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**FROM SAROJINI NAIDU'S "CURVED AND
ELOQUENT LITTLE MOUTH" TO ARUNDHATI ROY'S
"MASS OF UNTAMED CURLS AND
SMOULDERING DARK EYES":
STEREOTYPICAL DEPICTIONS OF FEMALE,
INDIAN AUTHORS IN REVIEWS OF THEIR WORK**

Melissa Purdue

*"Language, any language, has a dual character:
it is both a means of communication and a car-
rier of culture."*

—Ngugi wa Thiong'o¹

Sarojini Naidu, writing around the turn-of-the-century, is often described in contemporaneous reviews of her poetry as an exotic other, as infant-like, and as a less capable writer of English literature. Although these descriptions are disturbing, they are not surprising when one considers the wide-spread acceptance of imperialistic attitudes at the time.² What is surprising, however, is that these same types of descriptions continue to appear nearly one hundred years later in reviews of another female, Indian author: Arundhati Roy. Yet the aim of this paper is not simply to point out that these reviewers are wrong in their word choices or to defend Naidu and Roy. In her essay "Where Have All The Natives Gone?" Rey Chow asserts that "many critics of colonialism attempt to write about these peoples [non-white citizens of postcolonial countries] in such a way as to wrest them away from their status as symptom or object" and that the result of these attempts "is a certain inevitable subjectivizing" (125).

¹ The epigraph is from Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, written in 1986.

² I will be focusing largely on reviews found in British periodicals for this essay, although a small portion of them will be from North American periodicals as well. Thus, the patriarchal and imperialistic attitudes I mention here largely refer to the British colonial mind-set.

Thus the intent of this paper is not to wrest Naidu and Roy away from the objectification, infantilization, and exoticization that exists in reviews of their work and to emphasize that such practices are deplorable. The degrading nature of these reviews should already be apparent. Rather, this paper strives to make known that these historical practices are still quite prevalent today, to examine the reasons behind these persistent stereotypes, and to consider how and why the authors' use of the English language is discussed by reviewers.

Before delving into the reviews of Naidu and Roy, a brief biography of each is needed to justify the comparison of the authors. Sarojini Naidu was born in 1879 to a fairly upper-class family. Because of her privileged economic standing, Naidu was educated and taught English from an early age. Despite her childhood aversion to the language, she later published numerous volumes of poetry in English: *Songs* (1895), *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Although Naidu is chiefly remembered as a poet, she was also "deeply involved in politics" and played an important role in the struggle for independence (Tharu & Lalita 330). She worked closely with Gandhi, was elected president of the Indian National Congress, played a part in setting up the All India Women's Conference, and was appointed governor of Uttar Pradesh (Tharu & Lalita 331). Likewise, Arundhati Roy also grew up learning English and in 1997 published a novel, *The God of Small Things*, in the language. Roy is also currently a diligent activist and has "immersed herself in such causes the anti-nuclear movement," the Narmada dam controversy, and has donated the proceeds of the Malayalam edition of her book to support Dalits and Dalit literature (SAWNET). Further, the similarities between the two have not escaped the notice of at least one critic. Elleke Boehmer, in her essay "East is East and South is South: The Cases of Sarojini Naidu and Arundhati Roy" compares the authors.³ Although it is obvious, it is also important to point out that both authors are females and that any reviews of their

³ While Boehmer's interesting essay does address the similar critical reception of Roy and Naidu, this paper will differ in some important ways. Boehmer's main focus is to establish the similarities between the two authors and to point out that both authors have been stereotyped as exotic others. While Boehmer's essay is useful in setting up my argument, I will be taking the comparison of Naidu and Roy that she also addresses and extending it to include reviews that not only use the stereotype of exotic, female other but also infantilize both authors, lock them into an essentialized past, and make troubling proclamations about their use of the English language. Further, to show these stereotypes I will be working closely with a number of reviews on Naidu's poetry and Roy's novel that Boehmer does not.

literature will be complicated not only by ethnic stereotypes, but by gender stereotypes as well.

While the other similarities are important, these two authors were chosen specifically because they each write in English. Although English is now one of the official languages of India, it is also a language that was brought into the country by the colonizing British. The British presence created a bilingual elite. Thus, not only was English a language of power during colonization, it “continues to be a language both of power and of prestige” (Kachru 291). It should be recognized that both Naidu and Roy are members of this bilingual elite class. This bilingualism gives the authors access to both British and Indian peoples, but it also serves as a barrier to complete acceptance in either group. As Albert Memmi states, “most of the colonized will never have the good fortune to suffer the tortures of colonial bilingualism” (106). Naidu and Roy both experience the difficulties involved in being an Indian author writing in English. It is the non-acceptance of these Indian authors by the popular British press that will be dealt with in this paper.

The exotic other: Sarojini Naidu

Colonizers frequently positioned the colonized female as an exotic other. This phenomenon has been examined by many theorists.⁴ Anne McClintock, for example, describes the way colonizers viewed the land, and the female population of the land, as a “pornotropics” trope (22). Within this tradition the colonized female is a site on which the colonizing male places sexual desire (McClintock 22). This way of looking at the female other is prevalent in reviews of Sarojini Naidu’s writing. Although the focus of book reviews is usually the literature in question, reviews of Naidu instead often center around her body and physical appearance. One should note that while there is “very little that is new about a woman writer being either censured or praised, and, either way, objectified, on the basis primarily of her gender,” the issue is more complicated when the female writer is also of a different ethnic group than the reviewer (Boehmer 65). The objectification then arises jointly from her identity as an exotic other and from her gender.

The majority of contemporaneous book reviews on Naidu’s writing, whether by male or female, British or American reviewers,

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are just some of the theorists who have addressed this subject.

position Naidu as an exotic other. For example, in his review of Naidu's poetry Milton Bronner begins by describing Naidu as a "strange-gifted daughter of a wonderful race" (62). This description immediately sets Naidu apart from the reader and positions her as different; she is from a strange land and a different culture. Bronner goes on to explain that Naidu comes "from a land of cobras and those who master them" (64), that she expresses "the soul of the East" (64), and that her poems are "redolent of the Hindu world" (66). We see from these descriptions that Bronner is largely intrigued by Naidu's writing because she is mysterious and different. This positioning of Naidu as exotic is found in other reviews as well. Edith M. Thomas describes in detail the physical body of this author from "the mysterious Orient" (50). She tells the reader how she "observed the slight lithe figure in its Indian dress of flowing lines, the dusk hair falling upon the shoulders; the delicately modeled face, the curved and eloquent little mouth, and tenderly pointed chin, and above all, the soft, dark, quick-glancing eyes [...]" (Thomas 51). Nearly the entire review revolves around physical descriptions of Naidu, and it only briefly touches on her poetry. It is interesting to point out that this reviewer is female as well. Whether one argues that Thomas describes Naidu in this manner because she has been taught to write in a patriarchal fashion with a patriarchal language, or that this exoticized description occurs because Naidu is of a different nationality than Thomas and that gender is not so much the issue, the fact remains that these types of physical descriptions of Naidu existed and were prevalent.

Not only is Naidu's physical body exoticized by these reviewers, though, so is her writing. In fact, the majority of the praise given to her poetry focuses on what the reviewers see as its exotic subject matter. She is praised not so much for her talent as a writer, but for her willingness to reveal the secrets of a strange land to the western eye. For example, Bronner claims that Naidu's work is especially important because it is a "fresh voice from the inside" (68). Finally, Bronner excitedly explains, there is an Indian writer who can tell us about Indian life in *our* language. Another reviewer asserts that like the "elusive personality of this young Hindu woman," her poems are "strangely alluring" (T., E. 47). This reviewer goes on to claim that *The Golden Threshold* is a valuable contribution "to our understanding of the modern Hindu heart" (T., E. 49). Yet another reviewer praises Naidu's "profound native understanding of India" and is grateful that she shares this understanding in her poetry (Z., M.D. 169). Finally, Harold Hannington Child delights "to find an Indian atmosphere making fragrant English poems" (569). These reviewers all

proclaim Naidu's subject matter the chief aspect of her poetry deserving praise. But why does Naidu choose to be "a fresh voice from the inside"? Edmund Gosse, a British writer, tells us that he instructed her to write this way.

Gosse, who wrote the introduction to *The Bird of Time*, was disappointed in Naidu's poetry originally because it was "Western in feeling and in imagery" (4). He admits, in the very introduction to her book of poetry, that he explained to Naidu that what he, and other British readers, wished to receive was:

not a rechauffe of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul. (Gosse 5)

He proudly reveals that he is the one who steered Naidu away from discussing "robins and skylarks, in a landscape of our Midland counties" (Gosse 5) and led her instead to express emotions which were more "tropical and primitive" (Gosse 6). His greatest praise for her poetry, like the above mentioned reviewers, is that it allows the western reader a peek into the eastern world and is able to give them understanding. This, Gosse tells us, is because she has been trained by them to write in their fashion (Gosse 6). So we see in the very introduction to one of Naidu's books of poetry a British male taking credit for making Naidu's literature more exotic, for teaching her to cater to the desires of the colonizer.

The infantilization of Naidu

In addition to positioning the colonized writer as exotic, the discourse of infantilization is also prevalent amongst colonizers. Albert Memmi refers to this attitude as "paternalistic" (76). This discourse entails viewing the colonized as child-like and simple, as someone in need of proper education and discipline. It also encompasses the colonizer viewing himself/herself as the parent of the colonized. The colonizer then becomes the one who bestows knowledge and judgment onto a child-like people. Ashis Nandy, in *The Intimate Enemy*, also explores the issue of infantilization as being tied to the practice of locking the colonized into an essentialized past. Nandy argues that the infantilization of Indians came about in "two mutually inconsistent ways" (17). The first way was by positing that "civilized India was in the bygone past; now it is dead and 'museumized'" (17). Second, "the colonial culture postulated that India's later degradation was not due to colonial rule [...] but due to aspects of the

traditional Indian culture which in spite of some good points carried the seeds of India's later cultural downfall" (18). Thus, India's virtues were explained away as products of its contact with the colonizers and not as inherently Indian qualities. That is, the colonizers were positioned as the parent-like educators who enlightened a child-like people who might have been great in the past, but who were now in need of instruction.

This way of viewing the colonized as infantile is found in reviews of Naidu's poetry. If we continue with Bronner's review we see that in addition to describing Naidu as exotic, he also depicts her as infantile. Bronner explains that Englishmen have "always been ready to lend sympathetic ears to the verses of these Hindu children, these children matured after the manner of the Oriental" (61). Here, he explicitly compares Naidu to a child and positions himself as a patronizing parent who graciously reads her attempts at adult literature. Bronner also goes on to refer to Naidu as a "precocious poetess" (61) and as a "little rebel" (67). Again, both of these appellations relegate Naidu to the position of a child who needs parental guidance. Other reviews continue in the same fashion. One reviewer of *The Golden Threshold* makes clear that the author is "a very young girl" (*Academy* 1075), and another echoes this, calling her a "slender reed of a girl" (Thomas 51). One should also here remember the parent-like relationship Edmund Gosse clearly felt he had with Naidu. Gosse, in his own opinion, is the one who taught Naidu (as one would teach a child) how to be a true poet.

Additionally, just as Naidu's literature is exoticized as is her body in reviews, so too is her literature often described as infantile. In an anonymous review of *The Golden Threshold*, her poetry is described as "quaint and charming little songs" (*Times* 464), and Bronner refers to her poems as either "lovely things" (66) or "dainty things" (67). In the hands of these reviewers Naidu's poems become only "things," not even worth of being labeled literature. The reviewers clearly see Naidu's poetry as child-like and not meriting serious commentary. It is important to point out here that in positioning Naidu and her poetry as infantile, these reviewers are attempting to revise Naidu into someone who is non-threatening. These descriptions portray Naidu as unimposing, obedient, and harmless. They create a very different picture of the Naidu than that of at least one later reviewer who perhaps sees her more accurately. This anonymous reviewer argues that Naidu betrays:

an inflammable nationalistic spirit and an obdurate race consciousness that lead her to fling challenges at the white race, at the integrity

of the white man's honour, and even at the audacity of the white man in daring to take interest in this India that she feels he has treated so foully. ("Persons & Personages" 265).

The picture offered by this reviewer is so vastly different from that of Bronner or Thomas that one must either believe Naidu went through a complete change of personality, or that these beliefs were at least partially present and were altered or ignored by those who portrayed her as an infantile, exotic other.

Naidu's use of the English language

In his *A History of Indian English Literature* M.K. Naik argues that Indian-English literature "is not part of English literature, any more than American literature can be said to be a branch of British literature" (4). Naik feels that Indian-English writing constitutes a literature of its own and should not be seen as simply imitating the British tradition. Additionally, D. Maya explains that "the Indian English novelist is involved in the potentially independent process of specific self-definition and national recreation" (159). That is, not only does Indian-English literature not follow in the British tradition, it helps to re-create a separate India apart from one defined by colonialism. It is, perhaps, beliefs such as these that reviewers of Naidu's poetry are responding to, whether consciously or not. There seems to be a trend in reviews of Naidu's poetry to explain away all positive aspects of her writing as a result of her British form or style. What is good about her writing, in their opinion, is that she has learned the British mode of writing well. Credit is only partially given to Naidu as an Indian or as a writer. Naidu's Indian identity is forgotten in discussions of her style of writing even though it is prioritized in discussions of her exotic subject matter. Indian authors are seen as "Hindu boys and girls who have written in our tongue" (Bronner 62). These reviewers do not acknowledge the possibility that Naidu, and other Indian authors writing in English, make the language their own. Or, if they do recognize that Indian authors are creating something uniquely their own (although in the English language), they choose to emphasize instead how the literature fits into the British tradition, perhaps to undermine any agency they see arising from the literature.

Have the descriptions changed? The portrayal of Arundhati Roy as exotic other

To what extent, one hundred years after Naidu was writing, and 54 years after India gained its independence, are the stereotypes of

Indian women as “exotic other” or “infantile other” still present? The answer, as found in contemporary, British reviews of Arundhati Roy, is that these stereotypes are still widely propagated. There are two differences, however. First, these stereotypes are not voiced as blatantly as in reviews of Naidu’s poetry. You will not find a present-day critic referring to Indians as “Hindu children” as Milton Bronner did. Yet, although much of the language has changed, the stereotypes are still readily apparent. Second, the whole body of reviews on Roy is much more balanced. Every review one finds about Naidu stereotypes her, or her writing, in some way. However, there are a large number of reviews on Roy’s *The God of Small Things* that discuss Roy and her novel in a respectful and conscientious manner. For my purposes in this paper, though, I will be concentrating on the equally vast number of reviews that perpetuate the above mentioned stereotypes.

Just as Naidu’s body was exoticized in reviews of her literature, so too is Roy’s physical appearance up for scrutiny in reviews of her novel. For example, Jan McGirk’s article on Roy in the *Sunday Times* begins with a physical description of Roy: “With her mass of untamed curls and smouldering dark eyes Arundhati Roy could be the model for one of her romantic heroines.”⁵ McGirk goes on to emphasize how Roy is “beautiful” and even comments on the way her dachshunds “yipped at her slender legs.” Roy’s body is made prominent and exotic throughout the entire article. Jason Cowley, in his review of Roy’s novel, also emphasizes her physical appearance. Cowley comments on how Roy is “not much more than 5ft, and her legs scarcely touch the ground.” He also reveals, while studying Roy’s face, that “a small diamond gleams in one nostril, catching the light.” Additionally, in the *Sunday Telegraph* David Robson proclaims Roy “glamorous” and “engaging.” Although the concentration on Roy’s body is not as prevalent in reviews as the emphasis on Naidu’s body was in hers, it is clear that stereotypes of the exotic, female other are not dead. In fact, they still find their way into such unlikely places as reviews of literature where one would expect to hear about, well—literature.

Roy’s novel, along with her physical appearance, is also revealed in for its exoticness. Edward Said explains in his widely-read book *Orientalism* that “the Orient was almost a European invention, and

⁵ *The Times* and the *Sunday Times*, along with other newspapers like *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *Financial Times*, *The Daily* (or *Sunday*) *Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *Mail On Sunday* which will be used later in the paper, are all based in London.

had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes” (1). After reading Christine Barker’s review of Roy’s novel in the *Birmingham Post* one can change the “was” in this statement to “is.” Barker emphasizes the exotic nature of the novel’s world and tells readers that “Roy’s India smells and tastes like something hot and foreign” (36). She goes on to explain that the characters’ methods of dealing with problems “have more than a hint of jasmine and coriander and advice under the acaranda tree” (Barker 36). Barker delights in the novel chiefly because she sees it as a window to a strange, exotic land—much like earlier reviewers of Naidu. We see that Said’s description of how “the orient” was historically viewed is still with us today.

Has the female, Indian author reached adulthood over the last 100 years?

As with the issue of exoticism, the infantilization of Roy is much less frequent than that of Naidu. Yet, this practice is also still alive and should be acknowledged. For example, in a review of Roy’s novel in *The Times*, Jason Cowley describes Roy as having the “vitality of a child,” and observes that there is “something childish about Roy,” emphasizing the comparison yet a third time by claiming that Roy views the world “as a child might” (Cowley). Cowley also reveals to the reader that Roy “is 37, but could be ten years younger” (Cowley). This reviewer seems set on infantilizing Roy. Cowley is not the only reviewer to do so, however. Tom Deveson, in his *Sunday Times* review compares Roy’s writing to “diary jottings or a teenager’s letters” (Deveson). Again, we see the lack of respect for a female, Indian author materialize through the comparison of an adult woman to a child or teenager.

Roy’s use of the English language

The commentary on Roy’s style of writing falls into two categories: critics either dismiss it as inferior and complain that Roy does not know the proper nuances of English grammar, or they embrace it because it follows in the tradition of British canonical writers (just as reviewers praised Naidu for doing). Praise for the novel as a well-written and Indian piece of writing is scarce. According to these reviews, the value of Roy’s novel rests on how well it imitates the British style: if they do not like the book they argue that Roy does not have a firm grasp on how the English language works, and if they do like the novel they emphasize that it is good because it is so very

similar to the writing of certain well-respected British authors.

The complaints of those reviewers who do not like Roy's novel all sound strangely similar. For example, the same David Robson who we earlier learned described Roy as "glamorous" and "engagingly modest," has no praise for Roy's work itself. He describes her novel as "clumsy" and her prose style "awkward, crab-like" (16). In fact, Robson goes so far to comment on Roy's winning of the Booker prize saying her victory left him "close to despair" (16).⁶ He melodramatically claims that if *The God of Small Things* is the novel of the year, "then the novel is dead" (16). Another critic, Alex Clark, laments the novel's "fairly serious weaknesses," saying Roy "is much given to anarchic capitalisation, in Order to Underline her Point, the repetition of phrases and symbols, and rapid-fire series of short, portentous sentences" (T16). Clark ends his review claiming that at times the novel is "desperately overwritten and sadly under-edited" (T16). Another critic tells of the novel's "technical defects" (Hensher 38), and the last chair from a previous year's Booker panel proclaimed Roy's writing "execrable" (qt. in Whitworth). Finally, a third reviewer, Tom Deveson, argues that the novel is "fatally compromised" because "Roy habitually capitalises phrases" and because "there are countless one-word and two-word sentences and paragraphs, usually verbless." All of these reviewers focus on what they perceive as Roy's misuse of the English language. She does not capitalize properly, she creates one- or two-word sentences, they complain. Essentially, these reviewers do not like Roy's writing because it is not what they are used to—it is not "British-English." These reviewers assume that this style of writing must be accidental; it must be a result of not knowing proper English grammar. Not one of these three reviewers acknowledges the possibility that Roy's style of writing is purposeful. Here is a passage from Roy's novel to demonstrate the style in question:

As Estha stirred the thick jam he thought Two Thoughts, and the Two Thoughts he thought were these:

(a) *Anything can happen to Anyone.*

and

(b) *It's best to be prepared.*

Having thought these thoughts, Estha Alone was happy with his bit of wisdom. (Roy 185-86)

The capitalization in this passage does not seem to be random at all; it is used here to emphasize certain important words. The

⁶ Arundhati Roy won the Booker McConnell book prize in 1997 for *The God of Small Things*. She was the first non-expatriate Indian author, and the first Indian woman to have won.

capitalization, italics, repetition and format all appear to be purposeful, not accidental. Although this manner of writing may not be appealing to some, there does at least seem to be method behind it.

In her book, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black*, bell hooks argues that the work of liberation “demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice” (hooks 29). Although hooks is here specifically addressing the struggle of black authors in North America, her statement certainly can also be applied to other groups of people such as Indians who have had a colonizer’s language imposed on them. Perhaps Roy is doing just what hooks advocates; she is creating a “new language” which is an “oppositional discourse.” It seems very likely that Roy is perfectly aware of the traditional grammatical rules of the English language and that she purposefully modifies them. Boehmer argues just this: “Roy’s writing persistently works an unsettling and undoing of the English language” (70). Thus, the reviewers are then not simply responding to bad grammar, they are also—whether consciously or not—rejecting a new Indian-English language found in the novel.

While many reviewers rejected the novel because of its perceived grammatical flaws, other critics embraced it for the inverse reason: they saw it as a very correct and British piece of writing.⁷ Lisa Jardine, for instance, argues that *The God of Small Things* “is steeped in the canonical English writing which still provides the backbone of Indian education” (22). Jardine also states that Roy’s novel “pays playful homage to Shakespeare and Dickens, and her mischievous games with words depend on a rich literary language running back to Chaucer” (22).⁸ This British reviewer even goes so far as to praise

⁷ It should also be noted here that some British reviewers recognized the language of Roy’s book as something new and non-British. Carla Power comments that “Roy’s novel, written in Delhi and with phrases of Malayalam mixed into the distinctly Indian English, was resolutely homemade” (55). Likewise, Christina Patterson finds the random capital letters of Roy’s prose evidence of a “fresh perspective and a sparkling sense of humor” (17). Patterson also finds Roy’s invented compound nouns and adjectives “wonderfully witty” (17).

⁸ Although, as stated earlier, the purpose of this paper is not to systematically sift through reviews of Naidu and Roy and to contradict stereotypes or refute inaccuracies, it is hard to resist here offering my opinion that Roy’s writing is vastly different from Shakespeare, Dickens, and Chaucer. Specifically, Roy’s literary language in no way “depends” on Chaucer’s earlier example. Compare, for instance, a passage from Roy’s novel to one from Chaucer’s *Sir Thopas*:

Green weed and river grime was woven into her beautiful red-brown hair.
Her sunken eyelids were raw, nibbled at by fish. (O yes they do, the deepswimming fish. They sample everything.) Her mauve corduroy pinafore

Roy's novel as "our literature" later in the review (Jardine 22). Not only does she praise the novel for being written in the British fashion, she praises it and claims it as British literature. So, it seems if a piece of Indian-English writing is good it is because it follows the British example, but if it is perceived as bad it is blamed on the author's misuse or ignorance of proper British English.

The broader reception of Roy

While the reception of Naidu and Roy in British periodicals has been the focus of this paper, the wider reception of Roy should also be addressed in order to gauge how pervasive these colonial stereotypes are. Do Indian or Japanese or Canadian reviewers perpetuate the same images of female, Indian authors that have been discussed? The answer is complicated. For example, one review in *The Statesman* (an Indian newspaper) gives a balanced portrayal of Roy's novel and reveals that it has received both positive and negative reactions. Further, it avoids referring to Roy as either exotic or infantile. Yet, other Indian reviewers do seem to occasionally participate in the same stereotyping that British reviews use. Sumit Mitra, in *India Today*, infantilizes Roy by telling how she "chirped in a high, almost girlish note" (50); N.A. Karim, in *The Hindu*, praises Roy's novel because of its "Joycean use of the English language;" and Rohit Brijnath and Binoo K. John, in *India Today*, blatantly state in their review "it is better if we first get this out of the way, that she is truly beautiful" (114). These comments problematize the issue of colonial stereotypes. It seems that stereotypes which were created by colonizers are also absorbed into the cultures of the colonized. It is

said *Holiday!* in a tilting, happy font. She was as wrinkled as a dhobi's thumb from being in water for too long.

A spongy mermaid who had forgotten how to swim.

A silver thimble clenched, for luck, in her little fist.

Thimble-drinker.

Coffin-carwheeler. (Roy 238)

Sire Thopas wax a doghty swayn;

Whit was his face as payndemayn,

His lippes rede as rose;

His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,

And I yow telle in good certayn

He hadde a semely nose. (Chaucer 213)

Chaucer and Roy differ in subject matter, style, tone and, I would even argue, language. Chaucer's English is almost a completely different language from Roy's English. In fact, I'd be hard-pressed to find a single similarity.

inevitable that some Indians might unconsciously incorporate the images of themselves that the British projected over many years. Further, it is also possible that these comments result from gender stereotypes just as much as they do from colonial ones. Infantilizing a woman or focusing on her physical appearance are not practices confined only to the discourse of colonialism. These are also subtle ways of discriminating against all women.

Roy's novel was reviewed in other countries as well, and again we see mixed reactions. A review by Michael Drexler in a Japanese newspaper, *Mainichi Daily News*, seems fairly straightforward and free of stereotypes as do Conrado De Quiros' in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Ong Sor Fern's in the *Singapore Straits Times*, John Moore's in *The Vancouver Sun*, and Philip Marchand's in *The Toronto Star*. Yet, another article in *The Toronto Star*, by Krishnan Guruswamy, describes Roy as "smiling impishly and twirling curly black locks straying from her hair band" (D1). Additionally, Mary Jordan writes in *Business Day* (a South African newspaper) that the novel is "irritatingly overhyphenated, incomprehensible in parts and an unbearable drudge to read" (15), and Eileen Battersby of *The Irish Times* laments the novel's "self-indulgent use of capital letters for emphasis" and the "profusion of three- and four-word paragraphs," concluding that "for all its lyric pretensions, this is a crude performance" (8). While we see that some of the same types of comments that were prevalent in British periodicals do occur in newspapers of other countries, it seems they are much less frequent.⁹

Concluding thoughts

Although contemporary reviews of Arundhati Roy's novel are more balanced and do not so blatantly infantilize or exoticize Roy as reviewers of Naidu did, many of the same sentiments are still present, only couched in different language. It seems that many of the ways theorists argue that colonizers viewed those whom they colonized still exist in the minds of numerous individuals (not all British). Additionally, while exotic and infantile descriptions of female, Indian authors have decreased greatly since the time Sarojini Naidu was

⁹ In order to fully analyze these reviews in relation to this paper's argument one would have to first discuss the individual histories of each of these countries and then explain the relations each country has had with both Britain and India, and the English language. This paper does not attempt such an ambitious project. I refer to these reviews here simply to broaden the discussion of how Roy has been received by pointing out what has been said of her in non-British periodicals.

writing, it seems that disparaging the ability of these authors to write in English is still a perfectly acceptable criticism. Whether it is Bronner describing Naidu as infantile or Deveson shaking his head at Roy's grammar, the attempted dismissal of literature by Indian women, resulting from patriarchal and imperialistic attitudes, continues to exist today. We must also be careful to realize that gender and colonial stereotypes are tied up together in these reviews. Naidu and Roy are not only discussed and described in terms of their Indian identity, they are also commented upon as women authors. Nonetheless, it is clear that the effects of colonialism are present in reviews of British reviews of Indian literature. Many reviewers today continue to revive colonial tropes in order to suppress the writings of other cultures.

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