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Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India

Gauri Viswanathan

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In 19th century India, Viswanathan points out, the English literary text functioned as a mirror of the ideal Englishman in his most perfect state. The literature became a mask for economic expoloitation that camouflaged the material activities of the colonizing British government. In effect, the British goal was to create "brown Englishmen" in the service of the state and its mercantile objectives. This intellectually lively argument is covered in full by the author as her story unfolds. Viswanathan shows how the English studies introduced in India under British colonial rule came to be a most effective form of political control and how this abetted voluntary cultural assimilation. The author argues that challenges to the literary canon must take account of the role of Empire in the creation of modern English studies.

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