*A Review of Reviews**

ORIENTALISM NOW

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ABSTRACT

Notwithstanding its own authoritative status now, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has lived a seditious life and thrived on it. If its characterization of Orientalism as a political doctrine has infuriated critics into denouncing it as an ideologically-motivated work, this has also incited further assaults on the authority of Orientalist knowledge.

More than anything else, what accounts for *Orientalism*'s insurgent existence is its relentless transgression of boundaries drawn by disciplines of knowledge and imperial governance. Unsettling received oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, reading literary texts as historical and theoretical events, and cross-hatching scholarly monographs with political tracts, it forced open the authoritative modes of knowing the Other. An indeterminacy emerged in the authority of Western knowledge as it was brought down from its Olympian heights to expose its involvement in Western power. It is this indeterminacy that has served as a provocation to rethink the modern West from the position of the Other, to go beyond *Orientalism* itself in exploring the implications of its demonstration that the East/West opposition is an externalization of an internal division in the modern West. Even if *Orientalism* performs this task inadequately, the proliferation of the postcolonial "writing back" would be unimaginable without it.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* has lived a seditious life. Since 1978, when it launched an audacious attack on Western representations of the Orient, the book has breathed insurgency. Its history is now inseparable from the severe condemnations it provoked from some and the high praises it elicited from others. Denounced as an uncharitable and poisonous attack on the integrity of Orientalist scholarship, it opened the floodgate of postcolonial criticism that has breached the authority of Western scholarship of Other societies. The hallowed image of the Orientalist as an austere figure unconcerned with the world and immersed in the mystery of foreign scripts and languages has acquired

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a dark hue as the murky business of ruling other peoples now forms the essential and enabling background of his or her scholarship. The towering and sagely images of men like William ("Oriental") Jones have cracked and come tumbling down from their exalted spaces. This iconoclastic effect of *Orientalism* remains one of its most enduring influences, arousing some to an unrelenting hostility to the book while inciting others to mount further assaults on the authority of Western scholarship of the Other.

But what accounts for *Orientalism*'s subversive effect? After all, it was not the first to mount criticism of Western scholarship; the critique of Western knowledge of the Orient is at least as old as modern Orientalism itself and has been recurrent. Abd-al-Rahman al-Jabarti, the Egyptian chronicler and a witness to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, for example, had no doubt that the expedition was as much an epistemological as a military conquest.[1] More recently, and predating Said's work, the studies of V. G. Kiernan, Anwar Abdel Malek, and Bernard S. Cohn tracked the relationship between European representations and rule.[2] And few have seriously doubted the worldly involvement of Western scholarship. Yet Said's book provoked an unprecedented reaction that ranges, sixteen years after its publication, from ad hominem attacks to spirited defenses.[3]

It is tempting, though reductive, to attribute the enduring impact of *Orientalism* solely to either the festering Arab-Israeli conflict, or to the resurgent third-worldism that has emerged in the context of ideological refigurations produced by the capitalist reorganization of polities and economies in the last few decades. While these political contexts are relevant, to reduce the book's reading to them overlooks the text itself and the source of its subversive power—namely, its persistent violation of boundaries and conventions.

More than anything else, what accounts for the extraordinary impact of *Orientalism* is its repeated dissolution of boundaries drawn by colonial and neocolonial Western hegemony. The book ignited an intellectual and ideological

1. *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French Occupation, 1798* (Princeton and New York, 1993), 109–110. Also, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), 82.

2. V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of the Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (Boston, 1969); Anwar Abdel Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," *Diogenes* 44 (Winter, 1963), 102–140. See Bernard S. Cohn's essays on the colonial sociology of India, written, presented, and published originally in the 1960s and the 1970s, and now reprinted in his *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987).

3. A particularly shrill recent attack is Aijaz Ahmed's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York, 1992)—a book charged with considerable polemical heat but little insight. Uncomfortable with Said's stance with respect to Marxism, this book repeats many of the earlier criticisms of Said. But unlike other critics who note and explore the contradictions in *Orientalism*, particularly with respect to humanism and Foucault, to outline perspectives that remain in sympathy with the book, Ahmed repeats these criticisms to orchestrate an attack that accuses Said of mobilizing "all sorts of eclectic procedures to establish" that "Europeans were *ontologically* incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe" (178–189). As for the effect of the book, Ahmed attributes it to the aspirations of the middle-class immigrants and "ethnic" intellectuals in the West who allegedly find Said's perspective useful in their upward mobility (196–197). The journal *Public Culture* devoted an issue, 6:1 (Fall 1993), to Ahmed's book, consisting of several essays that view *In Theory*'s critique of Said and recent theories as caricature, and Ahmed's response.

conflagration by its insistent undoing of oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, Western knowledge and Western power, scholarly objectivity and worldly motives, discursive regimes and authorial intentions, discipline and desire, representation and reality, and so on. Violating disciplinary borders and transgressing authoritative historical frontiers, *Orientalism* unsettled received categories and modes of understanding. Its persistent and restless movements between authorial intentions and discursive regimes, scholarly monographs and political tracts, literature and history, philology and travel writings, classical texts and twentieth-century polemics produced a profound uncertainty.

Tossed into this maelstrom of indeterminacy and dubiety, the established authority of Orientalist scholars and their lines of inquiry have come undone. It is this ambivalent effect of *Orientalism* that invites charges of undisciplined thinking and ideological bad faith, and prompts critics to force its unsettling movement between different positions into an either/or choice which they then target for criticism. Significantly, it is precisely such boundary-crossings and stagings of contrary positions that have proved to be the most productive and influential maneuvers, inciting further critical studies of the modern West's construction of the Other. Such studies have elaborated and extended its argument, and Said himself has gone on to produce other studies of the relationship between Western power and knowledge. But *Orientalism*'s authority as a critique of Western knowledge remains unmatched, and continues to derive force from its subversive violation of borders.

I. "THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK"

It is significant though not surprising that the most explosive effect of *Orientalism*'s restless and transgressive energy has been felt on the borderlines of politics and knowledge. It is there that Said's transgressions provoked a staunch defense of Western authority and unleashed a wide-ranging postcolonial "writing back."

The early reviews were mostly hostile. Angry and charged by a sense of violation, these reviews took Said to task for crossing the line between scholarship and politics. In a blistering review, Bernard Lewis, whose considerable and impressive scholarship is subjected to a sharp critique in *Orientalism*, accused Said of "poisoning" and "polluting" Orientalism's true history and meaning.[4] Orientalism, he argued, was an archaic term that the Orientalists themselves abandoned in 1973 because it no longer described accurately their scholarly concerns. The contemporary scholarship, he suggested, had become too diverse and bore little resemblance to its nineteenth-century predecessor, which, in turn, also scarcely resembled Said's *Orientalism*. To use that term

4. Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," *New York Review of Books* (June 24, 1982), 49. Another review also complained of "the perversion of the term Orientalism." Bayly Winder, *Middle East Journal* 35 (1981), 617.

to describe the writings ranging from nineteenth-century travel accounts, philological and philosophical inquiries, to contemporary works by experts, therefore, was nothing but an example of "word pollution," an attempt to besmirch honest scholarship. Attributing the origin of this pollution to the Muslim world, Lewis declared *Orientalism* to be an ideological and illegitimate intrusion of politics into the world of scholarship.[5]

Such charged responses questioned Said's claim that "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine" (204), that the course of the Western pursuit of truth, crisscrossed with racist power and cultural supremacism, licensed the pillage of Other cultures in the name of disinterested scholarship. Did the Western will to power taint the inquiry of every scholar, dead or living, who studied the Orient? Naming a number of scholars who either "failed to be native citizens of the most successful imperial powers" or were not "altogether brainwashed by the tradition," Malcolm H. Kerr found Said's argument preconceived:

> Said seems to be struck with the residual argument that whatever the individual goodwill of the scholars, they are all prisoners of the establishment—the old-boy network of government, business, the foundations—which, in turn, depends on propagating the old racist myths of European Orientalism in order to further the Western imperial domination of the East.[6]

The book, Kerr suggested, needed to be written because it unmasks certain persistent Western misconceptions and prejudices about Islam and the Arabs. But the connection it drew between imperial interests and scholarly concerns, he alleged, was driven by polemics and passion, not sound analysis and calm reason. Turning Said's critique against him, Kerr accused him of caricaturing Orientalists.

Crucial in such readings is the conviction that imperial interests could never possibly be so overwhelming as to vitiate the writings of scholars drawn from different centuries, nations, institutions, academic fields, and cultural sensibilities. The persistence of racist stereotypes and politically-motivated distortions is readily conceded, but not the indictment of the Orientalist tradition as a whole of being complicit with Western power. The extraordinary productivity and influence of German Orientalism—a tradition at least as powerful as Anglo-French scholarship, but excluded from Said's analysis—is often invoked to challenge Said's case. Does not the strength of Orientalist scholarship in Germany—a nation without a significant imperial presence in the East—demonstrate that the lines of scholarly inquiry and political power did not always meet? Critics have returned also again and again, now to one nineteenth-century Orientalist who does not fit the pattern, and then to a contemporary expert

5. Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," 50. Only slightly less satisfactory is David Kopf's patronizing reading that *Orientalism* is a reminder of "the deep-rooted problem of identity among the intelligentsia of the third world (or of women and minorities)." "Hermeneutics versus History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39 (1980), 495.

6. Malcolm H. Kerr, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980), 546–547.

who exhibits sympathy for Oriental cultures, to suggest that Said's case is flawed. Even sympathetic reviewers have found his argument to be too sweeping, suggesting that contemporary scholarship, in particular, has broken from Orientalist traditions.[7]

The claim that many scholars and several strains within the Orientalist tradition escaped its pernicious prejudices and politics has been a persistent theme in the critique of Said's work. This criticism is not principally about the differing assessment of the scholarship of particular individuals, but about the relationship between political authority and authoritative discourse. Said's critics concede willingly that cultural prejudice and naked political interest have often marred Western studies of Other cultures, but they regard such biases as matters of *mentalité*. As a mental attitude, as a spirit of the times, racist thinking and stereotypes may blinker the vision of many Westerners, as it undoubtedly did in the nineteenth century, but the ambition of Orientalism as an academic tradition was always to cut through prejudices and represent reality accurately. Implicit in this formulation is the assumption that cultural frameworks and political interests distort truth; they do not form the basis for its enunciation. This negative conception of the effect of culture and power opposes knowledge to politics, truth to authority. The authority of Orientalist knowledge, from this point of view, depends on the claim that its complicity with Western domination was peripheral and episodic, not integral and enduring. To open Orientalism to anything more than a fleeting association with power is to give up the humanist conception of scholarship as something that rises above the particular cultural and political conditions of its production to furnish "universal" human truths.

Said's Foucauldian conception of Orientalism as a discourse, on the other hand, crosses authoritative writing with political authority; the two are mutually enabling rather than oppositional. This positive relationship views discourse as a system of possibility that produces and renders knowable such categories as the Orient, literature, author, and so on. Discourse does not restrict or distort knowledge but generates, encodes, and arranges it in diverse forms and locations. It is just such a positivity that Said sketches forcefully, demonstrating Orientalism's "sheer knitted-together strength" (6). He weaves texts ranging from Barthélémy d'Herblot's *Bibliothèque orientale* to the *Cambridge History of Islam* into an intertextual unity, juxtaposing and bringing into a relationship writings separated by decades and disciplines, and fastening sometimes, as Bernard Lewis complains, on minor works and omitting major contributions.[8] This method fragments the works of individual authors, jars them loose from their secure moorings in authorial intentions and "universal" standards of truth and objectivity, and imparts to them a unity as enunciations of a discourse distributed across different disciplines, periods, institutions, and texts.

7. Albert Hourani, "The Road to Morocco," *New York Review of Books* (March 8, 1979), 30.

8. "Mr. Said makes a remarkably arbitrary choice of works. His common practice indeed is to omit their [the Orientalists] major contributions to scholarship and instead fasten on minor or occasional writings." Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," 52.

While most early reviews by experts were loath to accept the identification of Orientalism as a discourse of power, Said's analysis also struck a favorable chord. Michael Dalby, contributing to the review symposium in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, endorsed Said's definition of Orientalism as a discourse, and wrote: "At a minimum, I would insist, nobody should think he is making it all up."[9] Talal Asad pointed out perceptively that *Orientalism* was "not only a catalogue of Western prejudices about and misrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims," but primarily an analysis of the "authoritative structure of Orientalist discourse—the closed, self-evident, self-confirming character of that distinctive discourse which is reproduced again and again through scholarly texts, travelogues, literary works of imagination, and the obiter dicta of public men of affairs."[10]

The analysis of the authoritative structure meant prying it open, disclosing the relationship between Orientalism's "self-evident, self-confirming" knowledge and Western power. It is this feature, unacceptable to some, that has become the insurgent and influential legacy of the book, inspiring numerous studies that analyze the position from which Orientalism produced and authorized its truths. At the very least, such studies read the Orientalist scholarship for the discourse it encoded. The Orientalist "discovery" of the antiquity of Sanskrit, for example, is considered to be as much about the conditions that rendered the language available for study to the Orientalists as about the language itself. Thus, Martin Bernal has argued that William Jones's discovery of Sanskrit and the general concept of an Indo-European family of languages coincided with efforts to bleach African traces from ancient Greece—the putative cradle of Europe—and led quickly to the notion of an "Aryan race."[11] Offering a complementary explanation, Walter Burkert suggests that German Orientalism gave anti-Semitism a fresh lease on life in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by isolating classical Greece from the Near East.[12] More immediately, it is amply evident that the East India Company's rule facilitated and drew sustenance from the Orientalist researches of Jones and his colleagues. With India defined as Hindu, and Hindus identified with Sanskrit, Brahminical Hinduism emerged as the essential India, opposed to Europe, or, what amounted to the same thing, its childhood. To examine how a Sanskritic and Brahminical Hinduism was authorized as the "essence" of India is to turn a critical gaze on Orientalist scholarship.

Such critical examinations of the Orientalist legacy, following the publication of *Orientalism*, have become common. Scholars increasingly interrogate Orientalist researches to disclose the conditions of their production, their functioning

9. Michael Dalby, "Nocturnal Labors in the Light of Day," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39 (1980).

10. Talal Asad, *English Historical Review* 376 (1980), 648.

11. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1987), I, 224–230.

12. Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 2–5.

as discourse.[13] Said's transgression of disciplinary boundaries to force the recognition of Orientalism as a discipline of power has become a model for navigating between literature, history, philosophy, and anthropology, and has gone on to inspire studies in such new fields as cultural, feminist, and postcolonial studies. Established centers of area studies in the United States have been moved to confront the challenge made by the book, and Western scholarship on other cultures has undergone a noticeable change.[14] Not only is the European presence in Africa, Latin America, and Asia routinely interrogated to disclose the construction and constriction of other subjects, empire and colonialism are increasingly seen placed at the very center of Europe's constitution. The discipline of English studies appears with a colonial genealogy that can be traced to British rule in India, and French modernity is shown to be forged in Algeria and Morocco.[15]

Obviously, such changes in the field of scholarship cannot be attributed solely to *Orientalism*. Said's work itself forms part of a larger discursive shift in literary studies, history, and anthropology animated by poststructuralism, Western feminism, and neo-Marxism. This shift has cast profound doubts on the ideas of subjects and origins authorized by Western humanism, and produced the recognition that binary oppositions institute hierarchical identities and knowledge. In this respect, *Orientalism* and the postcolonial criticism that it stimulated converge with the poststructuralist interrogation of universal subjects and origins.

While some may find the ready adoption of European writers such as Foucault and Derrida by postcolonial intellectuals as a sign of their emptiness,[16] it is worth remembering that the postcolonial experience includes Western hegemony. If "the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside," as Ashis Nandy suggests,[17] then it is naive and politically self-defeating to expect a critique to arise from the "outside," from some supposed uncontaminated postcolonial experience. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, postcoloniality consists in catachrestic criticism that seizes the given apparatus to reverse and displace

13. Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, Eng., 1988), for example, turns the Orientalist mirror in Egypt back on Europe to reveal the formulation of key ideas of representation and reality in the exercise of power. Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), among other things, interrogates the circulation and deployment of German Orientalism as part of the discourse that essentializes India to deny it agency.

14. The South Asia Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, devoted its 1988–1989 seminar series to Orientalism, leading to the publication of *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia, 1993).

15. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 1989); and Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

16. Simon During makes this criticism of the "import rhetoric" in Australia. "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?," *Landfall* 39 (1985). Wole Soyinka has made a similar point about the use of Marxist cultural criticism in Nigeria. See his "This Past Must Address its Present," *PMLA* 102 (1986).

17. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983), xi.

it; or in Homi Bhabha's terms, it is an in-between position of practice and negotiation.[18] We would be missing the significance of *Orientalism* and the postcolonial critique it has inspired if, in the urge to place them in context, we overlook their catachrestic appropriation of Western theory derived from cross-hatching the histories of knowledge and imperialism. This has placed the empire at the very center of Europe, deconstructing its self-same image. *Orientalism*'s subversive effect is derived from this postcolonial "writing back" it represents and has stimulated.

II. DISCOURSE AND DESIRE

Orientalism came as a breath of fresh air for many, but it also left others gasping for breath. The complaint that Said wove the "knitted-together strength" of the Orientalist discourse too tight, that he allowed little room for variation, change, ambivalence, that he essentialized the Orientalists, has been steady and has come not only from hostile quarters. James Clifford's thoughtful and sympathetic reading also notes that the book "sometimes appears to mimic the essentializing discourse it attacks."[19]

To some extent, this critique is misplaced. While it is true that tracing Orientalism all the way back to Aeschylus is problematic, Said's principal focus is on its functioning as a discourse since the late seventeenth century. In analyzing it as a discourse, Said does not deny heterogeneity in Orientalism. He insists, however, that heterogeneity did not undo Orientalism's internal regularity and unity as a discourse; rather, it rendered the integrity and authority of Orientalism more secure. He advances this argument by distinguishing latent Orientalism, defined by unity and synchronicity, from its manifest form, open to heterogeneity and change (206–207). This dual operation, he suggests, permitted Orientalism to proliferate and change while maintaining its constancy and authority. Scholars could differ, challenge previous writings, revise their understanding, and yet not disturb the Orient-Occident division. Louis Massignon could write differently from H. A. R. Gibb and be sympathetic to the Arabs without disturbing the stability of the discourse; and French and British Orientalisms could develop along dissimilar lines (262–283) while preserving the constancy of the Orientalist enterprise. The Orient could be at once something to be freshly discovered and something entirely and already known.

But if the already known was expressed in the discoverable, if the manifest was the mode of the existence of the latent, then Said's conception of Orientalism as a self-contained set of representations is called into question. Here, the criticism of Said's insufficient attention to Orientalism's heterogeneity returns,

18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (London, 1990), 228; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), 34–38.

19. James Clifford, "On Orientalism," *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 262. This essay appeared originally in *History and Theory* 19 (1980), 204–223.

but in a different form. This criticism relates to the difficulty entailed in treating Orientalism as a self-contained system of representations while analyzing it as an instrument of power. Surely, something that was pressed into service in conquering and ruling colonies could not remain a self-contained system of representations; it had to open itself to conflicts, change, and displacements generated by its operation in actual historical conditions. According to Robert Young, Said never resolves "the original theoretical problem of how a representation that it is claimed bears no relation to its putative object could nevertheless be put in service of the control and domination of that object."[20] How can Orientalism be just a representation that bears no relation to the Orient and yet shape and exercise power over it?

It is a sign of *Orientalism*'s immense richness that it poses this problem of the relationship between representation and its objects. In establishing that Orientalism was not just an idea but an instrument of power, Said suggests that the late nineteenth-century imperialist rivalry led the European powers "to prod the Orient into active life, to press the Orient into service, to turn the Orient from unchanging 'Oriental' passivity into militant modern life" (240). With representation opened to actual conditions of functioning, the "synchronic essentialism" of Orientalism is subjected to the pressure of diachrony. Said introduces this story of change in order to accommodate the functioning of Orientalism as an instrument of power, a mode of self-enclosed representation that opens itself to the actual conditions. Yet, he makes no theoretical space for it. According to Young, "what becomes apparent is that while Said wants to argue that Orientalism has a hegemonic consistency, his own representation of it becomes increasingly conflictual."[21]

This conflictual representation, expressed in the opposition between the stability of synchronicity and the instability of diachrony, Homi Bhabha suggests, speaks of a fundamental ambivalence within the discourse. Said himself identifies this ambivalence, Bhabha suggests, when he describes Orientalism as not only a discipline for domination but also as a desire for the Other, as a latent discourse of synchronicity and as a manifest discourse of history and narrative.[22] But Said closes this ambivalence in Orientalism as a system of knowledge and as a field of power by invoking the idea of intention. It is thus that instabilities, disruptions, changes produced by the opening of Orientalism to the actual conditions of functioning are rendered insignificant. Latent Orientalism becomes the content of the changing, historical form of Orientalism ruled firmly by the Western intention to dominate.[23]

By closing the gap between discipline and desire, the stability of synchronicity and the instability of diachrony with the will to dominate, Said removes the

20. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York, 1990), 130.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Bhabha, "The Other Question," *Screen* 24 (1983), 24.

23. *Ibid.*

possibility of placing the dominant in the same field of discourse and power as the dominated. Consequently, the critique of the discourse cannot arise in its own functioning but must emerge from the outside. As several commentators have noted, this creates space for Said's appeal to humanism. While refusing to place the "real Orient" in opposition to Orientalist knowledge, he denounces its hierarchical division of human reality. For him the principal question raised by Orientalism is:

> Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say of men into "us" (Westerners) and "they" (Orientals). (45)

This framework opposes humanist values to Orientalist essentialisms; it asks that we replace East-West dichotomies with intertwined histories and human experience. Not surprisingly, the influence of *Orientalism* can be traced, in large measure, to the critique of dichotomies and essentialisms it has inspired.[24]

While Said's text has undoubtedly given an iconoclastic thrust to studies that dismantle Eurocentric stereotypes and essentialisms, his endorsement of humanism as an alternative poses a problem. James Clifford writes that Said's invocation of "human experience" underscores "the absence in his book of any developed theory of culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and differentiating."[25] It also forces Said to abandon Foucault and explain Massignon's empathy with the Arabs as a result of his "genius," and Auerbach's hermeneutics to "the anthropological commonplace" that detachment from one's home leaves one better able to judge it.[26] Such a recourse to humanist ideals leaves the impression that the handicap of Orientalists such as Richard Burton and T. E. Lawrence was that, unlike Massignon, they could not rise above their cultural archives, that they did not have the detachment of Auerbach. Said's critics seize on this inescapable impression when they accuse him of impugning the motives and intentions of Orientalists. This charge has stuck partly because Said's conception of discourse disallows differentiation and displacements, leaving him dependent on humanist ideals, such as individual genius, to explain change and variation.

But even as *Orientalism* embraces the straitjacket of humanism, its restless energy and sheer inventiveness offers stunning insights. Thus, while speaking of Orientalism as "an internally structured archive," Said speaks of the unity of the discourse in its vacillation.

> One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. . . . The Orient at large,

24. See, for example, Inden, *Imagining India*. Said himself makes an impassioned case for intertwined histories in his *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993).

25. Clifford, 263.

26. *Ibid.*

therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty. (58–59)

Referring to this passage, Bhabha asks if this "median category" is not a recognition and disavowal of cultural and racial difference "in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear?"[27] Here, Said offers a tantalizingly differentiated description of discourse—vacillating, torn between power and desire, discipline and fantasy, alive to different pulls of history and cultural archives. Denied the deadening support of intentionality and humanist ideals, latent and manifest Orientalisms emerge as symptoms of discourse's ambivalence, something close to Clifford's "culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and disciplinary."

Because *Orientalism*'s restless movements produce such tantalizing insights, it has drawn detailed attention from scholars working in diverse fields. In fact, as established fields confront challenges to their disciplinary norms and boundaries, *Orientalism* has been an important agent in their refigurations. Thus, in anthropology's "textual" or reflexive turn, Said's influence is palpable. Calls for dialogic and polyphonic anthropological accounts that undo received categories of history and culture, and make space for the "native informant" owe something to his work.[28] *Orientalism* has also impelled literary studies to cross literature with history, to question literary discourse in order to reveal its colonial genealogy and disclose other sources of knowledge and agency. Reading it sympathetically though interrogating it rigorously, scholars find *Orientalism* a rich resource for asking fundamental questions about the relationship between discipline and desire, history and fantasy, discourse and its enunciation.[29]

III. SEXUAL/IMPERIAL POLITICS

In offering a critique of culture that depends upon and reproduces unequal distribution of power between East and West, *Orientalism* assembles a dynamic of how processes of domination are produced, distributed, and consumed. A key element in this dynamic, Said suggests, has been sexual imagery retailed by Orientalism. Travel accounts, anthropological descriptions, and imaginative literature have delighted their readers for centuries with tales of strange customs and secret pleasures of Orientals and depictions of exotic landscapes. Said suggests that Western hegemony functioned by enlisting Westerners in its conquest of the Orient, penetrating it by constituting it as a woman—seductive, mysterious, fecund, devious, and vulnerable.

Said offers telling examples of the incestuous relationship between imperial politics and sexual politics, and the theme of Western domination as sexual

27. Bhabha, "The Other Question," 26.

28. See, for examples, *Writing Culture*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley, 1986); and *Anthropology as Culture Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, ed. George E. Marcus and Michael J. Fisher (Chicago, 1986).

29. Among other examples, see Homi Bhabha's essays in his *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994).

conquest has found ready elaboration. Malek Alloula's study, for example, shows the desire to unveil the harem, lay bare its debauchery, and reconstitute it according to Western bourgeois norms.[30] Rana Kabbani describes how Richard Burton's experiences with women in India and Egypt never rose above a master-slave relationship; he regarded women as chattel and sexual convenience, and "his fascination with the *Arabian Nights* was greatly enhanced by the fact that they upheld his own views on women, race and class."[31] Beyond these general studies, there now exists a growing body of literature that analyzes the relationship between imperial rule and gender politics, showing the deep implication of one in the other.

If the imaging of the imperialist relationship on gender oppression that Said highlighted and that other scholars have studied more fully points to a certain convergence of feminist and postcolonial concerns, the consensus on "common oppression" has been short-lived. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in a series of essays, highlighted radical feminism's reproduction of colonialist representations.[32] Focusing on the elision of discontinuous subject-positions entailed in the concept of universal sisterhood, Spivak warned that feminism risked repeating nineteenth-century British imperialism's appropriation of the Other as History.[33] In a slightly different way, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," has also criticized Western feminism's constitution of third-world women as a single group.[34] Pointing out that this stance was paternalistic, Mohanty notes disquieting similarities between the Western feminist conception of third-world women and Western humanist representations of the "East." There is also now a growing literature on the cultural hegemony that Orientalist representations of the Orient have exercised over Western women.

Such critiques of Western feminism's elision of imperialism highlight Western women's past and present involvement in colonial representations, and have different theoretical and political concerns from Said's work. Yet, it is undeniable that his sketch of the hegemonic Western culture, consisting of a network of imaginative literature and scholarly writings that represented the East as a woman to be ravished, has been of crucial importance. For if Orientalist representations had indeed come to exercise hegemony in Western culture, enlisting both men and women, then feminism could not ignore Orientalism's sexual politics of conquest and penetration of the East.

This is clearly acknowledged in writings that recognize Said's contribution in sharpening the awareness of the extent to which Orientalism invaded Western

30. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis, 1986).

31. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of the Orient* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 48.

32. See the essays "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981); "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), 243–261; and "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," *Oxford Literary Review* 8 (1986), 225–240.

33. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Center to Margin* (Boston, 1984), especially 43–44, makes a similar critique of feminism from the perspective of race and class.

34. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary* 2, 23:3/13:1 (1984), 333–358.

culture, but criticize him for not going far enough in exploring the relationship between imperialism and gender. Jane Miller's extended consideration of *Orientalism*, for example, recognizes that Said offers an insightful parallel between imperialist and patriarchal oppression but suggests that he fails to confront sexual meanings on which the illuminating parallel depends.[35] Miller asks for the inclusion of women's histories in the analysis of Orientalism so that its functioning as a hegemonic discourse can be understood.

Such criticisms register both the horizon opened by *Orientalism* and its limitations. On the one hand, the book unmasks the use of women and sexual politics in the service of empire; on the other, it leaves the question of discourse's address unaddressed. It brings to light power relationships that encompassed both colonialist and gendered subjections, but does not probe the actual production of these subjectivities. It is precisely this ambiguous break offered by *Orientalism* that Spivak, in particular, has pried open to articulate the critique of imperialism with a feminism acutely aware of its own heterogeneity along the lines of race and class.

IV. DISLOCATION OF THE WEST

Orientalism's lasting influence can be attributed to the dislocation of the modern West which it brought into view. It has accomplished this both through its own analysis of Orientalist representations and through the postcolonial discourse it generated. Together, they have produced a portrait of the modern West deeply divided by the process of its representation. It is a West whose self-representation is crossed by the "passive" Orient in which it expresses its universality. The Orient also comes to exercise pressure on the West as its founding disciplines appear with a colonial genealogy. The Orientalist venture ends up distorting the West's own self-image as it is shown to reach out to the crutch of Sanskrit and the "Aryan race" in order to bleach its heritage white. Not only racism but sexism and misogyny also emerge interwoven into the hegemonic culture of the modern West.

While Said may not have accomplished such a dislocation of the modern West singlehandedly, the controversial but enduring influence of his book is owed to the deconstructive task it performed. In this sense, the defenders of Orientalist scholarship were not wrong in their reading that *Orientalism* was not just another criticism of Western misconceptions but a fundamental challenge to the authority of the modern West. By inserting the domination of the Other into the very constitution of the West, Said identified a deep fissure in the operation of Western hegemony. There, the West appeared both to reach its limits and to construct its dominance. For if the West represented itself as autonomous and universal in the domination of the Orient, then the encounter with the "native" was the point of both the limit and the fabrication of such a representation. According to Young, this internal dislocation, externalized

35. Jane Miller, *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture* (London, 1990), 118.

into an Occident-Orient dichotomy, produces both a fantasy of totality and a fear of dissolution, and constitutes a deeply ambivalent moment in the functioning of Orientalism.[36] Even if Said does not recognize and explore this explicitly, as Young argues, his analysis operates precisely in the ambivalent fissures of the Western discourse. Said's work is unthinkable outside the corpus of knowledge he subjects to scrutiny, but his critique works as a catachresis, in Spivak's sense, that seizes the apparatus of Western knowledge to reinscribe it. It is precisely this nature of *Orientalism*, shaped in the interstices of disciplinary knowledge, that has breathed sedition into its life.

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36. Young, *White Mythologies*, 139–140.