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Life After Postmodernism and Contrapuntal Textual Analysis

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Abstract

This article, to some extent a response to Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, concentrates on the dialectical attitudes towards the 'Orient' in a number of English literary texts. Through a contrapuntal textual analysis, signs emerge of a stereotypical and often monolithic Orient represented within the framework of dominant discursive practices. Similar discursive practices also seem to influence a significant number of contemporary scholars and critics active in the field of English literature. This raises many questions concerning the binary opposition as well as what Bhabha terms the ambivalent relationship, between the 'West' and its 'Other': is the portrayal of the Orient a relatively static or monolithic feature, and is it continually seen as a potential threat through transculturation or hybridity? These questions must be pursued in the context of the ideological position of both the writers themselves and the Orientalism of critics and theorists.

Key Words: Orientalism, Edward Said, discourse, contrapuntal, Orient, representation, Byron.

> *"Il fut des temps barbares et gothiques où les mots avaient un sens; alors les écrivains exprimaient des pensées".*
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> *It was in the barbarous, gothic times when words had a meaning; in those days, writers expressed thoughts.*
>
> Anatole France ***La Vie Littéraire***

If Paul de Man had ever read these words, he would have probably taken the time to reread them, though deconstructively. In his eyes, Deconstruction was criticism's final word or, recalling his political past, its Final Solution. He suggested that the lone significant critical task left for scholars was to reread the whole bulk of the literary canon, though deconstructively. He and the other Yale Deconstructionists were not the first ones to cry eureka, however. Decades earlier the New Critics too felt that they had achieved 'closure'. In neither case did things end as planned by the theorists.

In general, the narrative of Literary Theory in recent decades is one full of ups and downs. Views ranging from those of Jacques Lacan (whom Chomsky once called an amusing and perfectly self-conscious charlatan) to Harold Bloom and J. Hillis Miller to Terry Eagleton, have all met different fortunes at different times.

In the sixties, for example, the theoretical discrediting of totality was to be expected in an era when the left suffered major political defeat. Everything had suddenly become merely an interpretation and for a period of time this idea became very popular, especially as some postmodernists successfully straw-targeted and caricatured their opponents. However, numerous vexing questions would not go away. One such question was, if everything is merely an interpretation, what is the status of the claim itself? The claim itself, it seems, can be little more than a mere interpretation. As a

result, "the idea of interpretation would cancel all the way through and leave everything exactly as it was" (Eagleton, 1996: 14). Nowadays, it seems that without of the existence of un-deconstructable elements, postmodernist literary theory may be sliding towards relative obscurity.

Ironically, postmodernist thought already has quite a few un-deconstructable elements. While postmodern theory lays great emphasis on difference and heterogeneity, in reality it operates within extraordinarily rigid binary-oppositions itself. On the one side of the divide there are the unequivocally positive terms such as plurality, difference and heterogeneity, while on the other lay their ominous opposites, which include the likes of unity, identity, totality, and universality. In the words of Peter Osborne, "the narrative of the death of metanarrative is itself grander than most of the narratives it would consign to oblivion" (Osborne, 1995: 157). For all its talk of adaptability, transformation, volatility, and open-endedness, postmodernism has homogenized a supposedly homogenizing Western history and philosophy. It is over-reliant on the philosophical systems which it claims to deconstruct and assumes that terms such as différance can simultaneously be both permanently undecidable as well as practical.

However, coinciding with the declining fortunes of postmodernism in recent years and through the works of scholars like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and especially Edward Said, a new opening for scholarship has been wrought, especially among non-western scholars and students of English Literature. Said's most important contribution to Colonial Discourse Analysis and Post-Colonial Theory has unquestionably been Orientalism, without which these areas of theoretical inquiry would not have developed as they did. His special interest is the discourse of Orientalism and its construction of knowledge, through which Europe came

to know the East. According to scholars such as Said, it was and still is through this discourse and its construction of knowledge that the West has been able to legitimize and maintain its hold over the 'uncivilized Other' and the peripheral. A major and repeated feature of Oriental analysis in all its various forms is that it constantly confirms the thesis that the Oriental is primitive, mysterious, exotic, and incapable of self-government. However, Orientalism should not be looked upon as just the rationalization for colonial rule. Far more important, it seems, is how it knowingly or unknowingly justifies imperialism and colonialism in advance of their actual manifestation.

In other words, "Orientalism is best viewed in Foucauldian terms as a discourse: a manifestation of power/knowledge" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalie, 1999: 68). This is because, as Foucault sees it, discourse is a severely bounded area of social knowledge or "heavily policed cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of representation in a given society" (Gandhi, 1998: 77). It is a series of statements, through which the world can be known, as it is not recognized by simply analysing objective data. Its recognition is brought into being through discourse, which is ideologically loaded, but independent of individual will and judgement. According to Said, discourse is the system of thought by which dominant powers establish spheres of 'knowledge' and 'truth', and it is through such discursive practices that religions, races, cultures, and classes are represented. Discursive practices are interwoven with social and power relations, while history itself is indivisible from discursive formations.

The idea of representation is usually based upon a notion of being faithful to the original. However, representation is largely interwoven with many other things besides 'truth'. It is defined not just by inherent common subject

matter, but also by a common history, tradition, and universe of discourse that exists within a particular field (Said, 1985: 272-273). Representation is a phenomenon created by writers, intellectuals, artists, commentators, travellers, politicians, as well as others working within similar discursive formations.

This Foucauldian perspective permits Said to consider numerous 'Western' texts, from apparently separate intellectual disciplines such as politics, history, linguistics, and literature, among others, as belonging to a single discourse called Orientalism. What brings these texts together is the common culture and ideology intrinsic to the discursive practices through which they produce knowledge about the Orient. These discursive "practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them – hence they are also seen as exercises of power and control" (Loomba, 1998: 39). However, it should be kept in mind that this does not mean that a discourse is either static or cannot admit internal contradictions.

It is often the case that Orientalist modes of thought and representation are actually able to survive contact with the reality on the ground with which it often seems to be at odds with. One reason for this may be that the need for creating an overall consistency in discourse may constantly prevent the realization of objective analysis as well as commitment to 'truth'. The stronger the discourse becomes the longer it lives, and the better it is able to bring about consistency within its borders. This is helped through the continued repetition and adaptation of its motifs. Another explanation for the persistent Orientalist mode of representation is Said's concept of latent and manifest Orientalism. Manifest Orientalism is basically comprised of openly stated ideas about Eastern civilization, history, government, or literature produced at different historical junctures. Latent Orientalism, however, is an

"almost unconscious and certainly an untouchable positivity" (Childs and Williams, 1997: 101) that:

[...] contains the basic 'truths' of the Orient, so that while, for example historians might disagree about particular interpretations of the history of the Orient, underlying assumptions of oriental backwardness would remain unquestioned. As such latent Orientalism has strong affinities with certain concepts of ideology, particularly the 'negative' version of ideology as false consciousness, and the durability of ideological formations, especially when allied to strong institutions such as Orientalism, would also help to explain the survival of Orientalist attitudes (Childs and Williams, 1997: 101-102).

An important aspect of Said's Orientalism is that it explains the methods through which 'the Other' was constructed by the West as its barbaric, irrational, despotic, and inferior opposite or alter ego. It is a type of surrogate and underground version of the West or the 'self' (Macfie, 2002: 8). What may be even more significant is that through its position of domination, the West is even able to tell the 'truth' to non-Western cultures, in this case the Orient, about their past and present condition, as they are capable of representing the Orient more authentically than the Orient can itself. Such a 'truthful' representation not only aids the colonizer or imperialist in justifying their actions, but it also serves to weaken the resistance of 'the Other' as it changes the way in which 'the Other' views itself. Although this discourse is generated in the Occident, its influence is so powerful that it has significant impact on discursive practices in the Orient as well. 'The Other' may come to see himself and his surroundings as inferior or even barbaric. At the very least, it can create a major crisis in the consciousness of 'the Other' as it clashes with powerful discursive practices and 'knowledges' about the world. Eurocentricism, as a result, influences, alters, and even

helps produce 'Other' cultures.

It is Said's belief that the institutionalisation of Europe's 'Other' began in the late eighteenth century and that this is directly linked to the rise of colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Europe's knowledge of the Orient was developed through many centuries of discourse. According to Said, Orientalists are the heirs to a long tradition of European writing, which was founded by people like Aeschylus and Homer. In The Persians, for example, Asia is presented as a land of disaster, loss, and emptiness, and according to Said, such literary texts as well as other writings in general play a pivotal role in the creation of 'the Other'.

In Culture and Imperialism, Said points out how the nineteenth-century novel played a critical role in the actual formation and enforcement of Empire. He also stresses the indispensable role that culture plays in the development of imperialism. Modern European states are shown to be justifying imperialism as they imagine themselves as being on a civilizing mission rather than on a mission of plunder. They view their own culture as "the best that has been thought and said" (Arnold, 1865: 15). Therefore, colonial discourse tends to exclude or minimize reference to European exploitation of 'the Other', while repeatedly pointing to the barbaric nature of the subjugated peoples. This process often takes place without the individual colonizing subject even being consciously aware of it. This is what Said sees as the Western method of domination.

Through this Eurocentric discourse of superior wisdom and moral neutrality, a relatively monolithic and homogeneous 'Other' encompassing most of the world east and south of Europe, was created. The Orient, in other words, has actually been constructed by the neutralizing of the stereotypes and assumptions of Orientalists. However, what makes Orientalism so

relevant and significant today is arguably the way in which Said maps the discriminatory strategies of this discourse both diachronically and synchronically right into the contemporary period. In the words of Childs and Williams:

Although the centre of Orientalism's power may have shifted from Europe to the United States, its repertoire of images remains remarkably consistent, and its power is perhaps greater than in the past. That is because, on the one hand, now, more than ever Orientalists are directly linked to the government policy-making and power politics, and on the other, the stereotyped knowledges of Orientalism can gain global and near instantaneous dissemination thanks to the penetration of the mass media [...] (Childs and Williams, 1997: 101).

Western assumptions of cultural superiority have roots so deep that even the social reform movements, such as the liberal, the working class, and the feminist movements were all more or less imperialistic. None of these movements ever seriously touched upon the assumptions of imperialist culture. In literary circles today, writers like Carlyle, Dickens, Eyre, Ruskin, and Thackeray, who believed in colonial expansion and show obvious signs of racial prejudice in their works, are all viewed as people of culture whose works are an integral part of the Western cultural heritage. Their views on blacks and other 'peripheral' races are regarded as of lesser importance and forgivable in comparison to their enormous cultural contribution.

Significantly, some of Said's critics such as Aijaz Ahmad, Robert Young, Homi Bhabha, Dennis Porter, and John MacKenzie, accuse him of offering a theory that is monolithic and totalizing and which masks differences within Western societies. They question the totalising assumptions made in Orientalism, regarding an enormous amount of material written in different

languages and countries over many centuries. Some have also pointed out that Said, while expounding upon the bitter reality in Orientalism, does not seem to offer any form of theory of resistance, or what Porter calls "counter hegemonic thought" (Porter, 1993: 152), because of his reliance on the Foucauldian perspective.

In response to the first claim it can be said that what Orientalism, Covering Islam, The Question of Palestine, and Culture and Imperialism, among Said's other works, actually do is to reveal how the West represented and continues to represent other cultures through discursive practices which, though not completely monolithic, have always had an enormous amount of internal consistency. In fact, Said's argument shows that Orientalist discourse contains texts which "vary from genre to genre, and from historical period to historical period" (Said, 1985: 23). Nevertheless, most of these texts contain comparable notions of cultural difference which are stereotyped and negative. In the introduction to Orientalism, Said makes his position clear:

In quite a constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upperhand (Said, 1985: 7).

In other words, while different religions, cultures, and races are not seen as identical, and in some instances they may be presented as actually being quite diverse, they are still deemed similarly inferior. Therefore, even though Orientalist representations are probably more volatile than what was professed in Orientalism, it is perhaps not quite accurate to accuse him of rigid monolithic uniformity.

Regarding the second claim, it seems that in Orientalism, Said believes a

true representation to be something that probably does not and cannot truly exist. In his own words:

The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer (Said, 1985: 272).

In response to Said, Young points out that if this is the case, the question is: why and on what moral ground should Said attack or even criticize Orientalists for misrepresenting the Orient, if it is inevitable (Young, 1991: 138)? In the words of Stuart Hall, this "rejection of any criterion of 'truth' in favour of the idea of a 'regime of truth'" is "vulnerable to the charge of relativism" (Hall, 1997: 51). Beyond the philosophical and logical shortcomings of such a position, such forms of extreme relativism seem to be unhelpful and indeed detrimental to the cause of any form of meaningful or fruitful resistance. In a sense, the same can also be said of Spivak's position in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Even though she advocates resistance, refuting the idea that the Subaltern could ever be represented truthfully, serves to weaken resistance to discursive formations that are constituted by, as well as committed to, the perpetuation of dominant social systems.

Said's position, however, evolves later on. Regarding the question of resistance and the Foucauldian perspective, in The World, the Text, and the Critic, Said points out that:

The disturbing circularity of Foucault's theory of power is a form of theoretical over-totalisation superficially more difficult to resist because, unlike many others, it is formulated, reformulated and borrowed for use in what seems to be historically documented situations. [Gramsci] would

certainly appreciate the fineness of Foucault's archeologies, but would find it odd that they make not even a nominal allowance for emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counter-hegemony, or historical blocks (Said, 1984: 246).

On the whole, it seems that Said's outlook has been moving away from poststructuralist thought and in his later works he shows a significant difference in standpoint from that of Foucault. Said is more committed to an attempt to shift power relations in society, while Foucault's conception of power is closer to the idea of the futility of meaningful resistance. Although Foucault states that where there is power there is resistance, it is not clear how meaningful or evolutionary he considers such resistance to be.

Said proposes a model of worldly criticism and he criticises much of contemporary theory, due to its detachment from the problems existing in the real world. When he says that texts are worldly, he means "they are...a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said, 1984: 4). Hence, if texts are worldly, then criticism must also deal with the world.

Nevertheless, some critics, such as Bernard Lewis, seem wilfully to fail to recognize that on the issue of 'truth' Said parts company with Foucault. Indeed, he goes so far as to call postmodernism the bane of 'Third World' intellectuals.

Said's commitment to shifting power relations can be seen more clearly in Culture and Imperialism, where he employs a mode of reading which he calls 'contrapuntal'. A contrapuntal reading is a way for "reading back" and providing counterpoints to the texts of Western literature, in order to reveal the extent to which they are implicated in the process of imperialism and colonialism. A number of examples, ending with the author's own

contrapuntal reading of Byron's Lara will help to explain this method of "reading back".

Joseph Conrad is fascinating in this respect. Although, he was anti-imperialist, his belief that imperialism was inescapable made him complicit with its totalizing assumptions. According to Said, Conrad's knowledge of Africans has no more to do with any personal experience he may have gained in his 1890 African adventure than with a long-lasting politicised and ideological tradition of Africanism (Said, 1994: 79-80). While he is sceptical about imperial expansion, the portrayal of an almost evil primitiveness among black Africans along with the derogatory and dehumanising representation of Africa and Africans actually serves to help justify the mission of imperialism. What redeems the imperial process, according to Marlow, "is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental presence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea"(141). However, the danger of 'going native' is a real threat, as the colonized continent can seduce the white man into madness.

Passages like the one in Conrad's Heart of Darkness in which Marlow reflects on the idea behind imperialism as somehow redeeming it are not lifted out of the novel "like a message out of a bottle", in the words of Said. "Conrad's argument is inscribed right in the very form of narrative as he inherited it and as he practiced it". That is why the novel is of crucial importance to Said's analysis of imperial culture because, in his view, without empire, "there is no European novel as we know it" (Said, 1994: 82).

Further insight can be found in a contrapuntal reading of Kim. For Kipling there was no inconsistency between his empathy for India and Indians and his conviction in the honourable nature and effectiveness of

British rule. Thus, his fiction demonstrates contrapuntal ironies despite the presence of obvious imperial themes. For instance, the 'Indian Mutiny' or rebellion of 1857 by Hindu and Muslim soldiers against the British was seen as a catastrophe that cemented the permanent division between the British administration and the Indian population. For an Indian not to have felt revulsion for the British reprisals would have been very uncommon. However, in Kim an old veteran tells Kim and his companion that a "madness ate into the army" and that "they chose to kill the Sahib's wives and children"(242).

Another revealing contrapuntal reading is his analysis of Jane Austin's Mansfield Park in which Sir Thomas Bertram's absence from Mansfield Park in order to tend his Antiguan plantation leads to a process of refined, but distressing decay amongst the young people left in the inadequate care of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. Said argues that the position of Sir Thomas Bertram at home cannot be understood without reference to his position as an absentee plantation owner on the Caribbean island of Antigua. His estate in 'civilized' England is sustained by another estate that is maintained by 'uncivilized' slave labour thousands of kilometres away (Said, 1994: 106-107).

In addition, when Sir Thomas returns to Mansfield Park he quickly re-establishes order with a self-righteousness that, one can assume, betrays his manner toward his slaves on his plantation.

It was a busy morning with him. Conversation with any of them occupied but a small part of it. He had to reinstate himself in all the wonted concerns of his Mansfield life: to see his steward and his bailiff; to examine and compute, and, in the intervals of business, to walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest plantations; but active and methodical, he had not only

done all this before he resumed his seat as master of the house at dinner, he had also set the carpenter to work in pulling down what had been so lately put up in the billiard-room, and given the scene-painter his dismissal long enough to justify the pleasing belief of his being then at least as far off as Northampton. The scene-painter was gone, having spoilt only the floor of one room, ruined all the coachman's sponges, and made five of the under-servants idle and dissatisfied [...] (171-172).

One can easily assume that Sir Thomas does exactly the same thing but on a larger scale in his Antigua plantation.

A rereading of Jane Eyre in this light is quite enlightening in more ways than one. In this work one can see what Joyce Zonana terms feminist Orientalist discourse permeating the work. Charlotte Brontë displaces a western source of patriarchal oppression onto an Oriental society, which allows English readers to ponder local problems without having to question how they define themselves as Westerners and Christians. As is the case with many other Western proto-feminist writers such as Wollstonecraft, Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, by figuring objectionable aspects of life in the West as Eastern in essence, they in fact define their ultimate objective as the elimination of Eastern elements from Western life. Jane Eyre views Rochester as a Western man who is under the corruptive influence of Eastern ideas. The shawls, the turban, his 'Persian' laws and arrogance, as well as his 'Oriental-like' attitude towards women, must be dealt with in order for him to be redeemed and thoroughly westernized.

Contemporary feminists such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar simply perceive Jane Eyre as being a proto-feminist heroine who achieves victory over an oppressive and patriarchal world. However, as Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak points out, Jane Eyre is herself implicated in colonialism on at least two levels (Spivak, 1985: 262-280). As in Mansfield Park, one must assume that her inheritance, which includes the wealth that she bestows upon her cousin, St. John Rivers the Christian missionary, comes from the slave trade. Hence, like Rochester her freedom and independence is founded upon the enslavement of numerous people who are of a different colour and race.

In addition to this, she is also implicated at another level. Jane's representations of the 'Other' illustrates that, like Rochester, she holds a fundamental belief in her own racial superiority. Rochester's wife Bertha Mason, referred to by Jane as a "clothed hyena"(296), is a Creole with savage, lurid, and dark features. The idea that people born of parents from different races are more animal-like is an often-repeated assumption in colonial discourse. Added to this are the passages on the Orient, where women are all ignorant "Harem inmates", who need a western woman like Jane to "preach liberty to them" (272). To add to this there is Rochester's depiction of Jamaica as a hellish, maddening, and apocalyptic land:

[...] being unable to sleep in Bed, I got up and opened the window. The air was like sulphur–streams -- I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake -- black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball -- she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene, and my ears were filled with the curses the maniac [Bertha] still shrieked out (312).

His deliverance from potential madness or even suicide comes in the

form of a fresh wind from Europe (312):

The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty; my heart, dried up and scorched for a long time, swelled to the tone, and filled with living blood -- my being longed for renewal -- my soul thirsted for a pure draught. I saw hope revive -- and felt regeneration possible. From a flowery arch at the bottom of my garden I gazed over the sea -- bluer than the sky: the old world was beyond; clear prospects opened (312-313).

By the end of the novel, like St. John who "labours for his race" (457) in India, Rochester becomes a true Christian, through relinquishing all of his former Eastern traits.

A contrapuntal reading of Lord Byron's Orientalist works will reveal that his texts are not by any means an exception. Byron in this sense is more significant and interesting than most other writers of his age. Unlike his contemporary Orientalist rivals including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Southey, Walter Savage Landor, and Thomas Moore, Byron actually travelled to and experienced the Orient. Therefore, it is important to gauge the extent to which Byron's Orientalist preconceptions are able to survive contact with reality as well as the extent to which they are modified. It is important to understand the extent to which the correctness and truthfulness of his Oriental representations were deemed as important by the poet as well as how and why his writings on the Orient were and still are widely regarded as reliable among literary scholars and critics. The fact that even modern critics often take it for granted that his observations were and still are valid, shows that his emphasis on reliability, along with his representations, fit in well with the dominant stereotypes and discursive practices of more contemporary Orientalism.

The influence of Orientalism on Byron apparently began before the age of ten. His reading of Rycant's History of the Turks had a huge impact on his imagination. Subsequently, he began reading any book available concerning the Orient. These books included the works of Mignant, D'Herbert, Sir William Jones as well as Sale's translation of the Holy Qur'an, Jonathon Scott's edition of The Arabian Nights, and travellers' work by the Baron de Tott and Lady Mary Wortly Montagu. Even more important was the influence of Beckford's Vathek. Byron "drew extensively and with acknowledgement on Beckford -- or more correctly on Henley's notes for the annotations to The Giaour" (Joseph, 1964: 44).

Byron's attention to Oriental detail increases the influence of his work in certain aspects. While literature alone plays a major role in assessing the cultural mood of previous generations as well as that of the present, any text that is viewed as authentic by its author and more importantly by its critics can be potentially far more influential in the ideological sense than a similar text which makes no such claim. Such a text, and in this case an Orientalist text, is not only seen by readers to be of aesthetic value, but more importantly it also acts as a reliable source of information about unfamiliar peoples and lands. Of course, Orientalist literature that makes no such claim to authenticity mediates between the real and imaginary worlds and can often be seen as a form of latent Orientalism. As ideologies intersect and battle one another through language and signs, all literary texts must be viewed "as extremely fecund sites for such ideological interactions" (Loomba, 1998: 70). This view contradicts Harold Bloom's stated belief in The Western Canon that political motivation is non-existent in the traditional humanities and that reading literature has no practical influence on society (Bloom, 1995: 526). Nevertheless, it seems inevitable that "texts or

representations have to be seen as fundamental to the creation of history and culture" (Loomba, 1998: 40).

One of Byron's poems that has, in principal, been viewed as an authentic representation of the East is Lara. While some critics such as McGann and Joseph (Joseph, 1964: 39) believe that Lara was a sequel, Franklin and Gleckner believe otherwise (Franklin, 1992: 86 and Gleckner, 1967: 163). As evidence for this, the last two critics state that Lara does not even know that Kaled is a woman; otherwise, there would have been no need for the disguise. Gleckner, however, does add that there is an obvious and strong connection between the two poems as well as between their main characters (Conrad/Gulnara and Lara/Kaled). He believes that Lara "is not so much the Corsair, Conrad, as he is a Corsair", while he also doubts that Kaled and Gulnare are one and the same (Gleckner, 1967: 154 and 163). Although it seems improbable for Lara not to know the sex of his closest companion and while there is no reason to believe that Kaled disguises herself from him, in any case the significance of Kaled is not diminished because in either case she represents 'the Other'. Lara came back from the East, is influenced by the East, and his companion (Kaled) is an Oriental woman.

The poem informs us that Lara left his homeland in his youth in search of adventure in the East. When he finally returns he is a changed man, both disillusioned and alienated from his own society (Watkins, 1987: 94). Lara's bringing Kaled back with him, alone, symbolizes the extent of the Orient's influence upon him. When he leaves for the East, he abandons his destined bride to another man only to come back with what is later discovered to be an Eastern woman. This is somewhat similar to what happens in The Corsair, where Gulnare usurps Medora's position. Furthermore, it seems to be implied that Lara's downfall occurs for similar if not the same reasons as

those behind the fall of Conrad. In both poems the Orient has a similar and destructive influence.

According to McGann, Lara (Conrad) is tormented by the loss of his Greek and western wife Medora. His heart is not "sufficiently true" to her as he is "untrue to the highest possibilities of his own nature" and he has declined to an extent where he now deserves nothing more or better than Gulnare (McGann, 1968: 190). He is accompanied by an Oriental who, according to Rishmawi, has a "doglike fidelity" (Rishmawi, 1983: 100). He also clearly does not want anyone to learn about his past, because this would be the source of great shame. Perhaps this is the reason why Kaled (or Gulnare) is disguised as a page. According to Leask, Byron presents Lara as a figure mastered by Gulnare, one who has returned to Europe as a hybridized/Orientalised figure (Leask, 1992: 59). Lara:

[...] is cut loose from tradition and custom; morally unrestrained and sceptical of the notion of freedom, in adopting Gulnare's 'Asiatic' values he has accepted a fatalism which Byron would have us believe is foreign to the European/Hellenistic ethical tradition (1, 335-336) (Leask, 1992: 60).

The West can offer no him help, as there is no longer any medium of understanding. The moodiness and strange behaviour (1, 133-154), the midnight scream, his swoon, and his brief loss of speech are all signs of pathological behaviour, which is incomprehensible to the people of his race.

When Lara recovers his power of speech, he speaks the strange language of the 'Other'. It is the only medium that can be used to express his condition, as his own Western tongue cannot convey the magnitude of his horror. It seems implied that only in the Orient can such terrifying ideas and feelings be found along with the language to express them. Hence, no one can comprehend him besides Kaled. She understands him and his behaviour

(1, 236) and shows little surprise (1, 240), presumably because she is from the mysterious 'Other' that has brought about this condition. Although Leask believes that she "is clearly not the cause of Lara's hysterical, remorseful vision" (Leask, 1992: 56), it seems that she must be somehow linked to it, especially as in many ways her behaviour is similar to his (1, 550-552). Whether Kaled is Gulnare or not, she seems to have played a significant role in Lara's adoption of Eastern values. It is clear that Lara's condition and change in character has an Oriental origin and as a result:

There was in him a vital scorn of all:
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurled (1, 313-316).

This stresses the extent to which life in the East can corrupt the soul and mind of a human being. In the eyes of his Western countrymen, he has become almost as strange as his Oriental companion.

Later the situation continues to worsen, when Ezzelin recognises Lara and is intent upon revealing his dishonourable behaviour in the East. Ezzelin, a Spanish knight, is an honourable gentleman who upholds the Hellenic values of European civility even throughout his long stay in the "other lands" (2, 473). Unlike Lara, in the eyes of Blackstone and Leask, he keeps his link with the values held by Medora and he has not allow them to be usurped by the Orient (Blackstone, 1975: 56-57 and Leask, 1992: 56-57). After changing Lara beyond redemption, the East then brings about his final destruction. After a heated exchange between Lara and Ezzelin, it is decided through the Baron's mediation to put the matter off for a day with the hope that on the following day the truth would become clear for all to see.

While Lara is able to control himself during this encounter, Kaled's anger

seems far greater. Her "natural" Oriental wildness and fierceness (1, 579-580) thus reveals itself.

And when the crowd around and near him told
Their wonder at the calmness of the bold,
Their marvel how the high-born Lara bore
Such insult from a stranger, doubly sore,
The colour of young Kaled went and came,
The lip of ashes, and the cheek of flame (1, 594-599).

Later Ezzelin goes missing and is presumed dead. The reader assumes that either Lara killed him or ordered his death, or that Kaled killed him on her own initiative. According to Blackstone "Medora, Conrad's 'pure' love interacts with the 'guilty' Gulnare to evolve the 'page-boy' Kaled. Gulnare's Oriental treachery enters Conrad's soul to render him capable of the assassination of Ezzelin" (Blackstone, 1975: 122). Marshall, on the other hand, believes that Lara may have given a message to Kaled which no one but she could understand. According to Marshall:

If Lara, after promising that he will appear to face Ezzelin's charges, is either the instigator or the perpetrator of the murder of Ezzelin, then he has been completely deprived of that respect of honour that is essentially characteristic of Conrad. Such inconsistency would not be demonstrated if Kaled were the murderer, for her code (necessarily the Oriental code of Gulnare) would in no way forbid her secret destruction of one who threatened him she loved (Marshall, 1962: 52).

No matter who the instigator or perpetrator is, it is the Orient or the "Oriental code" that is responsible. Either an Oriental or someone who has been influenced by the destructive Oriental culture has committed the crime. Nevertheless, it does seem that Kaled was the one who actually committed

the act, because as both Marshall and Rishmawi indicate "the Oriental style" of the murder points to her (Rishmawi, 1985: 101-102). She seems to have murdered Ezzelin just as easily as Gulnare murdered the Pasha, but with a difference. In The Corsair, Gulnare usurps Medora and brings about Conrad's downfall; here Kaled brings about death and destruction on a much larger scale and in the West itself. Whether Lara was personally involved or not does not make much of a difference; what is really important is that this death and the subsequent war were both brought about through Lara's connection with the East and its values. In essence, little difference seems to exist between the 'Oriental' in Byron's textual representations and those of others who solely relied upon Orientalist text as sources.

In addition, as seen above, similar discursive practices also seem to influence most of his critics, which include contemporary scholars who view his works as authentic representations that correctly portray the monolithic Oriental as less civilized than westerners. This raises many questions concerning the binary opposition as well as what Bhabha terms the ambivalent relationship, between the 'West' and its 'Other': is the portrayal of the Orient a relatively static or monolithic feature, and is it continually seen as a potential threat through transculturation or hybridity? These questions must be pursued in the context of the ideological position of both the writers themselves and the Orientalism of critics and theorists.

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