

Orientalism and After

Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said

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Trained primarily in the classical mould of scholarship in comparative European literatures, in a milieu dominated by Auerbach and Spitzer, the German comparatists who had given to the discipline its stamp of high humanism of a very conservative kind, Edward Said's attempt to assemble a narrative of European humanism's complicity in the history of European colonialism lapses into ambivalences. Faced with the problem of identifying some sort of agency that might undo the centuries-old link between the narratives of high humanism and the colonial project Said posits the most ordinary and familiar values of humanist liberalism—humanism-as-ideality is invoked even as humanism-as-history is unequivocally rejected. This ambivalence is further complicated by the impossible reconciliation which Said tries to achieve between that humanism and Foucaultian discourse theory which is inseparable from Nietzschean anti-humanism and the currently dominant anti-realist theories of representation. This essay argued from a Marxist perspective offers a critique of Said on fundamental issues of theory and history.

It needs to be said that criticism modified in advance by labels like 'Marxism' or 'liberalism' is, in my view, an oxymoron... The net effect of 'doing' Marxist criticism or writing at the present time is of course to declare political preference, but it is also to put oneself outside a great deal of things going on in the world, so to speak, and in other kinds of criticism.

[Edward W Said, *The World, The Text and The Critic*, pp 28-29]

I HAVE written critically of Fredric Jameson in the past,¹ and substantial portions of what follows shall be highly critical of Edward Said. One reason simply is that with the passing away of Raymond Williams, Jameson and Said now are possibly the most significant cultural critics writing in the English language for the kind of work I do in this area, and I can scarcely find my own thought without passing through theirs. Disagreeing with Jameson had been easier. Writing from a Marxist position, I naturally share identifiable points of theoretical departure with Jameson even when—especially when—disagreements are on the most basic issues. Said is different in this regard. I disagree with him so fundamentally on issues both of theory and of history that our respective understandings of the world—the world as it now is, and as it has been at many points over the past two thousand years or so—are simply irreconcilable, which then leads, inevitably, to differences of local interpretation and local reading so numerous that no one article can possibly name them all.

These differences, both the general and the particular, are in any case the smaller part of my difficulty in writing about Edward Said. Much the larger difficulty resides, rather, with my sense of solidarity with his beleaguered location in the midst of imperial America. For, Edward Said is not only a cultural critic, he is also a Palestinian. Much that is splendid in his work is connected with the fact that he has tried to do honour to that origin; and he has done so

against all odds, to the full extent of his capacity, by stepping outside the boundaries of his academic discipline and original intellectual formation, under no compulsion of profession or fame, in no pursuit of personal gain, in fact at frightening risks to himself, including threats of assassination. Said has decided to live with such risks, and much honour—very rare kinds of honour—attaches to that decision. How does one, then, register one's many disagreements from within this solidarity? For some years I have felt that one simply could not do that, that dissenting speech might be a betrayal of that solidarity. More recently, though, I have come to believe that such a position of willed neutrality is politically wrong, morally indefensible. Said, after all, continues to pursue his vocation in circumstances given to him. Those of us who admire his courage and yet disagree with him on substantive issues also have to carry on our own critical pursuits—as if that gun, trained at him, was not there. Suppression of criticism, I have come to believe, is not the best way of expressing solidarity.

I

About the sense of that place, the question of that origin, Said has also written directly: notably in his two books, *The Question of Palestine*² and *After the Last Sky*,³ and in numerous articles. But the awareness of it is there—at times only on the margins, in some places very much foregrounded, and increasingly so with the passage of time—in many of the writings that have followed the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978.⁴ It is likely, in fact, that when the dust of current literary debates settles, Said's most enduring contribution shall be seen as residing neither in *Orientalism*, which is a deeply flawed book, nor in the literary essays which have followed in its wake, but in his work on the Palestine issue, e.g. his seminal essay 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims'⁵ the superbly-inflected prose which he

contributed alongside Jean Mohr's photographs in *After the Last Sky*, and generally the role he has played, with unrivalled energy and much salutary effect, in re-defining the issue of Palestine national liberation for western, especially American, intelligentsias. Even though the latter parts of *The Question of Palestine* were much weaker, one could see that in Said's own intellectual biography and in the history of his sentiments, the writing of *Orientalism* had been in some ways a preparation for the writing of that essay, on 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims'. One was in a sense grateful for that preparation, that will to settle the rage within, as much as possible, so that he could then speak, with scholarly precision and measured eloquence, about that most difficult place inside the self where the wound had once been, where the pain still was. And because one had already read *Orientalism*, the composure that Said had gained, the scruple he was now able to exercise, was all the more striking.

Orientalism marks such a radical break in Said's own intellectual career precisely because the writing of this book was an attempt at coming to terms with what it meant for him to be a Palestinian living and teaching in the US, armed with not much more than a humanist intellectual training, a successful career as literary critic, and a splendid mastery over wide areas of European literary textuality. As he put it in the 'Introduction':

'My own experience of these matters is in part what made me write this book. The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening... The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanising ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny.'⁶

That is one part of the purpose: to make manifest the many strands and histories of this 'web' confronting the Palestinian. But

an equally personal and more nuanced undertaking was announced, with the aid of a quotation from Gramsci, two pages earlier (p 25):

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci says: "The starting-point in critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, . . . as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory." The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci's comment at that, whereas Gramsci's Italian text concludes by adding that "therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory". . . . In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals.

This passage from Gramsci seems to have meant a great deal to Said, for it reappears at the beginning of his 'Zionism' essay. Several aspects of these two passages should therefore detain us. The first is that this was the first time in Said's writings that his personal voice had intruded so sharply, was positioned so centrally, in the definition of his scholarly project. As one returns today, some 20 years later, to Said's first two books, the one on Conrad and *Beginnings*,⁷ one notices the early mastery of style but one is also struck, from today's vantage point of the *tone* of *Orientalism*, by the essentially cerebral character of that earlier prose, by the fact that not much more than the mind is engaged, and the mind then seemed actually to have believed that, when it comes to intellectual inquiry, even in the human sciences, nothing other than the mind *need be engaged*. The emphasis here, by contrast, on one's own "uniquely punishing destiny" and the intent, then, to prepare an "inventory" of the traces—wounds, one might say—that the destiny has inflicted upon oneself, announces the emergence of a very different kind of prose, more personal and palpable, in which erudition is poised more or less precariously against the polemical verve.

But, why should this "inventory" of traces take the form of a counter-reading of the western canonical textualities, mainly in the cognate areas of literature and philology, from Greek tragedy onwards? The reason was again a personal one, though it was really not connected with being a Palestinian. Said had been trained primarily in the classical mould of scholarship in comparative European literatures, in a milieu dominated by Auerbach and Spitzer, the German comparatists who had given to the discipline its stamp of high humanism of a very conservative kind, more or less tory in orientation. It was the ghost of this precise canonicity which had to be laid to rest. The particular texture of *Orientalism*, its emphasis on the canonical text, its privileging of literature and philology in the constitution of 'Orientalist' knowledge and indeed the human sciences generally, its will to

portray a 'west' which has been the same from the dawn of history up to the present, and its will to traverse all the main languages of Europe—all this, and more, in *Orientalism* derives from the ambition to write a counter-history that could be posed against *Mimesis*, Auerbach's magisterial account of the seamless genesis of European realism and rationalism from Greek antiquity to the modernist moment. If there is an absent anti-hero in Said's own counter-classic, it is Eric Auerbach. If Auerbach began with Homer, Said too must begin with Greek tragedy; and a special venom must be reserved for Dante because Dante, after all, is the hero of Auerbach's account. But ghosts of that kind are not so easily laid to rest, provided that you are sufficiently possessed by them.⁸ Over the past decade or so, Said has recounted, most poignantly, over and over again, in several different texts, that moment in Auerbach's life when he, a refugee from fascism, sat in his lonely corner in Istanbul, cut off from the European libraries of classical and romance languages, and wrote *Mimesis*, his loving summation of his beloved humanist knowledge of European literature at a time when he thought that the tradition itself was at the point of vanishing. In this narrative, to which Said returns again and again, Auerbach is the emblem of scholarly rectitude, a lone figure defending humanist value in the midst of holocaust, a scholar in the finest sense; also a surrogate figure, because this figure of an ultimate scholar writing his masterpiece in exile has, for Said, the stateless Palestinian and the ambitious author of *Orientalism*, a very special resonance. Outside this particular narrative of personal desolation and perseverance, however, Auerbach is also the master of European knowledge against which the counter-knowledge of *Orientalism* is assembled.

This paradoxical relationship with Auerbach, the individual master, is played out on a much more complex scale, in an equally paradoxical relationship with high humanism as such. In the field of cultural studies, Said is our most vivacious narrator of the history of European humanism's complicity in the history of European colonialism: The global history of humanism doubtless includes much besides that complicity, and it is of course eminently arguable that this narrative of the convergence between colonial knowledges and colonial powers simply cannot be, assembled in cultural studies as such, because histories of economic exploitation, political coercion, military conquest play the far more constitutive part; those other histories are the ones which provide the enabling conditions for the so-called 'orientalist discourse' as such. But that argument we shall for the moment ignore. What is far more significant is that after Said has assembled the whole narrative of European literature, from Aeschylus to Edward Lane, as a history of literature's complicity in inferiorisation of the 'orient', and after he has identified the

enlightenment itself as an unified trajectory and master sign, of both orientalism and colonialism, he is of course faced with the problem of identifying some sort of agency that might undo this centuries-old tie between narratives of high humanism and the colonial project. At this point, we discover a peculiar blockage, for what Said now posits are the most ordinary, the most familiar values of humanist liberalism, namely, tolerance, accommodation, cultural pluralism and relativism, and those insistently repeated words: *sympathy, constituency, affiliation, filiation*. What is remarkable about this at times very resounding affirmation of humanist value is that humanism-as-ideality is invoked precisely at the time when humanism-as-history has been rejected so unequivocally.

These ambivalences about Auerbach and about humanism in general were problematic enough, but they were then complicated further by the impossible reconciliation which Said tries to achieve between that humanism and Foucault's discourse theory, which no serious intellectual would want to use simply as a method of reading and classifying canonical books because the theory itself is inseparable from Nietzschean anti-humanism and the currently dominant anti-realist theories of representation. The invocation of Foucault as the conceptual mentor we encounter early in the book (p 3), as soon as Said is done with his three definitions of the object, orientalism, as such:

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The archeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.

This sense of affiliation with Foucault remains strong throughout *Orientalism*, and the prose of the book is replete with Foucaultian terminology: regularity, discursive field, representation, archive, epistemic difference, etc. And yet one is not quite sure what the relationship of Said's thought with Foucault's really is.⁹ Foucault surely knew how to be allusive, but underneath all his multiple enunciations one knows exactly what his agreements and disagreements with Marxism actually have been. His first and irreconcilable difference is that he locates Marx firmly within the boundaries of what he calls the 'western episteme'; in its epistemic construction, he says, the thought of Marx is framed entirely by the discourse of political economy as this discourse is assembled within that episteme.¹⁰ From this purported philosophical difference, then, follows his equally clear disagreement with Marx on the issue of the principle that might

govern historical narrativisation; he radically denies that narratives of history can be assembled at the twin sites of the state and economic production, which he deems to be the exclusive originating sites of Marx's historical narrative. I shall not here examine these preposterous propositions of Foucault, because I am at the moment interested only in the form of Foucault's resurfacing in Said's thought. For, after disagreeing with Marx on these fundamental premises, Foucault then goes on to specify both the spatial limits and the temporal constitution of the episteme he is engaged in. He insists that it is a western episteme; about the rest of humanity he makes no claims of knowledge. Second, he locates the constitution of this episteme, historically, in the processes that range from roughly the 16th century to the 18th. Foucault always sidesteps Marxist terminology, but he knows what he is talking about, namely, that emergence of bourgeois society which spans from primary accumulation up to the first industrial revolution. With the exception of *Histoire de la folie*, which he finished before working out his philosophical system in what became *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*—with the exception of that one book, all the narratives he had assembled before 1978, especially the one in *Discipline and Punish*, which Said here specifically mentions—all begin in that crucible of bourgeois beginnings. The episteme is western because it is located in a transition that occurred specifically in Europe, and the narrative of incarceration and surveillance which Foucault assembles and Said invokes is designed, precisely, to demarcate the boundary between the *ancien regime* and the modern.

Said uses Foucaultian terms as discrete elements of an apparatus but refuses to accept the consequences of Foucault's own mapping of history. If Foucaultian pressures force him to trace the beginnings of the 'Orientalist discourse' from the 18th century or so, the equally irresistible pressures of Auerbachian high humanism force him to trace the origins of this very 'discourse', in the conventional form of a continuous European literary textuality, all the way back to ancient Greece. In a characteristic move, Said refuses to choose and, as we shall demonstrate below, he offers mutually incompatible definitions of 'orientalism' so as to deploy both these stances, the Foucaultian and the Auerbachian, *simultaneously*. Now, the idea that there could be a discourse—that is to say, an epistemic construction—traversing the whole breadth of 'western' history and textualities, spanning not only the modern capitalist period but all the preceding pre-capitalist periods as well, is not only an un-Marxist but also a radically un-Foucaultian idea. The Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* simply would not accept that there is any kind of integral relationship between ancient Greek and modern western Europe, except that post-renaissance

Europe begins to trace its lineage, in a more or less fantastic manner, from that antiquity while reversing most of the presuppositions prevailing in that antiquity. And, Foucault never speaks of a fully fledged discourse prior to the 16th century because what he calls 'discourse' presumes, as co-extensive corollary, a rationalism of the post-medieval kind, alongside the increasing elaborations of modern state forms, modern institutional grids, objectified economic productions, modern forms of rationalised planning. Said's idea that the ideology of modern imperialist Eurocentrism is already inscribed in the ritual theatre of Greek tragedy—or that Marx's passage on the role of British colonialism in India can be lifted out of the presuppositions of political economy and seamlessly integrated into the trans-historical orientalist discourse—is not only ahistorical in the ordinary sense but also specifically anti-Foucaultian in a methodological sense. And, from the 18th century onwards at least, Said traces the powers and densities of the 'Orientalist discourse' directly to what Foucault would designate as so many sites of the state—the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, the French occupation of North Africa, the Anglo-French rivalries in the Levant, and so on—which Foucaultian positions would disqualify as constitutive sites of discourse. I do not normally agree with most of what I find in Foucault, but I must recognise that Foucault was on such accounts by and large careful in his procedures. It is not for nothing that Foucault never constructed the history of any discourse on the basis of master texts; Freud's psychoanalytic procedure has no privilege in Foucault's thought over the country priest who supervises the Catholic girl's confession. He always distinguishes *discourse* from canonical tradition, from mentality, from institution. His philosophical distinction between *discursive* regularity and *personal* statement, his historiographic preoccupation with specifying the *form* and *boundary* of discourse, his refusal to collapse one discourse into another—the discourse of incarceration into the discourse of sexuality, for example—are fundamental to his thought, and the prolixity of his prose stands in direct contrast to the austerity of his boundaries. Said observes none of those austerities.

One of the most rigid boundaries in Foucault's thought was drawn against humanism as such, which he retained until the last couple of years of his life, when there were some glimmerings of recantation. On this count, most especially, Said's procedures of 1978 are radically anti-Foucaultian and are taken directly from the high humanist traditions of comparative literature and philology, which have shaped his narrative method as well as his choice of texts. For, it is the proposition of this alternative, humanist tradition that (a) there is a unified European/western identity which is at the *origin* of history and which has

shaped this history through its *thought* and its *texts*; (b) this seamless and unified history of European identity and thought runs from ancient Greece up to the end of the 19th century and well into the 20th, through a specific set of beliefs and values which remain eternally the same, only getting more dense; and (c) that this history is immanent in, and therefore available for reconstruction through, the canon of its *great books*. Said subscribes to the *structure* of this idealist metaphysic even though he obviously questions the greatness of some of those 'great' books. He duplicates, in other words, all those procedures even as he debunks the very tradition from which he has borrowed the procedures. Said's narrative here presumes, as Auerbach presumes, that there is a line of continuity between Aeschylus and the modern European; that this sense of continuity was itself fabricated in post-Renaissance Europe is something neither Auerbach nor Said (in *Orientalism* at any rate) would question. Like Auerbach, Said too is preoccupied with the canonical author, with tradition, with sequential periodisation. Auerbach finds humanist value in those books, Said finds only a lack; but both look for the same values, in the same books—or at least the same *kind* of books. He denounces with Foucaultian vitriol what he loves with Auerbachian passion, so that the reader soon begins to detect a very *personal* kind of drama getting enacted in Said's procedure of alternately debunking and praising to the sky and again debunking the same books, as if he had been betrayed by the objects of his passion. This way of alternating between inordinate praise and wholesale rejection was to endure far beyond *Orientalism*. For a more recent exercise of this procedure, the essay on Kipling may be cited,¹¹ where the criticisms of Kipling which Said offers are unsurprising since he only repeats, without acknowledgement of course, what has been said often enough by numerous critics on the left, but those familiar criticisms are then combined with surprisingly high and unwarranted praise for Kipling as a 'master stylist' so 'great', we are told, that

as an artist he can justifiably be compared with Hardy, with Henry James, Meredith, Gissing, the later George Eliot, George Moore, Samuel Butler. In France, Kipling's peers are Flaubert and Zola, even Proust and the early Gide.

The list of novels with which *Kim* is then solemnly compared includes *Sentimental Education*, *The Portrait of A Lady*, and *Way of All Flesh*. It is not entirely clear why a minor novel, which owed its wide circulation only to colonial currency, has to be thus elevated—and made worthy of the attack—before getting knocked down.

The issue of trying to reconcile Auerbach with Foucault is indicative in any case of a whole range of problems that are at once methodological, conceptual as well as political. For, Said's work is self-divided not only between Auerbachian high humanism

and Nietzschean anti-humanism (the issue of Nietzsche I will take up later), but also between a host of irreconcilable positions in cultural theory generally, from the most radical to the most reactionary, ranging all the way from Gramsci to Julien Benda, with Lukacs and Croce and Mathew Arnold in between. This I should want to illustrate with some comments on Benda, whom Said has often praised as one of the exemplary intellectuals of this century. That Benda, a man possessed by notions of high aesthetics, would come in for that kind of praise is perhaps not entirely surprising, given Said's original training, his preference for high canonicity, and the aestheticist claim of being located beyond all 'isms'. What is far more surprising is Said's habit of equating Benda with Gramsci, which is I suppose one way of domesticating the revolutionary content of Gramsci's thought. One does not have to read far into *Treason of the Intellectuals*¹² to see (a) that the 'treason' that Benda speaks of is none other than the intellectuals' participation in what he calls 'the political passions'; and (b) that 'class passions' and 'racial passions' are for him among the worst, so that 'anti-semitism' and 'socialism' are said to be equally diabolical, while 'the working classes who even in the middle of the 19th century, felt only a scattered hostility for the opposing class' are castigated because in Benda's own time (i.e. 1920s) 'they form a closely-woven fabric of hatred from one end of Europe to another' (pp 3-5). Benda then goes on to denounce dozens—literally dozens—of intellectuals, from all ages but especially from the modern age, who, in his opinion, 'have not been content simply to adopt passions ... They permit, they desire, them to be mingled with their work as artists, as men of learning, as philosophers, to colour the essence of their work and to mark all its productions. And indeed never were there so many political works among those which ought to be the mirror of the disinterested intelligence' (p 67; emphasis added). There is thus boundless denunciation of all politics, especially socialist politics, in the name of 'the disinterested intelligence'; even poor Michelangelo is denounced for 'crying shame upon Leonardo da Vinci for his indifference to the misfortunes of Florence' while 'the master of the Last Supper' is commended for replying 'that indeed the study of beauty occupied his whole heart' (p 47). One of Said's many laudatory comments on Benda runs, in turn, as follows:

Certainly what Benda says about intellectuals (who, in ways specific to the intellectual vocation itself, are responsible for defiance) resonates harmoniously with the personality of Socrates as it emerges in Plato's *Dialogues*, or with Voltaire's opposition to the Church, or more recently with Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual allied with the emergent class against ruling class hegemony. ... It is also the case, both Benda and Gramsci agree, that intellectuals are eminently useful in making hegemony work. For Benda this

of course is the *trahison des clercs* in its essence; their unseemly participation in the perfection of political passions is what he thinks is despairingly the very essence of their contemporary mass sell-out.¹³

The inflationary invocations of Socrates, Voltaire and Gramsci do not really help clarify what Said here really means, even as he ends with that Orwellian phrase: 'contemporary mass sell-out'. Gramsci, surely, means little if we abstract from his legacy his 'political passion'. And so fundamental is the tie in Benda's thought between anti-communism and a general hatred of the working class on the one hand, and 'the disinterested intelligence' and the 'study of beauty' on the other, that only a very conservative mind, essentially Tory in its structure, would want to think of him as an exemplary intellectual. But then a mind of that kind would not normally want to associate itself with Gramsci. It is an index of Said's self-division that he would think of Benda, the rabid anti-communist, and Gramsci, one of the more persevering communists of the century, as occupying essentially the same political position.¹⁴ And it is the listing of revolutionaries like Gramsci (in the more recent work such lists would get very lengthy indeed) which conceals how very traditionally literary-critical Said's thought actually is.

II

What is equally striking, as one looks back on the passage I quoted earlier, with a quotation from Gramsci embedded in it, is Said's own formulation—'In many ways my study of orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject'—which summarises more or less accurately what the book is about, especially if we take literally the idea that the phrase 'inventory of traces upon me' here refers to Said's own quite specific grounding in—and ambivalent relation with—a very traditional and canonical conception of 'literature'. The significant move here in any case is Said's self-description as 'the oriental subject'. Such self-representations are always somewhat one-sided, and therefore somewhat hazardous, for anyone whose own cultural apparatus is so overwhelmingly European and who commands such an authoritative presence in the American university. The irony of such usages in Said's case are all the greater because any careful reading of the *whole* of his work would show how strategically he deploys words like 'we' and 'us', to refer, in various contexts, to Palestinians, third-world intellectuals, academics in general, humanists, Arabs, Arab-Americans, and the American citizenry at large.¹⁵ More to the point, in any case, are the inflations that were to soon follow, on the heels of *Orientalism*. The cursory phrase 'the oriental subject' was then to be revamped in a number of radicalist strands in subsequent literary theory as 'the colonial subject' and, yet later, as 'the post-colonial

subject'; Said's own highly tendentious uses of these latter terms shall be discussed below, when I come to discuss his schematic characterisation of C L R James and George Antonius as the emblematic 'colonial' intellectuals, of S H Alatas and Ranajit Guha as the exemplary 'post-colonial' ones. The idea of the 'inventory of traces', eloquent and legitimate in itself, was to be inflated into the idea, by Fredric Jameson among others, that third world societies are *constituted* by the experience of colonialism and imperialism. Now, the notion of a 'colonial subject', or 'post-colonial subject' for that matter, of course *presumes* that we are indeed constituted by colonialism, then in quick succession by post-coloniality; if we are not *constituted* by colonialism then the term 'colonial subject' is theoretically meaningless.

The original Gramscian idea of an 'inventory of traces' presumes that there is a personality, a cultural location upon which the traces are inscribed; it presumes that there are other 'traces' into which *these* traces are woven, so that the personality that emerges out of this weave, this overlap, is conditioned not by a specific set of traces but by the whole of its history. What this original Gramscian idea could mean, for example, is that the Italian cultural formation cannot be read back from fascism or the Risorgimento or even the failure of the reform, hence the unfinished character of the Italian renaissance; that it would have to be traced all the way back, historically, to the very moment of the ascendancy of the high church and of high latin as the language of that church, as well as from the histories of subordinations following thereafter; in other words, histories, and therefore subjectivities, are constituted not by what Gramsci calls 'moments' but by the always accumulating processes of sedimentation and accretion. In relation to India, then, this original Gramscian formulation would mean, at the very least, that colonialism was doubtless a key 'moment', even in some specific areas a decisive 'moment', but the history of sedimentations which *constitutes* the Indian cultural formation includes much besides colonialism *per se*. I clarify this point here in order to emphasise that there is at least one major strand of literary theory which has developed under Said's influence—'colonial discourse analysis'—which is notable for its *separation* of the 'inventory of colonial traces' from other sorts of inventories, other sorts of traces. This, too, fits. Not only in the sense that if we are constituted by colonialism, then the only discourse that really matters is the discourse of the colonialist, but also because of the example that Edward Said himself had set in his book. For, a notable feature of *Orientalism* is that it examines the history of western textualities about the non-west quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the

intelligentsias of the colonised countries, not as an undifferentiated mass, but as situated social agents impelled by our own conflicts, contradictions, distinct social and political locations, of class, gender, region, religious affiliation, etc. Hence a peculiar disjuncture in the architecture of the book. One of its major complaints is that from Aeschylus onwards the west has never permitted the orient to represent itself; it has represented the orient. That peculiar vision of human history I shall discuss below. But what is remarkable is that, with the exception of Said's own voice, the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very western canonicity which, Said complains, has always silenced the orient. Who is silencing whom, who is refusing to permit a historicised encounter between the voice of the so-called 'orientalist' and the many voices that 'orientalism' is said to so utterly suppress, is a question very hard to determine as we read this book. It sometimes appears that one is transfixed by the power of the very voice that one debunks.

In some limited sense of course, *Orientalism* belongs in a very particular genre, of which Said seems to be very conscious, considering that Julien Benda is one of his favourite authors. Developed mostly in France, though Nietzsche was a notable practitioner of it, this is the tradition of philosophers debunking the discipline of philosophy itself, and of intellectuals generally, for betraying the ethics of their vocation. Two of the books most influential in France during the inter-war years, *Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927) by Julien Benda and Paul Nizan's glorious polemic *The Watchdogs* (1932) come immediately to mind, as does Régis Debray's more recent *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities* (1979). Said was doing for—in other words, against—his own discipline of comparative literature what they had done for theirs, which had been philosophy.

But we could actually push this matter of genre a bit further. For, part of the pleasure of the book, which caused anxiety in some circles, excitement in others, was its transgression of academic boundaries. Divisions of academic labour in the modern university are such that one is always pressed to disclose as to what it is that authorises one to speak: whether one is a sociologist, political scientist, historian, anthropologist, literary critic, or a mere interloper in defined and occupied territories. Attacks on Said on this count were numerous, joined, two years after this prolonged orchestration, by Bernard Lewis himself, one of the doyens of Zionist historiography, most recently at Princeton. The attack was unseemly on many counts, but the substantive point which Lewis raised was one of competence. What authorised Said to speak of Arab history and orientalist disciplines? What degrees did he have? Did he know such-and-such medieval Arabic dictionary? Did he know the meaning of such-and-such word in the whole range of Arabic lexicography

over ten centuries? etc.¹⁶ (In his elegant rejoinder, Said quite rightly ignored the issue of competence and authorisation, while concentrating on the issue that had gone unacknowledged in Lewis's attack, namely, that Lewis's scholarly pretence was itself a camouflage for Zionist allegiance.)

Orientalism was clearly not a book of middle-eastern studies, or of any established academic discipline, but it did belong, for all its academic sophistication, to a well known tradition of writing, and one that has been very dispersed through several genres: Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* or Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* could be mentioned as famous predecessors. In the field of literature itself, and within even the Anglo-American tradition as such, there had of course not been the kind of systematisation that Said here offers, but there is actually a very large body of work which has previously analysed, as Said himself analyses Flaubert or Chateaubriand here, western canonical authors and their complicity in western colonial enterprises and ideologies. This question had been posed quite widely throughout the American and British universities, especially since the beginning of the Vietnam war, not to speak of France where the issue had been posed even earlier, in fields as diverse as literature and anthropology, thanks also to wars of liberation both in Indochina and Algeria. In the literary part of its undertaking, which is doubtless the largest part of the book, *Orientalism* thus belongs to a well known lineage. For, if we subtract the terminological and stylistic shifts, which often regulate our impressions of novelty and originality, Said's readings of individual authors like Nerval or Chateaubriand in the impressive middle sections of the book are politically not much more far-reaching than the kind of readings that were common during the 1960s, such as Jonah Raskin offers in *The Mythology of Imperialism*.¹⁷ And, if one steps out of the Euro-American traditions, one is struck by the fact that neither the architecture of *Orientalism* nor the kind of knowledge that the book generally represents has any room in it for criticisms of colonial cultural domination of the kind that have been available in Latin America and even India, on an expanding scale, since the late 19th century. It is in fact one of the disagreeable surprises in *Orientalism* that it refuses to acknowledge that vast tradition, as old virtually as colonialism itself, which has existed in the colonised countries as well as among the metropolitan left traditions, and which has always been occupied, precisely, with drawing up an inventory of colonial traces in the minds of people on both sides of the colonial divide. When Said does return to this matter of what he might have owed to earlier critiques of colonialism and its cultural consequences for the colonies, in the well known essay '*Orientalism Reconsidered*',¹⁸ he deploys a characteristically contradictory rhetoric. The dominant strain in the essay is that of royal

contempt whereby all such efforts of the past are consigned to the dustbin of an undifferentiated 'historicism' which is itself declared to be twin as well as progenitor of imperialism as such. Thus, after debunking a loosely constructed genealogy which he calls 'historicism, that is, the view pronounced by Vico, Hegel, Marx, Ranke, Dilthey and others',¹⁹ Said proceeds to posit the following:

What, in other words, has never taken place is an epistemological critique at the most fundamental level of the connection between the development of a historicism which has expanded and developed enough to include antithetical attitudes such as ideologies of western imperialism and critiques of imperialism on the one hand, and, on the other, the actual practice of imperialism ...

All previous "critiques of imperialism" are thus effortlessly conjoined with "the actual practice of imperialism", thanks to the historicist contamination. So much for the intellectual capacities of national liberation struggles, which have often used at least the Marxist critiques of imperialism, not to speak of Gramsci's own historicism which Said often likes to invoke!

I must confess, though, that Said's irrepressible penchant for saying entirely contrary things in the same text, appealing to different audiences simultaneously but with the effect that each main statement cancels out the other, is in evidence in this essay as much as anywhere else. For, the sweeping statement which have just quoted stands in a curiously unresolved relationship with the following which we also find in this same essay:

At bottom, what I said in *Orientalism* had been said before me by A. L. Tibawi (1961, 1966), by Abdullah Laroui (1976, 1977), by Anwar Abdel Malek (1963, 1969), Talal Asad (1979), by S. H. Alatas (1977a, 1977b), by Fanon (1969, 1970) and Césaire (1972), by Panikkar (1959) and Romila Thapar (1975, 1978).

The most sweeping claim of originality is thus balanced against disclaimer of all originality; the most uncompromising attack on historicism is balanced against a list of authors among whom the majority would proudly associate themselves with historicism. The list of authors and dates is itself passingly strange, I might add, since it is drawn up in the manner, more or less, of the post-modern pastiche. Tibawi, Laroui and Abdel Malek appear here probably because in his review of *Orientalism*²⁰ Robert Irwin had also raised the issue of Said's unacknowledged debts and had cited precisely these three writers. Then, as one turns to Said's actual citations of Romila Thapar, one finds that the only publications of hers that he seems to know of are the two textbooks on ancient and medieval India which Thapar did, very much on the side, for middle school pupils. The arrogance of a scholarship which presumes that Thapar's seminal work on Indian history is to be known only through her little textbooks is simply breathtaking.

As for his other reference to an Indian writer in this list, the whole range of Said's citations—and he is copious in this matter—seems to suggest that the only significant book by an Indian writer that he had read until well after he had published *Orientalism* in 1978 was, precisely, K M Pannikar's good old *Asia and Western Dominance*.

Aside from the unclassifiability of genre, meanwhile, *Orientalism* had been notable also for the sweep of its contents. So majestic was the sweep, in fact, that few readers initially noticed that most of his references in the more substantial parts of the book were drawn from his training in comparative literature and philology. This was familiar territory for persons of similar background, but those were precisely the persons who were the most likely to resist the invitation to read this body of writing not as literature but as documents of an entirely different sort of archive, namely, the *Orientalist* archive, which they had thought was none of their business. The orientalist, on the other hand, into whose archive those other kinds of texts were being read, was equally displeased and bewildered, because he was being attacked but with no possibility of defending himself on what he had defined as his homeground—the ground of libraries, the comparison of medieval manuscripts, the labour of deciphering illegible manuscripts, the problems of establishing authentic texts and preparing the appropriate gloss, the learning of archaic languages, and bringing back the fruits of this labour for the enlightenment and edification of the public at large. The orientalist was, in his own eyes, a specialist, an innocent. As we well know, the effect in both these fields, that of literature and of orientalism (specifically middle-eastern studies), was electrifying, because the book did serve to open up, despite its blunders, spaces of oppositional work in these moribund fields. Meanwhile, for scholars working outside the academic fields of comparative literature, philology and orientalism, the contents of the book, the sort of documents it read, were largely unfamiliar in any case. That was novelty enough. But what was even more novel was, decidedly, Said's audacity of combination. Who, after all, had ever thought that Lamartine and Olivia Manning, Chateaubriand and Byron, Carlyle, Camus, Voltaire, Gertrude Bell, the anonymous composers of *El Cid* and *Chanson de Roland*, Arabists like Gibb, colonial rulers such as Cromer and Balfour, sundry quasi-literary figures like Edward Lane, scholars of Sufism like Massignon, Henry Kissinger—all belonged in the same archive and a deeply unified discursive formation! What was new, I must repeat, was the combination, the reach of erudition, the architecture of the book, the eloquence that went with it, even though the eloquence too had the tendency to be, at times, frightfully repetitive. What had happened in the past was that critics who had raised these issues with reference to modern British literature rarely knew much about

19th century French literature, and those who wrote about literature would rarely examine lexicography or the US state department, even though the imperialist design would often be at issue. Said assembled these varied strands into a single narrative line, and the sense of novelty in America, and British universities, therefore also in the Anglophone ex-colonies, was greatly enhanced by the fact that the most impressive part of the book, namely, its middle section where Said offers readings of individual authors, was preoccupied mainly with French writers. The book may not have added much to our knowledge of Edward Lane or Olivia Manning, T E Lawrence or Henry Kissinger, but its treatment of the Bibliotheque Nationale and Chateaubriand, Nerval and Flaubert, was surely unforgettable. (The power of the eloquence combined with the unfamiliarity of contents unfortunately had the effect, often enough, that Said's judgments were simply taken for granted as being true. Rare would be a reader of *Orientalism*, previously unfamiliar with Renan for example, who would then actually care to read Renan.)

Finally, the most striking novelty of *Orientalism*, which gave to it its essential prestige in avant-garde cultural theory, was methodological: not simply its wide borrowing from the constituted academic disciplines but, far more crucially, its explicit invocation of Foucault, its declaration that the object of this study, namely, orientalism, was a discourse, and its insistence that this was the constitutive discourse of western civilisation as such, both chronologically, in the sense that we find it there already in the oldest European textualities, and also civilisationally, since it is by defining the 'orient' as the dangerous, inferiorised civilisational other that Europe has defined itself. There were two distinct consequences of this novelty. One was obviously the shift from Marx to Foucault, which was clearly very congenial to the post-modernist moment. The irrefutable fact about the period before Said's intervention is that aside from the more obscurantist and indigenist kinds of anti-westernist protests against European influence, the vast majority of the socially enlightened and politically progressive critiques of colonialism had been affiliated with either Marxism or, at least, with the general cultural anti-imperialism which Marxism, and the communist movement generally, had helped bring about. Said's break with that political tradition was sweeping indeed. Marx himself was dismissed in the book as yet another orientalist, Marxism was swept aside as an unsavoury child of 'historicism', and the insights which had originally emanated from that tradition were now conjoined with Foucaultian discourse theory. All this fell in very nicely, as the book appeared in 1978 and began its career in a world supervised by Reagan and Thatcher, with various kinds of anti-communisms and post-Marxisms which were to grip the most advanced sectors of the metropolitan in-

telligentsia during the period. Alongside these large theoretical and political shifts was the matter of a certain trans-historicity which, in claiming that Europe establishes its own identity by establishing the difference of the orient and that Europe has possessed a unitary will since the days of Athenian drama to inferiorise and vanquish non-Europe, made it possible for Said to assert that all European knowledges of non-Europe are bad knowledges because already contaminated with this aggressive identity-formation. This indeed was a novel idea. Numerous writers had previously demonstrated the complicity of European cultural productions in the colonial enterprise, but only the most obscurantist indigenists and cultural nationalists had previously argued—surely, no writer with any sense of intellectual responsibility had ever accepted—that Europeans were ontologically incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe. But Said was emphatic on this point, and he mobilised all sorts of eclectic procedures to establish the point.

III

This issue of eclecticism should take us back into the text, starting with the very opening pages where Said offers not one but three—mutually incompatible—definitions of the term 'orientalism' itself, which he then tries to deploy, simultaneously, throughout the book. In his own words, first:

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or in its general aspects, is an orientalist, and what he or she does is orientalism.

In this sense, then, orientalism is an interdisciplinary area of academic knowledge, and the terms used here—anthropology, philology, etc—would suggest that it is a modern discipline. But then, in the second definition, it becomes something much more than that, far exceeding academic boundaries, indeed a mentality traversing great many centuries, if not a full-scale epistemology:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'... This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx. We shall return to the difficulties of this particular inflation, and then to the matter of 'Dante and Karl Marx' at very considerable length later, but let me cite the third definition:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient in short, orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient.

These three definitions come on two consecutive pages (pp 2, 3), and Aeschylus and Dante are in fact mentioned as examples of

the orientalist "style of thought" five lines before the 18th century is identified, in the third definition, as the "roughly defined starting point". Now, the demarcation of boundaries at the 18th century—and at the "post-enlightenment period" a few lines later—produces one kind of emphasis; but the naming of Aeschylus produces a very different sense of periodisation, which itself goes back to the opening paragraph where we had been told, in the very third sentence, that "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance..." When *did*, then, this discourse of orientalism begin? Nor is this issue of periodisation a minor matter. On pp 56-57, we get this crucial statement:

Consider first the demarcation between Orient and west. It already seems bold by the time of the *Iliad*. Two of the most profoundly influential qualities associated with the east appear in Aeschylus' *The Persians*, the earliest Athenian play extant, and in *The Bacchae* of Euripedes, the last one extant... What matters here is that Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is depicted as victorious over Asia, that hostile "other" world beyond the seas. To Asia are given the feeling of emptiness, loss, and disaster that seem thereafter to reward Oriental challenges to the west; and also the lament that in some glorious past Asia fared better...

The two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the west in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. Aeschylus represents Asia... It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries...

The 'Orientalist discourse' has already been set in motion, then, in the earliest of the Athenian tragedies, not in general but in the specific regularities which shall henceforth determine its structure: Asia's loss, Europe's victory; Asia's muteness, Europe's mastery of discourse; Asia's inability to represent itself, Europe's will to represent it in accordance with its own authority. The terms are set, and there is little that later centuries will contribute to the *essential* structure, though they will doubtless proliferate the discourse in enormous quantities. As Said puts it on p 62: 'It is as if, having once settled on the orient as a locale suitable for incarnating the infinite in a finite shape, Europe could not stop the practice.' And: "Only the source of these rather narcissistic western ideas about the orient changed in time, not their character." This sense of an *uninterrupted* history of "narcissistic" discourse is then made more dense with the discussion of figures like Dante who form a kind of bridge between ancient origins and modern repetitions, as I will clarify presently when I come to discuss Said's treatment of *Inferno*.

Now, if there really is this seamless and only incremental history of 'Orientalist discourse' from Aeschylus to Dante to Marx to Bernard Lewis, then in what sense could one take the 18th century "as a roughly defined starting point"? In other words, one does not really know whether the 'orientalist discourse' begins in the post-enlightenment period or at the dawn of European civilisation, whether in the period of the battle of Plassey or in the days of the battle of Troy. This, then, raises the question of the relationship between orientalism and colonialism. In one sort of reading, where post-enlightenment Europe is emphasised, Orientalism appears to be an ideological corollary of colonialism. But so insistent is Said in identifying its origins in European Antiquity and its increasing elaboration throughout the European middle ages that it seems to be the *constituting element*, trans-historically, of what he calls "the European imagination". In a revealing use of the word delivered", Said at one point remarks that orientalism *delivered* the orient to colonialism, so that colonialism begins to appear as a product of orientalism itself, indeed as the realisation of the project already inherent in Europe's perennial project of inferiorising the orient first in discourse and *then* in colonisation. This is of course doubly paradoxical, since Said is vehement in his criticism of 'Orientalism' for its highly 'textual' attitude, and yet in his own account imperialist ideology itself appears to be an effect mainly of certain kinds of *writing*.

But *why* has Europe needed to constitute—"produce" is Said's stark word—the Orient as "that hostile *other* world" to 'animate' as he puts it, "the otherwise silent and dangerous space" as "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (p 1). Well, because, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (p 3). There are many passages of this kind, and Said borrows his language from so many different kinds of conceptual frameworks and intellectual disciplines that one is simply bewildered.²¹ There is, for example, enough existentialism in Said's language, derived from identifiable Sartrean concepts, which stands in a peculiar relation with Derridean ideas of identity and difference, all of which is mobilised to posit in some places that the west has *needed* to constitute the orient as its other in order to constitute itself and its own subject-position. This idea of constituting identity through difference points, again, not to the realm of political economy in which colonisation may be seen as a process of capitalist accumulation but to a necessity which arises within discourse and has always been there at the origin of discourse, so that not only is the modern orientalist presumably already there in Dante and Euripedes but modern imperialism itself appears to be an effect that arises, as if

naturally, from the necessary practices of discourse.²² That is one sort of difficulty. But there is another one as well, namely, that the matter of identity-through-difference doubtless points to the primacy of representation over all other human activities, but why must representation also *inferiorise* the other? Said again offers greatly diverse ideas, so that in quite a few places this inferiorisation is shown to be a result of imperialism and colonialism in the sense in which most of us would understand these words, but in another set of formulations, which draw their vocabulary from psychoanalysis, 'the west' seems to have suffered something resembling ego-anxiety whereby the ego is able to constitute its own coherence only through aggressive objectification of the other, so that what Said calls 'orientalism' appears to be a compulsive drive inherent in Europe's unitary *psyche*. So, when one comes upon statements like "psychologically, orientalism is a form of paranoia" (p 72), as one frequently does, there is reason enough to be disconcerted by the psychologising impulse but, even more, one then shudders to recall that, for Said, this 'paranoia' is constitutive of all European thought. These ways of dismissing entire civilisations as diseased formations are unfortunately far too familiar to us from the history of imperialism itself.

But let us return to the three definitions, especially the intermediate one which defines orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the orient' and (most of the time) the Occident". It is rather remarkable how constantly and comfortably Said speaks, not only in this particular sentence but throughout the book, of a Europe, or the west, as a self-identical, fixed being which has always had an essence and a project, an imagination and a will; and of the 'orient' as its object, textually, militarily, etc. He speaks of the-west, or Europe, as the one which produces the knowledge, the east as the object of that knowledge. He seems to posit, in other words, stable subject-object identities, as well as ontological and epistemological distinctions between the two. In what sense, then, is Said himself *not* an Orientalist, or, at least, as Sadek'al-Azm puts it, an "orientalist-in-reverse"? Said quite justifiably accuses the 'orientalist' for essentialising the orient, but his own processes of essentialising 'the west' are equally remarkable. In the process, Said of course gives us that same 'Europe'—unified; self-identical, trans-historical, textual—which is always rehearsed for us in the sort of literary criticism which traces its own pedigree from Aristotle to T S Eliot. That this Athens-to-Albion Europe is itself a recent fabrication as a whole range of writers from Amin²³ to Bernal²⁴ have recently emphasised, and *any* Aeschylus-to-Kissinger narrative is therefore also equally a fabrication (or a fabricated reflection of a prior fabrication), is something that seems not to have occurred

to Said. The plain fact is that whatever Homer or Aeschylus might have had to say about the Persians or Asia, it simply is *not* a reflection of a 'west' or of 'Europe' as a civilisational entity, and no modern discourse can be traced back to that origin, because the civilisational map and geographical imagination of the antiquity was fundamentally different from the one that came to be fabricated in post-renaissance Europe. Parenthetically, we might emphasise again that Said does *not* say that 'orientalist' notions have been read *into* Greek and Latin texts; that the main regularities of the discourse are *already there* is central to Said's whole argument.

It is also simply the case that the kind of essentialising procedure which Said associates exclusively with 'the west' is by no means a trait of the European alone; any number of Muslims routinely draw epistemological and ontological distinctions between east and west, the Islamicate and Christendom, and when Ayatullah Khomeini does it he does so hardly from an orientalist position. And, of course, it is common among many circles in India to posit Hindu spirituality against western materialism, not to speak of Muslim barbarity. Nor is it possible to read the *Mahabharatha* or the *dharmshastras* without being struck by the severity with which the *dasyus* and the *shudras* and the women are constantly being made into the dangerous, inferiorised others. This is not a merely polemical matter either. What I am suggesting is that there have historically been all sorts of processes—connected with class and gender, ethnicity and religion, xenophobia and bigotry—which have unfortunately been at work in all human societies, European and non-European. What gave to European forms of these prejudices their special force in history, with devastating consequences in the actual lives of countless millions and expressed ideologically in full-blown Eurocentric racisms, was not some trans-historical process of ontological obsession and falsity—some gathering of unique force in domains of discourse—but, quite specifically, the power of colonial capitalism, which then gave rise to other sorts of powers. Within the realm of discourse over the past 200 years, though, the relationship between the brahminical and the Islamic high textualities, the orientalist knowledges of these textualities, and their modern reproductions in western as well as non-western countries, have produced such a wilderness of mirrors, in which reflections are refracted in such diverse ways, that we need the most incisive of operations, the most delicate of dialectics, to disaggregate these densities.

Said's penchant for foregrounding the literariness of this so-called discourse gives rise to yet another kind of problem when he defines orientalism, in his third definition, as "a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient". The surprising word but also the key word here is *style*—which should save us from

supposing that he might be talking of the political economy or the ideological constructs of colonialism and imperialism. For, he says quite directly, on p 12:

'Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institution; ...nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'oriental' world.

So, we have at least some clue as to what orientalism is *not*: it is not what is commonly understood by colonialist—or imperialist—*ideology*. In the process, though, we come upon a strange discrepancy: it is a 'style' that has always spoken of occident and orient as victor and vanquished, a discourse which has always had a will to power, but it expresses no imperialist design; it is full of racism, jingoism, religious bigotry, but it has no will to 'hold down' anybody. So, it is hard to know what Said actually *means*, beyond, of course, the familiar Foucaultian trope of a power which permeates everything and reproduces itself copiously in all the pores of society and textuality but which has neither origin nor object nor an agency to which its processes could be traced, and which can be known only through the knowledge it produces but the knowledge itself can be referred not to the thing represented but to the truth-effect produced. Meanwhile, Said does give us clues as to what the book, *Orientalism*, is and how he wishes us to read it, and yet these clues tend also to cancel out each other:

My analysis of the orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations as *representations*. ... The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.

The notable feature of this approach is Said's desire to combine very familiar emphases in literary-critical ways of reading ("style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances") with a post-modernist emphasis on 'representation as representation'. One of those ways of reading presses us toward the problematic of realism and mimesis, the other in the direction of non-mimetic, discursive 'truth-effects'. It would be unimaginably difficult if not altogether pointless, I should have thought, to refer a representation to its 'setting' and "the historical and social circumstances" of its production and dissemination without raising, in some fundamental way, the issues of its 'fidelity' and 'correctness', for, it is usually with reference to "historical and social circumstances" that worthwhile distinctions between a representation and a *misrepresentation* are customarily made. I shall take up elsewhere this crucial issue of the primacy of representation as well as Said's inability to make up his mind whether 'orientalist discourse' is a system of representations, in the Foucaultian sense, or of *misrepresentations*, in the sense of a realist problematic. For, Said's use

of this self-divided procedure leads to great many theoretical difficulties and political confusions which are then frequently replicated and even simplified in what has come to be known as 'colonial discourse analysis'. Let me say, meanwhile, that it is in the midst of all these difficulties—of definition, conception, periodisation, theoretical position and political uncertainty—that Said then launches on his reading of individual authors, most of which turn out to be the familiar canonical authors.

Many of these individual readings—of Nerval, for example, or T E Lawrence—are very good. One can actually say with fair certainty that, with the exception of those two magnificent opening chapters in *Question of Palestine*, where Said has handled extremely broad and complex issues altogether superbly, he still tends to be at his best when he is reading (closely) an individual canonical author, interpreting a particular canonical book, or at most preparing a focused critique of determinate issues in a particular academic discipline, such as anthropology, which has already had great many very trenchant critiques that he can then borrow from in erudite and distinctive ways.²⁵ When he exercises this skill at his best, few living literary critics can match him, for he learned this skill of close reading in the pedagogical laboratory of 'new criticism'; has applied it in the wider and even more exacting field of comparatism; and now exercises it with his great wit, matchless erudition, powerful prose style, and generous liberal sympathies. This skill is his achievement—but a limitation, too. For, when he is at his weakest, such readings of individual authors can also be merely derivative or trite, as for example in his recent essay on *Kim*. The one on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* is better,²⁶ but Said's difficulties with the issue of gender are such that he can scarcely see the precarious ways in which women of (and around) the British propertied classes, who were doubtless complicitly benefiting from designs of empire, are nevertheless differentially located in mobilities and pedagogies of the class structure. Those are difficulties of a different kind, however. In *Orientalism* itself, the largest difficulties occur when Said tries to fit rather complex matters in the unilinear 'orientalist' mode. This I should like to illustrate with some lengthier comment on his treatment of one author alone, namely, Dante.

IV

The transition that Said makes to Dante is *strategic* on at least two counts: Dante is the central, exemplary figure forming the bridge between antiquity and modernity; and, "Dante's powers as a poet intensify, make more rather than less representative, these perspectives on the Orient" (p 69). The theme of trans-historical continuity is stated unmistakably:

...as one surveys Orientalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the overriding impression is of Orientalism's insensitive schematisation of the entire Orient.

How early this schematisation began is clear from the examples I have given of Western representations of the Orient in classical Greece. How strongly articulated were later representations building on the earlier ones, how inordinately careful their schematisation, how dramatically effective their placing in Western imaginative geography, can be illustrated if we turn now to Dante's *Inferno* (p 68).

There is thus an incremental history ("later representations building on the earlier ones"), "inordinately careful" in its 'schematisation', which joins the 19th and 20th centuries with Dante and 'classical Greece'. Said is absolutely right, of course, in regarding the *Inferno* as a book mainly of judgments, and his initial comment on the poem turns, then, on Dante's treatment of Muhammed. This is predictable and unsurprising; Said is hardly the first to have noticed the inordinate horror of that passage. What is truly surprising is the way Said deals with Dante's far more complex treatment of, in Said's words, "the great Muslim philosophers and kings".

Now, few readers of *Inferno* would find it possible to forget that Muhammed, the prophet of Islam, is found in the eighth of the circles of hell, eternally gyrating and eternally being cleft from brain to anus, in the worst punishment that Dante's prolific imagination could devise. This treatment of the prophet of Islam is, to put it mildly, indefensible, and I am entirely in sympathy with Said when he takes offence. The peculiarity in any case is that Ibn Sina ('Avicenna' in English, the Arab-Islamic philosopher best known for his expertise in empiricist physiology and medicine), Ibn Rushd ('Averroes' in English, the great Arab-Islamic philosopher of rationalist humanism), as well as Salah ad-Din (the 'Saladin' made famous by the crusades), are found in the first circle, in the company of Socrates, Plato, etc. Now, the presence of those figures from antiquity in this mildest of all circles in hell makes a certain sense within the Christian topography of punishments and sufferings, because they are heathens only to the extent that they came before Christ and therefore never had the benefit of Christ's teaching; this also explains the otherwise surprising decision on part of Beatrice to appoint Virgil, himself a heathen, as Dante's guide on this eventful tour. But, why Ibn Rushd? He came after Christ, therefore, had the choice to renounce the Islamic heresy, but did not! Dante never faces up to this question, and is benign towards Ibn Rushd despite this key difference between him and Socrates and company. One grasps the full force of this discrepancy only if one recalls that Ibn Rushd was a splendid rationalist whose books were banned in some places by the Inquisition, not because he was a Muslim but, explicitly,

because he was a rationalist. How, then, does one explain the discrepancy in the *Inferno*? I would suggest that the discrepancy is to be understood in terms of the contradictions of Dante's own ideology, and that the contradictions stem from the fact that Dante powerfully represents that unfinished moment of transition in European thought wherein the medieval episteme is still there but in the process of being broken up and superseded by the humanist intellectual revolution which was the main theoretical contribution of the mercantilist phase of European capital. Muhammed is eternally undergoing the most awful punishment because predominant strands in medieval Christianity treated Islam as the most dangerous of all heresies and pronounced the prophet of Islam the worst of all heretics. Ibn Rushd, condemned by the authority of that same medieval Christianity through the awful powers of the Inquisition, was nevertheless greatly respected by mainly those who were to build toward the rising humanist revolution, with his books being copied and smuggled from one monastery to another. Still mired in the religious metaphysic, but unable to resist entirely the strain that was to soon blossom into a fully fledged humanism, and knowing that it was through its encounter with the labours of men like Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina that great many European thinkers were able to find their way into Greek thought in the first place, Dante tried to devise a topography of his hell that might do justice to these divided loyalties. Even more notable presence in fact is that of Salah ad-Din who, unlike Ibn Rushd, was to be much reviled by later centuries throughout Christendom, because he was in fact a commander of the Arab-Islamic forces that were ranged against the crusading Christians. Dante pays scant attention to that particular bigotry and delivers a "judgment" on "the great Muslim kings and philosophers" and on the prophet of Islam which is, from the viewpoint of orthodox Christianity, internally incoherent. The literary-critical point I am making is that one cannot read that passage about Muhammed outside this whole range of enormous complexity. The methodological point, in the Foucaultian language, is that one cannot detach a representation of Muhammed, which is produced in the discourse of Christian binaries between belief and heresy, and relocate that representation in the altogether different discourse of 'orientalism' which, if it exists at all and even though it may occasionally use religious forms of ideological interpellation, is a secular knowledge. Furthermore, Dante's treatment of Ibn Rushd, who is placed at least at par with Socrates, etc. and toward whom Dante is altogether more forgiving, shows that Dante makes a severe distinction between belief and heresy but none between occident and orient, as would be clear if Said were to actually reflect upon the fact that Judas, Brutus and Cassius do actually come even after Muhammed, in closer proximity

with Satan himself. I might add that the treatment that Ibn Rushd receives in Dante's imagination, which does to the Muslim philosopher at least no physical harm in the real world, was not worse than the treatment he received in real life from Abu Yusuf, the Almohid king of Muslim Spain, who ordered him banished into exile and his books burned on charges of heresy. Said ignores such complexities at his own peril when he comments as follows, on p 69:

...the special anachronisms and anomalies of putting pre-Christian luminaries in the same category of "heathen" damnation with post-Christian Muslims does not trouble Dante. Even though the Koran specifies Jesus as a prophet, Dante chooses to consider the great Muslim philosophers and kings as having been fundamentally ignorant of Christianity. That they can also inhabit the same distinguished level as the heroes and sages of classical antiquity is an ahistorical vision similar to Raphael's in his fresco *The School of Athens*, in which Averroes rubs elbows on the academy floor with Socrates and Plato (similar to Fenelon's *Dialogues des morts* [1700-1718], where a discussion takes place between Socrates and Confucius).

References to Raphael and Fenelon further substantiate Said's great erudition but contribute no insight to the substance of the argument. That Said should require that kind of literalist historicity from confessedly allegorical work is also surprising; one might as well castigate Dante for putting himself and Virgil in the same historical time and in a purely fictitious place, called hell. Matters are made worse by the way Said construes the meaning that 'ignorance' may have in the context of religious orthodoxy, for, not to believe in Christianity is for Dante (as not believing in Islam would have been for Sa'adi and even Hafiz) the worst kind of ignorance—worse in the case of Ibn Rushd than Socrates because the former had the means to overcome that ignorance! The fact that "the Koran specifies Jesus as a prophet" thus makes the matter of this 'ignorance' worse—though one would add, for the sake of a modern, irreligious discussion, that this reference to the status of Jesus himself in the literal word of the Koran is also irrelevant. What has been at issue in orthodox Islam is not the status of Jesus but of Christianity, and of how Jesus surfaces in Christian belief. For, if orthodox Christianity regards Islam as a heresy, orthodox Islam has historically regarded some of the main tenets of Christianity as altogether blasphemous: the idea of the trinity, the idea of Jesus as a son of god, the further idea that Mary was a virgin, the even more scandalous idea of the holy ghost. The legacy of the crusades lives, we might recall, on both sides of the orthodox divide.

V

Orientalism appeared in 1978, a rather precise point in the history of the world, in the history of the demographic composition and reorganisation of the political conjunc-

ture in the United States, and in the history of intellectual productions in the metropolitan countries generally. Each of these aspects shall bear some comment because all this has some bearings on how books were now being read.

By 1978, the two great revolutionary decades, inaugurated—roughly speaking—by the onset of the Algerian war in 1954 and culminating in the liberation of Saigon in 1975, were over. The decisive turning-point had come in Chile in 1973, with the defeat of the Unidad Popular, but we did not then know it, because the liberation movements of Indochina and the Portuguese colonies in Africa were still in progress. The two revolutions of 1978, in Iran and Afghanistan, then made the shift unmistakable. For, the Khomeinite take-over in Iran was one of those rare conjunctures in which the revolution and the counterrevolution were condensed in the same moment. In Afghanistan, the last country to have a revolution under a communist leadership, history now repeated itself, in Marx's famous phrase, both as tragedy and as farce. If the Irani revolution had signalled the decisive defeat of the left in west-Asia and the rise to ideological dominance of Islamic fundamentalism in that whole region, the history-as-tragedy-and-as-farce in Afghanistan was to contribute considerably to the collapse of what socialism there had ever been in the Comecon countries, helping to pave the way to perestroika first in the Soviet Union, then on the global scale. The savage destruction of Baghdad, the worst since the Mongols sacked that city in the 13th century, was the gift of this global perestroika, making one recall Marx once more. As he famously put it in his correspondence on the Gotha Programme: capitalism does not lead necessarily to socialism, it may lead just as inexorably toward barbarism.

All that was to come later. What the end of the revolutionary decades did, however, was, first of all, to shift the entire balance within the metropolitan countries further to the right. The Anglo-Saxon countries witnessed the rise to governmental power of the most reactionary kinds of ideologies, Reaganism and Thatcherism; movements for racial and social justice in the United States were beaten back, and the defeat of the miner's strike in Britain put an end to labour militancy there for years to come. Social democracy itself was soon to be defeated in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, while in Italy it submitted, under Craxi's leadership, to Christian Democracy, while PCI retreated and was then, after 1976, decisively disorganised; social democracy did come to power in France but survived by moving so far to the right that it renounced even the autonomist positions of high Gaullism. For the backward-capitalist zones, developments were far too many and too clearly rooted in histories of particular countries to be summarised in so short a space, but what happened in our own subcontinent is indicative. The Bhutto-ite version of

populist social democracy was first replaced, in 1977, by a fundamentalist military dictatorship and then fleetingly reappeared in a farcical form under his daughter's regime. In Bangladesh, the progressive content of the liberation struggle was dissipated quickly, leading to a regime of rightwing military officers who had previously served in the Pakistan army and had been trained at Fort Bragg in the United States; the widow of one of those officers is currently the prime minister. In India, communism has been contained in its regional locations; the social compact based on Gandhian ideas of religious tolerance has been increasingly under attack, sometimes in the name of Gandhi himself; Nehruvian models of parliamentary democracy, secularist polity, planned economy, and non-aligned foreign policy have been emptied out of their content, and a whole range of disorientations since the Emergency, dating back again to the mid-70s, have moved the country and its entire political and social discourse cumulatively and decisively toward the right.

This global offensive of the right, global retreat of the left, and retreat also of that which was progressive even in our canonical nationalisms, is the essential backdrop for any analysis of the structure of intellectual productions and their reception in our time. For, it was within this reorganised global conjuncture that we have witnessed, in all the bourgeois countries, the ascendancy to dominance of an entirely new kind of intellectual within a formation which continued to call itself a formation of the left. The characteristic posture of these new intellectuals was that they would gain legitimacy on the left by constantly and fervently referring to the third world, Cuba, national liberation and so on, but would also be openly and contemptuously anti-communist; they would often enough not affiliate themselves even with that other tradition which had also descended from classical Marxism, namely, social democracy, nor would he be affiliated in any degree with any labour movement whatever, they would invoke an anti-bourgeois stance in the name of manifestly reactionary anti-humanisms enunciated in the Nietzschean tradition and propagated now under the signature of anti-empiricism, anti-historicism, structuralism and post-structuralism, specifically Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, Glucksmann, Kristeva, and so on. It is in contrast to these reactionary anti-humanisms, across the whole spectrum of cultural theories, that the rectitude in careers of people like Raymond Williams turns out to be so exemplary.

I shall return to other kinds of determinations presently, but this matter of Nietzschean anti-humanism is of some crucial interest here, in part because of the way Said's treatment of Marx, to which I shall return in the next chapter, stands in tense balance with the authority of Nietzsche which is invoked indirectly through Foucault, and therefore structures the whole book around notions of representation and

discourse, but also directly, in a crucial passage, on page 203. But, before getting to 203, we shall first have to take a detour through 272 and 273. For, on those two consecutive pages, we find two rather inconsistent statements, brief and stark. First, we have:

as this book has tried to show Islam has been fundamentally misrepresented in the past... But then we quickly have on the next page: My whole point about this whole system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence...

Now, the substitution of the term 'oriental essence' in the latter sentence for the term 'Islam' in the former sentence may persuade one to believe that the two sentences are referring to two different things, or that they are not on the issue of (mis)representation, but what Said is actually doing is drawing closer to the Nietzschean idea that no true representation is possible because all human communications always distort the facts. For, what happens between these two sentences is that Said first raises the question: "The real issue is whether there can be a true representation of anything". In other words, is it possible to make true statements? There are powerful traditions, including the Nietzschean, which have denied such a possibility. There are other powerful traditions, including the Marxist, which have said that, yes, true statements are possible. Said's equivocation on the this key question is delivered in what appears to be a precise formulation, namely, that the line between a representation and a misrepresentation is always very thin. I should emphasise that this is not a personal statement on the part of Edward Said. Foucault would of course call this a discursive statement. What I would suggest is that this statement belongs directly in the Nietzschean philosophical tradition, and that Edward Said, who is here in the midst of writing a history of orientalism, is affiliating himself with a new kind of history-writing which is emerging more or less at this time; which goes far beyond the empirical historian's usual interrogation of and skepticism about his source materials; and which enters the Nietzschean world of questioning the very facticity of facts, so that it will eventually force a wide range of historians around the globe—some of the Indian subalternists, for example—to start putting the word 'fact' in quotation marks.

With this clarification in hand, we can now turn to page 203. For, what Said says there is the following, with a quotation from Nietzsche embedded in the passage:

[Orientalism's] objective discoveries—the work of innumerable devoted scholars who edited texts and translated them, codified grammars, wrote dictionaries, reconstructed dead epochs, produced positivistically verifiable learning—are and always have been conditioned by the fact that its truths, like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language, and what is the truth of language, Nietzsche once said, but

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.

This image of language as the enemy of experience, this assertion that representation is always-already a misrepresentation, this shallow pathos about the impossibility of truthful human communication, is of course a familiar romantic trope which has undergone much aggrandisement first in those irrationalist philosophies of the late 19th century and the early 20th century which preceded the rise of fascism and then again, on a much wider scale, in the reactionary anti-humanisms which have dominated avant-gardeist thought since the decisive defeat of the European labour movements and the consequent ascendancy of structuralism and post-structuralism; it is significant that these anti-humanisms should come to dominate American scholarship on the eve of the unprecedented imperialist consolidations of the present decade. That this form of irrationalism should surface so centrally in the very book which is doubtless the most influential among radically inclined cultural theorists today should give us, I believe, some pause. But it should also help us grasp some aspects of its enthusiastic reception and extremely widespread influence. For, in one range of formulations Said's denunciations of the whole of western civilisation is as extreme and uncompromising as Foucault's denunciations of the western episteme or Derrida's denunciations of the trans-historical Logos; nothing, nothing at all exists outside epistemic power, logocentric thought, orientalist discourse—no classes, no gender, not even history, no site of resistance, no accumulated projects of human liberation, since all is repetition with difference, all is corruption, specifically western corruption, and orientalism always remains the same, only more so with the accumulations of linear time. The manichean edge of these visions—Derridean, Foucaultian, Saidian—is quite worthy of Nietzsche himself. But this vision, in the case of *Orientalism*, gains its authority further from the way it panders to the most sentimental, the most extreme forms of third-worldist nationalism. The book of course says nothing about any fault of our own, but anything we ourselves could remember, the bloodbath that we conducted at the time of the partition let us say, simply pales in comparison with this other power which has victimised us and inferiorised us for twenty-five hundred years, or more. So uncompromising is this book in its third-worldist passion that Marxism itself, which has historically given such sustenance to so many of the anti-imperialist movements of our time, can be dismissed, breezily, as a child of orientalism and an accomplice of

British colonialism. How comforting such visions of one's own primal and permanent innocence are, one can well imagine, because, given what actually goes on in our countries, we do need a great deal of comforting.

But it is not within the so-called 'third world' that the book first appeared. Its global authority is in fact inseparable from the authority of the dominant sectors of the metropolitan intelligentsia who first bestowed upon it the status of a modern classic, while, perhaps paradoxically, its most passionate following within the metropolitan countries is within those sectors of the university intelligentsia which either originates in the ethnic minorities or affiliates itself ideologically with the academic sections of those minorities. I have discussed elsewhere the connection between the emergence of the category of 'third world literature' and the key changes that occurred in the patterns of immigration from the late 1960s onwards, with substantial numbers of Asian immigrants being based now among the petty bourgeois and technomanagerial strata.²⁷ Those who came as graduate students and then joined the faculties, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, tended to come from upper classes in their home countries. In the process of relocating themselves in the metropolitan countries, they needed documents of their assertion, documentary proof that they had always been oppressed. Books that connected oppression with class were not very useful, because they neither came from the working class nor were intending to join that class in their new country. Those who said that majority of the populations in Africa and Asia surely suffered from colonialism but that there were also those who benefited from it, were useless, because some of the new professionals who had come in this immigration themselves came from those other families, those other classes, which had been the beneficiaries; this question of the beneficiaries of colonialism would be posed by Said in very peculiar ways, in his invocation of Ranajit Guha, as we shall soon see. Among critiques that needed to be jettisoned were the Marxist ones, because Marxists had this habit of speaking about classes, even in Asia and Africa. What this new immigration needed were narratives of oppression that would get them preferential treatment, reserved jobs, higher salaries in the social position that they already occupied: namely, as middle class professionals, mostly male. *Orientalism* was for such purposes the perfect narrative. When, only slightly later, enough women found themselves in that same position, the category of the 'third world female subaltern' was found to be highly serviceable. I might add that this latter category is probably not very usable inside India, but the kind of discourse *Orientalism* assembles certainly has its uses. Communalism, for

example, can now be laid entirely at the doors of orientalism and colonial construction; caste itself can be portrayed as a fabrication primarily of the Population Surveys and Census Reports, as Ronald Inden literally does²⁸ and Partha Chatterjee appears poised to do.²⁹ Colonialism is now held responsible not only for its own cruelties but, conveniently enough, for ours too. Meanwhile, within the metropolitan countries, the emphasis on immigration was to continue getting strengthened. I have written previously on some aspects of this connection between post-modernism and migrancy,³⁰ but it is worth mentioning that the same theme surfaces with very major emphases in Said's latest essays, with far-reaching consequences for his own earlier positions, as we shall see.

The perspectives inaugurated in *Orientalism* served, in the social self-consciousness and professional assertion of the middle class immigrant and the 'ethnic' intellectual, roughly the same function which the theoretical category of 'third world literature', arising at roughly the same time, was also to serve.³¹ One in fact presumed the other, and between the two the circle was neatly closed. If *Orientalism* was devoted to demonstrating the bad faith and imperial oppression of all European knowledges, beyond time and history, 'third world literature' was to be the narrative of authenticity, the counter-canon of truth, good faith, liberation itself. Like the bad faith of European knowledge, the counter-canon of 'third world literature' had no boundaries either, neither of space nor of time, culture or class; a Senegalese novel, a Chinese short story, a song from medieval India could all be read into the same archive: it was all 'third world'. Marx was an 'orientalist' because he was European, but a Tagore novel, patently canonical and hegemonising inside the Indian cultural context, could be taught in the syllabi of 'third world literature' as a marginal, non-canonical text, counterposed against 'Europe'. The homogenising sweep was evident in both cases, and if cultural nationalism was the overtly flaunted insignia, invocation of 'race' was barely below the surface, not just with respect to the United States, which would be logical, but with reference to human history as such. Thus, if 'orientalism' was initially posited as something of an original ontological flaw in the European psyche, Said was to eventually declare that "in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the imperial or colonial or racial sense, race takes precedence over both class and gender. . . I have always felt that the problem of emphasis and relative importance took precedence over the need to establish one's feminist credentials."³² That contemptuous phrase, "establish one's feminist credentials", takes care of gender quite definitively, as imperialism itself is collapsed into a 'racial sense'. In a Nietzschean world, virtually anything is possible.

Said's interventions since the initial publication of *Orientalism* have doubtless been prolific and diverse. *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*, as they came in quick succession thereafter, were explicitly conceived as volumes of a series inaugurated with *Orientalism*. After *The Last Sky* and *Blaming the Victims*, which came some years later, may also be considered as parts of that same integrated oeuvre. Surrounding this impressive array of books are essays, articles and reviews on cognate themes in great many periodicals, political journals and newspapers, not to speak of unpublished interventions in scholarly conferences and public fora of various kinds, including very effective television appearances, so numerous that they could easily fill two or three volumes. Together, these writings constitute not only the most enduring, though inevitably uneven part of Said's work but also, by any standards, the most persuasive insertion of a national liberation struggle into the American imagination which is otherwise substantially formed by Zionist-colonial presumptions. That remains true even though *Covering Islam*, which is not about Palestine, is, I think, Said's most forgettable piece of writing.

Almost equally extensive, though far more problematic and at times even disconcerting, are Said's publications in the field of cultural studies. Central to this other work is of course his volume of 1983, *The World, The Text and the Critic*, which brings together essays written between 1969 and 1981. But there are also numerous other essays which have appeared in journals but have not yet been collected in a separate volume; a few of these, too, have been included in volumes edited by others. The book includes at least two major pieces, 'Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas' and 'Islam, Philology and French Culture: Renan and Massignon' which are thematically connected with *Orientalism*, even though some of the formulations in those essays are considerably different; the essay on Schwab actually reads, in part, as something of a retraction of the extremities of *Orientalism*, without any overt suggestion to that effect.³³ Two other essays in the book, which are in fact the best known and the most influential, namely, 'Criticism between Culture and System' and 'Travelling Theory', were evidently written some time after *Orientalism* and are notable not so much for explicating Said's preference for Foucault over Derrida as for his partial distancing of himself from Foucault. This distancing is facilitated by his reliance on criticisms of Foucault which had been framed already by Poulantzas³⁴ and Chomsky, whom Said cites directly, and part of what Said now says about Foucault is uncannily similar to some points I have raised above about *Orientalism* itself. The following from 'Travelling Theory', which is intended as reservations about Foucault and his notion of power applies almost exactly to Said and

his conception of orientalism:

Foucault's eagerness not to fall into Marxist economism causes him to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics, the role of insurgency and rebellion in the societies he discusses... The problem is that Foucault's use of the term *pouvoir* moves around too much, swallowing up every obstacle in its path... , obliterating change and mystifying its microphysical sovereignty... Foucault's history is ultimately textual or rather textualised; its mode is one for which Borges would have an affinity... they [his archaeologies] make not even a nominal allowance for emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counterhegemony, or historical blocs.³⁵

Since those two essays are only tangentially connected with the aspects of Said's work with which I am here the most concerned, I shall not offer any reading of the remarkable ambivalences one finds in them; it is in any event simply not possible within the space of an essay—even an inordinately lengthy essay such as this one—to give detailed accounts of each significant item in an output so substantial, distinctive and diverse.

This partial distancing from Foucault is in fact part of a number of shifts that have occurred in Said's more recent writings, which include a retreat from the Nietzschean position of all representations being misrepresentations, and admits, concomitantly, the possibilities of resistance from outside the colonial discourse. Meanwhile, his re-reading of both Foucault and Derrida, and his many convergences with diverse post-modernist positions, then culminates in the insistence that the double task of responsible knowledge is to resist the pressures both of the dominant culture as well as of what would now be increasingly known as "system", "theory", "grand theory, "disciplinary knowledge" and by several even more colorful epithets—referring frequently to Marxism in particular, but also to any other way of being in the world which which seek to establish theoretical as well as narrative intelligibility of history as such, and which then identify collective agents (such as class, gender, nation) as bearers of resistance and political action. All such systems are rejected, in the characteristic post-modernist way, so that resistance can always, only be personal, micro, and shared only by small, determinate number of individuals who happen, perchance, to come together, outside the so-called 'grand narratives' of class, gender, nation.³⁶ Ambivalences on this question are already notable in 'Travelling Theory', but even more representative in all this is the essay 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community',³⁷ where Said first speaks derisively of "the self-policing, self-purifying communities erected even by Marxist, as well as other disciplinary, discourses" and then goes on to specify what he considers as a key project that needs to be posed against, the "disciplinary" character of Marxism etc:

"to restore the non-sequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity to tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutional power". I am not quite sure what this last formulation actually means, but it would not be unfair to say, I think, that the sense in which Marxism is said to be "self-policing, self-purifying", as well as "disciplinary", "institutional" and "ideological" applies inescapably to feminism too. Theoretical eclecticism meanwhile gets increasingly out of control: sweeping, patently post-structuralist denunciations of Marxism can be delivered in the name of Gramsci, using the terminological language explicitly drawn from Althusser, and listing the names of communist poets like Aime Cesaire, Pablo Neruda and Mahmoud Derwish to illustrate the sites of resistance. Theory thus becomes what Roland Barthes called 'the free play of the Signifier'.

The largest shift, however, has been on the issue of nationalism. In the years immediately following the publication of *Orientalism*, Said's position was indistinguishable from straightforward third-worldist cultural nationalisms, and what we used to get was an unself-critical narrative of European guilt, non-European innocence. This has shifted dramatically, beginning in about 1984 and getting increasingly more strident in rejection of nationalism, national boundaries, nations as such, so that one now has reason to be equally alarmed by the extremity of this opposite stance. Characteristically, though, the most sweeping statements about 'nation' and 'state' as "coercive identities" are frequently delivered alongside resounding affirmations of national liberation, Palestinian *Intifada* in particular, and the right of the Palestinian people to either obtain a nation-state of their own or, alternatively, to live as co-equals in a bi-national state. It is this growing ambivalence about nation and nationalism—combined with an even more surprising shift from a wholesale rejection of 'the west' to an equally wholesale assertion that the only authentic work that can be done in our time presumes (a) third world origin, but combined with (b) metropolitan location—which should bear some scrutiny. The intellectual cited as an exemplary figure of our time in this latest construction is of course Ranajit Guha—who is commended both for initial origin in the Indian upper class and for later location in the metropolitan university—but an autobiographical self-referentiality is here quite unmistakable.³⁸

Among the numerous essays of Said which have appeared in journals over roughly the past decade but have yet not been collected into a single volume are a dozen or so that are thematically organised around the relationship between imperialism and (mainly) literature. Some of these happen to be on highly canonical figures (e.g. Jane Austin, Kipling, Yeats, Camus, Verdi); others are of more general import. Among

the essays on individual figures, the one on Verdi³⁹ is my favourite, not because I wholly understand operatic language or have ever actually seen *Aida* but because I quite follow Said's highly convincing argument. With all the knowledge he accumulated in the course of writing *Orientalism*, with his great competence as a pianist and his passion for opera, he is peculiarly well situated to write about this masterpiece of European classical music which was composed especially for the opening of the Suez Canal, and he accomplishes the task with verve and rare wit. However, readings of particular authors I must again perforce skip, and it is from among essays that fall in the latter category, bearing a certain sweep of generalisation, that I should like to examine only two: 'Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations', cited earlier, and 'Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture', from *Raritan Quarterly*. Of these two, the 'Figures' essay appears to be chronologically earlier and was originally delivered as a lecture at the Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, held at University of Kent in August 1989. Such associations are usually very conservative and mindless affairs, so the radicalism of great many things Said says in the essay is salutary. My interest in these essays is of a slightly different kind, however.

Both these essays, as several others in recent years, register some real advances over *Orientalism*. There had been, for example, no evidence until after the publication of that book that Said had read any considerable number of contemporary non-western writers. By contrast, references to principal figures of the counter-canon of 'third world literature' surface very regularly in his more recent writings, even though not even one of them has yet been treated with the hermeneutic engagement and informed reading which Said offers so often for scores of western canonical figures; in the rare event when Said actually refers to particular texts, as in the case of George Antonius or Ranajit Guha in the essay we shall discuss presently, none ever receives the kind of detailed scrutiny which Said routinely accords to a wide range of European writers ranging from Swift to Renan to Schwab to Kipling. His engagement both as activist and as scholar with the Palestine liberation movement has been extended, meanwhile, to regular expressions of solidarity with anti-colonial movements in general and a basic respect for figures associated with such movements. Similarly, the eloquence of his plea that the contemporary masters of western thought should extend humane attention and liberal sympathy to non-western writers, especially to those who have themselves taken up residence in the west, is undeniable.

These partial gains in the range of engagements and sympathies stands, however, in peculiar and paradoxical relation with the freshly-acquired but altogether

irrepressible rage *against* the peoples, societies, national boundaries, reading communities and literatures of Asia, Africa, and "the Islamic world"; the enormous privileging of a handful of writers, strictly those who now live in the west, over those societies and literatures; and the conception of the "western centre" as the only site where "contests over decolonisation" can now take place. The enormity of this shift is puzzling, to put it as kindly as possible. The continued American hostility toward the Arab world on the one hand, the sentencing of Rushdie by Ayatullah Khomeini on the other, combined with the failure of most people in Asia, Africa and the Arab world to do combat on Rushdie's behalf, seems to have given rise to an extraordinary fury against the west and non-west alike, with the figure of the lonely writer in the western city—and the uncommitted reader of novels in that same city—eventually emerging as the only figures of redemption.

VII

These ambivalences get played out fully only in the address on Commonwealth literature but some of the key formulations are found in the essay on 'Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture', which we shall take up first. The latter half of the essay consists of the entirely salutary recommendation that non-western writers be taken seriously by western readers. The main burden of the arguments rests, however, in a rather strange distinction between what get called "colonial" and "post-colonial" intellectuals; brief commentaries on four books to furbish this sweeping typology; and a resounding affirmation of the acquisition of western "technique" and personal location in "the western centre" as the prerequisites of "insurgency" and "contest over de-colonisation". Before we get to all that, however, it may be useful to briefly indicate the breezy way in which generalisations get handled, as in the following rather interesting passage which opens the third paragraph:

Resistance to imperialism does not, of course, only involve armed force or bands of guerrillas. It is *mainly* allied with nationalism and with an aroused sense of aggrieved religious, cultural, or existential identity. In its pantheon are great warriors like Abdel Qader of Algeria, prophets and priests like the Mahdi and Gandhi, a phalanx of nationalist writers—Tagore, Yeats, Neruda, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Singhor—and dozens of intellectual figures like Marti, Mariategi, Fanon, Cabral and others, whose major role in the creation of an emergent and alternative discourse cannot be minimised [emphasis added for the word *mainly*]. Given that the Mahdi had declared himself a prophet, Gandhi clearly falls in the category of "priests". The affirmation of "nationalism", here as in several other places, should be seen, meanwhile, in relation to the debunking of national identity which we shall see in the other essay. My immediate

interest, however, is in the list—compiled in the genre of the post-modern pastiche—of nine names, joined to the infinite category of "others", bringing together communists and anti-communists, pacifists and Marxists, five of whom actually either led or participated in guerrilla warfare, all mobilised to posit the idea that imperialism is *mainly* a cultural phenomenon to be opposed by an *alternative discourse*. What is important about Cabral evidently is his *discursive* position, not that he launched and led the armed struggle which led to the liberation of his country and contributed decisively to the liberation of all the Portuguese colonies in Africa, not to speak of the collapse of fascism in Portugal itself.

With this insight in hand, Said then goes on to specify a certain typology of two kinds of intellectuals: the colonial and the post-colonial. In all, he discusses four authors. In the category of the colonial intellectuals fall C L R James, the Trinidadian communist and famous author of *Black Jacobins*, and the Arab nationalist historian, George Antonius, the author of equally famous *The Arab Awakening*. In the category of post-colonial intellectuals come the Malaysian writer Alatas and the Indian writer Ranajit Guha. Between the four, the globe is nicely covered, as are political ideologies, notably Marxism and nationalism. Before going on to the theoretical import and arbitrariness of Said's usage in the context at hand, it is necessary to clarify what these terms, "colonial" and "post-colonial", actually mean in political thought. For, these are key analytic categories which are used for periodisation of history as regards the rule over peoples of particular countries by ruling classes of other countries; for the fundamental shifts that take place with de-colonisation in forms of state and relations between different national formations, units of capital, classes and economies; for the internal re-organisation of state personnel, modes of governance and appropriation as well as in circulation of surpluses nationally and internationally, when sovereign regimes are constituted in former colonies. This analytic distinction rests upon the fundamental fact that the ruling class of a colony is located outside the colony and the colonial state is the instrument of that externally-based ruling class; with de-colonisation, this structural feature of the dominated formation no longer applies and the formation therefore ceases to be colonial, regardless of any other kind of dependence. In political thought, these categories have a precise meaning because they refer not to the date of de-colonisation but to identifiable structural shifts in state and society, and in the hierarchy of systemic determinations which structure the relation between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the direct producers of the imperialised but sovereign nation-state of what previously was a colony. To describe, on the other hand, a critic as 'post-colonial' simply because he/she came of age after

decolonisation is a tautology; to ascribe a shared cultural attitude toward western dominance to *all* intellectuals who begin writing after decolonisation, and a structurally different attitude to all those whose intellectual formation was completed under colonial rule, regardless of their individual, social and political locations, is the sheerest idealism and a kind of ahistorical levelling unavailable for rational argument.

These categories, "colonial" and "post-colonial", have no analytic value, nor theoretical status, when they are mobilised to homogenise very complex structures of intellectual productions or the trajectories and subjectivities of individual writers and critics or broad intellectual strata, of the kind that Said suggests in his essay. For particular intellectuals or clusters of them, colonial cultural ambience can last far beyond the moment of decolonisation; for others, rejection of cultural dominance of the colonising country can take place, and often does take place, well before the actual dissolution of the colonial state. Careers of historians and teachers like Susobhan Sarkar, sociologists like A R Desai, militants and intellectuals like E M S Namboodripad, not to speak of D D Kosambi— mathematician, Sanskritist, anthropologist, historian of ancient India—span many years of both the colonial and the post-colonial periods, and none of them, let alone scores of others, display the kind of cut-and-dry characteristics that Said attaches so neatly to his category of "colonial" and "post-colonial" intellectuals. Kosambi started writing roughly at the same time as C L R James, Irfan Habib roughly at the same time as Ranajit Guha; the kind of distinction Said makes tells us nothing about these other trajectories. He simply inflates differences of individual formation and attitude into meaningless global typologies.

What Said tells us is that colonial intellectuals, by which he simply means non-Europeans who wrote during the colonial period, be they nationalists or Marxists, always write within the cultural perspectives of European dominance, identifying themselves with European culture and thinking of the colonising country as "mother country". As Said puts it:

For James and Antonius the world of discourse inhabited by natives in the Caribbean and the Arab Orient was honorably dependent upon the west... There is no sense in their work of men standing *outside* the Western cultural tradition, however much they think of themselves as articulating the adversarial experience of colonial and/or non-western peoples.

The generalisation which is intended here simply boggles the mind, for it is so obviously contrary to what one knows about numerous intellectuals of the colonial period who never thought of themselves as ever standing *inside* the western cultural tradition. Nor is one quite sure how Said can later describe Guha squarely as a "post-structuralist" and at the same time designate

him the exemplary "post-colonial" intellectual standing *outside* the western cultural tradition; where, one wonders, is that line of demarcation between post-structuralism and the western cultural tradition! Post-colonial intellectuals are in any case said to be both outside western cultural tradition as well as having even a better command of the weapons of European critical thought; their real distinction is that they turn these weapons against their own tutors. No one in the past, during the colonial period, apparently did that! Criticism of the most fundamental aspects of Europe through critical methods learned initially in the European institutions was, one should have thought, a favourite pastime of great many nationalists.

More significant nonetheless is Said's very special way of according absolute centrality to those intellectuals of non-European origin who command a high degree of technical competence and who have chosen, both in the colonial and the post-colonial periods, to locate themselves in the west:

These figures address the metropolis using the techniques, the discourses, the very weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved exclusively for the European, now adapted either for insurgency or revisionism at the very heart of the Western centre.

Both James (the "colonial") and Guha (the "post-colonial") have written significant books, but to designate the writing of such books as acts of "insurgency" appears excessive, not the least because words of that kind should be applied to the act of writing sparingly, lest not only acts but even words get devalued. Castro's writing of 'History Shall Absolve Me' or Mao's writing of 'The Hunan Report' were certainly acts of insurgency, as is the act of writing whenever it can constitute a challenge to the existing structure of rule and a risk to one's security, but scholarly works on events of the late 18th and early 19th century do not fall in that category. Guha did after all publish his study of the permanent settlement of the late 18th century, to which Said refers, some 16 years after de-colonisation when enormous quantities of writing in India as well as Britain, during the colonial as well as the post-colonial periods, had demonstrated how much Indian agriculture had suffered from that settlement. What brings about such inflationary tendency in Said's language here is probably the great importance that he attaches to the very act of "addressing the metropolis ...at the very heart of the western centre", and it is probably this need to be "at the very heart of the western centre" which accounts for the emphasis on "the techniques, the discourses, the very weapons of scholarship"; if "addressing the metropolis" is what one does, then one better have those "techniques", those "discourses". (It should be pointed out in all fairness to Guha, though, that he moved permanently to "the western centre" some years after writing the said book.) This migration of the superior scholar from non-western countries to the western ones is what Said

calls the voyage in and describes it in the following way:

...the voyage in constitutes a specially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalisation in an age of continued imperial structures.

That is a nice phrase: "adversarial internationalisation". Unfortunately, the novelty of the phrase serves to conceal the fact that there is usually no relationship between "the voyage in" and any "adversarial" activity. Earlier in the same paragraph Said speaks, inexplicably, of "intellectual and scholarly work from the peripheries, done either by immigrants or by visitors, both of whom are generally anti-imperialist". That is not even remotely accurate. The vast majority of "immigrants and visitors" who go from "the peripheries" to the "western centre" in the United States are right-wing people, like Bharati Mukherjee, often even worse. Far from being "generally anti-imperialist", they want to be part of the "centre"; the last thing they want is "adversarial internationalisation". Said seems not to know the immigrant communities on whose behalf he speaks, and one does indeed need a great distance from the reality of those "voyages", made overwhelmingly in pursuit of money and professional success, if one is actually able to formulate the following declarative, also in the same paragraph:

The contest over decolonisation has moved from the peripheries to the centre.

The force of that word "moved" takes one's breath away. The struggle against imperialism now simply does not take place in the countries that are actually imperialised; it is a movable feast, and it goes where the experts go! The "contest over decolonisation becomes in this kind of formulation mainly a literary and literary-critical affair, and the elite academic intelligentsia, anchored in the metropolitan university, claims for itself, in an amazing gap between fact and self-image, the role of the world's revolutionary vanguard. The statement is definitive enough, but we may still ask: why is Ranajit Guha deemed so uniquely endowed to represent the "post-colonial" intelligentsia? The first formulation we get is the following:

Guha's book is, in ways that later post-structuralist writers (including Guha himself) would recognise, an archeological and deconstructive study ...

Archeology (Foucault), deconstruction (Derrida and friends) and post-structuralism generally seem thus to guarantee the personal affinity. And Said also approves of Guha's writing in his capacity as literary critic: "narrative is replaced by irony", Said says admiringly of Guha's style and makes much of his postulate that "post-colonial" history-writing of the kind that Guha practises has ceased to be built around narratives and is far more interested in language itself. Literary criticism, in other words, is the desired model for the writing of history. But what fascinates Said about Ranajit Guha,

above all, is the issue of class origin, social and geographical location, and the accompanying mastery of research techniques and western knowledges. For, Said hardly talks about the substance of Guha's book and it remains unclear whether he has actually read it. What he talks about, rather, is the fact that Guha comes from a family that was notably a beneficiary of the same Permanent Settlement of which Guha then offers the fulsome critique; that he then moved to western countries to carry on his work; and that Guha's mastery of technique and archive is the equal of any western scholar. In a rhetorical inflation characteristic of the contemporary third-worldist intellectuals located in "the western centre", Said then goes on to erase the fundamental political distinction between immigration and exile when he simply declares Guha to be an "exile figure". With the personal choice one has utterly no wish to quarrel, and I surely neither know nor wish to judge the circumstances which lead any individual to emigrate from one country to another; those are strictly private matters. By the same token, however, it is best not to misrepresent personal preference as fate ordained by repression. Yet, the "exile figure" is central to the persona Said ascribes to Guha. For, it is in this combination of comprador class origin, western location, exile self, and mastery of techniques that Said locates the productive and oppositional energies of the subalternist project and its asserted ability to overturn the entire trajectory of all the schools and tendencies previously obtaining in Indian historiography.

The social context of this privileging of Guha is of some considerable interest. There are several references to *Subaltern Studies* in these essays but, with the exception of a passing reference to Guha's own introductory note in Volume One, Said does not even cite any of the individual texts that comprise this project, let alone any detailed engagement with the premises or products of the project or, especially, with what may signify its difference from—purported superiority over—other kinds of historiography in India. One is not sure what it is in the work itself that is being singled out for praise in this foregrounding. Even in the singular case of Guha, where a particular book is mentioned, namely, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, two facts stand out. One is that it is an early work of Guha, published some two decades before the launching of the subaltern project, based upon his doctoral work within what one may loosely call the main traditions of Indian historiography, not entirely indifferent to premises shared with teachers like Susobhan Sarkar or rough contemporaries like Irfan Habib. It is significant that Said is so notably silent about Guha's more recent work in the actual subalternist mould.⁴⁰ Then, even with reference to *A Rule of Property* Said quotes only from the Introduction and only the biographical detail; it remains unclear whether Said is even interested in thinking

of the book itself, in relation to the immense body of writing on the Permanent Settlement which has accumulated in India over the decades, before Guha's book and since. Given this pattern of invocation and affiliation, the actual content of what Guha or the general subaltern tendency actually does can hardly be an issue here, and all that matters is Said's own construction of it. One comes away with the impression that the paramount fact here is the structure of conversation; conference and personal encounter currently available in the American university, and the pre-eminence of the subaltern group in that particular milieu. This, then, is cemented by the matter of "post-structuralism"; all other recognisable traditions of history-writing in India have been, after all, self-confessedly "historicist". The main source of attraction is in any case the biographical one: class origin, privileged access to "technique" and "discourse", the imaginative construction of "exile", and the subsequent re-location. The irony of this personally felt and highly valorised biographical detail nevertheless is that Said has given to us, with or without Guha's consent, the portrait of a typical upper-layer bourgeois; for, it is that kind of individual who has typically mobilised the accumulations achieved during the colonial period to acquire the most modern western technology, Swiss bank accounts, apartments and branch offices in the metropolitan centres, to launch upon collaborative competition with the metropolitan bourgeoisie, from the margins of global capitalism. In this account, Guha becomes for Indian historiography what Bajaj and Birla claim to have been for Indian industry: patriotic, albeit monopolistic, national bourgeois.

In according such primacy to metropolitan location Said is quite indifferent to the fact that not all subalternists have left the country, and there is of course a trenchant irony in the obviously paradoxical relationship between how the subalternist project would define itself and the way Said defines it, namely, as an upper class, emigre phenomenon at odds with its own class origin and metropolitan location. Suffice it to say that there is a very considerable resonance in this narrative of class origin, the migration as a *voyage in*, and preferred metropolitan location—the pleasures of self-exile much more often than forced exile—and the subsequent professionalisation and hybridisation ("cultural amphibians" is Said's laudatory term)—which far exceeds the terms of any personal choice that Guha might or might not have made, even though he is the one who gets singled out. For, one of the few features that these latter essays share with *Orientalism* is that they continue to speak to the existential situation—the class privilege, the presumed oppositional and beleaguered situation, the technical ability to collaborate as well as compete, the professional location—of the more privileged sections of the incoming immigrant in the United States. What is significant in terms

of authorial intentions, meanwhile, is the fact that the turn from a wholesale denunciation of the west, so uncompromising in *Orientalism*, to an equally sweeping desire for a location in the west, which these latest essays assert, is now complete.

VIII

Predilections of this kind are what Said brings to the even more complex and internally far more riven essay, 'Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations', which is notable for its high estimation of western canonicity, its debunking of the non-west, its handsome praise for the civilising mission of English, its advocacy not only of literature's aesthetic pleasures but also its central importance as a vehicle for consuming the world. Reversals of great many earlier positions are simply astonishing.

Said starts by commending the "salutary and invigorating quality in the very notion of Commonwealth literature today", which is surprising for anyone on the left, since all that is wrong with the "Commonwealth" begins with the *notion* that it should exist at all. Said, however, sees in this construct an "invigorating" civilisational mission, as follows:

If configurations like Commonwealth or world literature are to have any meaning at all, it is ...because they interact ferociously not only with the whole nationalist basis for the composition and study of literature, but also with the lofty independence and indifference with which it has become customary Eurocentrically to regard metropolitan western literatures.

Now, "Commonwealth literature" is a construct pretty much of the British Council and is limited largely to its clients, who themselves construe it as a conglomeration of discrete "national" traditions; the "ferocity" Said imputes to it is at best imaginary. His ambivalent and self-cancelling remarks on literatures of Asia and Africa which surface in this same article I shall quote below, and it will become clear that what he means by "world literature" is pretty much what Goethe actually meant and Arnold might have accepted, namely, a club of 'great books'. What is most pertinent in any case is the denunciation of "the nationalist basis", which is a rather significant departure in this essay but should not be very surprising after our preceding analysis.

This civilising mission is said to reside, further, in the very global pre-eminence of English language itself: "What gives the actuality of Commonwealth literature its special force is that, of all languages today, English is, properly speaking, the world language." (I am certain Said does not register, let alone intend, the pun in "properly speaking".) Ngugi Wa Thongo, the Kenyan writer, is then invoked to make the point that this global circulation of English makes it possible for us to 'de-colonise' our minds through study in the same language that was used to colonise us. This too is somewhat surprising, both because Ngugi

has over the last several years made the point that in order to fully de-colonise his mind he must rather write in Swahili and Kikuyu, and because this beneficent role of English as a vehicle of enlightenment and world culture is at least over-stated. In present-day India, surely, English occupies a much more contradictory space: as at once a language for the production of knowledge, a means of connecting the country with currents around the world, both good and bad, as well as a line of demarcation, a cultural boundary between privilege and dispossession; for many among the literati, it is also the language of the Raj nostalgia. Said, however, is insistent on this point of the civilising ethos. He recounts a visit to a national university in one of the Gulf states and, having registered the fact that the English department attracted the largest number of students, goes on to bemoan two facts: that so many students took English not for its literature but as a technical language needed for professional advancement; and that "English, such as it was, existed in what seemed to be a seething cauldron of Islamic revivalism". Both these laments deserve some comment.

Said's main statement about the use of English in the Gulf state runs as follows:

This all but terminally consigned English to the level of a technical language almost totally stripped not only of expressive and aesthetic characteristics but also denuded of any critical or self-conscious dimension. You learned English to use computers, respond to orders, transmit telexes, decipher manifests and so forth. That was all.

Said's lament is quite unmodulated by any awareness that English has become a "world language", a fact which he celebrates, not because of its "aesthetic characteristics" or "critical dimension"—i.e., not owing to its literature and literary critics—but because of its centrality in the administrative and capitalist enterprises in the most powerful empires of past and present, hence as a language of rule ("taking orders") and of command in global grids of telecommunications, airlines, administration, transnational corporation. The poor student whom Said so derides in fact makes a rational choice, in his own circumstances, in learning the technical aspect and ignoring the aesthetic one.

The main comment on the beleaguered situation of this "world language" in the midst of a "seething cauldron" runs, meanwhile, as follows:

Either it is a technical language with wholly instrumental characteristics and features; or it is a foreign language with various implicit connections to the larger English-speaking world, but where its presence abuts on the much more impressive, much more formidable emergent reality of organised religious fervour. And since the language of Islam is Arabic, a language with considerable literary community and heiratic force, English seems to me to have sunk quite low...

Against this debasement and overwhelming of the "world language" by organised religious fervour" are ranged "smaller literate groups that are bound together not by insensate polemic but by affinities, sympathies and compassion". A particularly important member of these "smaller literate groups" is Salman Rushdie, whom Said has defended most fervently, in this article as well as in every other public forum available for the defence, partly because "That the novel dealt with Islam in English and for what was believed to be a largely western audience was its main offence."

Said's way of posing English against Arabic is odd. In the Arab-speaking countries, surely, the characterisation of Arabic as the language of Islam (as of all else) may be substantially true, but insofar as he speaks constantly of larger things (Asia and Africa, Commonwealth literature, Rushdie and "the Khomeini threat") it may be worth recalling that the vast majority of Muslims in the world speak or understand no Arabic. More to the point, any number of studies exist to show that the urban petty bourgeoisie which normally constitutes the cutting edge of "organised religious fervour" in a number of countries is educated in English as much as in any other language; in the "Islamic world", certainly, English-knowing professionals occupy key positions in such movements, and the representatives of orthodox Islam who led the campaign against *Satanic Verses* in England knew English very well, while great many knew no Arabic. And it is entirely to be doubted that such representatives of orthodox Islam, including the Iranian clerics, would have been any the more forgiving if *Satanic Verses* had been written in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu or any other language, for Asian and Arab readerships; what caused the outrage was the book's heresy, not its language of communication. Being written in English and for primarily western audiences became an issue only with regard to the money and power such facts normally represent, not to speak of the corrupting potential of that kind of money and that kind of metropolitan location, hero-worship, etc. made worse by the way the book got used by the (English-speaking) British and American states.

The touchstone for Said is provided by the issue of rising, or failing to rise, in Rushdie's defence. That most writers located in Asia and Africa failed to rise to this grand duty is said to indicate, then, that this intelligentia is possessed, on the one hand, by networks of multinational information (CNN, NBC, etc), and, on the other, complicities with their own states and regimes, with the result that

in the relatively open environment postulated by communities of readers interested in emergent post-colonial Commonwealth and Francophone literature, the underlying configurations on the ground are directed and controlled not by processes of hermeneutic investigation, nor by sympathetic and literate intuition, nor by informed reading, but by

much coarser and instrumental processes whose goal is the mobilisation of consent, the eradication of dissent, the promotion of an almost literally blind patriotism [emphasis added].

Those readers who are interested in 'Commonwealth literature', we are being told, "postulate" "open environments" but these readerly islands of liberality are besieged by "configurations on the ground" based on "blind patriotism"; bureaucrats of the British Council, who have invented the category of 'Commonwealth literature', feel, I am sure, the same way. There is even a note of nostalgia. "Environment" was once "open", but "intuition" has now ceased to be "literate", and communities have become incapable of "hermeneutic investigation" and "informed reading"; what once had the potential of becoming refined has become "much coarser"; the issue of the 'state' shall come up soon, but what is lamented here is "the underlying configuration on the ground", i.e., the state of mass culture itself, exemplified by those students who read English for technical purposes ("instrumental process") and not for its aesthetic beauty (through "hermeneutic investigation"). The Arnoldian problematic of culture and anarchy is here in full bloom. Once these "communities" can be accused of lacking in all that the literary critic most values—literate intuition, hermeneutics, informed reading—they obviously become "literally blind". The evidence of this literal blindness of course is "the quite stunning acquiescence of the Islamic world to the overall prohibitions and proscriptions as well as threats pronounced against Salman Rushdie", a lone genius whom an entire world ("Islamic world") fails to appreciate because of its blindness, its coarseness, its lack of hermeneutic finesse. Aside from the damning fact that they have come to regard English only as a "technical language" while disregarding its "aesthetic characteristics", the main problem of these communities is that they identify too closely with their state, not realising that "the chief, most official, forceful and coercive identity is the state with its borders, customs, ruling parties and authorities". We shall not comment here on the double-edged meaning of the word "customs", but that a stateless Palestinian, longing always to have a state of his own, should describe the state—all states; the state as such—as a "coercive identity" signifies a paradox too painful to bear comment. It is well to remember, however, that multinational capital registers exactly the same objection against sovereign states of Asia and Africa: they have their governments, custom duties, borders, etc, so that free movement of capital and commodities is impeded. Of course, 'customs' also means signifying cultural practices; to have 'customs' of one's own in a non-European setting means having a hermeneutics of judgment which the metropolitan critic would not recognise as hermeneutics at all.

The price of not possessing hermeneutics

but being enclosed within the borders and customs of Asian and African countries is not only that they fail to recognise a genius when they see one, Salman Rushdie in the case, but that the literature they themselves produce within those frontiers is fated to remain forever inferior:

I think it is a mistake to try to show that the 'other' literatures of Africa and Asia, with their more obviously worldly affiliation to power and politics, can be studied respectably, that is, as if they were in actuality as high, as autonomous, as aesthetically independent and satisfying as French, German or English literatures. The notion of black skin in a white mask is no more serviceable and dignified in literary study than it is in politics. Emulation and mimicry never get one very far.

Naipaul, surely, never made a judgment more damning. The key word here is of course "respectably"; people of Asia and Africa who produce literature within their own borders and according to their own 'customs' simply are not worthy of respect, because they are mimic men, all. In direct contrast, we get—from the author of *Orientalism*, no less—the characterisation of "French, German and English literatures" as not only "high" but also "autonomous", "aesthetically independent" and "satisfying". Now, satisfaction is doubtless a personal matter, but may one ask: "autonomous" and "independent" of what? The whole point of *Orientalism*, one should have thought was that these literatures were *not* autonomous, that they were too complicit in colonialism to be spoken of primarily in terms of "high" aesthetics.

All such mimics (African and Asian literatures) and such coercive identities (the state, surely, but also nation, gender, class) need to be left behind. Once these are shed, the real business of literature can begin:

The reader and writer of literature... no longer needs to tie him or herself to an image of the poet or scholar in isolation, secure, stable, national in identity, class, gender, or profession, but can think and experience with Genet in Palestine or Algeria, with Tayeb Saleh as a black man in London, with Jamaica Kincaid in the white world, with Rushdie in India and Britain, and so on.

...To paraphrase from a remark made by Auerbach in one of his last essays, our philological home is the world, and not the nation or even the individual writer.

Rarely has one come across in the latter half of the present century so unabashed a recommendation that the world, especially the "Orient"—Palestine, Algeria, India—and indeed all the races, white and black, be *consumed* in the form of those fictions of this world which are available in the bookshops of the metropolitan countries; the condition of becoming this perfect consumer of course is that one frees oneself from stable identities of class, nation, gender. Thus it is that sovereignty comes to be invested in the reader of literature, fully in command of an imperial geography. All that seems to have

changed since Auerbach made that recommendation, in the name of philology, is that London itself—Britain, the white world—has become an object among other objects of consumption, quite at par with India. This is the imperial geography not of the colonial period but of late capitalism: commodity acquires universality, and a universal market arises across national frontiers and local customs, while white trade rejoins the black trade. When cultural criticism reaches this point of convergence with the universal market, one might add, it becomes indistinguishable from commodity fetishism.

IX

So one returns, inevitably, to the question of Marxism. In the essay 'Secular Criticism', which serves both as dossier of his basic theoretical position and as Introduction to the book, *The World, The Text, The Critic*, Said had said:

...it may seem that I am an undeclared Marxist, afraid of losing respectability...

...on the important matter of a critical position, its relationship to Marxism, liberalism, even anarchism, it needs to be said that criticism modified in advance by labels like "Marxism", or "liberalism", is, in my view, an oxymoron.

The net effect of "doing" Marxist criticism or writing at the present time is of course to declare political preference, but it is also to put oneself outside a great deal of things going on in the world, so to speak, and in other kinds of criticism [pp 28-29].

But supposing that what Marxists write was not to be prejudged and already disparaged as "doing", in the quotation marks; and supposing also that Marxism itself, when used alongside criticism, would be neither marked in similar fashion nor described as a "label"—that is to say, if Said were to adopt a kind of direct phrasing that would accept responsibility for its own meaning, and not one so overwrought with mockery and polemic as to foreclose the possibility of serious argument—would it not be possible then to face the problem squarely? The problem of "losing respectability" I shall not raise because that is always a personal and therefore very touchy matter, though I must confess I cannot help being reminded of the passage I quoted a little earlier, where Said declares that those "other" literatures", Asian and African, cannot be read *respectably* as being at par with the European. Some other problems I may mention. The problem that one creates for the coherence of one's own thought when one refuses to acknowledge the full import of the fact that Gramsci was a communist militant, so that the word Marxist would quite accurately describe the nature of his undertaking, and when one tries to claim, instead, that Gramsci was just another Julien Benda, another Mathew Arnold. The problem of accepting far too much from the dominant

American ideology when one gives oneself the right to use the term 'Secular Criticism' as the title of the chapter, when "oppositional criticism" can be recommended, when Guha can be lauded for being a "post-structuralist writer"—when one regularly takes recourse, in other words, to the common practice of putting two words together in order to specify lineages of theoretical or political position in all kinds of other situations—but the use of the word 'Marxist' before the word 'criticism' is declared oxymoronic. Why should one *not* attach the word 'Marxist'—not the label, but the word—and attach it consistently, without quotation marks, to all that Lukacs wrote after he had in fact become a Marxist, and then try to think through *his* Marxism, *one's* own Marxism if one has any, and Marxism *in general*? What sanctity attaches to the word 'criticism' which gets elevated by the term 'oppositional' or 'secular', but gets defiled by the term 'Marxist'?

The larger issue, admittedly, is that of one's willingness, or lack of willingness, "to put oneself outside a great deal of things going on in the world". The pain of any ethical life is that all fundamental bondings, affiliations, stable political positions require that one ceases to desire, voraciously, everything that is available in this world; that one learns to deny oneself some of the pleasures, rewards, consumptions, even affiliations of certain sorts. This much Said must have himself learned through his consistent anti-Zionism. Why is Marxism singled out for this pain—and joy—of choosing? Rather, why Marxism alone is associated only with the pain, but not the joy and the ethical need, of choosing? Is it that the secular and the religious, even the Zionist and the anti-Zionist, can equally respectably partake of the imperial geography and the consumptions of 'great deal of things', and it is only a fundamental acceptance of a Marxist position, with all its consequences, which entails an unbearable self-denial?

Like all political positions which are ethically viable, the Marxist one also closes off certain possibilities and opens up certain others. In choosing such a position, one chooses the closures, certainly, but one also chooses the potentialities. Said's warning, which is also a self-warning, that a choice for Marxism entails putting "oneself outside a great deal of things" points toward a possible inventory of self-denials; it is a pity, though, that Said never takes stock of what Marxism might have made possible, nor of what one actually *loses* when one puts oneself *inside* too many things. Having access to "great deal of things" always gives one a sense of opulence, mastery, reach, choice, freedom, erudition, play. But resolution of the kind of ambivalences and self-cancelling procedures which beset Said's thought require that some positions be vacated, some choices be made, some of these "great deal of things" be renounced.

Notes

[This essay is based on a chapter in my forthcoming book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Verso, London). Earlier drafts were presented in the Fellows' Seminar at the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, and subsequently in seminars at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, as well as in the history department of Delhi University. The author is grateful for comments and criticisms offered by audiences at these distinguished institutions, in the course of subsequent discussions, formal and informal. For a related argument, see my 'Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India' in *Studies in History*, vol VII, no 1, January-June 1991, Delhi.]

- 1 See my 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National' Allegory' in *Social Text*, no 17, Autumn 1978, New York.
- 2 Said, Edward W, *The Question of Palestine*, New York, Doubleday, 1980.
- 3 Said, Edward W, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, New York, Pantheon, 1986.
- 4 Aside from scores of articles and interventions in the journalistic media, see in particular *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, London, Verso, 1987; co-authored with Christopher Hitchens.
- 5 Said, Edward W, 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims' in the inaugural issue of *Social Text*, Winter 1979, later integrated into *The Question of Palestine*.
- 6 Said, Edward W, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books Edition, 1979, p 27. All subsequent references to the book shall be to this edition.
- 7 See, Said, Edward W, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Harvard University Press, 1966 and *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Basic Books, 1975.
- 8 Twelve years after the publication of *Orientalism*, in his essay entitled 'Figures, Configurations, Transfiguration' in *Race and Class*, volume 32, no 1, 1990, where the title itself plays on the philological trope of 'figuration', Said uses the verb "revere", with its inescapably religious connotations, for describing his own sense of awe when he thinks of Auerbach and Spitzer.
- 9 For a scrupulous examination of Said's highly questionable uses of Foucault, though with very different emphases than mine, see 'On Orientalism' in James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard, 1988.
- 10 Said of course locates Marx not in what Foucault calls the 'discourse' of political economy but in the literary ambience of what Said himself designates as an 'orientalist discourse', without even addressing the question, as any Foucaultian obviously would, whether or not statements, and their authors, can actually circulate so very freely between discursive fields which are otherwise mutually so distinct and discontinuous. For more on the treatment of Marx in *Orientalism* see below.
- 11 Said, Edward W, 'Kim, The Pleasures of Imperialism' in *Raritan Quarterly*
- 12 Reference here and in subsequent quotation and pagination is to the Norton paperback edition of 1969, which is a reprint of the original 1928 translation by Richard Aldington.
- 13 Said, Edward W, *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, 1983, pp 14-15.
- 14 As Raymond Williams once trenchantly remarked in a very different context, those who claim to be beyond all 'isms' rarely examine the 'ism' of their own 'criticism'. See: Raymond Williams, 'The Crisis of English Studies', *New Left Review*, no 129, September-October 1981.
- 15 The latter pages of Said's famous essay, 'Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors' (*Critical Inquiry* no 15, Winter 1989), which was delivered originally as an address at the 86th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, November 21, 1987, may be usefully consulted for this use of the collective pronoun.
- 16 Lewis, Bernard, 'The Question of Orientalism' in *New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1982.
- 17 Raskin, Jonah, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, Random House, New York, 1971.
- 18 First presented at the Essex University Conference on 'Europe and its others' in 1984, six years after the original publication of *Orientalism*, this essay, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', had been reproduced widely, as, for example, in the American journal, *Critical Inquiry*, and the British journal, *Race and Class*, as well as in books, such as Barker, Hume, Iversen and Loxley (eds), *Literature, Politics and Theory*, London, 1986.
- 19 Elsewhere of course, it is precisely Vico's 'historicist' statements which Said would invoke for high praise. See, for example, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp 290-91, where he explicates one of his favourite quotations from Vico, as well as the superb passage on p 114 where he makes a crucial point about Vico's idea of history through a wonderfully inflected reference to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.
- 20 See 'Writing about Islam and the Arabs: A review of E W Said, *Orientalism*' in *I and C*, no 9, Winter 1981/82. It might be helpful to know that *I and C* was previously published as *Ideology and Consciousness*, but was then reduced to mere initials after the editors lost nerve about the categories of both 'ideology' and 'consciousness'.
- 21 Said keeps shifting, throughout the book, between one set of statements in which 'the Orient' is said to have 'always' served for Europe as the image of an absolute other, inferior and exotic and alien and insufferable because of this inferiority, and another set of statements which suggest that 'the west' has 'always' sought to represent 'the Orient' as a partial self-image, not necessarily inferior (e.g. 'To the Westerner, however, the Oriental was always like some aspect of the west; Indian religion was essentially an Oriental version of German-Christian pantheism', p 67). One might note, in passing, though Said does not say, that at least some of those romantics regarded the 'indian religion' as the purer, higher form.
- 22 Variants of the following statement, for example, can be found throughout the book: "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalisation of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact" (p 39).
- 23 Samir Amin's work on this question is far more extensive in Arabic but the relevant argument about epistemic unity both of the Mediterranean antiquity on the one hand, and of the Christian and Islamic theological bases on the other, is summarised also in his *Eurocentrism* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1989).
- 24 Bernal demonstrates convincingly that the fabrication of ancient Greece as an originary and autonomous cultural formation, its sundering from the composite Mediterranean culture in which it had been placed overlappingly with Egyptian and Levantine antiquities, and its relocation as the fount of a west European history rather than at the confluence of Afro-Asiatic-European confluence—i.e. the mapping of an Athens-to-Albion cultural grid which demarcates Europe from Asia—is a product really of the late 18th century onwards, after the main European interests (in both senses of the word) shift from Egypt to India and when the Indo-Aryan linguistic model gets going as the basic explanatory model for cultural unities and mobilities. See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, Volume 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1987).
- 25 For an erudite survey of a field, in which much originality resides actually in the way Said draws upon prior critiques, see his 'Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors' (*Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1989).
- 26 Said, Edward W, 'Jane Austen and Empire' in Terry Eagleton (ed), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, Polity Press, London, 1989.
- 27 See chapter two, 'Languages of Class, Ideologies of Immigration' in my forthcoming book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, Verso).
- 28 See my 'Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India' in *Studies in History* (Volume VII, no 1, January-June 1991) for detailed examination of Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* (Basil Blackwell, 1990).
- 29 See Partha Chatterjee, 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness' in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies*, Volume VI (Oxford, New Delhi, 1989).
- 30 See my 'Rushdie's Shame: Postmodernism, Migrancy and the Representations of Women' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 15, 1991.
- 31 See my essays referred to in notes 1 and 29 for detailed discussions of the theoretical category of 'third world literature'.
- 32 'Media, Margins and Modernity: Raymond Williams and Edward Said', Appendix to Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, pp 196-97 (London, Verso, 1989). The transcript of that public discussion, and indeed the whole book, ends on that

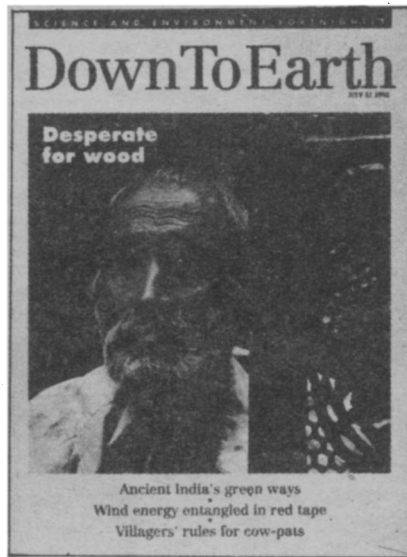
sentence about 'feminist credentials'.

- 33 This essay has also appeared as an introduction to Schwab's own *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, translation of *Le Renaissance Orientale* (1954) by Gene Patterson-Black and Victoria Reinking (New York, Columbia University Press, 1984). The high praise Schwab receives in this essay makes curious reading when set against the very marginal treatment he gets in *Orientalism* itself.
- 34 In his last book, *State, Power, Socialism* (New Left Books, London, 1978; translation by Patrick Camiller of *L'Etat, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme*, published in Paris that same year), Poulantzas offers a critique of Foucault from a Marxist position but tries also to find common ground between the two. See, in particular the section on 'Law' in Part One and the one entitled 'Towards a Relational Theory of Power?' in Part Two. This critique, in the book that is theoretically the most eclectic in Poulantzas's overall oeuvre, was obviously not available to Said at the time of the writing of *Orientalism*.
- 35 *The World, the Text...*, op cit, pp 244-46. This distancing from Foucault was then to be repeated in the more recent essay, 'Foucault and the Imagination of Power' in David Couzen (ed), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Routledge, London, 1989), which too says less than what is there already in Poulantzas.
- 36 This emphasis on 'resistance' outside the 'grand narratives' is not notably different from the one that Foucault (partially aided by Deleuze) delineates in great many places, including the two interviews published as the concluding chapters of Michel Foucault, *Language, Countermemory, Practice* (edited by Donald Bouchard, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1977).
- 37 See Said, Edward W, 'Opponents; Audiences, Constituencies and Community' (*Critical Inquiry*, no 9, 1982; reprinted in Hal Foster (ed), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, Port Townsend, Washington, Bay Press, 1983, pp 135-59).
- 38 Editor of the series *Subaltern Studies*, and author most notably of *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (1963) and *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), Ranajit Guha taught history for many years at Sussex in Great Britain before moving in 1980 to the Australian National University, Canberra.
- 39 See Said, Edward W, 'The Imperial Spectacle', *Grand Street*.
- 40 The more recent *Elementary Aspects* would be a closer approximation of the Subalternist approach ('post-structuralism', as Said designates it), but the monograph, *An Indian Historiography of India: A 19th Century Agenda and Its Implications* (K P Bagchi, Calcutta, 1988), the superb essay, possibly Guha's best work in the past quarter century, entitled 'Chandra's Death' (*Subaltern Studies*, V, Delhi, 1987), and the recent, much lengthier and much more problematic essay 'Dominance Without Hegemony and Its Historiography' (*Studies*, VI, Delhi, 1989) would have been even more representative.

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