11. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (London: Flamingo, 1997). Page references will be included in the text. Before 18 October 1997, the novel was already reputed to have sold 500 000 copies in 18 languages.
12. See Shirley Chew, 'The house in Kerala', *Times Literary Supplement* 30 May 1997: 23; Alex Clark, 'Fatal Distractions', *The Guardian* 19 June 1997: B4; Michael Gorra, 'Living in the Aftermath', *London Review of Books* 19 June 1997: 22–23; Stephen Moss, 'A contest won in a vacuum', *The Guardian* October 15 1997: A3.
13. See, for example, 'Interview', *Vrij Nederland* 18 October 1997: 18–19 (own translation). Latterly, across 1998 and 1999, no doubt in part on the back of Roy's success, a number of Indian women first novelists have sprung into prominence: Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Ameena Meer, Shauna Singh Baldwin.
14. See 'CV: David Godwin', *Independent* 20 October 1997: B5.
15. Gillian Beer, quoted in *The Guardian* October 15 1997: A3; and Alice Truax, rev. of *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, *New York Times Book Review* 25 May 1997: 5. See also Floris van Straaten, 'Wreedheid als sleutel tot de liefde', *NRC Handelsblad* [Amsterdam] 17 October 1997: 10. (own translation).
16. Moss A3 and Truax 5.
17. Gosse 7–8.
18. Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993) 277, and 'Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge', interview with Robert Young, *The Oxford Literary Review: Neocolonialism* 13 (1991): 226–227, has used the term *new orientalism* to describe the homogenising, de-contextualizing effects of late-twentieth-century multi-culturalism. As will become evident later in this essay, I prefer neo-orientalism, because of its analogy with neo-colonialism.
19. The intensity accentuated of course by the famously erratic capitalization of *The God of Small Things*.
20. The very phrases used to articulate this advance are often expressive of Western Christian humanist values. In this sense we might want to apply Terry Eagleton's line describing the persistence of total systems in a postmodern world, to postcolonialism: 'The term 'post', if it has any meaning at all, means business as usual, only *more so*'? Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990) 380–1.
21. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York and London: Verso, 1992) 33.
22. Dirlik 294–320.
23. See Jon Mee's speculations on the ideological work done within India by the Indian novel in English, 'After midnight: the Indian novel in English of the 80s and 90s', *Postcolonial Studies* 1.1 (April 1998) 127–141, especially 132 and 134.
24. Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1996) 178, and 149–150. For their comments on postcolonialism's neo-colonial complicities, see also: Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) 245–258, and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (New York and London: Verso, 1997) 3–4, 17–21.
25. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 277.
26. For a useful overview of the different axes inscribed or ascribed by postcolonial criticism, see Stephen Slemon, 'The Scramble for Post-Colonialism', *De-Scribing Empire*, eds. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1995) 15–32.
27. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 126–7.
28. Sarojini Naidu, 'Songs of my City', *Empire Writing*, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 314–15.

47

Edward Said and the Historians

John M. MacKenzie

Nineteen hundred ninety-three has been the year of Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism* was published in February. With one or two notable though insubstantial exceptions, the reviews were critical, sometimes even abusive. That of Ernest Gellner in *The Times Literary Supplement* stimulated a near-defamatory correspondence which rumbled on until June.[1] British television put out an "Arena" documentary on the man, his politics, and his controversial scholarship, which was hagiographical, if not narcissistic, in its approach. In July, fresh press interest, often disapproving, was aroused by his broadcasting of the highly prestigious Reith lectures on BBC radio. Here he used an establishment platform to deliver distinctly uncomfortable views, though their public edge was blunted by the charge that he was merely a propagandist, a proponent of political correctness whose arguments about the role of the intellectual in society were at times too idiosyncratically personal to carry much weight.[2] In August and September, he emerged as a leading critic of the PLO's developing accord with Israel.

All of this has illustrated in heightened form Said's central credo, his adherence to the notion of the organic scholar. Just as culture cannot be separated from its political affiliations, as he has always rightly argued, so the student of culture must be politically involved. As he implies, but has never explicitly laid out, "disinterestedness" or "objectivity" tend to be the claims of the political right and are invariably tools for the right's manipulation of power. As illustrated in recent educational debates in Britain and elsewhere, politicians too often cloak their petty nationalisms and highly partisan prescriptions in an allegedly lofty impartiality. In insisting that only one, triumphalist, model of society can be taught, they insist upon the surface canon rather than the interpretative depths, which they deeply distrust as disquieting and subversive.

Source: *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, vol. 18, 1994, pp. 9–25.

Few historians, particularly those brought up in the tradition of E.P. Thompson, who died on August 28th, can quarrel with this. Said's Reith lectures were essentially a restatement of the ideological stance occupied by an entire school of serious historical scholarship during the past thirty or more years (the school represented by the journal *Past and Present*, by the "History Workshop," and more recently by the Indian "Subaltern Studies" group), that the intellectual is necessarily a free agent who must, in Said's words in one of his lectures, "raise embarrassing questions" and "confront orthodoxy and dogma"; "be someone who cannot easily be co-opted"; "and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues who are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug." Thus the intellectual should be not only a delver in awkward corners, but also a sort of exile, a nomad who avoids the certainties of a permanent settlement and pitches her/his tents wherever a restless mental environment leads.

There is a strange paradox in the fact that Said's views so often have a certain air of *déjà vu* for historians. Since the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, Said has proclaimed himself to be more and more interested in history. He has seen his own work as supremely historicist and has proclaimed his increasing boredom with literary theory.[3] *Culture and Imperialism* is essentially a work of cultural history, although it attempts to assault by a new route ground that has been occupied by historians interested in the relationship between imperialism and culture for at least twenty years.[4] Yet *Orientalism*, for all its remarkable and admirable influence upon interdisciplinary debate, has had much less effect upon historians than might have been expected.[5] Even more markedly, *Culture and Imperialism* has (so far, at least) been largely disregarded by historians, review editors having sent it to literary critics, anthropologists, sociologists, and practitioners of cultural studies.

This article is concerned with why this should be so, why it is that historians, including this particular historian of cultural imperialism, some of whose political sympathies are close to those of Said, are unlikely to secure much mental sustenance from *Culture and Imperialism*. To do this it is necessary to adopt a wholly different tack from that of the reviews already published. The Gellner/Said debate was essentially sterile because it became bogged down in destructive mutual attacks on each other's scholarly competence and on the relative claims of their disciplines to shed light on historical processes, in denials of views ascribed to each by the other, in compliments and abuse respecting various twentieth-century scholars, and in relatively arcane debates about the respective significance of various luminaries in the social, intellectual, and political revolutions in North Africa of the twentieth century. It thus largely failed to confront the central historical issues at stake. Other reviewers either expressed rage and bafflement at Said's implication of the literature of sensibility, of the Leavisite great tradition, in the exploitative squalor and brutality of empire, or missed the point by being overwhelmed by Said's multidisciplinary erudition.[6]

Yet the starting point for a historian's disquiet must be Said's intellectual schizophrenia. He has admitted to this in his approach to western humanism, having declared that he reacts to the word "humanist" with "contradictory feelings of affection and revulsion" ("Opponents" 135). He seeks to expose the humanistic tradition while essentially writing within it himself. His works, and his recent lectures and journalism, are a collective plea for a new kind of liberal humanity, which Gellner found an unexceptionable truism. True to such a humanistic tradition, his political goals are largely undefined and unclear. He passionately supports Palestinian freedom, but he neither favours partition nor nationalist solutions. Though he has toyed with the language of base and superstructure, while he has been a member of the Palestine Liberation Council, he writes outside Marxist or Revolutionary traditions. Indeed, it is a characteristic of his work that neither economics nor class plays a particularly central role, insofar as he tends to substitute race for class. He has said that he finds Marxism "more limiting than enabling" and that he is more interested in an ethic of individualism than class consciousness. He is atheistic in religion, agnostic in politics, and has no general intellectual attachment beyond a respect for anarcho-syndicalism (Sprinker 260; Salusinszky 137–39, 146). Thus, influenced though he is by Gramsci and Foucault, in ways that some have found contradictory, he stands beyond any scholarly collective.[7] In some respects, his partial adoption by the "Subaltern Studies" school of Indian historians is strange, since their ideological stance is so much harder and clearer than his.[8]

No less perplexing is his approach to the "meta-narratives" of history and his situation on the watershed of the modernist–postmodernist debate. In *Orientalism* he identifies an imperial totalising project, a classic "master narrative" of Western power. Orientalist studies, in producing and reproducing a prefabricated East, a stereotypical Other, as a tool of Western power, were repetitious, self-generating, and both ideologically monolithic and chronologically continuous from the eighteenth century to the present day. They prepared the way for the imposition of full-blown imperial rule and survive as the cultural and ideological superstructure of neocolonialism. Yet he privileges this interpretive tool of West–East relations by profoundly distrusting all other "meta-narratives." He has said that instead of the "theorization of the whole" he prefers a "more unbuttoned, unfixed and mobile mode" which he has dubbed nomadic and unhoused (Sprinker 241).[9] Moreover, he is also disturbed by the cultural guerrillas which beset the fringes of the master narrative. These he has identified as "nativism" (which extols the virtues of and seeks to resurrect individual indigenous cultures), "nationalism" (which asserts the political creed of contesting nations), and "fundamentalism" (which seeks to restore religious purity as a rallying cry of resistance). Each is concerned to subdivide and separate, by cultural, political, or religious means, in order to escape the Western coils, and in doing so contributes to a re-orientalisation by appearing to confirm the irrational, the divisive, the aberrant character of the West's Orient.

Thus we have an extraordinary, and some might think disabling, paradox, that the author of a work purporting to identify a master discourse of the Orient operating over at least two centuries himself distrusts all global theorisation.

It is as though his critical totalising head is at war with his nomadic polymorphous heart. In *Orientalism* he seems to be a monolithic modernist; in all his ideological statements since, he seems to be a committed postmodernist. Moreover, the critiques of Said's *Orientalism* have tended to be profoundly postmodernist, refusing to accept the juggernaut of a global cultural history trapped in a specific misrepresentational groove. They have substituted pluralism and ambivalence (or more likely multivalence), the polyglot and the contingent, for Said's generalising discourse. They have sought to replace Said's Orientalist system-building with eclectic and fragmented structures of knowledge.

Not the least of these paradoxes is the fact that Said is self-consciously in the business of attempting to create cross-cultural awareness and understanding. As he indicates in *Culture and Imperialism*, this is to be achieved not only by carefully listening to those who "talk back" from other cultures, but also by "contrapuntal" readings of all cultural artifacts. Yet his work has precisely operated against such mutual comprehension by his "Occidentalising" of the West. Thus he constructs a hermetic and stereotypical Western culture (with which, like humanism, he has a love–hate relationship). The clearest statement of this comes in his Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory, published as *Musical Elaborations*:

> For in the encounter between the West and its various "Others" (to employ a fashionable, but still useful word) there was often the tactic of drawing a defensive perimeter called "the West" around anything done by individual nations or persons who constituted a self-appointed Western essence in themselves; this tactic protected against change and a supposed contamination brought forward threateningly by the very existence of the Other. In addition, such defensiveness permits a comforting retreat into an essentialized, basically unchanging Self. By the same token, there is a move to freeze the Other in a kind of basic objecthood. (52)

At this point, the historian of imperialism and of the arts is drawn up short. Neither the "retreat into an essentialized, basically unchanging Self" nor the freezing of "the Other in a kind of basic objecthood" bears any relation to the record of constant change, the instability, heterogeneity, and sheer porousness of imperial culture.

As John Sweetman has argued in *The Oriental Obsession*, the Western arts repeatedly sought inspiration and reinvigoration from Eastern traditions (245–46, 249). In a forthcoming book, I shall be examining the influence of the East upon art, architecture, design, music, and the theatre, demonstrating the ways in which the East was repeatedly invoked by radical movements seeking to overturn conservatism and reaction in the visual and performing arts.[10] Of course, Eastern forms and approaches were both manipulated to suit Western arguments and adapted, sometimes unrecognisably in terms of the originals, to fit an occidental canon, but nonetheless, various Eastern traditions, notably Chinese, Egyptian, "Moorish," Indian, and Japanese, were successively used as the catalysts for occidental design revolutions. Anyone who has read Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* of 1856, Christopher Dresser's *Principles of Decorative Design* of 1873, Sir George Birdwood's *Industrial Arts of India* of 1880, or any work on porcelain, textiles, the Arts and Crafts movement, or Art Nouveau, must wonder on what evidence Said bases his "essentialized, basically unchanging Self" or freezing of the Other.[11]

These examples serve to illustrate the historian's concern to analyse the specific and contrasting, even oppositional, character of different periods. Thus, despite Said's efforts at continuity in intellectual history, the contrast between the Orientalism of the enlightenment and the consciously oppositional and culturally dismissive approaches of philosophic radicalism, which Said almost ignored in *Orientalism*, remains profound.[12] It may be that both policies were merely alternative routes towards the same end, the establishment and security of imperial power, but they had significantly different outcomes. Thus historians, unlike Said, have always related these contrasting intellectual and philosophic approaches to specific policies and events, theories of causation, and political and cultural results, both intended and unintended. Whereas Said's version of Orientalism is broadly and even independently instrumental, something more than the conditioning intellectual framework which legitimated the imposition and maintenance of Western imperial rule, historians have been much more concerned with an intellectual history which is deeply embedded in its varied economic and social settings.

When intellectual and cultural history is wrested from this essential economic and social context, the results can be alarming. Gauri Viswanathan, a student of Edward Said, has examined English education in India as an essential aspect of the Anglicist objectives of the Utilitarians and Evangelicals. She argues that the Anglicists, abandoning respect for indigenous languages and associated texts, required a simple medium through which an alien morality and culture could be disseminated. They found it, she suggests, in the study of English literature. English literature offered the opportunity for a secular education, enabling the British to escape both the constraints of the Church at home and the accusation that they were meddling with indigenous religions in India. For its proponents, such literary study would have a "salutary, emancipatory influence because it released Indians from false consciousness and replaced outmoded styles of thought with enlightened concepts of justice and liberty" (17).

More significantly, English literature could be used to obscure the naked realities of British power:

> The self-presentation of the Englishman to native Indians through the products of his mental labor removes him from the place of ongoing colonialist activity – of commercial operations, military expansion, and administration of territories – and deactualises and diffuses his material reality in the process. In a parodic reworking of the Cartesian axiom,

> the Englishman's true essence is defined by the thought he produces, overriding all other aspects of his identity – his personality, actions and behavior. His material reality as subjugator and alien ruler is dissolved in his mental output; the blurring of the man and his works effectively removes him from history... The split between the material and the cultural practices of colonialism is nowhere sharper than in the progressive refinement of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature. (20)

This kind of airy theorisation reflects a staggering disregard for the actual intellectual character of the period. Viswanathan indicates that she is not concerned with social change or outcomes but with the discourse leading to the formulation of policy. She then imposes upon this discourse her own "split between the material and cultural practices of colonialism," implying that early nineteenth-century Anglicists were consciously trying to obscure their "rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless" activities beneath a cloak of literary study. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Scottish evangelical missionaries whom Viswanathan discusses were themselves the intellectual sons of Adam Smith. They would have seen no distinction whatsoever between an English education and the elevating effects of free trade and laissez-faire liberalism. Far from diffusing their material reality, they wished to concentrate it. Thought, personality, actions, and behaviour were indivisible. What's more, as has been demonstrated in the case of South Africa, their objectives were initially at odds with those of imperial rulers who either reflected older norms or were concerned with administrative quietude.[13] But neither administrators, nor missionaries, nor educators, in this period at any rate, would have made any distinction between their economic and their spiritual and cultural missions.

On the face of it, *Culture and Imperialism*, in which Said makes an admiring reference to the work of Viswanathan, should be of great interest to historians. Here Said asserts the close, and again instrumental, relationship between culture and imperialism at a time when historians have become increasingly concerned with the cultural dimensions of imperial rule, both for the dominant and subordinate peoples. What's more, he has used the work of some historians of empire and also discusses a few of the major theorists and propagandists of imperialism in the nineteenth century. He broadens the perspectives of Orientalism to embrace the European cultural expressions of a global imperialism as well as to consider the "fundamental liberationist energy" of the nationalist and postcolonial resistances to Western empire. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is a much more sprawling and less focused work than *Orientalism*, particularly as it has been delivered over a number of years as a series of lectures and papers. He does, however, make even higher claims than before, seeking to demonstrate that imperialism was central to the cultures of the British, the French and, later, the Americans, and that the very origins and development of modern literary forms like the novel are to be found in the spatial extensions, narrative character, and power relations of empire. But the imperial

historian turning to this book with high expectations is doomed to disappointment.

As described above, this book has been more vilified than admired. Those who share some of its ideological perceptions have praised it as a work of remarkable erudition, drawing on an extraordinary range of sources derived from literature, music, philosophy, sociology, geography, media studies, and history. Others have seen it as taking the polemics of Orientalism yet further, particularly in its excoriation of American policy and the Gulf War in its lengthy concluding section. But polemics aside, this work is again both "supremely historicist" and supremely ahistorical. From the point of view of the historian, the erudition is frequently misplaced, offering tangential quotation rather than central argument.[14] Moreover, it sets up phalanxes of heroes and villains among both historic figures and modern scholars, presumably according to whether they comply with some "libertarian and unrepressive" norm which is itself often anachronistic.

Said argues that imperialism, a continuing and unfinished phenomenon, has been the prime conditioning element of all Western culture for the past two centuries. In one of his favourite musical metaphors, he calls for a "contrapuntal" reading of literature, a counterpoint that has to be heard at various levels. Each cultural artifact can only be understood in terms of its "other," the negative against which it defines itself. English literature (and later French and American) can only be fully analysed in the light of Western power, the geographical and economic relations of empire. Finally, twentieth-century culture can only be comprehended against a background of response, the capacity of the non-Western world to speak back and reassert its cultural autonomy.

Where the metaphor begins to break down, however, is in relation to the visibility or audibility of the contrapuntal lines. The juxtaposition of melody in musical counterpoint is explicit. In literature and the other arts it is apparently capable of becoming merely a trace element, barely mentioned, yet implicitly vital to the entire message of the work. In works like *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield*, where empire enjoys apparently marginal references, these are in reality central to the structures of their plots. The "massive appropriations" of British power make the narratives of these novels work, since by these means limitless possibilities are held out to the British bourgeoisie, liberating energies and ambitions, creating the linear perspectives central to the novel's drive. Said goes further. Even those works that do not mention empire at all can be seen to fit the same criteria. Metropolitan space becomes a metaphor for global power: social relations and conflicts represent wider racial contacts. Here we have a mythic counterpoint in which one melody is supplied and the other has to be contrapuntally inserted in one's brain.

It is hard to gainsay that the counterpoint between dominant and subordinate cultures, between empire and nationalism, is indeed important in modern history, though some might dispute that it is the central or, indeed, the only one worth noticing. Moreover, Said privileges Western imperialism as a

unique historical experience. He makes no reference to other imperialisms, ancient, medieval, or modern. He views imperialism as a phenomenon which always has baleful effects and in relation to which only one moral stand is possible. Not for Said is the contention of one sympathetic reviewer that empire might well be the motor of history, producing as many constructive as destructive results (Inglis 25, 27). Further, the themes of state identity and otherness are always precisely defined in Said. To take the British case, Britain and English literature are always discrete entities defining themselves in relation to global (and therefore racially different) others. He fails to notice that the building of empire is first an internal process, with internalised others (Welsh, Scots, Irish, working-class "provincials"), and second, that the others of nineteenth-century European nationalisms are more likely to be rival Europeans, arguably more important in the definitions of culture and national character than imperial possessions and peoples. As Linda Colley has demonstrated, the prime other for the newly emergent empire of Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not located in the non-European world, but across the Channel in France. In the succeeding century and a half, France, Imperial Russia, Germany, and the Soviet Union were successively the principal instrumental others of British history. New national histories, idealised pasts, myths, sagas, and heroic figures were marshalled in these cultural formations and played a central role in the aesthetic artifacts of the period. This is not to deny the importance of the imperial relationship or to decry the power of racial stereotyping. But it does suggest that the European counterpoint is made up of a more complex set of motifs – not least the leitmotifs of class and European ethnicities – than Said allows.

Such a single-minded contrapuntalism leads Said into wilful misunderstandings. The dangers and displacements of his imperial obsession are well illustrated in the most obvious example of his eclecticism. In order to demonstrate the imperial character of most nineteenth-century artistic forms, Said indulges in a lengthy digression on Verdi's opera *Aida*. I first heard this passage as a keynote address to the conference of the British Association of Art Historians in Brighton in 1986.[15] I was not convinced then and I am even less convinced now when I see the arguments in cold print. Here Said's procedures throw up the technical flaws that lie behind so much of this work. He views *Aida* as an "article de luxe," an imperial spectacle that can be understood in terms of the European encroachment upon Egypt in the 1870s and 1880s, the period after it was written. It is an opera that creates not a realistic Egypt, but one based upon French Egyptology, an archaeological reconstruction over which Verdi throws an "imperialist structure of attitude and reference." Its musical complexity and intense chromaticism represent an orientalising of the historical experience of overseas domination, in which "an imperial notion of the artist" (which he derives from Verdi's desire to maintain tight control over his artistic product) "dovetailed conveniently with an imperial notion of a non-European world." But because Egypt is a place that Verdi cannot relate to, the plot ends in "hopeless deadlock and literal entombment" (*Culture and Imperialism* 140, 148).

Said's analysis is plucked from the air. It makes no reference to the surrounding history of the opera, says nothing about Verdi's attitudes at the time of its composition, and never once quotes the actual plot line. The facts are that Verdi was indeed intrigued by the story supplied to him by the French, but he soon departed from the archaeological aspects to create a work which, in its interweaving of the conflicts between imperial power and subordinate nationalism, between private anguish and public duty, was essentially universal and timeless. While it was being composed during 1870–1871, the designs and sets were trapped in Paris during the Prussian siege. Verdi expressed his admiration for French culture and his disgust at German militarism: he contributed a large sum of money for the victims of Sedan and he put into the mouths of the Egyptian priests in the opera a piece of triumphalism that was explicitly supposed to guy the Kaiser's bombast at the defeat of France. Verdi wrote to his librettist Ghislanzoni that extra lines had to be added to the priest's chorus "to the effect that 'we have conquered with the help of divine providence. The enemy is delivered into our hands. God is henceforth on our side' (see King William's telegram)" (Rose 12). Thus Verdi is bitterly sarcastic about an aggressive imperial nationalism, and further evidence lies in the victorious rodomontade in Act II, scene ii of the opera, which clearly works at two levels: it is a piece of pompous nationalism with a strong hint of satire.

The plot more than adequately exposes Verdi's true purposes: it is about a pair of star-crossed lovers, an Egyptian general and the daughter of the defeated Ethiopian king, whose hopes of personal fulfillment are entirely frustrated by the public roles they must play. Amonasro, Aida's father and defeated captive of the victorious Egyptians, is nationalism personified. A central moment of the opera is when Aida sings the aria "O patria mia" and invokes the landscape and physical characteristics of Ethiopia as a poignant illustration of the fact that she is doomed to both a geographical and romantic exile. The final entombment, after Radames is condemned to death by the sanctimonious priests (another illustration of Verdi's anticlericalism), represents not deadlock at all, but a concluding apotheosis, perfectly common in Christian Western art. Aida entombs herself with him, and the lovers achieve victory over public affairs through their final and triumphant consummation in death. The Egyptian imperial canvas is reduced to the personal cameo in the narrow frame of the tomb: that is all that matters to Verdi and all he expects to matter to his audience. It is astonishing that Said, who is after all a Palestinian Christian, should have misread an entombment, which both to the ancient Egyptians and in Christian art must represent triumphant hope. Agnostic or not, Verdi was consciously linking those traditions: "hopeless deadlock" could not have been further from his mind.

Thus the opera is a reworking of common European themes in an exotic context. Perhaps in that sense it is Orientalist, but it is decidedly not about European imperialism. It is, in fact, a very back-handed compliment to the Khedive who commissioned it, for in the 1860s and 1870s, in territorial terms at least, Egyptian imperialism in northeastern Africa was more prominent than European. The opera's sympathies are with Ethiopian nationalism, but above

all with private griefs irrevocably caught up in national affairs. Like Said himself, Verdi saw political subjection as a form of exile. He had created a smash hit by representing it in the celebrated Hebrew chorus in *Nabucco*, and something of the same sense of loss runs through *Aida*. Verdi loathed British imperialism and hoped that the British would be thrown out of India as the Austrians were thrown out of Italy. He was appalled when the Italian nationalism which he had so fervently supported turned to imperialism in the 1880s and 1890s, and he regarded Italy's defeat at Adowa (Ethiopian nationalism again!) as salutary (Budden 150). *Aida* is just about as anti-imperialist an opera as you can get, and Said's interpretation of it, so little grounded in real substance, is little short of grotesque.

Said's inadequate contextualisation and misreading of *Aida* is matched by his oversimplifications in relation to his sets of imperialist and anti-imperialist heroes and villains. Indeed, his ascription of virtue and vice has a distinctly fundamentalist ring to it. Nothing better demonstrates Said's lack of subtlety and sheer failure of comprehension of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century than his treatment of John Ruskin and J.A. Hobson. Ruskin is excoriated as an imperialist and racist in contradistinction to Hobson's laudable and honourable anti-imperialism (*Culture and Imperialism* 94–5, 123–26, 290–91).[16] Yet Hobson was a fervent admirer of Ruskin and, in his book *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* and several articles, described himself as a disciple of the great art critic and sage.[17] Hobson not only derived his critique of classical economics and some of his economic theory from Ruskin, particularly his ideas on underconsumption, but also secured from him his conception of an organic society, his sense of an orderly system of interdependence sustained by authority and obedience. It has even been suggested that Ruskin was "more radical, more daring and more vociferous in his social critique than Hobson was ever to be" (Matthew 16). What's more, in later editions of *Imperialism: A Study* Hobson viewed the economic penetration of backward areas as a mutually beneficial process, productive of world economic interaction which could be a route to world peace (Cain 33).

Another disciple of Ruskin was that scourge of the British and patron saint of Indian nationalism, M.K. Gandhi. In his autobiography, Gandhi described the powerful conversion he had undergone through encountering Ruskin's social theory. When he read *Unto This Last* in South Africa, it had a galvanising effect on him, influencing the manner in which he ordered his own household and developed his ashrams:

> I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life...
>
> The teachings of *Unto This last* I understood to be:
>
> 1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

> 2. That the lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
>
> 3. That the life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.
>
> The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realised. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight to me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice. (106–108)

Thus Ruskin's homely economics, in the hands of Hobson, fed the critique of the export of capital and working-class underconsumption which produced the major assault upon the theory of imperialism in the twentieth century, while his vision of an organic society under strong leadership, which suffused his own imperial views, helped to influence Hobson's ambivalence. On the other hand, his social message, his anti-industrialism and environmentalism inspired the leading theorist not only of the return to communal living and craft production, but also of anti-imperial passive resistance. Gandhi produced a summary of *Unto This Last* for Indians to read.[18] It is still in print in India. (What's more, as the anthropologist Richard G. Fox has pointed out, Gandhi was able to turn the British stereotype of the Hindu to useful effect in the nationalist struggle.) As it happens, in a postmodernist, environmentalist, and postindustrial age, Ruskin's thought is currently the subject of a major rediscovery and reassessment.[19] His imperialism reflected his desire to see his ideas applied on a global scale. It represented his acceptance (even radical prefiguring) of the dominant political ideology as one context in which his quasisocialist message could strike home.

By contrast, Hobson's critical concern with the export of capital and his underconsumptionist theories have little to do with Said's vision of racially liberal anti-imperialism. Indeed, his fierce anti-semitism (which goes unmentioned) runs directly counter to it. What's more, Said pays no attention to the lively discussion of Hobson's theories which has exercised historians throughout the twentieth century, nor does he notice the influential, right-wing critique of imperialism by Joseph Schumpeter.

It is perhaps this glaring divide between an alleged historicism and the complex historiographical understanding which is the historian's stock-in-trade that has led to the relative absence of historians from the Orientalist debate. Edward Said and the literary theorists have a tendency to "pick and mix" ideological fragments of historical interpretation which simply do not add up to any sort of coherent whole. Perhaps this is why Stephen Howe was forced to "the somewhat depressing conclusion" that "imperial history and colonial discourse analysis, the traditional chroniclers and the cultural theorists, apparently speak mutually incomprehensible – worse, reciprocally despised – languages" (17). There is much in this, though "traditional chroniclers" hardly

seems an apposite description of the majority of serious historians (a few renegades have appeared on the right) who have long since abandoned a partisan and narrative tradition for the strongly analytical and self-critical bent of recent imperial historiography. The problem of translation lies not in a conflict between description and deconstruction, but between modes of analysis that occupy such different linguistic and mental spheres that so far no Rosetta Stone has been found to connect the two.

Indeed, radical scholars who might be expected to be sympathetic to Said, and who have themselves been influenced by Gramsci, have had difficulties with the notion of an unchallenged Western dominance and a Manichaean set of binary oppositions in the colonial cultural confrontation. Historical geographers have also begun to reassess Said's "imaginative geographies," his use and misuse of Foucault, and his ignorance of or uninterest in the wider social relations of geographical knowledge, including its production and consumption.[20] Above all, it is difficult for historians to find in all this work a single instance in which cultural artifacts are directly influenced by specific events or themselves have bearing on individual decision-making or developments in the European imperial relationship with particular territories, although such connections abound.[21] Although Said is so concerned with cultural narrative, he himself offers no narrative thread which the historian can follow.

Moreover, the procedures of Edward Said and of his followers and the colonial discourse analysts (some of whose work he does not necessarily find sympathetic) are at odds with fundamental tenets of historical procedures. The historian is necessarily concerned with explaining change over time, with the interrelationship of ideas and events, with the social, economic, and intellectual milieu in which sources are produced. The historian seeks to tie analysis to a firm empirical base, to specific episodes, particular individuals, and territories, definable socioeconomic contexts in the historical record. For most of those outside the Marxist tradition – and for some within it – the mode of explanation is highly particularist. The historian seeks out unities of period, place, and often person, even when dealing with broader time spans.

While historians, who have felt uncomfortable with a "discourse" which, however complex, had a supposedly unchanging intention and effect over a century and a half, may welcome some of the recent revisions of Said by Suleri, Bhabha, Spivak, Lowe, Majeed, Porter, and Melman, nonetheless for them some of this work seems to circle around an intellectual superstructure wrenched from its empirical base (Majeed, Porter, and Melman offend less in this respect).[22] Moreover, the historian trades in the ironic and the unwitting, what has sometimes been dubbed "incidental causality." To take some examples derived from the Indian Empire, historical interpretation has been full of the unanticipated: Britain's economic and social policies forging her into Marx's "unconscious tool of history" (interpreted, in turn, in a different way by subsequent Marxist and non-Marxist commentators);[23] education policies designed to produce collaborators, turning out resisters instead;[24] oriental studies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries helping to produce the Bengali intellectual renaissance which fed into Indian nationalism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth;[25] Macaulay's 1830s vision of English education leading to the demand for English freedoms proving more prescient than the "illusion of permanence" generated by the British later in the century;[26] the imperial stereotypes of martial races conveniently turned against the British in the decolonisation period.[27] Paradox has long been the stock-in-trade of the historian, whose discipline breeds a certain cynicism. Modern practitioners are much less attracted to the illusion of "balance" or "progress" than by the seduction of the unexpected. The unpredictable and unplanned outcome often appeals more than the master design.

But for Said and the discourse theorists, the paradox, the irony, and the unexpected tend to be destructive. Perhaps this is why Said has a very considerable problem with irony, as he revealed in his dispute with Gellner and in his misreading of a passage from Orwell in *Orientalism*.[28] Colonial discourses are seen to emanate from the search for power, to reflect those relations of power, and to perpetuate the exercise of that power. Consequently, their work implies both moral judgments and prescriptive programmes. Historians, on the other hand, have never been confident about the predictive and practical purposes of their discipline, even if most of them have sensibly recognised the impossibility of escaping value-laden language. Further, Said falls into all the pitfulls the historian constantly warns students, the public, and himself to avoid: reading present values into past ages; passing judgments on entire previous generations; failing to discriminate intention from effect; missing the multiple readings emanating from the conflict between authorial intention and audience expectation.

What historians perhaps find most difficult to come to terms with in Said is the fact that he is a Whig. What he implies throughout his work is that until at least the middle of the twentieth century, all Western scholarship involving representations of other peoples is tainted by its viewpoint of political dominance. In the recent past, it has just become possible for scholars to operate in unmanipulative ways. In the present and the future, if certain principles are followed, principles that seem to deny ideology but embrace humanity, scholars may aspire to operate in libertarian and unrepressive ways. And the key to this intellectual utopia is the slaying of the dragon of imperialism. Progress is possible and Said is its apostle. Where *Orientalism* hinted at this opportunity, *Culture and Imperialism* is a manifesto for its achievement.

Certainly many historians (though not all) seek to offer explanations of contemporary phenomena, even messages for the present, in their work. All would wish to analyse the ideological and normative contexts of the work of previous historians, but none would so confidently reject so many of the products of the past or offer such an optimistic vision of the future as Said. Nor, particularly in the arts, would they find such atemporal coherence, such hermetic cultural artifacts as Said has claimed to find. It is true that he frequently recognises the aesthetic power of literature whose ideology he abhors. But in his search for moral absolutes, he prefers clarity to doubt. Thus he finds the

consistencies of Kipling more attractive than the ambivalence of Forster. However, this becomes a problem for him, for in his search for moral definition, he finds it difficult to comprehend why early twentieth-century critics of imperialism could not have fully envisioned decolonisation. In a strikingly ahistorical way, he is straining for heroes who will jump out of period and conform more readily with his contemporary criteria. The historian finds it much more interesting to explain the doubt.

Yet it must be said that his messages for the present, in respect to ethnocentrism, cultural nationalism, the need for multidisciplinary understanding, and contrapuntal readings, are wholly attractive and present a model of liberal humanitarian scholarship to which all should cleave. Imperialism has been one key element of Western culture and of the cultures of the rest of the world over the past two centuries, but to say that it has been the only one is to privilege it too much. Local and regional identities, small-scale popular cultures, and the arts that go with them, have survived and flourished. The relationships of imperialism, nationalism, and Benedict Anderson's imagined communities have been a great deal more complex and significant in different ways from those suggested by Said. And his use of history, his tendency to create a unidimensional past, his efforts to pigeonhole artists and thinkers into categories of "for" and "against" imperialism, and his refusal to recognise that complex historical forces can produce surprising, and even by his lights, sometimes positive results, render his work of little value to historians.

Notes

1. See Ernest Gellner, "The Mightier Pen? Edward Said and the Double Standards of Inside–Outside Colonialism," *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 19, 1993: (3–4). The issue carried an Orientalist painting, Ludwig Deutsch's "The Scribe" on its front cover, under the heading "The Bogy of Orientalism." The correspondence is to be found in the *TLS*, February 26, March 5 and 19, April 2, 9, 16, and June 4 and 11, 1993.
2. A review of press criticism can be found in Ashok Bery, "What Said Really Said" (14).
3. See, for example, interviews with Said in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said, A Critical Reader* (248–49), and Imre Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society* (138).
4. A.P. Thornton was one of the first to consider the culture of imperialism; see his *Doctrines of Imperialism* and *For the File on Empire*. See also William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870–1900*; John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture*; and the volumes in the Manchester University Press "Studies in Imperialism" series.
5. John Pemble's *The Mediterranean Passion, Victorians and Edwardians in the South*, which deals with travel in North Africa and the Levant, never mentions Said. Peter Marshall, co-author with Glyndwr Williams of *The Great Map of Mankind, British Perceptions of the World in the Age of the Enlightenment*, has said that he would be unlikely to change the thesis of the book even after Said (London seminar and private information). Among many other examples, the contributors to Geoffrey Carnell and Colin Nicholson, eds., *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, made very little reference to *Orientalism*.
6. Peter Conrad's "Empires of the Senseless," and Terry Eagleton's review of *Culture and Imperialism* in *The Guardian* illustrate this point.
7. See Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and Its Problems."
8. Said wrote a foreward to the selection of their essays in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*.
9. See also Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered."
10. *The Orientalism Debate: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester UP) is forthcoming, 1994.
11. These works and others are considered in Chapter 6, "Orientalism and Design," in *The Orientalism Debate*.
12. See David Kopf, "Hermeneutics versus History." For continuing efforts to maintain the positive meaning of the word "Orientalism" as it pertains to the scholarship of the enlightenment, see the letter of Edward Ullendorff in *TLS*, and J.L. Brockington's "Warren Hastings and Orientalism."
13. For example, see Andrew Ross's *John Philip (1775–1851), Missions, Race and Politics in South Africa*.
14. Note, for example, his curious misuse of R.E. Robinson's collaborationist theory, *Culture and Imperialism* (316–17). See also my review in the *Journal of Historical Geography* 19 (1993): 101–106.
15. It was subsequently published as "The Imperial Spectacle (*Aida*)." In *Culture and Imperialism*, it can be found on pp. 134–157.
16. Said does note that Hobson did not attack the notion of "inferior races."
17. See J.A. Hobson, *John Ruskin, Social Reformer*, "Ruskin and Democracy," "Ruskin as a Political Economist," and *Ruskin the Prophet*. See also Michael Freeden, ed., *Reappraising J.A. Hobson, Humanism and Welfare*, and Jules Townshend, *J.A. Hobson*.
18. I am grateful to Professor Michael Wheeler for showing me a copy of this pamphlet.
19. This is reflected in the work of the Ruskin Programme at Lancaster University, England, and in a future issue of *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*.
20. See Felix Driver, "Geography's Empire: Histories of Geographical Knowledge."
21. Ernest Gellner poked fun at Said on this subject in *TLS*, June 11, 1993: 17.
22. The relevant works of Bhabha and Spivak are too well known and too numerous to list. They are fully discussed in Chapter 3 of *The Orientalism Debate*, forthcoming. The other works are Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains, French and British Orientalisms*; Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writings*; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*; Billie Melman, *Women's Orients*; Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism*.
23. See Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India."
24. See Bruce McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, and Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*,
25. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernisation 1773–1835*.
26. Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*.
27. Fox, "East of Said" in Sprinker, *Edward Said, A Critical Reader*.
28. Said misreads a heavily ironic passage of Orwell in *Orientalism*, (250–5); see also his letter in *TLS*, March 19, 1993: 15, and Gellner's response, April 9, 1993: 15.

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