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Document A

D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), Ware: Wordsworth, 1995 (39-42)

Kate woke up one morning, aged forty. She did not hide the fact from herself, but she kept it dark from the others.

5 It was a blow, really. To be forty! One had to cross a dividing line. On this side there was youth and spontaneity and 'happiness.' On the other side something different: reserve, responsibility, a certain standing back from 'fun.'

10 She was a widow, and a lonely woman now. Having married young, her two children were grown up. The boy was twenty-one, and her daughter nineteen. They stayed chiefly with their father, from whom she had been divorced ten years before, in order to marry James Joachim Leslie. Now Leslie was dead, and all that half of life was over.

She climbed up to the flat roofs of the hotel. It was a brilliant morning, and for once, under the blue sky of the distance, Popocatepetl stood aloof, a heavy giant presence under heaven, with a cape of snow. And rolling a long dark roll of smoke like a serpent.

15 Ixtaccihuatl, the White Woman, glittered and seemed near, but the other mountain, Popocatepetl, stood farther back, and in shadow, a pure cone of atmospheric shadow, with glinting flashes of snow. There they were, the two monsters, watching gigantically and terribly over their lofty, bloody cradle of men, the Valley of Mexico. Alien, ponderous, the white-hung mountains seemed to emit a deep
20 purring sound, too deep for the ear to hear, and yet audible on the blood, a sound of dread. There was no soaring or uplift or exaltation, as there is in the snowy mountains of Europe. Rather a ponderous, white-shouldered weight, pressing terribly on the earth, and murmuring like two watchful lions.

25 Superficially, Mexico might be all right: with its suburbs of villas, its central fine streets, its thousands of motor-cars, its tennis, and its bridge-parties. The sun shone brilliantly every day, and big bright flowers stood out from the trees. It was a holiday.

30 Until you were alone with it. And then the undertone was like the low, angry, snarling purring of some jaguar spotted with night. There was a ponderous, down-pressing weight upon the spirit: the great folds of the dragon of the Aztecs, the dragon of the Toltecs winding around one and weighing down the soul. And on the bright sunshine was a dark steam of an angry, impotent blood, and the flowers seemed to have their roots in spilt blood. The spirit of place was cruel, down-dragging, destructive.

35 Kate could so well understand the Mexican who had said to her: *El grito mexicano es siempre el grito del odio*—The Mexican shout is always a shout of hate.

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The famous revolutions, as Don Ramón said, began with *Viva!* but ended always with *Muera!* Death to this, death to the other; it was all death! death! death! as insistent as the Aztec sacrifices. Something for ever gruesome and macabre.

40 Why had she come to this high plateau of death? As a woman, she suffered even more than men suffer: and in the end, practically all men go under. Once, Mexico had had an elaborate ritual of death. Now it has death, ragged, squalid, vulgar, without even the passion of its own mystery.

45 She sat on a parapet of the old roof. The street beyond was like a black abyss, but around her was the rough glare of uneven flat roofs, with loose telephone wires trailing across, and the sudden, deep, dark wells of the *patios*, showing flowers blooming in shade.

50 Just behind was a huge old church, its barrel roof humping up like some crouching animal, and its domes, like bubbles inflated, glittering with yellow tiles, and blue and white tiles, against the intense blue heaven. Quiet native women in long skirts were moving on the roofs, hanging out washing or spreading it on the stones. Chickens perched here and there. An occasional bird soared huge overhead, trailing a shadow. And not far away stood the brownish tower-stumps of the Cathedral, the profound old bell trembling huge and deep, so soft as to be almost inaudible, upon the

55 air. It ought to have been all gay, *allegro*, *allegretto*, in that sparkle of bright air and old roof surfaces. But no! There was the dark undertone, the black, serpent-like fatality all the time.

60 It was no good Kate's wondering why she had come. Over in England, in Ireland, in Europe, she had heard the *consummatum est* of her own spirit. It was finished, in a kind of death agony. But still this heavy continent of dark-souled death was more than she could bear.

65 She was forty: the first half of her life was over. The bright page with its flowers and its love and its stations of the Cross ended with a grave. Now she must turn over, and the page was black, black and empty.

The first half of her life had been written on the bright, smooth vellum of hope, with initial letters all gorgeous upon a field of gold. But the glamour had gone from station to station of the Cross, and the last illumination was the tomb.

70 Now the bright page was turned, and the dark page lay before her. How could one write on a page so profoundly black?

75 She went down, having promised to go and see the frescoes in the university and schools. Owen and Villiers and a young Mexican were waiting for her. They set off through the busy streets of the town, where automobiles and the little omnibuses called *camiones* run wild, and where the natives in white cotton clothes and sandals and big hats linger like heavy ghosts in the street, among the bourgeoisie, the young ladies in pale pink *crêpe de chine* and high heels, the men in little shoes and American straw hats. A continual bustle in the glitter of sunshine.

80 Crossing the great shadeless *plaza* in front of the Cathedral, where the tram-cars gather as in a corral, and slide away down their various streets, Kate lingered again to look at the things spread for sale on the pavement: the little toys, the painted gourd-shells, brilliant in a kind of lacquer, the *novedades* from Germany, the fruits, the flowers. And the natives squatting with their wares, large-limbed, silent, handsome men looking up with their black, centreless eyes, speaking so softly, and lifting with small sensitive brown hands the little toys they had so carefully made and

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85 painted. A strange gentle appeal and wistfulness, strange male voices, so deep, yet so quiet and gentle. Or the women, the small quick women in their blue *rebozos*, looking up quickly with dark eyes, and speaking in their quick, coaxing voices. The man just setting out his oranges, wiping them with a cloth so carefully, almost tenderly, and piling them in bright tiny pyramids, all neat and exquisite. A certain sensitive
90 tenderness of the heavy blood, a certain chirping charm of the bird-like women, so still and tender with a bud-like femininity. And at the same time, the dirty clothes, and the unwashed skin, the lice, and the peculiar hollow glint of the black eyes, at once so fearsome and so appealing.

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Document B

Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2001 (13-15)

Although the word 'exotic' currently has widespread application, it continues—possibly because of this—to be commonly misunderstood. For the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent *quality* to be found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—

5 one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. The exoticist production of otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and reconciliation, but

10 legitimising just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest. Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. Within this circuit, the strange and the familiar, as well as the relation between them, may be recoded to serve different, even contradictory, political needs and ends. As Stephen Foster has argued, the exotic functions dialectically as a *symbolic system*, domesticating the foreign, the culturally

15 different and the extraordinary so that the 'phenomena to which they ... apply begin to be structured in a way which makes them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity' (Foster 1982/3: 21). Exoticism is, in one sense, a control mechanism of cultural translation which relays the other inexorably back again to the same (Bongie 1991; Wasserman 1994); but to domesticate the exotic fully would neutralise its capacity to create surprises, thereby integrating it 'into the humdrum of everyday routines' (Foster 1982/3: 21-2). Thus, while exoticism describes the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things, it also denotes an expanded, if inevitably distorted, comprehension of

25 diversity which effectively limits assimilation 'since the exotic is ... kept at arm's length rather than taken as one's own' (Foster 1982/3: 22). As a system, then, exoticism functions along predictable lines but with unpredictable content; and its political dimensions are similarly unstable, for the ideology it implies always 'stops short of an exhaustive interpretation' (Foster 1982/3: 22).

30 Exoticism describes a political as much as an aesthetic practice. But this politics is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification. As a technology of representation, exoticism is self-empowering; self-referential even, insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back (Root 1996: 45). For this reason, among others, exoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of

35 imperial power. And its effectiveness can be measured, in part, by the occlusion of underlying political motives. The wonder beheld in exotic peoples, as Stephen Greenblatt demonstrates in his book on New World conquest, may precede their violent subjugation; the exotic splendour of newly colonised lands may disguise the brutal circumstances of their gain (Greenblatt 1991: esp. chap. 3). The exoticist rhetoric of fetishised otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of

40 the power relations without which the discourse could not function. In the imperial context, as Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo have suggested, this masking involves the transformation of power-politics into *spectacle*. If imperialism, as they define it, is 'the

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45 expansion of nationality', then exoticism is 'the aestheticizing means by which the pain
of that expansion is converted into spectacle, to culture in the service of empire' (Arac
and Ritvo 1991: 3). A similar point is made by Edward Said in his study *Culture and*
Imperialism (1993). For Said, exoticism functions in a variety of imperial contexts as a
mechanism of aesthetic substitution which 'replaces the impress of power with the
50 blandishments of curiosity' (Said 1993: 159). Said's formulation is characteristically
elegant if, in this case, slightly inaccurate; for it is not that exotic spectacle and the
curiosity it arouses replaces power, but rather that it functions as a decoy to *disguise* it.

Studies like Arac and Ritvo's and, to a lesser extent, Said's, focus on nineteenth-
century exoticisms and, more particularly, on the concealment of imperial authority
through exotic spectacle. The plethora of exotic products currently available in the
55 marketplace suggests, however, a rather different dimension to the global
'spectacularisation' of cultural difference. Late twentieth-century exoticisms are the
products, less of the expansion of the nation than of a worldwide *market*—exoticism
has shifted, that is, from a more or less privileged mode of aesthetic perception to an
increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption. The massification of exotic
60 merchandise implies a new generic form of exoticism, 'suitable for all markets and at the
limits of its own semantic dispersion' (Gallini 1996: 219). It also entails a
reconsideration of the conventional exoticist distinction between the (imperial) 'centre'
and the 'peripheries' on which it depends.

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Jennifer Baird, *Hidden City*, water colour and oil pastel painting, dimensions unknown, 2008

