Tracing the Oriental Origin of Gothic Fiction in Eliza Haywood’s *The Adventures of Eovaai*

Jane Lim
Seoul National University

Eliza Haywood’s *The Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo* (1736) has received only a handful of criticisms in the recent couple of decades, not least because of its extravagant narratological construct. The narrative is fragmented, incoherent, salacious, wild, and fantastical; or rather, everything that the English assumed to be traits of “Oriental” tales, a literary vogue that spread across the English Channel in the early eighteenth century.¹ Inspired by the translation of Antoine Galland’s *The

¹ Recent literary critics like Ros Ballaster or Srinivas Aravamudan have used “Oriental tales” as an umbrella term to encompass actual and imaginary fictions from the East. In *Fabulous Orients*, for instance, Ballaster categorizes Oriental tales according to three distinct geographies: Turkey/Persia, India, and China. This is not an attempt to jumble many different Eastern identities into a single category, but to highlight the ways in which seventeenth and eighteenth-century English writers were “looking East” to satisfy a thirst for extranational fiction. In this paper, I also use the term Oriental tales to refer to English fiction that was inspired by Islamic and Chinese culture, respectively.
*Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* (1706), Giovanni Paolo Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (1684-86) and Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1722), English writers were soon writing their own version of Oriental tales, claiming them as authentic “translations” from the East. For instance, influenced by Marana and Galland, Charles Gildon wrote *The Golden Spy: Or, a Political Journal of the British Nights Entertainments of War and Peace, and Love and Politics* (1709), while Defoe published two spy narratives, *The Conduct of Christians Made the Sport of Infidels; In a Letter from a Turkish Merchant at Amsterdam to the Grand Mufti at Constantinople* (1715) and *A Continuation of Letters Written by a Turkish Spy at Paris* (1718). Samuel Johnson’s *The History of Rasselas* (1759) also features an Abyssinian prince, and James Ridley published *Tales of the Genii* (1764) as a Persian “translation.”

Written as a pseudo-Oriental fairy tale—an English fiction that claims to have been written by an Oriental hand—*Eovaai* thus defies the rules of formal realism delineated by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*. Watt describes the English novel as a new prose genre that produces a “full and authentic report of human experience” (32). In order to represent the “daily lives of ordinary people” (60), novels adopt proper names from “ordinary” life. Early fiction writers like Aphra Behn or Delarivier Manley, Watt argues, are exceptions who instead use names that “carried foreign, archaic or literary connotations which excluded any suggestion of real and contemporary life” (19). By reading something “foreign” and