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(Not) Reading *Orientalism*

Few texts could be more excessive, in terms of their production and reception, than *Orientalism* (1978), the best-known book of a man whose death took away from us one of the most eloquent and forceful public intellectuals of the present day (Viswanathan xi). *Orientalism*, although frequently seen as flawed, even as one of Edward Said's weakest efforts, is far and away the most talked-about and influential of the 20-odd books he wrote during an almost unimaginably prolific career. The book, translated at the last count into 36 languages, is the product of an equally protean personality, known alike for his 'passionate humanism, his cultivation and erudition, his provocative views, and his unswerving commitment to the cause of Palestinian self-determination' (Viswanathan xi–xii). Multiple and wide-ranging contributions to the fields of literary scholarship, cultural politics and music are less suggestive of the achievements of a single figure than of several, while in the work itself the dizzying plurality of not always compatible subjects, methods and approaches similarly presents us with not one but a veritable surfeit of Saids. Given the astonishing range and lasting impact of Said's oeuvre, it is hardly surprising that there should now be a booming Said industry, in which numerous scholars from all corners of the world have taken the opportunity to engage in conversation – not all of it friendly – with his work. To adapt a phrase applied by Henry Louis Gates to the great Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial activist Frantz Fanon, we have been witnessing for some time now an evolved form of 'critical Saidism' in which very different readings are applied, and very ideological uses given, to Said's work. Like Fanon before him, Said was to become a talismanic intellectual and political figure, while *Orientalism*, in particular, was to be transformed over time into one of the late twentieth century's few truly totemic critical works (Gates 457–58).

Why *Orientalism*? In a 1995 review essay, Gyan Prakash attributes the phenomenal success of *Orientalism* to its capacity to unsettle 'received categories and modes of understanding' (n.p.). According to Prakash, *Orientalism's*

[p]ersistent 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 [...] in which the established authority of Orientalist scholars and their lines of inquiry [came] undone. [The] ambivalent effect of *Orientalism* [invited] charges of undisciplined thinking and ideological bad faith, and prompt[ed] critics to force its unsettling movement between different positions into an either/or choice which they then target[ed] for criticism. Significantly, it [was] precisely such boundary-crossings and stagings of contrary positions that [proved] to be the most productive and influential maneuvers, inciting further critical studies of the modern West's construction of the Other. Such studies [...] elaborated and extended its argument, and Said himself [went] 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. (n.p.)

This is an astute and, I would argue, fairly accurate account of the impact of *Orientalism* both on contemporaneous readers in the late 1970s and on a generation of self-styled 'oppositional' critics – postcolonial, feminist, minority-activist – ever since. Not all of these readers, needless to say, have agreed with the central tenets of *Orientalism*, and much of the oppositional criticism that the book has generated derived its momentum from aspects of Said's argument to which it is itself often vehemently opposed. Broadly speaking, three patterns in the critical response to *Orientalism* have established themselves. The first of these patterns involves what might be called the 'de-Orientalization' of Orientalism (the method). As Lisa Lowe has suggested, *Orientalism* is more historically and geographically heterogeneous than many readers have given Said credit for; the Orient to which he refers, at different moments and in different interests, may encompass all or parts of Central Asia, North Africa, Turkey and the Middle East (Lowe 5). But given the fundamental heterogeneity and instability of the discourses contained within the umbrella term 'Orientalism', why not cast the net even wider? Lowe, for one, cannot resist, including a chapter in her book on the utopian projection of Japan and China under French poststructuralism (ch. 5). Other critics have interpreted the range and scope of *Orientalism* even more freely, using it, for example, as a critical tool for the unpacking of self-serving European colonial constructions of 'darkest Africa' and their corresponding cultural myths (Miller). Studies such as these, which Said welcomed ('*Orientalism* Reconsidered' 140; see also Viswanathan 220), risk emptying out the already mythologized category of the Orient, turning Orientalism into a codeword for virtually any kind of othering process that involves the mapping of dominating practices of knowledge/power onto peoples seen, however temporarily or strategically, as culturally 'marginal', economically 'undeveloped' or psychologically 'weak'. The focus on the translocal or, perhaps better, the relocalized representational and administrative mechanisms of *Orientalism* have produced some powerful anti-authoritarian scholarship: in Japan and Latin America, for

instance, and in many regions of the formerly colonized world. As might be expected, though, the loosely rhetorical usage of the category of the Orient that such an approach encourages has led at times to a re-inscription of the very binaries ('West' versus 'rest' or, paradoxically, 'West' versus 'East') that Said's own work had previously gone to such lengths to resist.

A second pattern of response to *Orientalism* emerges here which we might call the 're-Orientalization' of *Orientalism* (the book). Within this pattern, *Orientalism*'s exclusionary and immobilizing strategies are either inadvertently reproduced by those who seek to uncover alternative examples of its workings ('anti-Orientalist Orientalism') or are consciously deployed by those who, constructing themselves as the West's victims, turn against their adversaries in uncompromising gestures of collective pride and righteous anti-imperialist revenge ('Occidentalism'). The phenomenon of 'anti-Orientalist Orientalism', in particular, begs the question as to the self-replicating tendencies of Orientalism, neatly captured in James Clifford's almost apologetic suggestion that Said's book, for all the power of its criticism, 'sometimes appears to mimic the essentializing discourse it attacks' (262). I will come back to this suggestion in detail later, via Aijaz Ahmad's caustic reading of *Orientalism*. For the moment, suffice to point out a third category of response to Said's text that draws attention, explicitly or implicitly, to the unreflected Orientalism of *Orientalism* itself. This largely hostile view of *Orientalism* (the book) is founded on a series of apparently embarrassing paradoxes: that it reproduces the enumerative, patiently cumulative and paternalistic methods of the 'master' Orientalists; that it reinstates broad transhistorical and cultural generalization in the service of magisterial expertise; that its seemingly counter-intuitive insistence on the internal consistency of *Orientalism* is inconsistent with Said's own Foucault-inspired discursive methods (but remains uncannily consistent with the self-authorizing manoeuvres of classical Orientalism itself); and that it assembles a textualized Orient with a view to establishing intellectual authority over it, even if this 'textual, contemplative' Orient is never allowed, like its nineteenth-century historical counterpart, to facilitate the control of the geographical Orient as an 'economic, administrative and even military space' (*Orientalism* 210).

My own view is that these criticisms are largely valid, even if they flirt with the kind of self-congratulatory abreaction that is perhaps more typical of second-order ('anti-Orientalist Orientalist' and/or 'Occidentalist') responses to Said's work. What interests me in this particular chapter, however, is not to produce an inventory of different (mis)readings of *Orientalism* but to show the link between knowledge, power and authority that derives from the ways it has been read. Read and not read, or at least often read in isolation or selectively; for one of the most interesting aspects of the continuing saga of (not) reading *Orientalism* has been a tendency to bypass the text, either in the interests of declaring a political allegiance or in the more disguised attempt to make the book symptomatic for the entirety of its author's work. This tendency is all the more interesting given the connections Said himself makes between Orientalist textuality and reading. The Orientalists, Said suggests, produced – among several other things – a

kind of collective guidebook for uninitiated Western readers, but less a guidebook that informed them than one that confirmed what they already knew (*Orientalism* 81). Hence the constitutive tension in Orientalism between the need to accumulate detailed scholarly knowledge of the Orient and the desire to fall back on prescriptive formulations that distilled it into a version of what was already known before. More knowledge was needed, but not really needed since the Orient was already known (or at least intelligently intuited); more reading was needed, but not really needed since it confirmed what had already been written before. Images of the Orient were thus added to the stockpile of familiar representations, while these individual images were made to stand in metonymically for the Orient as a whole. Orientalism emerged as a coordinated system of representations, structured largely through readily identifiable repetitions, which perpetuated itself at the institutional level, eventually becoming 'fully formalized into a repeatedly produced copy of itself' (*Orientalism* 197). Prescriptive rather than descriptive, the Orientalist system of representation was as likely to impede knowledge of the Orient as to produce it. Certainly it was disinclined to the production of new knowledge: its contradictory reality was that it fostered a 'textual attitude' or predisposition that allowed the Orient to be regularly rewritten, but that effectively prevented it from being critically reread (*Orientalism* 80–81). Now, while objections might be raised to Said's provocative account of Orientalism's self-perpetuating capacities, my contention here is a different if perhaps, in its own way, an equally provocative one: that *Orientalism* (the book) has often been approached via Orientalism (the method); and that a side-effect of Orientalism (the method) is a paradoxical tendency for the very books on which it depends to go critically unread. The rest of this chapter goes some way towards explaining what might be at stake in such a critical reading, beginning with Said's own retrospective comments on *Orientalism* and continuing with a brief look at how three gifted anti-Orientalist critics – Aijaz Ahmad, Meyda Yeğenoğlu and David Cannadine – responded to the book in such a startlingly pre-emptive fashion that it almost seemed as if its contours must have been known to them before it was actually read.

In the preface to *Beginnings* (1975), Said distinguishes between 'beginnings' and 'origins'. '[T]he latter', he says, are 'divine, mythical and privileged', while 'the former [are] secular, humanly produced and ceaselessly re-examined' (xiii). For Said, the idea of re-examination has inspired the recent revisionisms of counter-memory and the archive, revitalizing such intellectual trends as 'the critique of domination [...] and the [re-evaluation] of suppressed history (feminine, non-white, non-European, etc.)' (xiii). *Beginnings*, suggests Said, are renewals rather than repetitions or recurrences; beginning, in this sense, is about the making or producing of differences: it is tantamount to beginning again (xvii). For Said, a beginning can be understood in the double sense of an intention and a critical intervention: critical consciousness, he argues, has facilitated 'that constant re-experiencing of beginning and beginning-again whose force is neither to give rise to authority nor to promote orthodoxy but to stimulate self-conscious and situated activity, activity with aims non-coercive and

communal' (xiv). In this part of the chapter, I want to gauge to what extent the interventionist spirit of beginnings, and 'beginnings-again', stands behind Said's own responses to *Orientalism*, itself conceived by many, unreflectingly perhaps, as a 'foundational' critical work (see, for example, Ashcroft *et al.*). I also want to use Said's notion of 'critical consciousness', elaborated in later works such as *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), to examine the argument he makes in his work for a certain kind of reading: one that opens up to what he calls the 'non-coercive and communal' aims of intellectual activity, and that is alert to the complicities and self-aggrandizing tendencies of modern academic work.

Said's first detailed response to *Orientalism* was in the influential 1985 essay 'Orientalism Reconsidered', an essay that itself gave rise to several critical reconsiderations, some of them even more extreme than in the first instance, of the place of cultural politics in Said's collected work. For his part, Said is largely content in the essay to repeat the central ideas behind *Orientalism*: that, writ large, it charts a 4,000-year-old history of cultural relations between Europe and Asia; that, more specifically, it refers to a scientific discipline that, emerging in the early nineteenth century, specialized 'in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions'; and that, ideologically, it legitimizes the circulation of images and fantasies of the Orient designed, in large part, to confirm the epistemic authority of the West ('Orientalism Reconsidered' 128). As he did in the earlier book, Said acknowledges his own personal investment in *Orientalism* as part of 'current debates, conflicts and interpretations of the Arab-Islamic world' ('Orientalism Reconsidered' 129). However, Said goes further than he does in *Orientalism* in conceding his own involvement, for as he admits, there is no Archimedean point 'outside' the Orient from which the Orient, and the strategies used to represent it, can be objectively understood ('Orientalism Reconsidered' 129–30). Said's confession, however, only heightens his affront that the Orient, generally, and the Arab world, in particular, have all too often been constructed as 'Europe's silent Other', frozen into place as the fixed objects of a self-privileging Western gaze (130–31). Thus, while he initially acknowledges the wide variety of instructive Western-academic responses he has received to *Orientalism*, he then points out that many of his respondents have continued, possibly inadvertently, to drown out the voices of those on whose behalf they have appeared to want to speak (127–28).

He stresses, however, that this dialogue of the deaf has developed on both sides of the Oriental/Occidental divide, not only in certain sympathetic kinds of Western anti-Orientalist criticism, but also in those anti-Western (Said calls them 'nativist' or 'fundamentalist') readings that have chosen to misinterpret *Orientalism*, from a position of 'cultural insiderism' (142), as an apology for Islam or a wholesale condemnation of the iniquities of the West (132). Ironically, then, Said sees his book as having become subject to an Orientalism of reception in which the critics have often fallen into an alternative Orientalism, and the critics of the critics have been unwilling or unable to engage the critics 'in a genuine intellectual exchange' (132).

Here, as so often in his work, Said lets his impatience get the better of him, launching into an all-out attack on the 'programmatically ignorant' of readers, like Daniel Pipes, who are mere lackeys of US neo-imperialism or, like Bernard Lewis, who are tacit apologists for Zionism, despite their hypocritical insistence that their studies of the Orient, Arabs and Islam are not 'political' at all (133–35). Better not to read at all, Said implies, than to read in this reprehensibly expedient fashion, exhibiting in the process a 'sheer heedless anti-intellectualism unrestrained or unencumbered by the slightest trace of critical self-consciousness' (133). It is worth noting here that Said tends not to attribute 'critical self-consciousness' to those who happen to disagree with him – to those who have 'read' him but not read him, as it were, or to those who have read him but either had the temerity to rebuff him or to filter his work in such a way as only to see what they have expressly wanted to see. Said's own reading of his work oscillates, similarly, between the very form of political partisanship he is so quick to deride in others and his cultivation of a 'decentred' critical consciousness based, unlike Orientalism, on 'investigative, open models of analysis', and committed to 'the dismantling of systems of domination', like Orientalism, that are 'collectively maintained' (141–43). The type of reading Said favours, though does not necessarily practise himself, thus gestures not only towards the possibility of new beginnings, but towards 'nothing less than the creation of new objects for a new kind of knowledge' (129).

Two further attempts on Said's part to begin *Orientalism* again – to take a 'dominating system of knowledge' and prise it apart to create the conditions for a 'new kind of knowledge' – should be mentioned here. These are the afterword to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism* and the preface to the 2003 edition, one of the last pieces of writing Said completed before he died. In the 1995 afterword, Said carries on where he left off in '*Orientalism* Reconsidered'. Recognizing that *Orientalism*, 'in almost a Borgesian way, has become several different books', Said sets out to account for nearly a decade of reception, 'reading back into the book' what his many appreciators and detractors have said (*Orientalism* 330). As in '*Orientalism* Reconsidered', Said gives short shrift to those who have seen the book as resolutely 'anti-Western' or as an unadulterated celebration of the collective Arab cause. 'One scarcely knows what to make', Said complains, 'of [such] caricatural permutations of a book that to its author and in its arguments is explicitly anti-essentialist, radically sceptical about all categorical designations such as Orient and Occident, and painstakingly careful about not "defending" or even discussing the Orient and Islam' (331; emphasis in original). Much of the argument of '*Orientalism* Reconsidered' (and, indeed, *Orientalism* itself) is repeated: the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' are a 'combination of the empirical and the imaginative', and should in no way be understood as corresponding to a stable ontological realm (331); Orientalism is not 'just the antiquarian study of oriental languages, societies, and peoples', but is an evolved 'system of thought [that] approaches a heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex human reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint' (333); Orientalism presupposes a non-Oriental reader insofar as '[t]he discourse of

Orientalism, its internal consistency [*sic*] and rigorous procedures, were all designed for readers and consumers in the metropolitan West' (336). This familiar roll-call is then followed by an equally familiar demolition of Bernard Lewis, Said's intellectual nemesis, whose 'verbosity scarcely conceals both the ideological underpinnings of his position and his extraordinary capacity for getting nearly everything wrong' (343). Lewis and his followers, fumes Said, specialize in the 'elaborate confection of ideological half-truths [intended] to mislead non-specialist readers' (346), thereby reconfirming the very prejudices his own book had been explicitly designed to contest. These are the arguments one finds, again and again, in *Orientalism*: that routine misreadings and misinterpretations can have devastating consequences for those routinely misread and misinterpreted; that erudition in the service of ignorance is another form of ignorance; that reading itself may produce knowledge – as in knowledge of the Orient – that confirms the authority of the knower without creating new possibilities for understanding or extending the boundaries of the known.

As in 'Orientalism Reconsidered', Said concedes a few points, namely the 'scholarly and humanistic achievements' (*Orientalism* 342) of at least some Orientalist practitioners, or the tendency of Orientalism to confess its own attraction to the works of writers, scholars and administrators who clearly 'condescended to or [actively] disliked the Orientals they either [studied] or [ruled]' (336). In general, though, the 1995 afterword has a confirmatory ring to it. This is corroborated by Said's view that some of his later work – *Culture and Imperialism*, for instance – was primarily an amplification of, rather than a departure from, *Orientalism*'s governing 'cultural' theses: on the symbiotic link between culture and empire; on the constitutive hybridity of cultures; and on the continuing existence of Orientalism as a willed form of human activity – as cultural work (349). But if Said himself was always more likely to revisit than to revise *Orientalism*, he was also appreciative of others' efforts to push their readings of the text into libertarian initiatives of their own. As Said says proudly in the afterword:

I intended my book as part of a pre-existing current of thought whose purpose was to liberate intellectuals from the shackles of systems like Orientalism: I wanted readers to make use of my work so that they might then produce new studies of their own that would illuminate the historical experience of Arabs and others in a generous, enabling mode. That certainly happened in Europe, the United States, Australia, the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, Ireland, Latin America, and parts of Africa. The invigorated study of Africanist and Indological discourses, the analyses of subaltern history, the reconfiguration of postcolonial anthropology, political science, art history, literary criticism, musicology, in addition to the vast new developments in feminist and minority discourses – to all these, I am pleased and flattered that *Orientalism* made a difference. (340)

The updated 2003 preface re-issues the compliment, with an important clarification. The clarification consists of an impassioned defence of humanism

and humanistic critique's capacity to 'open up [...] fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis [that might] replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange' (*Orientalism* xvii). Said's humanism, itself the subject of sustained critique, is triumphantly reasserted here: not as an excuse for nostalgic traditionalism, but rather as an instrument for 'rational interpretive analysis' at a time when 'patient and sceptical inquiry' is needed to counteract the perceived need for 'instant action and reaction', and equally needed to retrieve a lost sense of 'the density and interdependence of human life' in a world 'often dehumanized in the extreme' (xx, xxii). The contexts for the preface – continuing violence in Israel/Palestine, fundamentalist dogma and intolerance, the bellicose post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq – reveal a Said more concerned than ever with the crudely differentiating labels that people pin on one another, and with the lack of a reasoned discourse that might help them come to terms with repeating histories of conflict, as well as to negotiate the fraught complexities of the modern globalized world. More interesting, perhaps, is that these contexts also reveal a Said as insistent as ever on the value of humanistic research and its symbiotic dependence on the 'book culture [...] and general principle of mind that once sustained humanism as a historical discipline' (xx). This culture, increasingly replaced by the 'fragmented knowledge[s] of the mass media and the internet', Said now sees with more than a hint of wistfulness as having 'almost disappeared' (xx). Reading reappears here as a mantra for the type of patient interpretive analysis that is needed to offset formulaic conceptions of ourselves and others, eventually allowing us to 'live together in far more interesting ways than an abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow' (xxii). It is reading that best fosters the development of the 'decentred critical consciousness' – but not any reading, rather reading in what Said problematically, if characteristically, calls 'the proper sense of the word' (xxii). Reading, in other words, of the kind that stimulates reflection, debate and rational argument, and that is informed by the sturdy moral principles that reinforce the idea of history being made and remade by human beings in a modern secular world (xxii). Whether this reading is so different from the reading of many of the European Orientalists is a point, understandably, on which Said is not too keen to linger. Sure enough, though, Said's critics have been alert to the apparent contradictions in his humanist philosophy; and these contradictions are made apparent, explicitly or implicitly, in the three readings below.

Probably the most notorious attack on *Orientalism* has been that of the South Asian Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad, whose coruscating critiques of Said, Jameson and a number of other leading Leftist intellectuals in his wide-ranging book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992) left much of the academic world wondering where, if such potential allies could be turned so effectively into enemies, Ahmad himself might want to find his friends. In his chapter on Said, Ahmad wastes little time in moving onto the offensive. While Ahmad expresses

solidarity with Said's anti-Zionism and 'his beleaguered location in the midst of imperial America' (160), he disagrees strongly with his historical and theoretical methods, which he sees as being riven by 'ambivalences' and 'self-cancelling procedures', particularly in *Orientalism* but also in much of his later work (219). Some of Ahmad's criticisms – and there are many – are as follows: that Said's attempt to write a counter-history to the European literary tradition that might be posed against, say, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946) falls into the same elitist humanism from which its inspiration is taken (163–64); that this ideal humanism contradicts Said's awareness of the complicity of European humanism in the history of European colonialism, and thus runs the risk of turning *Orientalism* not into a strategically counter-historical, but a fundamentally anti-historical work (167); that *Orientalism* is methodologically muddled, 'denouc[ing] with Foucauldian vitriol what [it also] loves with Auerbachian passion', and 'alternately debunking and praising to the skies and again debunking the same [canonical European] book[s], as if he had [somehow] been betrayed by the objects of his passion' (168); that it duplicates the tactics of *Orientalism* (the method) by refusing to take on board the numerous ways in which non-Western intellectuals have responded to, resisted or refuted the dominant representations of the Orient in the West (172); that *Orientalism* (the book) remains confused as to whether *Orientalism* (the method) is a historical by-product of colonialism or whether it is a constitutive element of 'the European imagination', from the Greeks to the present day (181); that it is equally confused about whether *Orientalism* is an interlocking set of discursive representations or an accumulated record of misrepresentations in the narrowly realist sense (185–86); and that it goes so far as to make a virtue out of these and other conspicuous inconsistencies, raising contradiction to the level of a method, and providing the rationale for 'saying entirely contrary things in the same text, appealing to different audiences simultaneously but with the effect that each main statement cancels out the other' (175).

Ahmad scores a number of palpable hits here. However, much like Said, he has a tendency to let his eloquence get the better of him, and in the chapter he proves singularly adept at matching his opponent's sweeping generalizations with several of his own. Hence we find statements, attributed astonishingly to Said, of the order that 'all European knowledges of non-Europe are bad knowledges because they are already contaminated with [Orientalism's] aggressive Identity-formation'; or, on the same page, that 'Europeans [are] ontologically incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe' (178). One hardly knows which book Ahmad is referring to here; surely not *Orientalism*. Why this passionate denunciation of a book Ahmad submits to the closest of close readings yet seems, at other times, not to have read at all? Said's anti-Marxism – predictably – turns out to be at the root of Ahmad's problem, with the latter not being frightened to nail his colours to the mast. These are very red. *Orientalism*'s success, Ahmad sourly suggests, was unsurprising given the prevailing neo-conservative political climate in which the 'manifestly reactionary anti-humanisms' (192) of Foucault, Derrida and others were intellectually in the

ascendancy, as was the type of crudely essentialist identity politics that blithely divided the world into 'European' and 'non-European' literatures, globally 'dominant' and historically 'marginalized' societies and cultural groups. This caricatural portrait of Western academic politics in the late 1970s and on into the 1980s might have gained from some of the historicist insight that Ahmad accuses Said of lacking; similarly, one of the main charges he levels at Said – the essentialist assumption of an ontological division between the 'West' and the 'Orient', between 'colonizing' and 'colonized' societies and cultures – is arguably replicated in his own embattled rhetoric and his appropriation of a spokesperson's role for a victimized 'non-West'.

What is interesting about Ahmad's attack is neither the level of its ferocity nor the carelessness of his reading of *Orientalism* and selected others of Said's works. What is interesting about it, I would suggest, are the characteristics it shares with *Orientalism*: the weakness for polemic, usually transferred onto another authoritative body; the muscular use of eloquence and erudition to outflank an opponent whose views are so clearly misbegotten or misguided as to invite attack; and, not least, the Battle of the Books that such a use of eloquence and erudition fosters, with intellectual tilting at intellectual on the basis of historical and theoretical understandings derived from what they have, or haven't, 'properly' read.

This tendency to 'out-Orientalize' *Orientalism* is also apparent in feminist critiques of Said's study, at least some of which reinforce the type of binary thinking they hastily accuse Said of practising, but which they see their work (looking right past the considerable deconstructive activity in Said's own text) as seeking to dismantle and disrupt. The example I have picked out here is the Turkish sociologist Meyda Yeğenoğlu's book-length study *Colonial Fantasies* (1998), which advertises itself in its subtitle as working 'toward a feminist reading of Orientalism' (the method, though, as is soon made clear, this method is closely tied in with the workings of Said's eponymous text). *Colonial Fantasies*, it has to be said, is a good step forward from several earlier feminist approaches to *Orientalism* that either falsely assumed the gender-blindness of Said's methods or prematurely judged him to have joined the massed ranks of the Orientalists, thereby reinforcing the male gender specificity of Orientalism and giving the impression that all Orientalists, to paraphrase Wordsworth, are men speaking to other men (see, for example, Emberley and Lewis). Like most of these earlier critics, Yeğenoğlu believes that there is a connection between the production of cultural and gender differences in Orientalism, and that representations of the Oriental other require an understanding of the unconscious nature of Western male fantasies and desires. The Orient, she suggests, is 'a fantasy based upon sexual difference' (11): a difference, however, that has frequently been unaccounted for or strategically effaced. She falls short, however, of accusing Said himself of conspiring in this effacement; after all, he readily acknowledges in *Orientalism* that 'Orientalism [has often been] an exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it [has] viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders' (*Orientalism* 207). What she objects

to is Said's suggestion that the Orient as sexualized site is not 'the province of [his own] analysis' (*Orientalism* 188); as if what he calls, after Freud, the 'latent' (sexual) and 'manifest' (cultural) constructions of the Oriental other could somehow be separated out (*Orientalism* 206). This is a reasonable objection; for as Yeğenoğlu convincingly argues, sexual fantasy and the production of sexual difference are constitutive of Orientalism, as is the link between (imagined) knowledge of the Orient and (unconscious) sexual desire. Less convincing is her insistence that 'the Western subject's desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women' (Yeğenoğlu 62–73). While she is surely right that '[t]he process of Orientalization of the Orient is one that intermingles with its feminization' (73), her insistence that the Orient is always mediated through the feminine clearly overstates the issue while recoding the process of Orientalization in what appear to be exclusively heterosexual terms. Equally questionable is her assertion of the dualistic nature of Said's approach to Orientalism: 'latent' versus 'manifest' Orientalisms; 'synchronic' versus 'diachronic' Orientalisms; 'scholarly' versus 'sensual' Orientalisms; and so on. These are binary categories that Said admittedly deploys, but also repeatedly interrogates and challenges, in *Orientalism*; like several other poststructurally oriented analyses of *Orientalism*, Yeğenoğlu's seems reluctant to acknowledge the deconstructive activity already at work within the text. Yeğenoğlu's book certainly reveals her, in the main, to be a careful reader and reviser of *Orientalism*, but at the risk of withholding a similar status to Said himself as a reader and reviser of his own text.

My last example, the British historian David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism* (2001), occupies a rather different status, since it is a book that grudgingly acknowledges Said's work before proceeding studiously to ignore it, despite the existence of *Orientalism* as a kind of ghostly marker or invisible referent hovering behind the title of the text. *Ornamentalism* is less a response to than a departure from *Orientalism*, leaving the 'postcolonial approach' to Empire inspired by Said, among others, trailing vainly in its wake (Cannadine xv–xvi). Like several other contemporary historians of Empire, Cannadine has little time for 'postcolonial' and/or 'anti-Orientalist' critics, to the extent that he usually conflates them to dismiss them: on the grounds not so much, as some of these historians think (see, for example, Dewey and MacKenzie), that they often do bad history, but rather because they are unhealthily fixated by the idea of the superiority of the white European 'race'. Cannadine admits – how could he not? – that race played a factor in how the British saw their empire, but just as big a factor, and an undervalued one, was the perception of rank and social status: '[T]he hierarchical principle that underlay Britons' perceptions of their empire', argues Cannadine, 'was not exclusively based on the collective, colour-coded ranking of social groups, but depended as much on the more venerable colour-blind ranking of individual social prestige. This means that there were at least two visions of empire that were essentially (and elaborately) hierarchical: one centred on colour, the other on class' (9). What this means, more provocatively

put, is that 'we [...] need to recognize that there were other ways of seeing the empire than in the oversimplified categories of black and white with which we are preoccupied. It is time we reoriented orientalism' (125). It is uncertain who is to be included in Cannadine's 'we', and who it is, exactly, who is so preoccupied with 'the oversimplified categories of black and white'. But Said and his followers are certainly among those on Cannadine's mind, as he also suggests in the following early rejoinder: '[T]he British Empire was not exclusively (or even preponderantly) concerned with the creation of "otherness" on the presumption that the imperial periphery was different from, and inferior to, the imperial metropolis: it was at least as much (perhaps more?) concerned with formal "construction of affinities" [operating] on the presumption that society on the periphery was the same as, or even on occasions superior to, society in the metropolis' (xix).

Cannadine's suggestion for the reorientation of Orientalism is 'ornamentalism', by which he understands the grand display by which the British Empire made 'visible, immanent and actual' the hierarchical values for which it collectively stood (122). It does occur to Cannadine that this might be as large an order of generalization as that which he accuses Said and his ilk of perpetrating; as he contentiously suggests, however, 'the theory and practice of social hierarchy [in the colonies] served to eradicate the differences, and to homogenize the heterogeneities, of empire', to the extent that a little understood aspect of the British civilizing mission was the attempt to create other versions of the intricately layered structure of British society 'back home' (8–10).

I am less concerned here with the validity of Cannadine's argument (although my tone immediately gives me away as being sceptical) than I am with the ways in which *Orientalism* is being read, or rather not read, into the fabric of his text. The most obvious thing to say here is that *Orientalism* and the postcolonial criticism with which it is associated are largely treated as straw categories. Cannadine, it appears, is a historian in a hurry – so much of a hurry, in fact, that he feels no need to define or elaborate on entire categories of analysis (Orientalism, postcolonialism) that he summarily rejects. This is a pity, since a closer look at *Ornamentalism* reveals doubtless unwanted affinities with the duplicated 'anti-Orientalist Orientalism' for which Said and others have been regularly attacked. Lofty generalizations are made with minimal historical or sociological evidence; polemic is substituted for analysis; an anti-elitist argument is assembled, but by using an elitist approach. A phrase of Aijaz Ahmad's, used against Said, might equally be turned against Cannadine: 'It sometimes appears that one is transfixed by the power of the very voice that one debunks' (Ahmad 173). Certainly, Cannadine seems at times to be almost nostalgic for the empire his class analysis skewers, as in passages such as the following:

The head of the Commonwealth and the divisible sovereign is no longer the iconic king-emperor of old, a symbol of unity and order and subordination; and while the advent of air travel has made [royal] visits more easy and more frequent, familiarity has also served to undermine their mystery and magic.

The six-month voyages in British battleships, the transcontinental journeys in splendid trains, the massed throngs of eager and expectant crowds, the obsequious behaviour of colonial princes and premiers, the hushed and reverent tones of journalists and authors: all this has long since gone, and along with it the very notion that the monarch was the supreme embodiment of imperial unity and hierarchy. (169–70)

The jury remains out on whether *Orientalism* is one of the landmark works of the contemporary era or whether its flaws condemn it to secondary status; whether it will be remembered fondly for catalysing critical debates across a large number of different academic disciplines or, more grudgingly, as a deeply contradictory work that hardly merits the attention it nonetheless continues to receive. Whatever the case, it seems likely that *Orientalism* will continue to be at the centre of lively debates on self-authorizing Western scholarship, the politics of cross-cultural representation, the connection between cultural production and imperial power, and the privileges that accrue to 'race'. No doubt, it will still be seen in some quarters as a continuation, rather than a critique, of the conceptual legacies of Orientalism, while as I have suggested here, readings will still be produced that themselves replicate these 'Orientalizing' strategies, often in the name of libertarian scholarship and anti-authoritarian critique. *Orientalism*, in short, will continue to be read: meticulously, selectively, sometimes carelessly. Sometimes, I suspect, it may well be referenced by those who have not read it at all. Perhaps that is the fate of books that acquire what Said might have described as their own 'imaginative geography', and that, far exceeding the boundaries within which they were originally designated, have the uncanny capacity to generate any number of simulacral copies of themselves. Take it or leave it, read it or not, *Orientalism* is such a book. Oscar Wilde once famously said that there is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. Said seems unlikely to suffer the latter fate, even if it sometimes seems as if his work has been all the more enthusiastically talked about the less it has been comprehensively read.

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