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tez, her reputation made you automatically think of bedrooms', said Aldous Huxley.

Lola Montez's origins are quite confusing. In fact, she has been given as many birthplaces as she has biographers; and, geographically, they are quite disparate – Madrid, Constantinople, Lucerne, Calcutta, Seville! However, nowadays it is generally agreed that she was born in Limerick in 1816. She was the daughter of Ensign Edward Gilbert, a young Irish officer in the 25th Foot Regiment, who had married one of the Olivers of Castle Oliver, Co. Limerick. She was christened Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna, but this was quickly contracted to Lola. When she was five years old her father was posted to India with the 44th Foot Regiment. He took his wife and child with him, but within a few short weeks he died of cholera. Mrs. Gilbert was quickly befriended by a brother officer of her late husband, Lieutenant Patrick Craigie, a Scotsman, and within a short time married him.

Lola was sent back to Craigie's family in Montrose, Scotland, for her education but hated the dour, bleak, Calvinistic atmosphere of the house. She did not fit in, so her father arranged for her to stay with some friends in Bath. There she finished her education, visiting Paris in the process. She was, as I have

Lola Montez, Countess of Landsfeld, from a lithograph by Prosper-Guillaume Dartiguenave.

husband. Bath, she feared, was full of 'fortrimentals'.. At any rate, she did choose a son-in-law for Lola – Sir Abraham Lumley, a Calcutta judge who was old enough to be the girl's father! Lola was quick to dub him 'that gouty old rascal' and refused to marry him. Instead, she eloped with a young lieutenant, Thomas James, and ended up in Rathbiggon, Co. Meath, where the bridegroom's brother, Rev. John James, married them. They moved to Dublin for a short time before he was posted to India but Lola was unhappy. 'He slept like a boa-constrictor and drank too much porter,' she complained. Not long afterwards she left him and India, when it was discovered that he had engaged in 'conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman' with a colleague's wife.

Lola turned up in London. She stayed for a short time in the Imperial Hotel, Covent Garden, with a Captain Lennox whom she had met on the boat from India. But before long news of her affair got back to her husband in Calcutta and he lost no time in attempting to rid himself of her. When sufficient evidence was amassed a suit for divorce was filed and a *decree a mensa et thoro* ('from bed and board') was given. From then on Lola had to fend for herself and it is from this point that her career takes off.

She met two people who were to influence her greatly, Jean Francois Montez, an extremely wealthy man, and Edward Blanchard, a hack dramatist of Drury Lane. The former supported Lola financially and regularly turns up in various places throughout her career; the latter pointed her in the direction of the theatre; and while she quickly found she had no great talent for drama, the boards attracted her so she decided to become a dancer. Incidentially, on receiving this news, her family reportedly went into mourning and issued undertakers' cards to signify that she was now dead to them!

At any rate, when Lola headed for Madrid in 1842 to learn the rudiments of Spanish dancing she set out on an odyssey which was to take her into the annals of the theatre. For more than two decades she blazed a trail through a succession of husbands, lovers, countries and theatres to win for herself an enduring place on the stage of world history.

In May, 1855, while on an American tour, she announced that she would be travelling to Australia, bringing with her a team of actors and actresses. In the following month she set out on the ten weeks' voyage on board the rather inelegantly named *Fanny Major.*

Sydney was Lola's first port of call. Her fame and notoriety preceded her.