Edward Said, from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993): extracts from the chapter ‘Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories’: section v (‘Connecting Empire to Secular Interpretation’), pp. 43-61, and from the chapter ‘Consolidated Vision’: section 1 ‘Narrative and Social Space’ pp. 62-79 and section 2 ‘Jane Austen and Empire’ pp. 80-96.

From ‘Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories’: section v (‘Connecting Empire to Secular Interpretation’) (pp. 43-61)

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What partly animated my study of Orientalism was my critique of the way in which the alleged universalism of fields such as the classics (not to mention historiography, anthropology, and sociology) was Eurocentric in the extreme, as if other literatures and societies had either an inferior or a transcended value. (Even the comparatists trained in the dignified tradition that produced Curtius and Auerbach showed little interest in Asian, African, or Latin American texts.)

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Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* – a concept that waffled between the notion of "great books" and a vague synthesis of *all* the world's literatures—was very important to professional scholars of comparative literature in the early twentieth century. But still, as I have suggested, its practical meaning and operating ideology were that, so far as literature and culture were concerned, Europe led the way and was the main subject of interest. In the world of great scholars such as Karl Vossler and DeSanctis, it is most specifically Romania [cf. Curtius’s use of the concept] that makes intelligible and provides a center for the enormous grouping of literatures produced world-wide; Romania underpins Europe, just as (in a curiously regressive way) the Church and the Holy Roman Empire guarantee the integrity of the core European literatures. At a still deeper level, it is from the Christian Incarnation that Western realistic literature as we know it emerges. This tenaciously advanced thesis explained Dante's supreme importance to Auerbach, Curtius, Vossler, and Spitzer.

To speak of comparative literature therefore was to speak of the interaction of world literatures with one another, but the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its center and top. When Auerbach, in a justly famous essay entitled "Philologie der *Weltliteratur,"* written after World War Two, takes note of how many "other" literary languages and literatures seemed to have emerged (as if from nowhere: he makes no mention of either colonialism or decolonization), he expresses more anguish and fear than pleasure at the prospect of what he seems so reluctant to acknowledge. Romania is under threat.

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Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known.

It is possible to argue that the continued production and interpretation of Western culture itself made exactly the same assumption well on into the twentieth century, even as political resistance grew to the West's power in the "peripheral" world. Because of that, and because of where it led, it becomes possible now to reinterpret the Western cultural archive as if fractured geographically by the activated imperial divide, to do a rather different kind of reading and interpretation. In the first place, the history of fields like comparative literature, English studies, cultural analysis, anthropology can be seen as affiliated with the empire and, in a manner of speaking **/51/** even contributing to its methods for maintaining Western ascendancy over non-Western natives, especially if we are aware of the spatial consciousness exemplified in Gramsci's "southern question." And in the second place our interpretative change of perspective allows us to challenge the sovereign and unchallenged authority of the allegedly detached Western observer.

Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. We may thus consider imperialism as a process occurring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of the empire itself. The important point – a very Gramscian one – is how the national British, French, and American cultures maintained hegemony over the peripheries. How within them was consent gained and continuously consolidated for the distant rule of native peoples and territories?

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally,* with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. In the same way, I believe, we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities.

It should be evident that no one overarching theoretical principle governs the whole imperialist ensemble, and it should be just as evident that the principle of domination and resistance based on the division between the West and the rest of the world – to adapt freely from the African critic Chinweizu – runs like a fissure throughout. That fissure affected all the many local engagements, overlappings, interdependencies in Africa, India, and elsewhere in the peripheries, each different, each with its own density of associations and forms, its own motifs, works, institutions, and – most important from our point of view as rereaders – its own possibilities and conditions of knowledge. For each locale in which the engagement occurs, **/52/** and the imperialist model is disassembled, its incorporative, universalizing, and totalizing codes rendered ineffective and inapplicable, a particular type of research and knowledge begins to build up.

An example of the new knowledge would be the study of Orientalism or Africanism and, to take a related set, the study of Englishness and Frenchness. These identities are today analyzed

not as god-given essences, but as results of collaboration between African history and the study of Africa in England, for instance, or between the study of French history and the reorganization of knowledge during the First Empire. In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem and are considered to be like essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions: Greeks always require barbarians, and Europeans Africans, Orientals, etc. The opposite is certainly true as well. Even the mammoth engagements in our own time over such essentializations as "Islam," the "West," the "Orient," "Japan," or "Europe" admit to a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference, and those require careful analysis and research.

If one studies some of the major metropolitan cultures-England's, France's and the United States', for instance--in the geographical context of their struggles for (and over) empires, a distinctive cultural topography becomes apparent. In using the phrase "structures of attitude and reference." I have this topography in mind, as I also have in mind Raymond Williams's seminal phrase "structures of feeling." I am talking about the way in which structures of location and geographical, reference appear in the cultural languages of literature, history, or ethnography, sometimes allusively and sometimes carefully plotted, across several individual works that are not otherwise connected to one another or to an official ideology of "empire."

In British culture, for instance, one may discover a consistency of concern in Spenser, Shakespeare, Defoe, and Austen that fixes socially desirable, empowered space in metropolitan England or Europe and connects it by design, motive, and development to distant or peripheral worlds (Ireland, Venice, Africa, Jamaica), conceived of as desirable but subordinate. And with these meticulously maintained references come attitudes-about rule, control, profit and enhancement and suitability-that grow with astonishing power from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century. These structures do ·not arise from some pre-existing (semi-conspiratorial) design that the writers then manipulate, but are bound up with the development of Britain's cultural identity, as that identity imagines itself in a geographically conceived world. Similar structures may be remarked in French and Ameri-/**53**/can cultures, growing for different reasons and obviously in different ways. We are not yet at the stage where we can say whether these globally integral structures are preparations for imperial control and conquest, or whether they accompany such enterprises, or whether in some reflective or careless way they are a result of empire. We are only at a stage where we must look at the astonishing frequency of geographical articulations in the three Western cultures that most dominated far-flung territories. In the second chapter of this book I explore this question and advance further arguments about it.

To the best of my ability to have read and understood these "structures of attitude and reference," there was scarcely any dissent, any departure, any demurral from them: there was virtual unanimity that subject races should be ruled, that they *are* subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its own domain. (Indeed, as Seeley was to put it in 1883, about Britain – France and the United States had their own theorists – the British could only be understood as such.) It is perhaps embarrassing that sectors of the metropolitan cultures that have since become vanguards in the social contests of our time were uncomplaining members of this imperial consensus. With few exceptions, the women's as well as the working-class movement was pro-empire. And, while

one must always be at great pains to show what different imaginations, sensibilities, ideas, and philosophies were at work, and that each work of literature or art is special, there was virtual unity of purpose on this score: the empire must be maintained, and it *was* maintained.

Reading and interpreting the major metropolitan cultural texts in this newly activated, reinforced way could not have been possible without the movements of resistance that occurred everywhere in the peripheries against the empire. In the third chapter of this book I make the claim that a new global consciousness connects all the various local arenas of anti-imperial contest. And today writers and scholars from the formerly colonized world have imposed their diverse histories on, have mapped their local geographies in, the great canonical texts of the European center. And from these overlapping yet discrepant interactions the new readings and knowledges are beginning to appear. One need only think of the tremendously powerful upheavals that occurred at the end of the 1980s – the breaking down of barriers, the popular insurgencies, the drift across borders, the looming problems of immigrant, refugee, and minority rights in the West to see how obsolete are the old categories, the tight separations, and the comfortable autonomies.

It is very important, though, to assess how these entities were built, and to understand how patiently the idea of an unencumbered English culture, **/54/** for example, acquired its authority and its power to impose itself across the seas. This is a tremendous task for any individual, but a whole new generation of scholars and intellectuals from the Third World is engaged on just such an undertaking. Here a word of caution and prudence is required. One theme I take up is the uneasy relationship between nationalism and liberation, two ideals or goals for people engaged against imperialism. In the main it is true that the creation of very many newly independent nation-states in the post-colonial world has succeeded in re-establishing the primacy of what have been called imagined communities, parodied and mocked by writers like V. S. Naipaul and Conor Cruise O'Brien, hijacked by a host of dictators and petty tyrants, enshrined in various state nationalisms. Nevertheless in general there is an oppositional quality to the consciousness of many Third World scholars and intellectuals, particularly (but not exclusively) those who are exiles, expatriates, or refugees and immigrants in the West, many of them inheritors of the work done by earlier twentieth-century expatriates like George Antonius and C.L.R. James. Their work in trying to connect experiences across the imperial divide, in re-examining the great canons, in producing what in effect is a critical literature cannot be, and generally has not been, co-opted by the resurgent nationalisms, despotisms, and ungenerous ideologies that betrayed the liberationist ideal in favor of the nationalist independence actuality.

Moreover their work should be seen as sharing important concerns with minority and "suppressed" voices within the metropolis itself: feminists, African-American writers, intellectuals, artists, among others. But here too vigilance and self-criticism are crucial, since there is an inherent danger to oppositional effort of becoming institutionalized, marginality turning into separatism, and resistance hardening into dogma. Surely the activism that reposits and reformulates the political challenges in intellectual life is safeguarded against orthodoxy. But there is always a need to keep community before coercion, criticism before mere solidarity, and vigilance ahead of assent.

Since my themes here are a sort of sequel to *Orientalism,* which like this book was written in the United States, some consideration of America's cultural and political environment is

warranted. The United States is no ordinary large country. The United States is the last superpower, an enormously influential, frequently interventionary power nearly everywhere in the world. Citizens and intellectuals of the United States have a particular responsibility for what goes on between the United States and the rest of the world, a responsibility that is in no way discharged or fulfilled by saying that the Soviet Union, Britain, France, or China were, or are, worse. The fact is **/55/** that we are indeed responsible for, and therefore more capable of, influencing *this* country in ways that we were not for the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union, or other countries. So we should first take scrupulous note of how in Central and Latin America-to mention the most obvious--as well as in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, the United States has replaced the great earlier empires and is *the* dominant outside force.

Looked at honestly, the record is not a good one. United States military interventions since World War Two have occurred (and are still occurring) on nearly every continent, many of great complexity and extent, with tremendous national investment, as we are now only beginning to understand. All of this is, in William Appleman Williams's phrase, empire as a way of life. The continuing disclosures about the war in Vietnam, about the United States' support of "contras" in Nicaragua, about the crisis in the Persian Gulf, are only pan of the story of this complex of interventions. Insufficient attention is paid to the fact that United States Middle, Eastern and Central American policies--whether exploiting a geo-political opening among Iranian so-called moderates, or aiding the so-called Contra Freedom Fighters in overthrowing the elected, legal government of Nicaragua, or coming to the aid of the Saudi and Kuwaiti royal families--can only be described as imperialist.

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To read most cultural deconstructionists, or Marxists, or new historicists is to read writers whose political horizon, whose historical location is within a society and culture deeply enmeshed in imperial domination. Yet little notice is taken of this horizon, few acknowledgements of the setting are advanced, little realization of the imperial closure itself is allowed for. Instead, one has the impression that interpretation of other cultures, texts, and peoples – which at bottom is what all interpretation is about – occurs in a timeless vacuum, so forgiving and permissive as to deliver the interpretation directly into a universalism free from attachment, inhibition, and interest.

We live of course in a world not only of commodities but also of representation, and representations –their production, circulation, history, and interpretation – are the very element of culture. In much recent theory the problem of representation is deemed to be central, yet rarely is it put in its **/57/** full political context, a context that is primarily imperial. Instead we have on the one hand an isolated cultural sphere, believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation, and, on the other, a debased political sphere, where the real struggle between interests is supposed to occur. To the professional student of culture – the humanist, the critic, the scholar – only one sphere is relevant, and, more to the point,

it is accepted that the two spheres are separated, whereas the two are not only connected but ultimately the same.

A radical falsification has become established in this separation. Culture is exonerated of any entanglements with power, representations are considered only as apolitical images to be parsed and construed as so many grammars of exchange, and the divorce of the present from the past is assumed to be complete. And yet, far from this separation of spheres being a neutral or accidental choice, its real meaning is as an act of complicity, the humanist's choice of a disguised, denuded, systematically purged textual model over a more embattled model, whose principal features would inevitably coalesce around the continuing struggle over the question of empire itself.

Let me put this differently, using examples that will be familiar to everyone. For at least a decade, there has been a decently earnest debate in the United States over the meaning, contents, and goals of liberal education. Much but not all of this debate was stimulated in the university after the . upheavals of the 196os, when it appeared for the first time in this century that the structure, authority, and tradition of American education were challenged by marauding energies, released by socially and intellectually inspired provocations. The newer currents in the academy, and the force of what is called theory (a rubric under which were herded many new disciplines like psychoanalysis, linguistics, and Nietzschean philosophy, unhoused from the traditional fields such as philology, moral philosophy, and the natural sciences), acquired prestige and interest; they appeared to undermine the authority and the stability of established canons, well-capitalized fields, long-standing procedures of accreditation, research, and the division of intellectual labor. That all this occurred in the modest and circumscribed terrain of cultural-academic praxis simultaneously with the great wave of anti-war, anti-imperialist protest was not fortuitous but, rather, a genuine political and intellectual conjuncture.

There is considerable irony that our search in the metropolis for a newly invigorated, reclaimed tradition follows the exhaustion of modernism and is expressed variously as post-modernism or, as I said earlier, citing Lyotard, as the loss of the legitimizing power of the narratives of Western emancipation and enlightenment; simultaneously, modernism is rediscovered in the **/58/** formerly colonized, peripheral world, where resistance, the logic of daring, and various investigations of age-old tradition *(al-Turath,* in the Islamic world) together set the tone.

One response in the West to the new conjunctures, then, has been profoundly reactionary: the effort to reassert old authorities and canons, the effort to reinstate ten or twenty or thirty essential Western books without which a Westerner would not be educated-these efforts are couched in the rhetoric of embattled patriotism.

But there can be another response, worth returning to here, for it offers an important theoretical opportunity. Cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid, and if it has been the practice in the West since Immanuel Kant to isolate cultural and aesthetic realms from the worldly domain, it is now time to rejoin them. This is by no means a simple matter, since--1 believe--it has been the essence of experience in the West at least since the late eighteenth century not only to acquire distant domination and reinforce hegemony, but also to divide the realms of culture and experience into apparently separate spheres. Entities such as races and nations, essences such as Englishness or Orientalism, modes

of production such as the Asiatic or Occidental, all of these in my opinion testify to an ideology whose cultural correlatives well precede the actual accumulation of imperial territories world-wide.

Most historians of empire speak of the "age of empire" as formally beginning around 1878, with "the scramble for Africa." A closer look at the cultural actuality reveals a much earlier, more deeply and stubbornly held view about overseas European hegemony; we can locate a coherent, fully mobilized system of ideas near the end of the eighteenth century, and there follows the set of integral developments such as the first great systematic conquests under Napoleon, the rise of nationalism and the European nation-state, the advent of large-scale industrialization, and the consolidation of power in the bourgeoisie. This is also the period in which the novel form and the new historical narrative become pre-eminent, and in which the importance of subjectivity to historical time takes firm hold.

Yet most cultural historians, and certainly all literary scholars, have failed to remark the *geographical* notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territory that underlies Western fiction, historical writing, and philosophical discourse of the time. There is first the authority of the European observer, traveller, merchant, scholar, historian, novelist. Then there is the hierarchy of spaces by which the metropolitan center and, gradually, the metropolitan economy are seen as dependent upon an overseas system of territorial control, economic exploitation, and a socio-cultural vision; without these stability and prosperity at home – "home" being a word with extremely **/59/** potent resonances--would not be possible. The perfect example of what I mean is to be found in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park,* in which Thomas Bertram's slave plantation in Antigua is mysteriously necessary to the poise and the beauty of Mansfield Park, a place described in moral and aesthetic terms well before the scramble for Africa, or before the age of empire officially began. As John Stuart Mill puts it in the *Principles of Political Economy:*

> These [outlying possessions of ours] are hardly to be looked upon as countries, ... but more properly as outlying agricultural or manufacturing estates belonging to a larger community. Our West Indian colonies, for example, cannot be regarded as countries with a productive capital of their own ... [but are rather] the place where England finds it convenient to carry on the production of sugar, coffee and a few other tropical commodities.

Read this extraordinary passage together with Jane Austen, and a much less benign picture stands forth than the usual one of cultural formations in the pre-imperialist age. In Mill we have the ruthless proprietary tones of the white master used to effacing the reality, work, and suffering of millions of slaves, transported across the middle passage, reduced only to an incorporated status "for the benefit of the proprietors." These colonies are, Mill says, to be considered as hardly anything more than a convenience, an attitude confirmed by Austen, who in *Mansfield Park* sublimates the agonies of Caribbean existence to a mere half dozen passing references to Antigua. And much the same processes occur in other canonical writers of Britain and France; in short, the metropolis gets its authority to a considerable extent from the devaluation as well as the exploitation of the outlying colonial possession. (Not for nothing, then, did Walter Rodney entitle his great decolonizing treatise of 1972 *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.)*

Lastly, the authority of the observer, and of European geographical centrality, is buttressed by a cultural discourse relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, ontological status. Yet this secondariness is, paradoxically, essential to the primariness of the European; this of course is the paradox explored by Césaire, Fanon, and Memmi, and it is but one among many of the ironies of modern critical theory that it has rarely been explored by investigators of the aporias and impossibilities of reading. Perhaps that is because it places emphasis not so much on *how* to read, but rather on *what* is read and *where* it is written about and represented. It is to Conrad's enormous credit to have sounded in such a complex and riven prose the authentic imperialist note – how you supply the forces of **/60/** world-wide accumulation and rule with a self-confirming ideological motor (what Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* calls efficiency with devotion to an idea at the back of it, "it" being the taking away of the earth from those with darker complexions and flatter noses) and simultaneously draw a screen across the process, saying that art and culture have nothing to do with "it."

What to read and what to do with that reading, that is the full form of the question. All the energies poured into critical theory, into novel and demystifying theoretical praxes like the new historicism and deconstruction and Marxism have avoided the major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism. This massive avoidance has sustained a canonical inclusion and exclusion; you include the Rousseaus, the Nietzsches, the Wordsworths, the Dickenses, Flauberts, and so on, and at the same you exclude their relationships with the protracted, complex, and striated work of empire. But why is this a matter of what to read and about where? Very simply, because critical discourse has taken no cognizance of the enormously exciting, varied post-colonial literature produced in resistance to the imperialist expansion of Europe and the United States in the past two centuries. To read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral – and so on and on - is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments. That is a process that should be reversed.

But there is more to be done. Critical theory and literary historical scholarship have reinterpreted and revalidated major swathes of Western literature, art, and philosophy. Much of this has been exciting and powerful work, even though one often senses more an energy of elaboration and refinement than a committed engagement to what I would call secular and affiliated criticism; such criticism cannot be undertaken without a fairly strong sense of how consciously chosen historical models are relevant to social and intellectual change. Yet if you read and interpret modern European and American culture as having had something to do with imperialism, it becomes incumbent upon you also to reinterpret the canon in the light of texts whose place there has been insufficiently linked to, insufficiently weighted toward the expansion of Europe. Put differently, this procedure entails reading the canon as a polyphonic accompaniment to the expansion of Europe, giving a revised direction and valence to writers such as Conrad and Kipling, who have always been read as sports, not as writers whose manifestly imperialist subject matter has a long subterranean or implicit and proleptic life in the earlier work of writers like, say, Austen or Chateaubriand.

Second, theoretical work must begin to formulate the relationship between empire and culture. There have been a few milestone - Kiernan's work, for instance, and Martin Green's – but concern with the issue has not **/61/** been intense. Things, however, are beginning to change, as I noted earlier. A whole range of work in other disciplines, a new group of often younger scholars and critics – here, in the Third World, in Europe – are beginning to embark on the theoretical and

historical enterprises; many of them seem in one way or another to be converging on questions of imperialist discourse, colonialist practice, and so forth. Theoretically we are only at the stage of trying to inventory the *interpellation* of culture by empire, but the efforts so far made are only slightly more than rudimentary. And as the study of culture extends, into the mass media, popular culture, micro-politics, and so forth, the focus on modes of power and hegemony grows sharper.

Third, we should keep before us the prerogatives of the present as signposts and paradigms for the study of the past. If I have insisted on integration and connections between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, I have done so not to level or reduce differences, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things. So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history.

from the chapter ‘Consolidated Vision’: section 1 ‘Narrative and Social Space’ (pp. 62-79).



Nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of empire, but perhaps nowhere with more regularity and frequency than in the British novel. Taken together, these allusions constitute what I have called a structure of attitude and reference. In *Mansfield Park,* which within Jane Austen's work carefully defines the moral and social values informing her other novels, references to Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas possessions are threaded through; they give him his wealth, occasion his absences, fix his social status at home and abroad, and make possible his values, to which Fanny Price (and Austen herself) finally subscribes. If this is a novel about "ordination," as Austen says, the right to colonial possessions helps directly to establish social order and moral priorities at home. Or again, Bertha Mason, Rochester's deranged wife in *Jane Eyre,* is a West Indian, and also a threatening presence, confined to an attic room. Thackeray's Joseph Sedley in *Vanity Fair* is an Indian nabob whose rambunctious behavior and excessive (perhaps undeserved) wealth is counterpointed with Becky's finally unacceptable deviousness, which in turn is contrasted with Amelia's propriety, suitably rewarded in the end; Joseph Dobbin is seen at the end of the novel engaged serenely in writing a history of the Punjab. The good ship *Rose* in Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* wanders through the Caribbean and South America. In Dickens's *Great Expectations,* Abel Magwitch is the convict trans-**/64/** ported to Australia whose wealth – conveniently removed from Pip's triumphs as a provincial lad flourishing in London in the guise of a gentleman – ironically makes possible the great expectations Pip entertains. In many other Dickens novels businessmen have connections with the empire, Dombey and Quilp being two noteworthy examples. For Disraeli's *Tancred* and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda,* the East is partly a habitat for native peoples (or immigrant European populations), but also partly incorporated under the sway of empire. Henry James's Ralph Touchett in *Portrait of a Lady* travels in Algeria and Egypt. And when we come to Kipling, Conrad, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, R. L. Stevenson, George Orwell, Joyce Cary, E. M. Forster, and T. E. Lawrence, the empire is everywhere a crucial setting.

The situation in France was different, insofar as the French imperial vocation during the early nineteenth century was different from England's, buttressed as it was by the continuity and stability of the English polity itself. The reverses of policy, losses of colonies, insecurity of possession, and shifts in philosophy that France suffered during the Revolution and the Napoleonic era meant that its empire had a less secure identity and presence in French culture. In Chateaubriand and Lamartine one hears the rhetoric of imperial grandeur; and in painting, in historical and philological writing, in music and theater one has an often vivid apprehension of France's outlying possessions. But in the culture at large – until after the middle of the century – there is rarely that weighty, almost philosophical sense of imperial mission that one finds in Britain.

There is also a dense body of American writing, contemporary with this British and French work, which shows a peculiarly acute imperial cast, even though paradoxically its ferocious anti-colonialism, directed at the Old World, is central to it. One thinks, for example, of the Puritan "errand into the wilderness" and, later, of that extraordinarily obsessive concern in Cooper, Twain, Melville, and others with United States expansion westward, along with the wholesale

colonization and destruction of native American life (as memorably studied by Richard Slotkin, Patricia Limerick, and Michael Paul Rogin); an imperial motif emerges to rival the European one. (In Chapter Four of this book I shall deal with other and more recent aspects of the United States in its late-twentieth-century imperial form.)

As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named, rarely studied (though Bruce Robbins has recently written on them), or given density. To cite another intriguing analogue, imperial possessions are as usefully *there,* /**64**/ anonymous and collective, as the outcast populations (analyzed by Gareth Stedman Jones) of transient workers, part-time employees, seasonal artisans; their existence always counts, though their names and identities do not, they are profitable without being fully there. This is a literary equivalent, in Eric Wolf's somewhat self-congratulatory words, of "people without History," people on whom the economy and polity sustained by empire depend, but whose reality has not historically or culturally required attention.

In all of these instances the facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money-making, and sexual adventure. Disgraced younger sons are sent off to the colonies, shabby older relatives go there to try to recoup lost fortunes (as in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette),* enterprising young travellers go there to· sow wild oats and to collect exotica. The colonial territories are realms of possibility, and they have always been associated with the realistic novel. Robinson Crusoe is virtually unthinkable without the colonizing mission that permits him to create a new world of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific, and Atlantic wilderness. But most of the great nineteenth-century realistic novelists are less assertive about colonial rule and possessions than either Defoe or late writers like Conrad and Kipling, during whose time great electoral reform and mass participation in politics meant that imperial competition became a more intrusive domestic topic. In the closing year of the nineteenth century, with the scramble for Africa, the consolidation of the French imperial Union, the American annexation of the Philippines, and British rule in the Indian subcontinent at its height, empire was a universal concern.

What I should like to note is that these colonial and imperial realities are overlooked in criticism that has otherwise been extraordinarily thorough and resourceful in finding themes to discuss. The relatively few writers and critics who discuss the relationship between culture and empire – among them Martin Green, Molly Mahood, John McClure, and, in particular, Patrick Brantlinger – have made excellent contributions, but their mode is essentially narrative and descriptive – pointing out the presence of themes, the importance of certain historical conjunctures, the influence or persistence of ideas about imperialism-and they cover huge amounts of material. In almost all cases they write critically of imperialism, of that way of life that William Appleman Williams describes as being compatible with all sorts of other ideological persuasions, even antinomian ones, so that during the nineteenth century "imperial outreach made it necessary to develop an appropriate ideology" in alliance with military, economic, and political methods. These made it possible to "preserve and extend the empire with-/**65**/out wasting its psychic or cultural or economic substance." There are hints in these scholars' work that, again to

quote Williams, imperialism produces troubling self-images, for example, that of "a benevolent progressive policeman."

But these critics are mainly descriptive and positivist writers strikingly different from the small handful of generally theoretical and ideological contributions-among them Jonah Raskin's *The Mythology of Imperialism,* Gordon K. Lewis's *Slavery, Imperialism, and Freedom,* and V. G. Kiernan's *Marxism and Imperialism* and his crucial work, *The Lords of Human Kind.'* All these books, which owe a great deal to Marxist analysis and premises, point out the centrality of imperialist thought in modern Western culture.

Yet none of them has been anywhere as influential as they should have been in changing our ways of looking at the canonical works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European culture. The major critical practitioners simply ignore imperialism. In recently rereading Lionel Trilling's fine little book on E. M. Forster, for instance, I was struck that in his otherwise perceptive consideration of *Howards End* he does not once mention imperialism, which, in my reading of the book, is hard to miss, much less ignore. After all, Henry Wilcox and his family are colonial rubber growers: "They had the colonial spirit, and were always making for some spots where .the white man might carry his burden unobserved." And Forster frequently contrasts and associates that fact with the changes taking place in England, changes that affect Leonard and Jacky Bast, the Schlegels, and Howards End itself. Or there is the more surprising case of Raymond Williams, whose *Culture and Society* does not deal with the imperial experience at all. [...]

Why did these lapses occur? And how was the centrality of the imperial vision registered and supported by the culture that produced it, then to some extent disguised it, and also was transformed by it? Naturally, if you yourself happen to have a colonial background, the imperial theme is a determining one in your formation, and it will draw you to it if you also happen to be a dedicated critic of European literature. An Indian or African scholar of English literature reads *Kim,* say, or *Heart of Darkness* with a critical urgency not felt in quite the same way by an American or British one. But in what **/66/** way can we formulate the relationship between culture and imperialism beyond the asseverations of personal testimony? The emergence of formerly colonial subjects as interpreters of imperialism and its great cultural works has given imperialism a perceptible, not to say obtrusive identity as a subject for study and vigorous revision. But how can that particular kind of postimperial testimony and study, usually left at the margins of critical discourse, be brought into active contact with current theoretical concerns?

To regard imperial concerns as constitutively significant to the culture of the modern West is, I have suggested, to consider that culture from the perspective provided by anti-imperialist resistance as well as pro-imperialist apology. What does this mean? It means remembering that Western writers until the middle of the twentieth century, whether Dickens and Austen, Flaubert or Camus, wrote with an exclusively Western audience in mind, even when they wrote of characters, places, or situations that referred to, made use of, overseas territories held by Europeans. But just because Austen referred to Antigua in *Mansfield Park* or to realms visited by the British navy in *Persuasion* without any thought of possible responses by the Caribbean or Indian natives resident there is no reason for us to do the same. We now know that these non-European peoples did not accept with indifference the authority projected over them, or the general silence on which their presence in variously attenuated forms is predicated. We must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-

modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling's Indian characters) in such works.

In practical terms, "contrapuntal reading" as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England. Moreover, like all literary texts, these are not bounded by their formal historic beginnings and endings. References to Australia in *David Copperfield* or India in *Jane Eyre* are made because they· *can be,* because British power (and not just the novelist's fancy) made passing references to these massive appropriations possible; but the further lessons are no less true: that these colonies were subsequently liberated from direct and indirect rule, a process that began and unfolded while the British (or French, Portuguese, Germans, etc.) were still there, although as part of the effort at suppressing native nationalism only occasional note was taken of it. The point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to **/67/** include what was once forcibly excluded – in *L'Etranger,* for example, the whole previous history of France's colonialism and its destruction of the Algerian state, and the later emergence of an independent Algeria (which Camus opposed).

Each text has its own particular genius, as does each geographical region of the world, with its own overlapping experiences and interdependent histories of conflict. As far as the cultural work is concerned, a distinction between particularity and sovereignty (or hermetic exclusiveness) can usefully be made. Obviously no reading should try to generalize so much as to efface the identity of a particular text, author, or movement. By the same token it should allow that what was, or appeared to be, certain for a given work or author may have become subject to disputation. Kipling's India, in *Kim,* has a quality of permanence and inevitability that belongs not just to that wonderful novel, but to British India, its history, administrators, and apologists and, no less important, to the India fought for by Indian nationalists as their country to be won back. By giving an account of this series of pressures and counter-pressures in Kipling's India, we understand the process of imperialism itself as the great work of art engages them, and of later anti-imperialist resistance. In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and to what its author excluded. Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked-in this case, the nationalist experiences of post-independence India.

In addition, one must connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support. Conrad's Africans, for example, come from a huge library of *Africanism,* so to speak, as well as from Conrad's personal experiences. There is no such thing as a *direct* experience, or reflection, of the world in the language of a text. Conrad's impressions of Africa were inevitably influenced by lore and writing about Africa, which he alludes to in *A Personal Record;* what he supplies in *Heart of Darkness* is the result of his impressions of those texts interacting creatively, together with the requirements and conventions of narrative and his own special genius and history. To say of this extraordinarily rich mix that it "reflects" Africa,or even that it reflects an experience of Africa, is somewhat pusillanimous and surely misleading. What we have in *Heart of Darkness* – a work of immense influence, having provoked many readings and images – is a politicized, ideologically saturated Africa which to some intents and

purposes was the imperialized place, with those many interests and ideas furiously at work in it, not just a photographic literary "reflection" of it. This is, perhaps; to overstate the matter, but I want to make the point that far from *Heart of Darkness* and its image of Africa being "only" literature, the **/68/** work is extraordinarily caught up in, is indeed an organic part of, the "scramble for Africa" that was contemporary with Conrad's composition. True, Conrad's audience was small, and, true also, he was very critical of Belgian colonialism. But to most Europeans, reading a rather rarefied text like *Heart of Darkness* was often as close as they came to Africa, and in that limited sense it was part of the European effort to hold on to, think about, plan for Africa. To represent Africa is to enter the battle over Africa, inevitably connected to later resistance, decolonization, and so forth.

Works of literature, particularly those whose manifest subject is empire, have an inherently untidy, even unwieldy aspect in so fraught, so densely charged a political setting. Yet despite their formidable complexity, literary works like *Heart of Darkness* are distillations, or simplifications, or a set of choices made by an author that are far less messy and mixed up than the reality. It would not be fair to think of them as abstractions, although fictions such as *Heart of Darkness* are so elaborately fashioned by authors and so worried over by readers as to suit the necessities of narrative which as a result, we must add, makes a highly specialized entry into the struggle over Africa.

So hybrid, impure, and complex a text requires especially vigilant attention as it is interpreted. Modern imperialism was so global and all-encompassing that virtually nothing escaped it; besides, as I have said, the nineteenth-century contest over empire is still continuing today. Whether or not to look at the connections between cultural texts and imperialism is therefore to take a position *in fact taken-either* to study the connection in order to criticize it and think of alternatives for it, or not to study it in order to let it stand, unexamined and, presumably, unchanged. One of my reasons for writing this book is to show how far the quest for, concern about; and consciousness of overseas dominion extended-not just in Conrad but in figures we practically never think of in that connection, like Thackeray and Austen-and how enriching and important for the critic is attention to this material, not only for the obvious political reasons, but also because, as I have been arguing, this particular kind of attention allows the reader to interpret canonical nineteenth- and twentieth-century works with a newly engaged interest.

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**69**

[...]

Without empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the /70/ impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism. Every novelist and every critic or theorist of the European novel notes its institutional character. The novel is fundamentally tied to bourgeois society; in Charles Moraze's phrase, it accompanies and indeed is a part of the conquest of Western society by what he calls *les bourgeois conquérants.* No less significantly, the novel is inaugurated in England by *Robinson Crusoe,* a

work whose protagonist is the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England. True, whereas Crusoe is explicitly enabled by an ideology of overseas expansion--directly connected in style and form to the narratives of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century exploration voyages that laid the foundations of the great colonial empires--the major novels that come after Defoe, and even Defoe's later works, seem not to be single-mindedly compelled by the exciting overseas prospects. *Captain Singleton* is the story of a widely travelled pirate in India and Africa, and *Moll Flanders* is shaped by the possibility in the New World of the heroine's climactic redemption from a life of crime, but Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and Sterne do not connect their narratives so directly to the act of accumulating riches and territories abroad.

These novelists do, however, situate their work in and derive it from a carefully surveyed territorial greater Britain, and that *is* related to what Defoe so presciently began. Yet while distinguished studies of eighteenth-century English fiction--by Ian Watt, Lennard Davis, John Richetti, and Michael McKeon – have devoted considerable attention to the relationship between the novel and social space, the imperial perspective has been neglected. This is not simply a matter of being uncertain whether, for example, Richardson's minute constructions of bourgeois seduction and rapacity actually relate to British military moves against the French in India occurring at the same time. Quite clearly they do not in a literal sense; but in both realms we find common values about contest, surmounting odds and obstacles, and patience in establishing authority through the art of connecting principle with profit over rime. In other words, we need to have a critical sense of how the great spaces of *Clarissa* or *Tom Jones* are two things together: a domestic accompaniment to the imperial project for presence and control abroad, and a practical narrative about expanding and moving about in space that must be actively inhabited and enjoyed before its discipline or limits can be accepted.

I am not trying to say that the novel – or the culture in the broad sense – "caused" imperialism, but that the novel, as a cultural artefact of **/71/** bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other. Of all the major literary forms, the novel is the most recent, its emergence the most datable, its occurrence the most Western, its normative pattern of social authority the most structured; imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other.

Nor is this all. The novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopedic cultural form. Packed into it are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power. The novelistic hero and heroine exhibit the restlessness and energy characteristic of the enterprising bourgeoisie, and they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become. Novels therefore end either with the death of a hero or heroine (Julien Sorel, Emma Bovary, Bazarov, Jude the Obscure) who by virtue of overflowing energy does not tit into the orderly scheme of things, or with the protagonists' accession to stability (usually in the form of marriage or confirmed identity, as is the case with novels of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot).

But, one might ask, why give so much emphasis to novels, and to England? And how can we bridge the distance separating this solitary aesthetic form from large topics and undertakings like "culture" or "imperialism"? For one thing, by the time of World War One the British empire had

become unquestionably dominant, the result of a process that had started in the late sixteenth century; so powerful was the process and so definitive its result that, as Seeley and Hobson argued toward the end of the nineteenth century, it was the central fact in British history, and one that included many disparate activities. It is not entirely coincidental that Britain also produced and sustained a novelistic institution with no real European competitor or equivalent. France had more highly developed intellectual institutions-academies, universities, institutes, journals, and so on-for at least the first half of the nineteenth century, as a host of British intellectuals, including Arnold, Carlyle, Mill, and George Eliot, noted and lamented. But the extraordinary compensation for this discrepancy came in the steady rise and gradually undisputed dominance of the British novel. (Only as North Africa assumes a sort of metropolitan presence in French culture after 1870 do we see a comparable aesthetic and cultural formation begin to flow: this is the period when Loti, the early Gide, Daudet, Maupassant, Mille, Psichari, Malraux, the exoticists like Segalen, and of course Camus project a global concordance between the domestic and imperial situations.)

from the chapter ‘Consolidated Vision’: section 2 Jane Austen and Empire (pp. 80-97)



[...]

All the evidence says that even the most routine aspects of holding slaves on a West Indian sugar plantation were cruel stuff. And everything we know about Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery. Fanny Price reminds her cousin that after asking Sir Thomas about the slave trade, "There was such a dead silence" as to suggest that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both. That is true. But what stimulates the extraordinary discrepancy into life is the rise, decline, and fall of the British empire itself and, in its aftermath, the emergence of a postcolonial consciousness. In order more accurately to read works like *Mansfield Park,* we have to see them in the main as resisting or avoiding that other setting, which their formal inclusiveness, historical honesty, and prophetic suggestiveness cannot completely hide. In time there would no longer be a dead silence when slavery was spoken of, and the subject became central to a new understanding of what Europe was.

It would be silly to expect Jane Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist or a newly liberated slave. Yet what I have called the rhetoric of blame, so often now employed by subaltern, minority, or disadvantaged voices, attacks her, and others like her, retrospectively, for being white, privileged, insensitive, complicit. Yes, Austen belonged to a slave-owning society, but do we therefore jettison her novels as so many trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery? Not at all, I would argue, if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation to make connections, to deal with as much of the evidence as possible, fully and actually, to read what is there or not there, above all, to see complementarity and interdependence instead of isolated, venerated, or formalized experience that excludes and forbids the hybridizing intrusions of human history.

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