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“We, who happier, live /  
Under the holiest dispensation”:

Gender, Reform, and the  
Nexus of East and West  
in Toru Dutt

Toru Dutt was born in Calcutta on March 4, 1856 and raised within a converted Christian family that moved to Europe when she was 13 so that she and her sister Aru might be exposed to Western culture. According to Chandani Lokugé, they were the first Bengali women to travel to England (xvii), and when she was 15 the family moved to Cambridge, where she attended the Higher Lectures for Women. They returned to India when she was 17; the next year, Aru died from consumption (as had their only brother, Abju, when Toru was 9).

In 1876 Toru published *A Sheaf Gleaned from French Fields*, a volume of French poems she had translated into English, with Saptahiksambad Press of Bhowanipore, India. (Aru had translated a small handful of poems for this project before her death, so Toru included these as well.) This volume came to the attention of Edmund Gosse in 1877, who reviewed it quite favorably in the *Examiner* that year. *Sheaf* would see a second Indian edition in 1878 and a third edition by Kegan Paul of London in 1880, but Dutt lived to see neither of these triumphs. On August 30, 1877, she died of consumption at the age of 21, leaving behind two unpublished novels— *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* (thought to be the first novel in French by an

Indian writer) and *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden* (thought to be the first novel in English by an Indian woman writer)—in addition to an unfinished volume of original poems in English, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Her father, Govin Chunder Dutt, ensured that these works would be published posthumously: *Bianca* in Calcutta's *Bengal Magazine* (1878), *Le Journal* by Didier of Paris (1879), and *Ancient Ballads* with Kegan Paul (1882).

Dutt's contemporaries seem to have been more aware of her rightful place in literary history than we are today. As Sir Edmund Gosse (her British "discoverer") observes in his Introductory Memoir to *Ancient Ballads*, "Her name . . . is no longer unfamiliar in the ear of any well-read man or woman" (vii). Indeed, according to Gosse, "It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt. Literature has no honours which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty-one, and in languages separated from her own by so deep a chasm, had produced so much of lasting worth" (xxvi). Gosse thus concludes the Introductory Memoir by insisting, "When the history of the literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page in it dedicated to this fragile exotic blossom of song" (xxvii).

Unfortunately, that page has yet to be written. Dutt's work has remained largely unread by students and scholars of British Victorian literature, and critical work by Western academics on this fascinating Indo-Anglian poet is still virtually nonexistent.<sup>1</sup> Yet Dutt is a writer who has a crucial role to play in extending our understanding of both British and Indian literary history. The question of how exactly to position her as a writer is an extremely complicated one, to say the least. She was Indian—but she was Christian rather than Hindu, she was educated in Europe

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<sup>1</sup> To date, there are only 7 articles on Dutt listed in the *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*, all published since 1999. Tricia Lootens and Alpana Sharma have been leading the way so far, with two articles apiece. For a sample of Dutt's poetry, see my editorial contribution to the short anthology of colonial poetry in the 2004 special issue of *Victorians Institute Journal*, Poetry and the Colonies.

rather than in Calcutta, and she wrote in English rather than Bengali. Her Christian faith complemented her interest in beneficial social change for women; indeed, these two combine to form the impetus behind her critique of Hindu orthodoxy. At the same time, her clear affinities with Hindu culture (particularly its literary traditions) served as the primary basis for a parallel critique of British imperialism. One thus must examine the nexus of East and West in her life and work if one is to arrive at a more complex understanding of her views on gender and reform—and, in turn, if one is to begin to theorize how one might (or, might not) position this Indo-Anglian writer as more properly an Anglo and/or an Indian voice. In the final analysis, a consideration of Toru Dutt is absolutely essential to any thorough plumbing of the complex intersections of class, gender, and race in the Victorian era, particularly within the contexts of imperialism and colonialism (and, by extension, within the contexts of post-colonialism and transnationalism).

*Ancient Ballads*, composed primarily of new renditions of classic Hindu tales in English, is divided into two sections. The first part contains nine poems that together comprise over 90 percent of its total lines. All of these texts foreground the Indian experience for Dutt's British readers, presenting them with an Indian mythography (along with, for many, a whole new set of intertexts) and with catalogues of Indian flora and fauna. The choice of ballads and legends is interesting in itself—Dutt primarily selects those with a focus on women, children, and the lower castes. Their content is quite thought-provoking as well, particularly where gender and reform are concerned: protagonists are both true to their traditional representations and at the same time subtly inflected by contemporary circumstances (see, for example, "Savitri"), just as Dutt's obvious pride in and love for her heritage is qualified by some explicit Christian/Western revisionings (see, for example, "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind").

The second part of the volume consists of seven short miscellaneous poems, only one of which is not either about or in part in dialogue with Europe, thus further allowing one to tease out Dutt's complex positioning via-à-vis India and England. These poems also serve to corroborate *Sheaf's* anglophilia and francophilia, as do many of her letters. The bulk of these letters are to her British friend Mary Martin, and in them she continually reiterates her desire to return to England and to settle there for good. She was not particularly happy with her life in Calcutta after the family's return from Europe, and much of this unhappiness seems to have stemmed from the fact that she was a young woman. On 20 September 1874 she writes to Martin, "The free air of Europe, and the free life there, are things not to be had here. We cannot stir from our own Garden without being stared at . . ." (231).<sup>2</sup> A few years later she will express her broader frustration with such lack of mobility in "Savitri," the substantial piece with which she leads off *Ancient Ballads*. There, her poetic speaker takes a swipe at women's current claustrophobia in India by foregrounding their now largely former freedoms:

In those far-off primeval days  
Fair India's daughters were not pent  
In closed zenanas. On her ways  
Savitri at her pleasure went  
Whither she chose. . . . (25-29)<sup>3</sup>

Dutt lived at a time when there most certainly were calls for social change on numerous women's issues (such as child marriage, female education, polygamy, sati, and zenanas), but conservative attitudes remained the prevailing ones, including within most privileged families. Dutt herself, however, was progressive on this front.

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations of Dutt's letters are from *Toru Dutt: Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Chandani Lokugé.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations of Dutt's poetry also are from *Toru Dutt: Collected Poetry and Prose*.

In a letter dated 13 January 1876, she tells Martin of the controversy surrounding the decision by a notable Bengali gentleman to open his zenana to the visiting Prince of Wales. Her own opinion concurs with one particularly “sensibly and fairly put” article from *The Indian Daily News*, which she summarizes as suggesting that

If the Babu means to bring out his family . . . and let his friends visit and mingle with his family, as behaves civilized men and manners, he is a very well-meaning man, and his aims are laudable; but if he has only made an exception for the Prince, and his suite, and means to ‘lock up’ his wife and family, as all Hindus do, his allowing the Prince to visit his family is a bit of flunkeyism, quite unpardonable, and worthy of the highest disapprobation. (259)

That Dutt remained unmarried into her twenties was in and of itself highly unusual and, for many, highly suspicious—a fact she jokes about in her letters on multiple occasions. As a 16-year-old she had attended the Higher Lectures for Women at Cambridge, and she consistently alludes to supporters of female education favorably in her letters. At one point she calls attention to a report that two young Indian women had passed the Entrance Examination “very creditably,” and concludes, “I do hope Indian girls will be in the future better educated, and obtain more freedom and liberty than they now enjoy” (334).

Yet Dutt’s isolation and her relative lack of freedom is not exclusively an effect of her gender; it also is an effect of her Christianity, and not simply because a typical rhetorical strategy of missionaries (and women missionaries in particular) was to contrast an idealized version of Western domestic partnership with the oppressiveness of the zenana. For example, Dutt relates to Martin why she had not attended the marriage ceremony of her mother’s cousin: “She is a Hindu and so is her family, so of course we were not invited” (261). Certainly this is a major

part of the reason she later tells Martin, “you are quite mistaken to think that we should be greatly missed by [friends and relatives], if we leave Calcutta” (321). Dutt believes that “Hindus are getting more liberal in their views” on social interactions with Europeans and with those Indians associated with them, noting, “indeed, Hindus, liberal ones, will dine at a European’s table without much demur, but it is done *en cachette*” (325). At the same time, she also insists that, even if such families are becoming rarer all the time, “there are some orthodox families who will not mix with friends and relations who have been to England, unless these make the necessary purifications ordained in the Hindu shastras and by pundits” (325).

Dutt’s Christianity does not simply serve as an obstacle to more lively social relations, however; it equally leads her to separate herself intellectually from Hindu society. For instance, while on some occasions she seems to thoroughly enjoy the music and processions of the Hindu holidays, at other times she is less than appreciative, with the noise and crowds mentioned as more of a bother than anything. Particularly suggestive is her comment on the festivities of the *Kali-Poojah*: “one feels sometimes so sad when one looks on all these processions following a graven image, offering goats, and other sacrifices to it, and bowing themselves before it. Oh, that all India should turn to the true and loving God, who is alone able to save us and cleanse us from our sins!” (313). Her expressed interest in such Christian conversion is not merely an abstract concept, but rather it also extends to such dear and favorite individuals as her maternal grandmother, of whom she writes, “she is, I am sad to say, still a Hindu” (228), and, “I wish she would become a Christian” (274).

Not surprisingly, then, one may find expressions of Dutt’s Christian faith in her poetry as well. There are Christian allusions in some of the miscellaneous poems (see, for example, “Near Hastings,” “France, 1870,” and “The Tree of Life”), and there even are a few explicit moments

of Christian proselytizing in her renditions of the Sanskrit legends. One of these is found in “Prehlad,” a tale from the *Mahabharata* about an ancient king who bans all religious thought and practice, decreeing everyone must worship him and him alone. One of his sons, Prehlad, rebels by worshipping Vishnu instead, so the king has him put in prison. In Dutt’s version, Prehlad’s account of the effect of his imprisonment for his beliefs (which also includes an echo of Ecclesiastes) allows her British readers to suspect he actually is speaking as a devotee of Dutt’s Christian God rather than of Vishnu:

For I have in my dungeon dark  
Learnt more of truth than e’er I knew  
There is one God—One only—mark!  
To Him is all our service due (293-296)

and,

In Him I trust,  
He can protect me if He will,  
And if this body turn to dust,  
He can new life again instill. (301-304)

Eventually, the deity appears as a colossal lion-headed warrior who vindicates Prehlad by killing the king.

Dutt’s most overt challenge to Hinduism comes in the aforementioned “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind.” In this tale from the *Vishnu Purana*, Dutt faithfully renders the details of a great king who abdicates to pursue the ascetic rites and privations of a hermit. His proper devotion is undermined when he allows himself to care too deeply for a fawn that he saves from drowning. After narrating the royal ascetic’s death, Dutt’s poetic speaker takes a decidedly

editorializing turn and offers a brazen rebuttal of the traditional Hindu interpretation of the tale.

It is long, but worth quoting in full:

Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of old  
By Brahman sage; but we, who happier, live  
Under the holiest dispensation, know  
That God is Love, and not to be adored  
By a devotion born of stoic pride,  
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,  
But with a love, in character akin  
To His unselfish, all-including love.  
And therefore little can we sympathize  
With what the Brahman sage would fain imply  
As the concluding moral of his tale,  
That for the hermit-king it was a sin  
To love his nursling. What! A sin to love!  
A sin to pity! Rather should we deem  
Whatever Brahmans wise, or monks may hold,  
That he had sinned in *casting off* all love  
By his retirement to the forest-shades;  
For that was to abandon duties high,  
And, like a recreant soldier, leave the post  
Where God had placed him as a sentinel.



This little hind brought strangely on his path,  
This love engendered in his withered heart,  
This hinderance to his rituals,—might these not  
Have been ordained to teach him? Call him back  
To ways marked out for him by Love divine?  
And with a mind less self-willed to adore?

Not in seclusion, not apart from all,  
Not in a place elected for its peace,  
But in the heat and bustle of the world,  
‘Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,  
Must he still labour with a loving soul  
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate. (101-132)

Given such a strident Christian agenda, Gosse’s insistence upon orientalizing his “fragile exotic blossom of song” may perhaps seem a bit of a stretch. According to Gosse, Dutt “was pure Hindu, full of the typical qualities of her race and blood, . . . preserving to the last her appreciation of the poetic side of her ancient religion, though faith itself in Vishnu and Siva had been cast aside with childish things and been replaced by a purer faith” (xi-xii). In *Ancient Ballads*, then, he writes,

No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic . . . . The poetess seems in these verses to be chanting to herself those songs of her mother’s race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure. They breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly

devoid of that littleness and frivolity which seem, if we may judge by a slight experience, to be the bane of modern India. (xxiv)

Gosse's whole posture, however well-intentioned, is offensive. Yet, if his orientalist assessment seems to suggest a dimension to Dutt's relationship to Hinduism thoroughly absent in "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind," that is because in many of the other ballads and legends there is in fact a very different relationship, an undeniable affection for and pride in her Hindu heritage.

Take, for example, "Sîta," the last poem in the ballads and legends section of the volume. Not a retelling of a ballad or legend at all, this short poem evokes with profound nostalgia the scene of a mother singing the "old, old story" (16) of Sîta at bed-time to "Three happy children . . . / . . . with wide-open eyes" (1-2). Her song is so powerfully rendered that all three children are moved to tears, and we are told that they shall "dream of it until the day" (20). The elegiac, if not anguished, note of the poem's final question ("When shall those children by their mother's side / Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?" [21-22]) grows not merely out of a yearning for childhood innocence or for the simplicity of yesterday. Surely one also may read these lines as an implicit lament for the fate of the ancient ballads and legends of Hindustan and their tradition of storytelling in the modern era of British imperialism. Indeed, we find a similar sentiment in the conclusion to "Jogadhya Uma," a story (not from a puranic source but from Bengali folklore) of how the goddess Uma appeared to a pedlar of shell-bangles. The poem concludes,

Absurd may be the tale I tell,  
Ill-suited to the marching times,  
I loved the lips from which it fell,  
So let it stand among my rhymes. (237-40)

For an even more intriguing ending in support of this other dimension to Dutt's relationship to Hinduism, one need only turn to "Sindhu," a tale from the *Ramayana*. The plot revolves around a king who, while hunting, mistakenly kills a boy, the only son of two ascetic sages who in turn die upon learning of Sindhu's fate. After noting that the king fulfilled "with royal pomp / Their funeral obsequies" (317-318), Dutt's poetic speaker concludes the poem with the following stanza:

What is the sequel of the tale?

How died the king?—oh man,

A prophet's words can never fail—

Go, read the Ramayan. (321-324)

At this point, fresh upon the success of her first book of poems with the British press, Dutt is consciously writing for a British audience as well as to the Indo-Anglian community, so the fact that she directs the reader to the original Hindu source material itself (or, does she actually challenge, or even command, the reader to look there?) for the final word on the tale and its moral is quite provocative—certainly a very different approach from that of the poetic speaker in "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind."

What all this should suggest is that delineating the nexus of East and West in Dutt is a much more complex and complicated matter than at first it may have appeared to be. For, if Dutt is (as, first and foremost, a Christian) only antagonistic towards Hinduism, then why does she decide to glean a poetic sheaf from Sanskrit fields in the first place, when her first sheaf was exclusively European in its origins? Why does she develop such an interest in learning Sanskrit and work so hard at it even as her health is failing? Why is she so pleased that Mary Martin takes up reading the *Ramayana*: "I am so glad you like the Ramayana and that my country's

heroine [Sîta] has won your heart” (295)? Why does this Indo-Anglian poet even enjoy giving her friend little lessons in Bengali, at one point telling her, “I think our Bengali language is very rich in words” (330)?

Surely it is Dutt’s profound affinities with Bengali culture, in conjunction with a more properly Christian form of righteous anger, that leads her increasingly to offer personal critiques of British imperialism in the letters to Martin. So she relates a police case in which a hunting party dispute left nine Bengalis dead and seven more wounded, with one British soldier severely beaten on the other side. The magistrate fined all of the villagers and acquitted the soldiers, she reports, in order that “natives should know how precious is the life of one British soldier in the eyes of the British government” (283). So also she caustically proclaims, “We have no real English gentlemen or ladies in India, except a very few. People generally come out to India to make their fortunes, you see, and real gentlemen and ladies very rarely leave home and friends for the ‘yellow gold’” (302).

In her letter to Martin dated 7 August 1876, the very same letter in which she effuses about Sîta and the *Ramayana*, Dutt reports another egregious miscarriage of justice in which an Englishman in effect beat one of his servants to death, only to be ‘punished’ with a fine of 2 pounds! She bitterly observes, “You see how cheap the life of an Indian is, in the eyes of an English judge . . .” (295). She then goes on to laud the efforts of Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, for swiftly and strongly condemning this injustice, removing the ruling magistrate, and initiating a review of the appropriate section of the Indian Penal Code. It is obvious that to Dutt, while its religion and its intellectual foundations have much to offer her country, British imperialist rule in India urgently needs to be reformed.

Once again, Dutt's poetry in *Ancient Ballads* contains reformist sentiments similar to those found in the letters. In "The Legend of Dhruva," from the *Vishnu Purana*, Dutt only narrates the story as far as Dhruva's departure into the forest after his slight by his father (the king) in favor of his half-brother. By doing so—and by not including Dhruva's subsequent ascetic devotions, his eventual return to rule, and his eternal reward from Vishnu—she maintains her readers' focus squarely on the motivating injustice that impels Dhruva to (re)act. In "Buttoo," a retelling of the story of Ekalavya the archer from the *Mahabharata*, the poem's questioning of rank and caste—particularly when taken together with its portrayal of the imperious Dronacharya—allows for a parallel questioning of British assumptions of imperial privilege and racial superiority.

To more clearly establish Dutt's poetic engagement with the excesses of Empire, one need only return to "Prehlah." "Prehlah" is a poem with a clear message about one's higher duty to God (for Dutt, her Christian God), but it also is a poem with a politically charged final message. After the king's demise at the hands of the lion-headed representation of the deity, Dutt's poetic speaker tells her readers that "A sovereign people's wild acclaim" (342) is, "Kings rule for us and in our name" (344). With this in mind, the speaker turns to address "Tyrants of every age and clime" (345) and assures them they all have their own awful lion-headed shape that will just as surely bring them down "when comes the time" (347). The poem concludes with this warning:

As human, peoples suffer pain,  
But oh, the lion strength is theirs,  
Woe to the king when galls the chain!  
Woe, woe, their fury when he dares! (349-352)

This poem thus effectively positions its subversive, even overtly threatening political challenge to all forms of earthly Power that are not ultimately answerable to the people whom they rule as a type of the higher duty endorsed by God.

Indeed, Dutt's very project in *Ancient Ballads* on the one hand would seem to set her up as a classic female tradition-bearer (in line with a nationalist project). As Alpana Sharma Knippling has observed, one may see Dutt's decision to work on these ancient Sanskrit texts as reflecting a need to (re)connect with her country and its heritage in response to her time in Europe (219). There had long existed a perceived need (certainly heightened after the Revolt of 1857) for a more properly Indian voice in the face of British imperialism, and Dutt would have been well aware of the nascent nationalist sentiments current in her day—particularly after her return to Calcutta in 1873. In fact, the ballads and legends she decides to work on are set in a variety of regions, the rough modern-day equivalents of which range from Kolkata (Calcutta) to Bhopal and Chennai (Madras) to Delhi. She would have had personal examples of nationalist sentiment to draw upon as well. Her father quit his job with the British administration because Indian workers could not look forward to the opportunity for equal advancement and her cousin, Romesh Chunder Dutt, was a prominent nationalist figure who would serve as President of the Indian National Congress at the turn of the century.

Dutt's anglophilia, however, should at the very least qualify any simplistic positioning of her as an Indian voice in a more properly nationalist space. In fact, when Meenakshi Mukherjee makes a token reference to Dutt in setting up her version of Indian literary history in her very early work on Indian fiction (from 1971), she insists Dutt is so "highly Westernized" that she cannot qualify as an authentic Indian voice (*Twice* 17). For Mukherjee, as Dutt was not a product of the general Indian culture and as Indo-Anglian literature itself ultimately is "written in

Victorian idioms” and “fashioned by English sensibility,” Dutt’s work should be understood as “a colonial venture vaguely aspiring to continue the great English tradition” (*Twice* 17).

Historically, most Indian scholars have responded to Dutt’s westernization less pejoratively, instead using it to paint her as an international writer who nevertheless retains enough identity as an Indian writer to win their pride and admiration. According to Padmini Sen Gupta, “There are some writers who belong to the world in general . . . . They may be born in any country, the stamp of which they will always bear, but they are universal in their creative output” (7). Such a one, he says, is Dutt. For A. N. Dwivedi, Dutt is “a citizen of the world, and not of any particular race or country” (5). K R. Ramachandran Nair even goes so far as to claim Dutt, “unhindered by national, linguistic, or religious inhibitions,” is the first Indo-Anglian writer to effect a “rapprochement” between East and West (55).

In Mukherjee’s more recent work (1999), she rightfully acknowledges more fully Dutt’s significance within Indian literary history, and in the process of reassessing Dutt’s place suggests yet another plausible option for positioning Dutt’s multi-dimensional reformist poetics. Dutt still does not qualify as a representative Indian writer in Mukherjee’s eyes in that, far from championing “Indian tradition,” she instead offers a “running critique” of its caste and gender hierarchies (“Hearing” 222). Yet, if Dutt’s project is not an Indian (or, a nationalist) one, according to Mukherjee it also is not an Anglo or international one either. Dutt’s Indian vocabulary, she suggests, is “stubbornly regional” (“Hearing” 220). Her ethos, for Mukherjee, is distinctly Bengali, despite her use of English. In fact, “writing in Bengali . . . might not have automatically guaranteed an unproblematic continuation of an anterior precolonial poetic tradition” in that all of the major male poets writing in Bengali at the time were “swept off their feet by . . . British Romantic poetry” and thus were prone to their own form of imitateness

(“Hearing” 224). In any case, Mukherjee finds Dutt’s verse much more preferable than that of the women who were writing in Bengali, since their poetry was highly stylized, formulaic, and conservative in its endorsement of approved feminine codes (“Hearing” 224).

At the same time, as Mukherjee reminds us, voice and authenticity are not innocent qualities but rather are “imbricated . . . with possibilities of insidious complicity with, or co-option by, the prevailing literary culture” (“Hearing” 207). According to Shu-mei Shih, “non-Western Others who . . . *affect* Western-centric values . . . join in the essentialization of the non-West” (115). This may in part explain why the typical British reaction to Dutt—represented most (in)famously in the response of Gosse—seems to completely elide the political dimensions of *Ancient Ballads* in favor of an orientaling aestheticism, despite the fact that from our own contemporary vantage point Dutt’s project appears to be engaging in at the very least a covert critique of British imperialism. What does it mean that her subversiveness (at least as far as British imperialism was concerned) does not seem to have been acknowledged by British readers, or to have affected their ability to appropriate or co-opt it for orientalist or other imperialist purposes?

A pair of 2003 *PMLA* articles by Paul Giles and John Carlos Rowe on transnationalism and nineteenth-century American literature suggest yet another possibility when it comes to positioning Dutt and *Ancient Ballads*. Rowe argues for a comparative transnationalism for nineteenth-century American studies that would “extend[] transnationality [back] to the heyday of United States nationalism” (88). For Rowe, “if we identify transnationalism only with postmodern forces of globalization or with resistances to them, such as creolization and hybridization, then we are likely to forget the roots of these postmodern economic and cultural practices in modernization” (79). His elaboration on his comparative transnationalism that



follows not only involves re-thinking and re-presenting works by canonical figures such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Jacobs, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, but also involves expanding our conceptions of the American canon to include lesser-known writers such as Native American John Rollin Ridge and Asian-American Lee Yan Phou. For Giles, American literature is “interwoven systematically with transversals between national territory and intercontinental space” (63). “To problematize the geographical integrity of America” (64) is thus to “challenge circular, self-fulfilling definitions of American literature” by “seek[ing] various points of intersection . . . where cultural conflict is lived out experientially” (65).

Works by the likes of Antoinette Burton, Iderpal Grewal, and Billie Melman have been effecting similar paradigm shifts in our understanding (where India is concerned) of nineteenth-century British literature for awhile now, though it seems to me that most teaching syllabi (at least at the undergraduate level) have yet to reflect this. If we are at all interested in re-visioning the field along these lines, then Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads* surely is one of the texts to which we must turn. Indeed, Knippling’s article already contains the seeds of such a re-visioning when she argues for Dutt’s poetry as the sort of “site . . . of re-invention and improvisation” (217) that Homi Bhabha has characterized as an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (qtd. in Knippling 217).

According to Debjani Banerjee’s dissertation on Indian women’s fiction, a writer like Dutt “offers powerful perspectives on women writers and their contrapuntal negotiations of the ambivalence of colonialism as well as the empowerment and the circumscription of nationalist identities” (84). Dutt’s work does seem, like much writing coming out of the post-colonial Indian diaspora, “vulnerable to neo-colonial forces of co-optation, but precisely because of this vulnerability “it also serves as an important nodal point [from which] to strategize resistance and

generate counter-discursive practices” (4)—for women writers in particular, whose identity resembles “an ensemble of plotted positions which is simultaneously involved in relations of domination and subordination, producing ambivalent power relations and resisting oppression” (29).

In discussing Li Xiaojiang’s articulation of “an ethics of transnational encounter,” Shih suggests that “the key to transnational communication is the ability and willingness to situate oneself in both one’s own position and the Other’s position, whether on the plane of gender, historical contexts, or discursive paradigms” (118), and that transvaluation “is the result of such transpositionality, since to position oneself in the history of the Other is to be given the opportunity to see how a given system of value production works and thus to be exposed to the mechanisms of value-coding and knowledge production as political, material, and affective acts” (119). *Ancient Ballads*, it seems to me, is potentially the result of a similar sort of transpositionality. I would thus suggest that one may posit Dutt as a writer who, to some extent, already has fulfilled Shih’s concluding charge to “border-crossing intellectuals and scholars,” that they “must use their radically multiple positions to destabilize the production and circulation of value from any one given locational standpoint as preparation for transpositional dialogues in transnational encounters” (119). That is, Dutt’s “ability and willingness” to speak from the multi-locational spaces present in *Ancient Ballads* allows one to explore how Indian and European “value-coding and knowledge production” work (separately, as well as in conflict or in dialogue with one another), which in turn allows one to read her poetics as effecting the sort of transpositional dialogue that seems one of the more hopeful possibilities transnationalism contains.

D. N. Rodowick's discussion of a *new cosmopolitanism* sees the mobility associated with transnationalism as "by no means qualitatively positive" owing to the all-too-evident negative effects of dis-location and exclusion, but he also feels it "opens possibilities for contestation and critique" (15). For Rodowick, "The mobility of deterritorialized transnationals must be characterized across several levels"—including "the transformation of identity as a set of complex cultural and political allegiances that unite as well as divide local communities subnationally, nationally, and transnationally" (15). One arguably may find such a transformation of identity, again, in *Ancient Ballads*. This is not to claim, with Nair, that Dutt effects a rapprochement between East and West; instead, it is to suggest that her poetry fosters an awareness of regional (subnational), national, and global (international and/or transnational) spaces—and to suggest that this awareness, in containing possibilities for both new unity and the same old (and/or further) division, above all productively foregrounds rather than forecloses the question of space(s) in both nineteenth-century Indian and nineteenth-century British literatures.

In conclusion, it is by exploring the nexus of East and West in the life and work of Toru Dutt that one may begin fully to plumb her complex position as a writer with a reformist agenda. It is to begin to grasp how one simultaneously may cast her as both of the very different Indian Sir Walter Scotts conceptualized by the nineteenth-century British colonial administrator James Thomason and the contemporary Indian scholar Nair. Thomason looked for an Indian Scott who was needed to "make [literature] the vehicle of historic and other instruction" by creating "not Christian books, but books written in a Christian spirit" (qtd. in Schwarz 582) that, in Henry Schwarz's words, "must reach under the skin and inject [Christian] morality via its lessons" (582). Nair, on the other hand, posits that an Indian Scott would, like Dutt, be typified by work that "gave a habitation and a name to the hoary past of [her] ancient land" through "essentially

Hindu stories, steeped in the age-old values of Hindu culture,” of which Dutt herself “was a product” (78). It is also to begin to grasp how one simultaneously may cast her as Gosse’s thoroughly co-opted Orientalized “fragile exotic blossom of song” and as Makarand Paranjape’s creator (in a tradition extending from Rammohun Roy to Gandhi) of “not so much a counter-modernity as an alternative modernity that was distinctly Indian . . . not a hybrid, not some kind of mongrel in-betweeness, but a third world, without the pejorative associations of that term” (128-129).

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