including an excess of sensuality along with "ungovernable wilfulness, inhumanity, [and] cruelty," recalls Lindsay's use of the term "Moor" in his account (*HM* 33) and positions the Mughal in a twin frame as the enemy of the English and the villainous oppressor of the Hindus. This dual frame of reading that Orme sets up enables an understanding of British action against the Mughals as morally justified in itself and also as particularly justified for the benefit of the Hindus who seem unable to protect themselves against these so-called foreign oppressors. As a result of Orme's account, British intervention takes the shape of redemption for the Hindus and righteous opposition to the Mughals.[11] This idea was later repurposed by Warren Hastings in his defense during his impeachment

[11] Chatterjee makes a similar point to close his discussion of the fifth edition of James Mill's *History of British India* (1858), which featured extensive editorial footnotes by Horace Hayman Wilson. Chatterjee writes that in response to "Mill's comments on the responsibility of British penal practices for the Black Hole tragedy . . . Wilson . . . added what would now become the authorized historical gloss on the event" (184). Chatterjee quotes from Willson's gloss, which says:

> The whole transaction admits of no defence; it was an exemplification of Mohamedan insolence, intolerance, and cruelty; and in contemplating the signal retribution by which it has been punished, a mind susceptible of reverence, though free from superstition, can scarcely resist the impression, that the course of events was guided by higher influences than the passions and purposes of man. (Chatterjee 184)

In this view, the emotional hardness of the Muslim conquerors had been brought to an end by an act of divine providence that had placed the Indian people under British paternal care.

trial and has resurfaced in the shape of fundamentalist Hindutva politics in postcolonial India. These several layers of textuality created by textual migrations that recall and fortify each other produce a bulwark for the British and subjugation for the Indians on the apparently inconsequential field of sensibility, which emerges as the metric that measures the essential humanity of the possessor.

The double freighting of sensibility based on notions of imperial protectionism shapes Orme's discussion of Hindus and Hinduism in which he singles out ritual observance and superstition as the twin forces that shape the life of a Hindu. He says,

> A Moor; who no sooner obtains power, than he is lost in *voluptuousness*; he becomes vain and lordly, and cannot dispense with satiating the impulses of his *sensual appetites*: whereas a Gentoo prince retains in his Durbar the same spirit which would actuate him if keeping a shop. Avarice is his *predominant passion* . . . and his religion, instead of inspiring, frees him from, the remorse of his crimes. (Orme, *Historical* 435)

Orme here is concerned with the "voluptuousness," the "sensual appetites," and other "predominant passions[s]" of the Moor, which all combine to extend a damning emotional profile of Muslim Indians that has migrated into his description from the survivor narratives of the Black Hole incident. In this passage, Orme emphasizes the animalistic picture conjured up by the term *Moor* and overlays it with a sense of dissolute emotional behavior. Orme is also troubled by the Hindu Indians because of the transactional nature of Hinduism, which enables the vices of avarice and cunning. Orme's focus is on how Hindu life converts religious observance into mere idolatry, and he therefore constructs the Hindu as a superstitious rather than a spiritual person. Orme's conceptualization later finds a potent and strongly critical expression in Robert Southey's literary reconstructions of Hinduism in *The Curse of Kehama* (1810).

Furthermore, Orme's reference to Christianity in his final reflections reveals the rhetorical frame within which the critique of Hinduism functions (*Historical* 454). In this reflection, he sets up a clear binary between the virtues of Christianity and the vices of the "horrid impieties" of the non-Christian nations. He freights this opposition with notions of liberty, which belongs to the Christian world, and its opposite, which would seem to be the imprisonment of "the slaves of a despotic power" in "mighty ills." The Christian world is characterized by its emotional purity, and the non-Christian world is defined by a darkened spirit and a tortured body. Till this point the contrast is clear, but the boundaries between the preferred world of Christianity and the despised world of non-Christianity become blurred in what would appear to be a vertical hierarchy, with Orme's final thought about his sense of "*our* happiness, and *our* zeal for the preservation of it" (*Historical* 454; emphasis added). What is intriguing about his insertion of himself as a collectivity is the placement and the function of this collectivity. Is he saying that he takes pleasure and comfort in belonging to the Christian rather than to the non-Christian world, or is he saying that, as a member of the Christian world, he has an obligation to convert the non-Christian world to virtue, which seems to be the monopoly of the Christian world? The latter possibility would seem to be the one favored by history and other articulations such as Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, which unflinchingly and unabashedly exhibits the vices of the Hindu world marked by emotional perversion and extreme cruelty. The move to Christian virtue also recalls Holwell's Christlike

posture and recuperation in his own narrative as well as in the narratives of those that follow him, such as Orme's and Barber's. These tangled textualities work together to assign emotional profiles and to arrange them in imperial hierarchies as a first step to consolidating territorial power.

The many textual migrations explored in this article exhibit the accretion and variation of meaning and significance with reference to the cultural positioning of sensibility by British writers—literary and nonliterary—in British India immediately following the Black Hole of Calcutta incident of 1756. The survivor narratives of the Black Hole incident deploy the major tropes of what would become Romanticism, such as melancholy, genuineness, sincerity, spontaneity, and overpowering feelings, which then have a ripple effect as they migrate across a variety of forms, genres, and modalities. For example, the language of the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* echoes Holwell's memoir not because of direct transmission or influence but because of the shared trends of a culture that was moving to an affect-based emphasis. I find that in these textual entanglements the politics of sympathy articulates itself variously depending on geographical location and political intentionality. The texts that emerge firmly from within the imperial context set a clear divide between the Europeans and the Indians in terms of the subject's ability to feel sympathy. For example, the survivor narratives and the historical recuperations of the incident present the textual configuration of trauma, but they limit suffering and refined sensibility to the European. All imperial textual iterations betray the notion of the noble savage. The literature and culture of the West, on the other hand, remain enclosed within their sense of self-signifying radicalism, which is, however, subject to recoding via strategies of reading, such as the present one, that deconstruct that radicalism by tracing its migrations in other contexts and other textualities.

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