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Critical Distance: The Postcolonial Novel and the Dilemma of Exile

David S. Morgan
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by David S. Morgan entitled "Critical Distance: The Postcolonial Novel and the Dilemma of Exile." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

<div align="right">Allen Dunn, Major Professor</div>

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Amy J. Elias, Urmila Seshagiri, Stephen Blackwell

<div align="right">Accepted for the Council:</div>

<div align="right"><u>Carolyn R. Hodges</u></div>

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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A Dissertation Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David S. Morgan
December 2009

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I argue that Edward Said's theory of exile offers a stronger version of human agency than do other postcolonial theories of identity which rely on poststructural theory, and therefore, his theory of exile provides a useful model for postcolonial criticism. His theory of exile animates almost all of his work from his earliest literary criticism to his later theoretical texts. By "exile," Said refers to the experience of peoples displaced from their homes for political reasons and to the experience of intellectual homelessness that a critic must have in order to be free of the constraints of cultural, ideological, and professional entanglements. However, he insists that exile is a traumatic experience that does not lead to transcendence but to a greater awareness of the contingency of human experience.

In my first chapter, I establish how Said's theory of exile allows him to appropriate some of the lessons of poststructuralism without relinquishing the strong sense of human agency which drives his political commitments. In the following three chapters, I examine Said's relationship to three novelists – Joseph Conrad, V.S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie – to consider how his theory of exile is developed in relation to their work. In Joseph Conrad, Said found a fellow-traveler whose extreme depictions of the predicament of exile, especially the depiction of language's inability to ameliorate the isolation of exile through the production of new affiliations, remind Said that exile is an experience of trauma. Said had a publicly contentious relationship with V.S. Naipaul, but their works bear strikingly similar descriptions of the relationship between exile and writing. They both insist that exilic writing can lead to valuable self-knowledge.

However, Said insists that writing is an act of engagement which leads to new affiliations, but Naipaul's writing offers a place of solace which he can reconsider his life with clearer vision. Said very publicly defended Salman Rushdie and wrote admirably of his project. Rushdie's theory of migrancy mirrors Said's theory of exile by attempting to construct a complex relationship to the metropolitan center without surrendering strategic opposition to various forms of oppression.

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Chapter One: Exile as a Model for Critical Postcolonial Agency

Necessarily, then, I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But, provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity. (Edward Said "Reflections on Exile")

Exile and the Problem of Agency in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory – that body of theoretical work, distinct from the more historicist postcolonial studies, that has sought to chart the historical effects of colonialism and criticize their persistence in contemporary culture, politics, and philosophy – has been plagued by a problem of agency that undermines its own political and ethical project. In attempting to articulate theories of the postcolonial that both critique various forms of imperialism and open a space for such critique, its theorists have struggled to acknowledge the resistant power of the individual postcolonial agent. The agency of those victimized by colonialism has been reduced in these descriptions to the after-effects of colonial power itself, their distinctive responses (moral, political, and even aesthetic) choked out by the all-encompassing reach of colonial power. This problem appears in the work of many postcolonial theorists, but it may be most clearly exemplified in the work of the three figures so prominent in the field that Robert Young has famously called them the "holy trinity" of postcolonial theory: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said. These theorists share the postcolonial project of theorizing the effects of colonial power and critiquing its various manifestations, though they would not each embrace the label 'postcolonial theorist.' (Bhabha may be the only one of the three to actively engage the term). The work of each of these thinkers faces

this challenge by describing the ways in which the postcolonial subject is constructed by imperial ideologies while also suggesting (to varying degrees of success) how such a subject might resist the constricting pressures of ideology.

While each of these theorists makes significant contributions to the theories of the postcolonial, I will conclude that it is Said, in his notion of exile, that offers the most promise for achieving the ethical and political goals of the postcolonial project because what he call criticism insists on a strong sense of human agency as a grounds for political and ethical action. Therefore, I will take Said's description of exile as a model that challenges the postcolonial critic, in particular, to live up to the ethical and political goals of the postcolonial project, but I also take it as a general description of a postcolonial subjectivity that may be appropriated by the non-intellectual as well. After giving to exile a fuller theorization than does Said and comparing its critical, resistant potential to other descriptions of postcolonial subjectivity, I will turn to the work of three novelists: Joseph Conrad, V.S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie. Each of these figures writes fiction which mirrors certain aspects of Said's exilic project and which suggests different ways that exile opens the possibility of resistant criticism.

*   *   *

Gayatri Spivak's famous and controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and her subsequent revision of its argument in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* clearly demonstrate the problem of agency in postcolonial theory. In these essays, she describes the representation of the "sexed subaltern subject." By emphasizing the "subaltern," a term she borrows from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and from a group of Indian historians known as the Subaltern Studies Group who attempt to revise the history of

India from the perspective of the lower-class peasantry, Spivak broadens her analysis to include all lower-class subjects, especially postcolonial women, whom she feels have been neglected by the classical Marxist approach of the Subaltern Studies Group. The sexed subaltern is among the most vulnerable of postcolonial subjects, and ultimately Spivak argues that the sexed subaltern is trapped by the ideological representations of both benevolent radical Western philosophers as well as those of imperial powers because they each essentialize the subaltern in order to appropriate her voice. That is, the practitioners of what she calls "radical Western philosophy" justify their intrusion into the postcolonial world by constructing a passive feminine subaltern that must be saved from an indigenous patriarchy. Spivak takes as her chief example of the subaltern-essentializing impulse of radical Western philosophy two of the most purportedly anti-essentialist thinkers of twentieth century philosophy: Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Despite the anti-essentialist thrust of their work on Western subjects, when they turn to subaltern subjects (prisoners and psychiatric patients for Foucault and the working class for Deleuze), Spivak argues, they create a homogenous subaltern subject by conflating two senses of the term "representation," which can be glossed as "speaking for" (in the sense that representatives in a republic speak for their constituents) and "speaking of" (in the sense that writers attempt to represent the world outside of the self).

By conflating these two senses of representation, Foucault and Deleuze efface their own positions as Western intellectuals relative to the subaltern subjects that their works address. This is made apparent in what Spivak believes are Deleuze's disingenuous invocations of 'the workers' struggle' and Foucault's insistent privileging of the experience of prisoners and psychiatric patients. Spivak implies that these two

supposedly radical philosophers are unaware of the implications of their own position as Western intellectuals. Particularly, she says "Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor" (275). Thus, Deleuze and Foucault represent themselves as transparent figures capable of representing subalterns as knowable, unified subjectivities that have no need to speak for themselves.

In this way, radical Western philosophers like Deleuze and Foucault share with British imperialists a desire to represent (in both senses) the subaltern subject to serve its own political purposes. In the context of British imperialism, this "epistemic violence" is exemplified in the constitution of the colonial subject as Other. Here, Spivak turns to the Hindu practice of Sati (the self-immolation of widows) to illustrate how the sexed subaltern subject is simultaneously given and refused her own voice. According to her, the self-immolation of widows is an exceptional practice that silences the sexed subaltern subject: "Even as it [sati] operates the most subtle general release from individual agency, the sanctioned suicide peculiar to woman draws its ideological strength by *identifying* individual agency with the supraindividual" (303). Thus, sati can be understood to perpetuate patriarchy by attributing to the sexed subaltern's individual agency the heroic desire both to join her husband in death and to refuse to be claimed by other (possibly colonial) males. This construction of the sexed subaltern masks the ways in which it enforces patriarchical subordination by speaking for her.

In the rhetoric of the civilizing mission of British imperialism in India, sati represented the most cruel and savage of Hindu practices, and thus, protecting Hindu widows became a priority for colonial officials. Spivak phrases the problem this way:

"White men are saving brown women from brown men" (296). As this clever formulation of the problematic suggests, the prevention of sati became a way for British imperialism to consolidate its power of the colony. By representing itself as transparently benevolent in the face of Hindu barbarism, British imperialism was further able to justify its control of India. This consolidation of power, however, was not merely a matter of putting a moral face on the practices of imperialism and colonialism. It also depended on an appropriation of the sexed subaltern voice through representation which, in turn, allowed British imperialism to speak for her, and sati is no mere cultural practice (noble or barbaric) but an "ideological battleground" claimed by both Hindu patriarchy and British imperialism.

Therefore, according to Spivak, the sexed subaltern subject is caught between contradictory enunciative positions that prevent the possibility of political will, and Spivak must conclude that the subaltern cannot speak. It is among her most controversial claims, and in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she has recently backed away from it, saying, "It was an inadvisable remark" (308). Nonetheless, Spivak's analysis of the ways in which British imperialism, Hindu patriarchy, and Western radical philosophy construct the subaltern for their own ideological benefits does much to illustrate the ways in which representation can work to erase the possibility of agency. More concerned with criticizing the ideological representations of the subaltern in British imperialism and radical Western philosophy than with theorizing the possibility of a subaltern critique, however, she fails to imagine a discursive setting in which the sexed subaltern might be able to speak of and for herself. Despite a consistent and open effort to map her own enunciative position relative to other philosophers and to the subaltern, Spivak also does

not account for how her own volition makes possible her critique. As Bart Moore-Gilbert notes,

> While one must acknowledge the force of Spivak's argument about the
> dangers of constructing a "monolithic collectivity of 'women'" in the list of
> the oppressed whose unfractured subjectivity allows them to speak for
> themselves, there seem to be equivalent dangers in seeing the contemporary
> female subaltern, equally monolithically, as *incapable* of coming to the point
> of voice or self-representation. (106)

Spivak's formulation of the sexed subaltern's voicelessness threatens to undermine not only the ideological projects of imperialism and Western philosophy but also her own project because she takes no account of the ways in which individual agency may interrupt and perpetuate the ideological construction of subaltern subjectivity.

Like Spivak's, Homi Bhabha's work prioritizes the construction of subjectivity in his critique of imperial ideology. He ultimately reaches a less pessimistic conclusion about the possibilities of postcolonial agency than does Spivak, but his theory of "hybridity" gives to the postcolonial subject an ambivalent agency that takes its place in the "in-between" spaces of the colonial encounter. The collection of essays *The Location of Culture* (1994) develops a theory of postcolonial agency that relies heavily on Jacques Derrida's notion of *differánce* which Bhabha uses to reveal the ambivalence of colonial power and to deconstruct it. His most explicit description of the ambivalent self-deconstruction of colonial authority appears in the essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." Here he describes the ways that colonial authorities attempt to produce colonial subjects who are replicas of their rulers – primarily through

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education. This produces an incomplete copy of colonial authority by not giving full access to the powers and privileges of colonial authority to the colonized subject, what Bhabha describes as "almost, but not quite," and so colonial mimicry disrupts the civilizing mission of colonization (86). The colonial mimic, then, is a "strategic failure" because he fails fully to assimilate into colonial culture. The mimic's failure, however, threatens the very authority which it resembles. This is a result of what he names "the metonymy of presence" in which the mimic attempts to appropriate the presence of colonial authority by imitating (and being taught to do so by the colonizer) portions of colonial identity but not being allowed full access to it. Thus, he says, the colonial mimic "is an effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (87).

The resistant power in Bhabha's hybrid formulation of colonial mimicry is the result of the partial, metonymic imitation of colonial authority that marks the slippage between the colonial desire to be imitated and its desire to maintain the difference between colonizer and colonized. That is, the colonized resist by embodying the mimetic ambivalence inherent in colonial authority, thereby destabilizing it. The colonial mimic destroys the narcissistic gaze of colonial authority which, in this sense, can be said to produce its own resistance in the colonial encounter. Moreover, in mimicry, Bhabha has attempted to name a form of postcolonial resistance that allows for the possibility of a postcolonial agency that does not rely on liberal, individualist modes of action. In "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency," he describes a "postcolonial contramodernity" that resembles but predates the critiques of logocentrism made in postmodern theory and culture (175). Therefore, he says his project is "[driven] by the

subaltern history of the margins of modernity – rather than by the failures of logocentrism – I have tried, in some small measure to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial" (175). Bhabha, then, attempts to label a postcolonial agency that takes account of the ambivalent productions of colonial discourse while not seeking a postcolonial oppositional totality. He says,

> My contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative 'unpicking' and incommensurable, insurgent relinking. It singularizes the 'totality' of authority by suggesting that agency requires a grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it requires movement and manoeuvre, but it does not require a temporality of continuity or accumulation; it requires direction and contingent closure but no teleology or holism. (185)

The power of postcolonial agency, as Bhabha describes it, lies in its inability and refusal to be recognized by colonial authority, its liminal presence "outside of the sentence" of modern teleological history (182). As the manifestation of an agency whose only presence is "outside the sentence," Bhabha's notion of an ambivalently hybrid postcolonial subject marks the absence of postcolonial agency as much as it can be said to illustrate its existence. The mimic, as a prime example of Bhabha's postcolonial agent, has no clear course of action that would allow speech or action to resist the power of colonial authority or any potential to imagine such an agency. His theory of postcolonial agency dramatizes the failures of agency in the structure of colonial authority as much as

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it defines its resistant potential. The flaw revealed in mimicry is more an accident than it is a political program.

The work of Edward Said has been criticized for some of the same ambivalences that mar Bhabha's theoretical project. Long the focus of such criticisms, his landmark study *Orientalism* helped to initiate one of the primary forms of postcolonial criticism, colonial discourse analysis, by relying heavily on Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the systematic ways in which Western colonial powers represent the Orient. He describes his reason for utilizing Foucault this way:

> My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (*Orientalism* 3)

Orientalism is thus a mode of thinking about the colonial Other, an academic discipline, and a matter of political policy towards the Orient. However, it threatens to leave little room for subjects (colonial or anti-colonial) to resist or critique the ideological discourses in which they may find themselves. And this brings into the project of *Orientalism* a tension between the mapping of Orientalist discourse and the individual subject's (Said's, in this case) attempt to critique the power of that discourse. James Clifford noted this tension in his famous review of *Orientalism* (reprinted now as "On *Orientalism*" in his study of ethnography's relation to literature and art, *The Predicament of Culture*). He describes Said's "basic values" as "cosmopolitan" and indicts the argument of Orientalism for resorting to "humanist common denominators" that "bypass local cultural

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codes that make personal experience articulate" (261,263). That is, because he relies on humanistic generalizations to describe human experience, Said is unable to account for the local particularities of that experience. Further, he says, quoting Said,

> He appears to endorse the anthropological commonplace that 'the more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision.' (263)

The detachment and generosity of Said's critical perspective, in Clifford's view, are thus a "confusion" that undermines the Foucauldian promise of the work by erasing important local differences in favor of humanist generalizations.

This criticism of his work is where readers of Said who focus on the more polemical of his postcolonial writings have often stopped. They suggest that Said's work reduces cultural and political activity to the determinism of colonial ideology. However, to understand his critical oeuvre in this way, as only or primarily concerned with the matter of colonial discourse, is to dismiss the significant contributions it represents to the broader concerns of critical agency. As Abdirahman Hussein argues in his intellectual biography *Edward Said: Criticism and Society*, the reception of *Orientalism* has produced "a major discontinuity in [Said's] career." Chief among the consequences of this "cock-eyed reception" is the common view that "*Orientalism* (and by implication Said's criticism as a whole) is Foucauldian in conception" (13). Such understandings of Said's work neglect his consistent commitment to understanding human agency and its relation to history from his earliest work in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* through his work on postcolonial themes in texts like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* to his

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explicit endorsement of humanist critical practice in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*.

Thus, Clifford's critique of *Orientalism* (a much more sensitive reading of Said than the one I have just described) should be understood to mark a primary tension that inhabits almost all of Said's work and is common to much postcolonial theory, a tension between generalized descriptions of culture and individual critical and comparative judgment, or, to put it another way, a tension between a potentially determinist poststructural anti-humanism and a liberationist enlightenment humanism. To Said's credit, he did not allow this important tension to become mere contradiction (or "confusion" to use Clifford's term), but in returning to this problem of agency over and over again in his later work, he made the tension a productive one that is embodied in his work on the intellectual, the postcolonial, and culture.

In particular, it is Said's description and use of the notion of exile that has provided for him a mode of engaging the tension that I have just described. He consistently called on his exilic background, as a Palestinian intellectual educated and living in the West, to explain the enunciative position from which he critiques the culture and politics of Western imperialism. In the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, which he describes as an "exile's book," he makes a claim that largely summarizes his view of exile. He explains that as an Arab who lives in the West, "belonging to both sides of the imperial divide [enables him] to understand them more easily" (xxvi, xxvii). This Saidian notion of exile thematizes the split I have been describing, between generalized cultural descriptions and individual actions within such cultural frameworks, that is only implied in the work of other postcolonial theorists. Thus, he has named a space and a

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subjectivity that allow the postcolonial subject to critique power from a distanced

perspective while also acknowledging the subject's grounding in the cultural and political

world.

The figure of exile animates almost all of Said's work, but it is most explicitly

engaged in two essays, "Reflections on Exile" and "Criticism and Exile," and in the

collection of essays *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Taken together, these essays

develop a theory of exile which allows for a criticism that is both engaged with and

distanced from its worldly situation. In "Reflections on Exile," Said aims to criticize a

romanticized or heroic version of exile. He, therefore, begins by distinguishing between

the exile of the twentieth-century postcolonial subjects and that of nineteenth century

artists. He says,

> But the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears
>
> stressing, scale: our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the
>
> quasitheological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the
>
> refugee, the displaced person, mass migration. (174)

The magnitude of twentieth-century postcolonial exile, he therefore argues, makes it

qualitatively different from that of nineteenth-century romantics or that of Euro-

American modernist artists who sought the displacement of exile, or at least expatriation,

in order to gain a tenuous separation from their home cultures. Thus, he says, "exile

cannot be made to serve notions of humanism" (174). Its unbearably historical character

takes it beyond the recuperative attempts of those who would seek to appropriate it for

ethical purposes. In order to understand exile, one "must set aside Joyce and Nabokov

[writers who, according to Said, romanticized their individual experiences of exile] and

think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created" (175).

The experience of exile, as Said describes it, is one defined by intense feelings of loneliness and dislocation that require creative strategies of survival that may result in the fetishization of exile or in the desire to assimilate the culture of a new home. The crucial challenge of exile, then, is to take up an ethical position that resists triumphalism and assimilation while not rejecting the possibility of affirmative human community.

Said finds this a valuable position from which to view the world critically. He insists on the historical and existential trauma of exile in order to illustrate the unavoidable binds in which exiles find themselves. So, he prefers the term 'exile' which "originated in the age old practice of banishment" and carries "a touch of solitude and spirituality" to the more politicized (and deterministic?) term 'refugee' when describing the experience of those moved from their homes because the latter emphasizes the individual experience of displacement (181). He says,

> Necessarily, then, I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But, provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity. (184)

Such scrupulous subjectivity cannot be cultivated in the fetish of exile that rejects human community nor in the uncritical adoption of cultural norms, but instead, it comes as the result of the "plurality of vision" afforded to exiles by their awareness of multiple

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cultures (186). Thus, he argues in "Introduction: Criticism and Exile" that the exilic position produces "an affiliation maintained in conjunction with critique" (xxxiii).

It is the "scrupulous subjectivity" of exile – exile as an alternative rather than privilege – which is the chief subject of Said's work on the intellectual and criticism. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, for instance, Said returns to his conception of exile in order to articulate the intellectual's need for critical distance. Intellectual exile is a metaphoric state of consciousness rather than a condition of physical exile which prevents the intellectual from becoming too comfortable within any institutional home or under any ideology:

> Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You [the would-be exilic intellectual] cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and alas, you can never arrive, be at one with your new home or situation. (53)

Here, Theodor Adorno, whose fragmented *Minima Moralia* registers the unsettling experience of exile, is his example of the critically productive aspects of exile. Elsewhere, and often, it is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, which according to Said could not have been completed without the distanced perspective of Auerbach's World War II exile in Turkey – a separation that both freed him from the institutional constraints of European academia and spurred the critic's recuperative desire to remember a home that he no longer occupied. As Said says in "Secular Criticism," the essay that serves as the introduction to *The World, the Text, and the Critic*,

> [*Mimesis*] owed its existence to the very fact of Oriental, non-Occidental exile

and homelessness. And if this is so, then *Mimesis* itself is not, as it has frequently been taken to be, only a massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural traditions, but also a work built upon *a critically important alienation from it*, a work whose conditions and circumstances of existence are not immediately derived from the culture it describes with such extraordinary insight and brilliance but built rather on an agonizing distance from it.

(8, emphasis added)

What is common to the exilic experiences of Adorno and Auerbach, as well as others whom Said admires, is the critical subjectivity produced by the separation from home brought about by physical displacement. The subjectivity of exile, then, is a result of a scrupulous awareness of one's homelessness that prevents exiles, both literal and metaphorical, from taking advantage of the benefits of home and which gives them a special, plural vision in their experience of separation. The exile can marshal the experience of multiple cultures in the service of comparative judgment as the basis of willfull, affiliative associations. So, he is able to make use of his physical separation to understand critically his position in the world. Likewise, exilic subjectivity allows individuals to stand apart from the places they inhabit in order to critique prevailing ideologies. Thus critical distantiation is coupled with a grounded awareness of the exile's current positionality that opens the possibility of political and ethical action. Further, it is the exilic narrative of loss that grounds historically the distanced perspective of exile. The exile necessarily understands that he is 'from' somewhere and that he now lives somewhere different. In contrast to Spivak's description of the sexed subaltern who is trapped in manipulative discourses and Bhabha's colonial mimic whose only resistance is

ultimately ambivalent, Said's exile both acknowledges its embeddedness in a network of discursive powers and resists them through exilic criticism. Such a notion of exile, then, attempts to describe the dialectical tension that Bruce Robbins has called "situatedness-in-displacement" ("Comparative Cosmopolitanism" 173).

The anthropologist James Clifford has likewise been concerned with the critical potentials of displacement. However, unlike the postcolonial theorists I have discussed, he is more concerned with the production of knowledge in cross-cultural encounters, with the way anthropologists represent their subjects, for example. He has put forth the notion of the 'traveler,' in some ways similar to Said's exile, in an attempt to map the position of the authors of cultural descriptions. Clifford therefore argues for a "traveling theory" that accounts for what he calls the "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" of postcolonial experience. He suggests that the relationship between dwelling and traveling be understood comparatively in order to account for the varieties of intercultural experience in a postcolonial world. He therefore rejects the traditional anthropologist's conception of 'field' as a "special kind of localized dwelling" usually identified by the image of the anthropologist's tent in the primitive village, which locates the object of cultural study in stable, usually primitive, locales (*Routes* 21). In its place, Clifford suggests the trope of the 'hotel/motel' as a supplement to the 'field' in order to "rethink cultures as sites of dwelling and travel, to take travel knowledges seriously" (31). The hotel trope, he says, "frame[s] . . . encounters between people to some degree away from home" (31). However, because of its association with male bourgeois travel, Clifford further suggests the image of the motel as a way of understanding contemporary postmodern cultural spaces because it evokes a constancy of motion and travel that describes a "relay or node

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rather than a site of encounter between coherent cultural subjects" (32). Clifford's traveling theory emphasizes the movement of individuals and cultures and destabilizes notions of culture and subjectivity in such a way as to undermine the confidence of privileged cultural interpreters such as traditional anthropologists: it emphasizes the ambivalence of cultural experience and focuses on the local relationships brought about by the movement and interaction of traveling people(s) in unstable and unhomely places without respect to national borders.

While Clifford does much to displace the cultural authority of traditional anthropology and studies of culture that have often supported imperial power, his traveling theory does not suggest a mode of resisting such power because it presents a substantially weaker model of subjectivity and agency than does Said. Clifford ultimately offers only localized understandings of cultural interaction because his theory lacks a comparative framework that would give the traveling subject the geographical and historical grounding necessary to moral, ethical, and political judgment, a judgment enabled by the kind of stability and commitment that he mistrusts. Thus, blown about by the winds of global capitalism with no place to dwell, the traveler is capable only of thick description rather than comparative judgment and critique. By reducing postcolonial subjects to travelers, he refuses them the specific positionality that gives their subjectivity its force outside of, or at least on the margins of, culture.

The Saidian view of exile, on the other hand, emphasizes exilic displacement and emplacement over the constancy of movement in travel, and it is grounded in the postcolonial experience of loss of home which gives to it both its comparative critical distance and its ability to act in the world. Exiles, unlike travelers, bear the mark of

history in their personal narratives of loss and thus desire the stability of belonging, but that belonging must come as the result of critical, affiliative efforts to participate in collectivities. The image of exile theorized and embodied in Said's work presents us with a model of an affirmative, though not unlimited, version of human agency based in the traumatic experience of loss that is the beginning of exile. Unlike Spivak's description of a voiceless subalternity, Bhabha's ambivalent textually subversive hybridity, or Clifford's destabilized traveling subject, Saidian exile offers both an understanding of the world and a model of agency that can achieve and/or revise that understanding. I'll now turn to the question of how subjectivity of exile animates Said's project.

Exile and Criticism: The Intellectual Challenge of Saidian Exile

The importance of exile as a structuring experience and enunciative position for Said's critical work cannot be underestimated. The language of exile informs his criticism (both literary criticism and political critique since the former provides an example of the latter) and his own critical rhetoric. It will be my contention that Said's notion of criticism is so inflected by his understanding of exile that it might best be labeled 'exilic criticism.' This is most clearly seen in the collection of polemical literary theoretical essays *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. I have already mentioned the way in which the example of Erich Auerbach illustrates the positionality of exile for Said, but it is in several key Saidian concepts exemplified by Auerbach's exile – secular criticism, filiation/affiliation, and worldliness – that he articulates most explicitly the character of exilic criticism.

In the series of essays that make up that text, Said argues for what he calls a "secular criticism" over (and some would say against) uncritical solidarity. Secular

criticism, as he defines it, is in opposition to "religious criticism" which is characterized by claims of finality (or infinite deferral) beyond the capacity of human knowledge. Such religious critics are those who resort to "appeals to the extrahuman, the vague abstraction, the divine, the esoteric and secret" in their descriptions of human experience (291). Religious criticism refuses to investigate or account for its worldly positioning, and it is exemplified in political movements like Arab nationalism but also in the work of theorists like Jacques Derrida who, according to Said, concern themselves only with matters of pure textuality rather than the worldly situations and implications of literary texts.

Secular criticism, on the other hand, is based on a grounded critical distantiation of the critic from her critical object. The secular critic is called upon to resist, though not necessarily refuse, all ideological entanglements – cultural, political, and professional. This means that the work of secular criticism cannot be determined by a particular cultural perspective, political objective, or theoretical system. To illustrate the way in which such a critical stance might be achieved, Said employs the notion of "affiliation," a notion that, appropriately enough, he both endorses and resists. Affiliation attempts to reclaim the cultural authority of filiation, the apparently natural social connections family, culture, or nation, by constructing associative collectivities. Embodying this filiative desire is modern literature which suffered from what might be called a crisis of filiation. Faced with the fear of an inability to produce a following generation, modern writers charted the loss of certain filial bonds and affiliative attempts to recuperate them. This, for example, according to Said, is how we are to read T.S. Eliot's embrace of the English church.

More than just a crisis of modern literature, the turn from filiation to affiliation is characteristic of modernity at large, "a passage from nature to culture" (20). He says,

> Thus if a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority—involving obedience, fear, love, respect, class, and instinctual conflict—the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into that seem to be transpersonal forms—such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and "life," whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society. (20)

Affiliation, then, promises a critical reappropriation of filial authority that has the potential to free the modern individual from the uncritical ideologies of filiative relationships. It is a source for potential human originality and creativity which in turn opens up such affiliative relationships to criticism because they have historically definite beginnings as opposed to ahistorical or theological origins.

The effects of affiliation are generally but not completely salutary. Where filiative relationships persisted through a hierarchical relationship of tradition, subordinating the son to the father, affiliative relationships have a communal, but not hierarchical, structure that privileges the affiliative collectivity over the individual. Affiliation thus establishes a new cultural system that while new at its beginning has the potential of ossifying, of becoming a de-historicized system which demands uncritical assent from its members. This, according to Said, is the situation of contemporary literary theory, particularly in the Anglo-American academy, and this is why, having identified filiation with nature and affiliation with culture, Said adds another parallel to the filiation/affiliation dialectic:

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culture and system. In literary critical terms, culture comes to represent the immediate and filiative culture of a text, author, or critic while system implies the affiliatively acquired theory or mode of literary interpretation that may be applied to a text. The critic, as the title of a particularly polemical essay on Foucault and Jacques Derrida describes, is charged with creating "Criticism between Culture and System."

According to Said, the critical work of Foucault and Derrida resists the domestication of theoretical systems that plagues Anglo-American criticism by "[attempting] to devise what is a form of critical openness and repeatedly renewed theoretical resourcefulness" which allows their work both to produce knowledge and open a field for critical exploration as well as "to avoid if possible both the self-confirming operations of culture and the wholly predictable monotony of a disengaged critical system" (191). Even so, Said does not fully endorse the philosophical and political implications of their criticism. Said credits Derrida's method of deconstruction for what he sees as its exposing of the myths of presence, essence, and metaphysical transcendence as mere rhetorical ploys meant to privilege a stable subject which have often been used to buttress oppressive hierarchies. However, he argues that Derrida has not taken great enough account of the material implications of the hierarchies that he dismantles, and in so doing, has reduced the lived experience of ideological oppression to a rhetorical or textual effect. Thus, he negates the potential of agency to act in the world. He ignores the authorial intention that motivates his own work and might also motivate the work of others.

Likewise, Foucault is praised for unmasking the ways in which discourses have been constructed as methods of control, but he too is a target of criticism for reducing

material realities to textuality. Said is certainly more amenable to Foucault's project,

having made such use of it in *Orientalism*, than to Derrida's project because Foucault at

least concerns himself with historical conditions. Still, like Derrida, Foucault fails to

account for human will and the effects that it can have on historical change. Whereas

Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics revealed human agency to be a self-

deconstructing impossibility, Foucault reduced the drama of history to discursive systems

of power in which human agency was merely (and necessarily) a pawn. Foucault, then,

accounts for the ubiquitous presence of power in discursive systems but not for the ways

in which power might be motivated as oppression or resistance. Hussein aptly

summarizes Said's critique of Foucault this way:

> as a doubly-alienated intellectual – one who, though professionally affiliated
>
> to the great institutions of high culture in the West, is obliged both by his
>
> subaltern filiation and by his commitment to human dignity to effect a trenchant
>
> critique of that culture's insidious conservatism and imperialism – he is unwilling
>
> to surrender freedom of intention and action to the bureaucratic machinery of
>
> impersonalized power. (199)

The determinism that is inherent in Foucault's description of power is unsatisfying from

Said's perspective because it erases the potential for critical resistance to power.

Instead of the isolated textuality of Derrida or the discursive determinism of

Foucault, Said posits a criticism that is secular but also worldly. As applied to literary

criticism, worldliness implies that literary critics concern themselves with placing literary

texts in their historical contexts and investigating their relationships in those contexts. It

also suggests that critics live up to the historical responsibility that they place on their

literary objects. 'The world' represents both a discursive field in which agents and texts operate and to which they respond *and* the material and historical pressures that influence that field. Therefore, even though secular criticism is built on an affiliative relationship with its historical context, it is not utterly divorced from its worldly setting. The secular critic cannot simply pick and choose the history with which she will affiliate herself.

The argument for secular criticism has implications that go beyond the relatively narrow focus on literary theory and criticism in the essays of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. In fact, Said generalizes them into a broader understanding of the social role of the intellectual. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, he describes his own intellectual practice in remarkably personal terms:

> as an intellectual I present my concerns before an audience or constituency, but this is not just a mater of how I articulate them, but also of what I myself, as someone who is trying to advance the cause of freedom and justice, also represent. I say or write these things because after much reflection they are what I believe; and I also want to persuade others of this view. There is therefore this quite complicated mix between the private and public worlds, my own history, values, writing and positions as they derive from my experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how these enter into the social world where people debate and make decisions about war and freedom and justice. (12)

Said develops his description of exile and the intellectual as well as his argument for "secular criticism" as a way of describing, as a metaphor for, his own critical practice. He consistently accounts for his own positioning relative to his critical object so that even critical work on even the most rarefied subject takes on an autobiographical dimension

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for him. So he declares his filiative and affiliative commitments even as he distances himself from them for critical perspective. Even a highly critical of reader of Said such as Aijaz Ahmad must recognize the way in which his criticism works autobiographically to map his own critical subjectivity. Consider his description of *Orientalism* in his book *In Theory: Nation, Race, Class*:

> *Orientalism* marks such a radical break in Said's own intellectual career precisely because the *writing* of this book was an attempt at coming to terms with what it meant for him to be a Palestinian living and teaching in the USA, armed with not much more than a humanist intellectual training, a successful career as a literary critic, and a splendid mastery over wide areas of European literary textuality. (161)

For a Marxist/nativist such as Ahmad, the autobiographical impulse of Said's work is a special kind of indulgent bourgeois individualism popular in the Western academy. The author of *Orientalism* is an "upper-layer bourgeous" of the kind "who has typically mobilized the accumulations achieved during the colonial period . . . to launch upon collaborative competition with the metropolitan bourgeois, from the margins of global capitalism" (210). In the same way, he criticizes the tone of Said's early work in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* and *Conrad: The Fiction of Autobiography* for being "essentially cerebral" (162). "Not much more than the mind is engaged" in that work, he claims (162). We might be willing to grant Ahmad's highly subjective description of the tone of Said's early work. They are indeed more explicitly philosophical than books like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. However, we should not be tempted to accept his claim that Said's more philosophical texts are mere "academic" (in the pejorative

sense) intellectual exercises with no bearing on Said's more politically inflected works. As Hussein argues throughout his intellectual biography of Said, *Beginnings* and *Conrad* are space clearing texts that prepare the philosophical ground for Said's later critical interventions. It is in those texts that Said makes his own beginning, insisting on human will in history rather than theological origins, a beginning which paved the way for his description of criticism and its relation to human agency.

Ahmad contends that Said has abdicated his political responsibility as an intellectual by turning his back on political solidarity with the postcolonial subaltern in favor of critical distance and humanistic ideals. In his view, Said is ultimately ambivalent about the political consequences of his own work, and the chief example of this ambivalence is found in the fact that he deploys "Foucauldian and Auerbachian stances *simultaneously*" (166, italics in original). Ahmad takes Said to task for refusing to choose between these stances as well as the political stances that those philosophical positions imply. This accounts for the emergence and popularity of Said's work, through *Orientalism*, in the context of a first world intelligentsia rather than in the context of resistance movements in postcolonial nations. Said and most migrant postcolonial intellectuals are little more than native informants in Ahmad's view, and their political proclamations are little more than pretensions to radical politics. Pointedly, he says apropos of his critique of Said,

> The pain of any ethical life is that all fundamental bondings, affiliations,
> stable political positions, require that one ceases to desire, voraciously,
> everything that is available in the world; that one learns to deny oneself some
> of the pleasures, rewards, consumptions, even affiliations of certain sorts. (219)

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Ahmad paints Said as an uncommitted, unstable, disengaged bourgeois intellectual who desires to 'have it all' thanks to his fashionable political radicality that garners him acceptance in the liberal Western academy. This, of course, calls into question Said's political engagements as mere performance.

Ahmad's understanding of Said's work is important for the contrasts that it presents to the exilic character of Said's general project. As Hussein argues of Said's general reception, Ahmad misreads *Orientalism* and Said's criticism as Foucauldian projects, and thus, he criticizes Said for failing to fully trace the implications of Foucault's work. More importantly, though, he mistakes the dialectical tension of Said's exilic positionality for 'ambivalence' in much the same way that Clifford mistakes it for 'confusion.' Ambivalence suggests, for Ahmad, that Said's critical affiliations are a kind of political or theoretical consumerism under which the critic is able to pick and choose the truths that he will accept and the commitments he will make without regard to their possible contradiction. Said, however, while idiosyncratically selective about his philosophical and political commitments, has remained committed to humanistic ideals that run through each of his individual affiliations.

These places of ambivalence, confusion, or more accurately dialectical tension mark the presence of critical consciousness in Said's work. This is also where I locate Said's subjectivity of exile. Like the notion of exile I described in the first section, Saidian criticism makes an intellectual home for itself in the displacement of critical practice but refuses to idealize that displacement as a mode of escape from the material and historical pressures of the world. Said's exilic position, then, is hardly the disengaged position of bourgeois intellectualism. While eclectic, his position is one that allows deep

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personal commitments as well as critical distance. His work formally embodies the tensions of exilic subjectivity in its many dialectical tensions that point to potential affiliative relationships (for texts, authors, and critics) and to the material and historical world in which those relationships might be formed.

This position in many ways resembles the notion Amanda Anderson has identified, in *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, as "critical distance," the practices of detachment that have marked the project of enlightenment. According to Anderson, these practices, which include "science, critical reason, disinterestedness, and realism, but also a set of practices of the self, ranging from stoicism to cosmopolitanism to dandyism," are aspirational attempts to cultivate detachment. That is, they are practices that reach toward detachment without assuming the possibility of unfettered objectivity. Anderson advances the notion of critical distance in defense of the project of enlightenment against the critiques of the so-called "hermeneutics of suspicion" which suggest that all claims to objectivity mask the efforts of dominant groups to maintain their power.

The perspective of Saidian exile, as I have described it, shares the aspirational component of Anderson's notion of critical distance, its desire for a broader understanding of the world as well as its desire to continue a project of human liberation. It accepts that objectivity is not achievable but, nonetheless, attempts to see the world from a perspective beyond that of the individual self. Exilic criticism, however, is a good deal more favorable to a particularist perspective than is Anderson's critical distance. Anderson's description of detachment privileges the distanced perspective over the local perspective by aspiring to a sense of *complete* detachment. Said, on the other hand,

advances a notion of critical distance that aspires to a perspective which is broader and more varied than that available to a single culture or individual. However, it has no desire whatsoever to escape the worldly connections that prohibit detachment. Anderson may willingly admit that objectivity or complete detachment is not ultimately possible. Nonetheless, she contends, it is desirable. Instead of objectivity, complete or incomplete, Saidian exile suggests a comparative vision that is generated by the multiple perspectives of exile. It is a perspective which is broader than the individual but more localized than the so-called "God's-eye-view." Exilic criticism, then, insists on the secularity of its aspirations. The ends of exilic criticism, the future which it imagines, are fundamentally the product of particular human efforts, and therefore, they have no other-worldly aspirations. It will be the subject of the next section of this chapter to consider just what kind of future is imagined by the exilic critic and to articulate the role that exilic criticism might have in the production of that future.

Exile and Humanism: The Ethico-Political Trajectory of Saidian Exile

Humanism is the achievement of form by human will and agency; it is neither system nor impersonal force like the market or the unconscious, however much one may believe in the workings of both. (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 15)

Thus far I have presented a portrait of Said as a dedicated, even liberal, individualist, a proponent of affirmative human agency who nevertheless sees it permanently bound up in historical and material, worldly, contingencies. This portrait is largely consistent with Said's own claims about his critical project. However, readers familiar with Said's work may object that I have made him out to be a closet pragmatist or a proponent of a groundless transnational cosmopolitanism by emphasizing his

resistance to critical systems and the displacement of intellectual exile and neglecting his staunch political activism. How can Said profess to have an exilic perspective free from cultural and ideological entanglements and maintain his strong advocacy for the people of Palestine? In order to clarify my understanding of the relation between Said's view of exile and his view of politics, I will demonstrate the particularly postcolonial inflection of Saidian exile and criticism that distinguishes his philosophical and political positions from pragmatism and cosmopolitanism by comparing his view of exile with the work of two liberal thinkers: Richard Rorty and Kwame Anthony Appiah.[1] At first glance, Said has less in common with a pragmatist philosopher like Rorty than a proponent of ethical cosmopolitanism like Appiah (and maybe little in common with both), but their separate projects each place specific emphasis on the individual's relationship to the cultural world s/he inhabits. While both Rorty and Appiah present methods for coexisting in a world of cultural difference, I will argue that only Said's notion of exile offers the possibility of a robust criticism capable of creating the grounds for a humanism built on inter-cultural dialogue.

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[1] Admittedly, these two figures are somewhat idiosyncratic representatives of the two philosophical positions I am contrasting to Saidian exile. Rorty, while the most famous of recent practitioners of pragmatism, is hardly the only pragmatist. However, on the few occasions Said chose to criticize pragmatism, Rorty was the representative he chose. Appiah is likewise not the only possible representative of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is being studied and theorized from a variety of perspectives by figures such as Martha Nussbaum, Amanda Anderson, Seyla Benhabib. Appiah may seem a minor figure in relation to these, but because his work in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* and *The Ethics of Identity* approaches the topic from a postcolonial perspective that is remarkably similar to Said's perspective, his work provides a useful point of contrast. The collection of essays *Cosmopolitcs: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, provides a useful sampling of some of the main lines of inquiry in contemporary studies of cosmopolitanism, and includes essays by Appiah and Anderson.

In *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Rorty argues for an ironic perspective on self and culture that promises to open the possibility for pragmatic dialogue. The ironist, contends Rorty, "fulfills three conditions:"

> (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. (73)

Such ironists are opposed to common sense, the sense that one's final vocabulary, the words with which we "tell the story of our lives" beyond which communication is impossible, is adequate to explain all that goes on in the world (73). Instead, they insist on the radical contingency of their own vocabularies and the claims that those vocabularies can make on others. "Liberal ironists," then according to Rorty, are those who accept their own contingency and that of the cultural communities to which they may belong and also are "people for whom (to use Judith Sklar's definition) 'cruelty is the worst thing they do'" (74).

Opposed to the ironists are those whom Rorty, following Martin Heidegger, calls "metaphysicians." Metaphysicians are those who take questions about the intrinsic nature of all sorts of things seriously and who believe in common sense. They, therefore, "[assume] that the presence of a term in [their] own final vocabulary ensures that it refers

to something which *has* a real essence" (74, italics in original). In short, they are at home in the final vocabularies that they have been given while ironists are not:

> The ironist spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been
> initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She
> worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being
> by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so
> turned her into the wrong kind of human being. But she cannot give a criterion
> of wrongness. So, the more she is driven to articulate her situation in
> philosophical terms, the more she reminds herself of her rootlessness by
> constantly using terms like "Weltanschauung," "perspective," "dialectic,"
> "conceptual framework," "historical epoch," "language game,"
> "redescription," "vocabulary," and "irony." (75)

Although it may be readily apparent from the exilic language that appears throughout this passage, there are numerous points of commonality between Rorty's notion of the ironist and Said's notion of exile, but there are two important caveats made by Rorty that should be noted before discussing the similarities between the two notions as political projects. The first concerns the status of truth in Rorty's argument. Rorty, while he may admit the general existence of a non-subjective world, denies that human language, that is any particular human language, can adequately represent that world. Therefore, he is not concerned with the truth or accuracy of a particular language with regard to the world. All languages are equally contingent. The ironist realizes this and attempts to live with it by taking an ironic view of herself and her own language. The second caveat has to do with the role of irony with regard to public or political life.

According to Rorty, ironism is "largely irrelevant to public life and to political questions" (83). In fact, he says, he cannot even imagine a culture whose public rhetoric was ironic. A culture's public rhetoric must necessarily take itself seriously as a final vocabulary in order for it to have the power to socialize individuals. This gives ironists something to ironize, to react against, from which to be alienated.

Rorty's ironism, then, is an attempt to allow individuals to function in a world of cultural differences by separating private doubts from public action. The ironist cannot accept any vocabulary, even her own, as final, but she must still publicly act through the final vocabulary in which she lives. Therefore, Rorty contends that the ironist's primary activity is self-redescription. Instead of attempting to find a final vocabulary with which to tell the story of all or even to tell her own story most accurately, the ironist uses newer and newer vocabularies to tell the story of her life over and over. This leads Rorty to his most explicit political claim, the claim "that if we take care of political freedom, truth will take care of itself" (84). If the ironist does not desire a 'metaphysical' final vocabulary, she needn't bother with discovering truth. Her chief political goal is to make the grounds for dialogue as politically free as possible. Truth, then, is nothing more than the result of the consensuses arrived at through the process of this dialogue.

Ultimately, this insistence on the contingency of human knowledge, on the protecting freedom and allowing truth to worry about itself, causes Rorty to endorse a pragmatic version of ethnocentrism, or more precisely, "anti-anti-ethnocentrism." In *Objectivity, Relativism, Truth* he argues for ethnocentrism as a link between the antirepresentationalist perspective on truth and political liberalism. For the pragmatic liberalism of Rorty, there is no escape from one's final vocabulary, and therefore, once

the contingency of one's final vocabulary has been diagnosed by ironism, the ironist must construct a mode of coping with his claims without resorting to appeals to truth. This is a potentially crippling logical position for the metaphysical liberal. With no recourse to universal values or truth, there is apparently nothing by which to justify being liberal. Ethnocentrism names the attempt to cope with one's own contingency and remain an affirmative agent in the world. By simply avowing that one believes what one believes because one speaks the vocabulary one speaks, Rorty suggests, individuals may then speak ironically, always aware of their own contingency.

The liberalism that Rorty advocates is an ironic one located in the cultural traditions of the West, and so, it is an attempt to move beyond the dependence of metaphysical Western liberalism on truth and reason as modes of intercultural dialogue. This ironic attempt to cope with such criticisms is typified in the comments on "national pride" that open *Achieving Our Country*:

> National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement. Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism, just as excessive self-respect can produce arrogance. But just as too little self-respect makes it difficult for a person to display moral courage, so insufficient national pride makes effective debate about national policy unlikely. Emotional involvement with one's country— feelings of intense shame or of glowing pride aroused by various present-day national policies—is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive. Such deliberations will probably not occur unless pride outweighs shame. (3)

Rorty prescribes national pride, a corollary to anti-anti-ethnocentricism, to the American liberal so that she may recover enough pride in her own traditions and the final vocabulary that they have produced to be able to take affirmative actions in the political sphere. One need not be ashamed of being the product of contingent historical occurrences such as being born into a particular nation; one need only have enough self-pride to redescribe oneself in a new vocabulary.

Rorty's notion of the ironist and Said's formulation of exile bear a number of marks of similarity. They are both based on alienation and affiliation: the ironist is alienated from her own vocabulary only to return to it with an awareness of its contingency; the exile is alienated from a physical home and affiliated to a new one. They are both attempts to allow affirmative political action in the face of cultural differences: the ironist participates in intercultural dialogue and protects the freedom of others as she protects her own freedom to describe herself; the exile makes use of her exilic perspective to advocate for the outsiders of her new exilic home.

In these two ways, Rorty's and Said's projects are nearly identical, and so their differences may be mainly temperamental and strategic. One could easily, if simplistically, contrast the rhetorical styles of their work – Rorty the calm philosopher vs. Said the angry critic – as an explanation for the different approaches they take to the same problems. The terms, ironist and exile, with which they engage the problem of affirmative political action also point to this difference. Rorty uses the rhetorical trope of irony to establish his program while Said uses the painful experience of forced physical displacement. This stylistic distinction dovetails with the difference between the two thinkers' particular political desires. So, one could argue that Said is simply doing what

Rorty would have him do, but instead of doing it in the name of American liberalism, he does it in the name of a postcolonial critique of imperialism.

This account, however, does not address what may be the most important difference between Said and Rorty – the status of truth in their formulations. On one view, Said appears ready to concede to Rorty's antirepresentationalist view of truth. His praise of Derrida, and his insistence on alienation as the grounds of contingency certainly, suggest this. The exact status of truth, however, is never made this clear in Said's work. This is, indeed, one of the major frustrations of studying Said. He apparently dismisses the notion of representational truth at the same time that he insists on its necessity in the revision of historical accounts of colonialism, in the critique of colonial ideology, and in the responsibility of the intellectual to her worldly situation. This is the main source of what Clifford calls "confusion" in *Orientalism*. Nonetheless, it is Said's ultimate refusal finally to dismiss truth as a category for judgment in his project that distinguishes him from Rorty.

From Rorty's view, the critical perspective of Saidian exile is doomed from the start because it places too much faith in the exile's ability to represent the world and too much hope in the utopian possibilities of humanism. On the other hand, from Said's view, Rorty's ironist, like Clifford's traveler, has the capability of thick, ironic self-description but lacks the ability (or even the desire) to discern between different final vocabularies. Judgment is utterly unnecessary in Rorty's formulation because truth is generated by the consensus of free dialogue. Said, on the other hand, insists that truth must be accounted for in the work of the critic, however inadequate her language may be for representing it, and that the exile has a greater ability to discern truth by virtue of her

displacement. It is the product of such critical, comparative judgment that Said will call humanism to which I will turn at the end of this section.

It is in the affiliative humanism that results from the exile's comparative judgment that Said's perspective most closely resembles the perspective of cosmopolitanism. Kwame Anthony Appiah has argued for a "cosmopolitan patriotisim" that resembles Rorty's account of ethnocentricism and, in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, has attempted to reinvigorate this tradition in a way that resembles the attempts of Rorty and Said to describe affirmative modes of living in a world of competing cultural differences. In the essay "Cosmopolitan Patriots," Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism and patriotism are not necessarily opposed ideologies but complimentary sentiments. Here he takes a position similar to that which Rorty takes in *Achieving Our Country* by defending patriotism (what Rorty calls "national pride") against the claims of universalism. He says,

> We cosmopolitans can be patriots, loving our homelands (not only the states where we were born but the states where we grew up, the states where we live); our loyalty to human kind—so vast, so abstract, a unity—does not deprive us of the capacity to care for lives nearer by. (95)

And his recent book *Cosmopolitanism* extends this claim that cosmopolitans can also be patriots by developing an ethics that attempts to describe the moral claims that are made on the cosmopolitan.

Tracing cosmopolitanism back to the fourth-century Cynics who formulated the idea in the phrase "citizen of the cosmos," Appiah contends that cosmopolitanism has always been a paradoxical construction. The citizen, he says, "belonged to a particular

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polis, a city to which she owed loyalty" while "cosmos referred to the world" (xiv). So

the tension between universalism and patriotism is fundamental to notions of the

cosmopolitan, and the effect has been to dispel the notion that "every civilized person

[merely] belonged to a community among communities" (xiv). Thus, he says there are

"two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism:" first, that cosmopolitans

have obligations to others that extend beyond the filial ties of kinship and country and,

second, that cosmopolitans "take seriously the value not just of human life but of

particular human lives" (xv). There are times, says Appiah, when these two sets of

paradoxical perspectives (cosmopolitanism/patritiotism and universalism/respect for

difference) will necessarily come into conflict. It is the project of his book to examine

which adhere in different local situations.

Like Rorty, Appiah sets as his target a kind of universalized liberal guilt that

threatens to stunt the project of benevolent liberalism within the state as well as beyond

its borders by denying individuals the privilege of a self-respect which is the product of

local commitments. So he is concerned with developing practices that will allow

affirmative benevolent agency in the face of the overwhelming ethical responsibilities

that such guilt places on liberals. Thus, in what I take to be a typically pragmatic way that

echoes Rorty, he focuses on "making conversation" as one of the most basic of these

"habits of coexistence" that allow for the development of universal values (xix). Through

the inevitable practice of conversations across cultural borders, individuals can become

accustomed to the idea of individuals' differences. This may threaten those who wish to

preserve cultural difference in the face of the homogenizing effects of globalization, but

says Appiah, we should not be afraid: this is how it has always been. Instead of

preserving the purity of cultural difference, he contends that "cosmopolitan contamination," the hybridization of culture, is the salutary result of cross-cultural relationships and that difference, while valuable for individuals, should not be forced on them.

In this way, Appiah attempts to reformulate identity politics as do Rorty and Said. Instead of identity politics as an un-ironized ethnocentrism that sees a particular cultural perspective as sufficient to explain reality or that sees all cultures as necessarily in oppositional conflict with each other, these thinkers argue for a respect for cultural differences that does not privilege a particular cultural perspective: Rorty through an ironized awareness of contingency, Appiah through cosmopolitan respect, and Said through exilic criticism.

Appiah, however, goes a step further than Rorty and Said by suggesting that the dissolution of cultural differences will be the necessary result of certain kinds of cosmopolitan contamination. This is exemplified for him in the idea of what is often called "cultural imperialism." Appiah suggests that complaints of cultural imperialism, such as complaints about the prevalence of American cultural productions (art, literature, etc.) in postcolonial countries, should be dismissed as reactionary attempts to preserve culture. Even though he allows for patriotism in his formulation of cosmopolitanism, Appiah privileges the universal side of the cosmopolitan paradox by making universal values the necessary, if ever changing, result of all cross-cultural conversation. "We may not have achieved a shared set of universal values," says Appiah's cosmopolitan, "but everything we do works toward them."

Rorty might criticize Appiah's formulation of cosmopolitan contamination and conversation for not doing enough to ensure that such conversation takes place on politically free grounds, that is free from political coersion, and Said would likely agree. But he would add that, because it does not suggest the need or possibility of criticism or resistance, Appiah's cosmopolitanism too easily acquiesces to the discourses of power. Saidian exile, because it takes as its force the traumatic experience of exilic displacement, maintains its grounding in historical identity as, first, a basis for critique and, second, as the grounds intercultural dialogue. The affirmative power of the exile he describes is the result of filiative and affiliative commitments that are maintained in the face of alienation and critique. This is what allows and necessitates Said's consistent appeals to his identity as an Arab in his critiques of Western representations of Arab and Islamic peoples, as a Palestinian in defense of Palestinian causes, and, perhaps more importantly, in his critiques Western culture and politics. This is why, I believe, Said's work points in the direction of humanism rather than cosmopolitanism. In his desire to overcome the crippling effects of liberal guilt, Appiah sacrifices the ethical responsibility to advocate for and practice liberal values and, therefore, the privilege of critiquing those who reject or fail to practice them as well. Thus, he reduces cosmopolitan ethical responsibility to its most basic forms. Said, on the other hand, relies on a robust notion of ethical responsibility that takes postcolonial exile as its grounding.

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said begins to develop the kind of humanism that is hinted at throughout his project by retrieving humanism in general from its sharpest critics. Against the (finally conservative) perception of humanism that sees it as a particularly Western version of high culture attainable only by a small group of

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elites, he argues for an open, democratic form of humanism that is open to the presence

of Others as well as the near constant changes of human history. In particular, what he is

arguing for is a reinvigorated view of humanist practice, the humanities, that is the kind

of critical and intellectual activity to which he devoted so much of his project. Therefore,

he advocates a return to philology, "literally, the love of words" he says, as the basis of

humanistic practice and renews his call for intellectuals to take a public role in revealing

and describing that which "imposed silence" and "the normalized quiet of unseen power"

wish to cover over (135). In this sense, humanism names the attempt to admit those who

have been excluded from it for any variety of reasons, and the humanities are the

practices that seek to remedy such exclusions through criticism of humanism in the very

name of humanism.

It in this sense that Said's description of humanism, and the intellectual practice

of the humanities, can be said to be the utopian horizon of Saidian exilic criticism. Where

Rorty has no horizon of hope to which he can look to justify his ethical and political

claims and Appiah has only the hope that with enough cosmopolitanism more people will

be cosmopolitans, Said harbors the distinct hope that human community will be expanded

through critical and creative achievement. It is also this sense that points to the

postcolonial and exilic inflection of Said's view of humanism. Said's revival of

humanism is based on what traditional conceptions of humanism have left out, and he is

keenly aware of how those exclusions have aided in the constructions of oppressive

ideologies like exclusivist versions of nationalism and imperialism. This is, after all, the

project of *Orientalism*. As Emily Apter says in "Saidian Humanism," an article published

shortly before *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, "Saidian humanism . . . prompts an

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activist return to the 'great works' of humanism, with the understanding that humanism itself be rezoned to avoid misleading cartographic divisions between European and non-European cultures" (52). As such, the project of Saidian humanism is a revisionist one that seeks to re-imagine the ways in which humanistic ideals have been instantiated through human agency.[2]

Exile and the Postcolonial Novel

In Chinua Achebe's *Home and Exile*, a series of three lectures delivered at Harvard in 2005, the Nigerian novelist reflects on the particular nourishment given him by his home country and culture and the veneration of exiled writers in Western and postcolonial nations. Achebe sets himself in contrast to the numerous non-African writers who have taken Africa as topic or setting of their fiction, writers such as Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, and V.S. Naipaul. Joyce Cary's novel *Mr. Johnson*, which has been said to be the impetus for Achebe's becoming a writer, provides the most dramatic example of the contrast that Achebe attempts to draw between African and foreign writers. He describes the scene of reading Cary's novel in a university class in which he and his classmates criticized the author for his depiction of Africa:

> Now, this incident, as I came to recognize later, was more than just an
> interesting episode in a colonial classroom. It was a landmark rebellion. Here
> was a whole class of Nigerian students, among the brightest of their

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[2] An active debate has arisen since Said's death over the question of Said's relation to humanism. William V. Spanos (see Spanos's *The Legacy of Edward W. Said*) has been highly critical of those who view Said's work as primarily humanist (instead of poststructuralism) or insist that Said made a humanist "turn" late in his career in which he rejected poststructuralism. Instead, Spanos argues that Said's work fulfills the revolutionary promise of poststructuralist theory. I am taking a middle ground position here by suggesting that Said's work is neither a rejection of poststructuralism nor an unambiguous endorsement of humanism. Instead, I would argue that Said's utilized the tools of poststructural critique strategically to advance a project of humanist liberation.

generation, united in their view of a book in complete opposition to their

English teacher who was moreover backed by the authority of metropolitan

critical judgment. (23)

Achebe discovers in Cary's novel and the tradition of English writing about Africa a

perspective wholly hostile to African peoples and concludes that writers like Cary were,

at best, poorly equipped to write of Africa in any other way and, at worst, mere products

of British imperial culture. In answer to the question "Was there any way that Joyce Cary

could have written a novel that we Nigerian students could have accepted as our story?"

he says,

My answer, in retrospect, must be: not likely. And my reason would not be

the obvious fact that Cary was a European, but rather because he was the product

of a tradition of presenting Africa that he had absorbed at school, in magazines

and in British society in general, at the end of the nineteenth century. (39)

Achebe, nonetheless, holds out the hope that "In theory, a good writer might

outgrow these influences [imperialist and racist attitudes toward Africa]," but he says,

"Cary did not" (39-40). In the lecture, Achebe goes on to list a small number of examples

of good Western writers who were able to overcome such attitudes and "assume a

genuine disinterested service to literature" and restore what he calls the "balance of

stories" (44). He cites British civil servant F.J. Pedler, for correcting common

misconceptions about Africa in his 1951 book *West Africa*, Dylan Thomas for his praise

of Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and Alan Hill for his work to begin the African

Writers Series with the Heinemann publishing house. Further, he cites several instances

of African writers and critics who have migrated to the metropolis only to "dilute their

Africanness" by looking down on writers from their home countries with shame (72).

Thus, being European does not guarantee the kind of attitudes toward Africa shared by

writers like Cary, and being African does not necessarily ensure against those same

attitudes.

All this is presented as an argument against the valorization of the exiled writer

that is so common in European literature. In particular, Achebe is critical of postcolonial

exiles who become "copy cats" and who "tag on to whatever the metropolis says in the

latest movement, without asking the commonsense question: later than what?" (83, 81-2).

Here, V.S. Naipaul, about whom more later, and his novel *A Bend in the River* come in

for the sharpest criticism. According to Achebe, the "advertisement of expatriation and

exile as intrinsically desirable goals for the writer or as the answer to the problem of

unequal development" by writers like Naipaul has led postcolonial writers to adopt

Western culture at the expense of their own home cultures because they assume that

Western culture is necessarily universal (96). These writers, he contends, "suggest that

the universal civilization is in place already [are] willfully blind to our present reality and

even worse, [trivialize] the goal and hinder the materialization of a genuine universality

in the future" (91). Instead of migrating to the metropolis, Achebe encourages writers to

"Write it where you are, take it down that little dusty road to the village post office and

send it" (97).

Achebe's argument is worth considering here because it grants the theoretical

possibility that authors can write about cultures other than their own with both sympathy

and accuracy, but he insists that this is a significant challenge and that, to do so, writers

need not leave their homes behind to take up residence in the metropolis. In fact, he

suggests that writers who have left their native homes have betrayed, or at least risk betraying, the cultures to which they had belonged. Instead, he would have writers restore the "balance of stories" by writing their 'own' stories from their own homes. Yet, he also describes a practice of writing that 'balances' a commitment to local culture with the goal of a universality-yet-to-come. This balance resembles, somewhat paradoxically since Achebe is so critical of the notion of exile, the goals of Saidian exile that I have attempted to describe, but Achebe offers no methodology by which to achieve such balance other than to insist that all writers write stories of their homeland. Further, he assumes that exile necessarily involves the rejection of one's native home and thus cannot be of any use to the project of restoring the balance of stories. The model of Saidian exile, I believe, shows us that the latter point, that exile is a rejection of homeland, is demonstrably untrue, and it offers us a way of thinking that leads to a kind of balance between local commitments and universalizable values and between theoretical generalities and descriptive specificity. And thus, Saidian exile points the way toward a universalism that is always in the making that is preferable to Achebe's desired balance. Achebe's view of exile is an impoverished one that only sees rejection in the rootlessness of exilic dislocation. Saidian exile, however, releases the postcolonial subject from the constraints of home while simultaneously insisting on a commitment to home. Writers who accept the challenge of this model of exile gain its comparative perspective but also must live up to its ethical demands.

This rather lengthy discussion of exile, particularly Said's conception of it and its relation to postcolonial theory, has been a corrective meant to show the ways in which postcolonial theory has contradicted its own political and ethical claims and to

show how a stronger sense of the way human agency interacts with the cultural world can lead the way out of this philosophical and political impasse. It is also meant to suggest that postcolonial theory should develop a stronger sense of human responsibility for the actions of the colonizer, the colonized, and the postcolonial subject. Said's notion of exile proves a necessary starting point for this revaluation of the postcolonial project. What this means for the future of postcolonial theory should by now be apparent: postcolonial theorists should continue to emphasize the grounds of postcolonial critique and resistance, and they should place a renewed emphasis on the ways in which postcolonial subjects can engage their world to perform such critiques. Further, this should permit postcolonial theorists to continue to turn to the literary text as a place of worldly engagement, a move for which postcolonial theory has often garnered charges of cultural elitism and political escapism.

The interest of postcolonial theorists in literature has often been derided as apolitical and other-worldly, but literary texts provide instructive examples of individuals situating themselves in the world in ways both critical and ideological. The literary text, in this view, becomes both a mode of situating the individual in relation to the world and a mode of engaging that world in ways that may potentially promote critical action. What will follow, then, in the remaining chapters of this dissertation will be an attempt to instantiate this stronger sense of human agency's relation to the world in the examination of the work of three largely canonical novelists – Conrad, Naipaul, and Rushdie – with special attention to their relationships with Said. It will thus be an attempt to 'do' what might be called exilic criticism, to take seriously the challenges of Saidian exile and to examine the ways in which different writers have marshaled the perspective of exile with

or without fulfilling its critical promise. The work of these three authors, taken together,

will demonstrate the potentials and the limits of exile as a critical perspective.

Chapter Two: At the Limits of Language and Culture: Joseph Conrad, Edward Said, and the Worldliness of Exile

With the possible exceptions of the Italian philosopher Giambatista Vico and the German literary scholar Erich Auerbach, no writer holds a place more prominent in the work of Edward Said, especially on matters concerning exile, than that of the Polish born English novelist Joseph Conrad. Said's first published book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (and the only book he would devote to a single figure) was an existential-phenomenological study of Conrad which reconsidered his novels through an examination of his personal correspondence. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Conrad occupies a central chapter ("Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative") which advances Said's descriptions of "critical consciousness" and "secular criticism." Conrad also plays smaller, if no less significant roles, in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism* as well as a host of occasional essays including two essays of special importance to this study, "Reflections on Exile" and "Between Worlds."

It is apparent from this list that Said found in Conrad's work a subject worthy of repeated investigation and reconsideration, but more than that, he also found in Conrad an intellectual fellow-traveler whose work anticipated many of the most important themes of Said's own project. He said of Conrad, "Over the years, I have found myself writing about [him] like a *cantus firmus,* a steady groundbass to much that I have experienced" ("Between Worlds" 3). Because of this intellectual identification, it would be tempting to read Said's relationship to Conrad as one based primarily on shared

experiences of displacement, and indeed, there is much that can be gained from such comparisons. However, as Abdiramin Hussein notes, understanding Said's admiration of Conrad only in terms of their shared experiences of displacement neglects some of the nuances of Said's use of Conrad. Hussein offers this description of the differences between Said's treatment of Conrad and that of other authors who might also be said to have lived similarly exilic lives:

> [E]xile as such is rarely ever explicitly thematized by Said in his discussions of Conradian dilemmas, and if it is occasionally mentioned, it is never foregrounded. Second, Said has over the years, examined different ways in which other thinkers (among them Swift, Auerbach, and Massignon) came to terms either with actual exile or with circumstances analogous to it. And yet his standard treatment of these writers has usually assumed the form of the occasional article or two rather than copious mediations involving a multiplicity of texts. (21)

Therefore, the question for Hussein is "What, then, is it about Conrad that Said finds so interesting?" For Hussein, it is the shared interest in the "phenomenon of modern European imperialism" that animates the relationship between Said and Conrad. This, he says, is "far more consequential for humanity at large than the personal matter of exile" (21).

Indeed, there can be little doubt that a major component of Said's abiding interest in Conrad has to do with the novelist's intense, if often ambivalent, engagements with the effects of European imperialism. However, while it could be argued that Said does not always "explicitly" thematize exile in his discussions of Conrad, it does not necessarily follow that we should dismiss the fact that exile is always implicit in Said's

understanding of Conrad. Essays such as "Reflections on Exile" and "Between Worlds" certainly seem to foreground the predicament of exile as they consider Conrad's work, and moreover, Said's theory of exile is developed and reworked in his numerous examinations of Conrad and his texts. Exile may only be one among a number of concerns, including criticism and imperialism, which draw Said's attention to his work, but Conrad is no less central to Said's articulation of a theory of exile for that.

In emphasizing the exilic nature of Conrad's work, Said follows the work of early critics of Conrad such as Ian Watt who found in both Conrad's work and his life an example of modernist exile *par excellence*. In Watt's famous statement,

> Exile [was] central to the lives and the art of Joyce and Lawrence, Pound and
> Eliot; [it was] not much less so the later generation of Hemingway, Beckett and
> Auden. Conrad's case, though, was special, and in two ways. For one thing,
> Conrad did not choose his exile—the fate of his family and his country forced it
> on him; and for another, Conrad's exile was much more absolute—with very
> minor exceptions he did not write about his own country, and he wrote nothing
> for publication in his native tongue. The very absoluteness of his exile, however,
> set the course of Conrad's thought in a different direction from that of his peers.
> . . . [T]he son of Apollo, the defeated orphan, the would-be suicide, the inheritor
> of the Polish past, [Conrad] had walked the Waste Land from childhood on. (32)

For Watt, Conrad's idiosyncratic personal struggles with physical displacement make him an extreme example of the more general modernist themes of isolation and deracination. His is a version of exile more intense than, if not qualitatively different from, that of Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, and Eliot. By making him out to be the most

extreme of all the modernist writers of exile, he elevates Conrad as the chief instance of modernism more generally. Watt's view of Conradian exile was common among Conrad's early critics, and it continues to permeate the work of contemporary analyses of Conrad's work and modern literature in general. This, for example, is the view of Conrad F.R. Leavis adopted when he elected to include Conrad in his "Great Tradition." Therefore, he says, "When we come to Conrad we can't, by way of insisting that he is indeed significantly 'in' the tradition—in and of it, neatly and conclusively relate him to any one English novelist. Rather, we have to stress his foreignness—that he was a Pole, whose first language was French" (17). For Leavis, Conrad's exile allowed him the freedom to adopt the morally superior English tradition and to choose selectively from the tradition of great English novelists whom he would emulate without feeling beholden to the entire tradition itself. In Conrad, he argues, "we have a master of the English language, who chose its distinctive qualities [over those of the French language] and because of the moral tradition associated with it" (18). Both Watt and Leavis present a romanticized view of Conrad's exile that makes of him a perfect, if extreme, example of the general condition of the modern artist.

However, Said deviates from these early critical readings of Conrad and his relationship to exile by emphasizing the traumatic isolation of Conradian exile which prevented him from establishing affiliations in his adopted country instead of the peculiarly modern freedom which Conrad's experience of exile granted him (nor the cultural privileges of his choice of England as a home). Exile in Conrad, according to Said, is an overwhelming predicament; it is about fear and isolation, not freedom. This produces in Conrad's work an overwrought narrative style that attempts to grapple with

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this exilic trauma by confronting the inadequacies of language as a medium for representing experience and creating human community.

The question of Conrad's narrative style is for Said more than a question of aesthetics; rather, it is central to his view of the novelist's controversial political standing especially regarding imperialism. In fact, it will be my argument in this chapter that exile in Said's understanding of Conrad is necessarily bound up with Said's concerns about imperialism and the work of the intellectual, or criticism. Specifically, I will argue that the dual concerns of exile and imperialism coalesce around the question of language as Said uses the example of Conrad to formulate a notion of criticism that is fundamentally exilic. This results, firstly, from Said's exilic explanation of Conrad's narrative style and, secondly, from his attempt to negotiate his ambivalent response to Conrad especially as it regards his great novella of imperialism, *Heart of Darkness*. It is a practical instance of his attempt to maintain affiliation "in conjunction with critique." Said's heterodox reading of Conrad illustrates how the apparently contradictory tensions of the exilic perspective can be made productive. By refusing to disavow any particular perspective to which his numerous cultural attachments give him claim – as a Palestinian, an Arab, an American academic – Said constructs a relationship with Conrad that is neither purely oppositional nor unreservedly admiring. Conrad's work, then, is a place where Said's personal, cultural, and political perspectives converge and thereby mark out Said's own complex relation to the great novelist of modern imperialism and to the larger culture of imperialism as well.

This chapter, then, will begin with a consideration of Said's reading of Conrad – his development of an exilic understanding of Conrad's writing predicament as well as

his understanding of Conrad's (somewhat) critical relation to imperialism – as it is developed in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, *Culture and Imperialism*, and the occasional essays that contribute to his conception of Conrad as an exilic intellectual. I will pay special attention to Said's political analysis of Conrad's well-known novella, *Heart of Darkness*, to consider the implications of Said's reading of Conrad for the articulation of an exilic criticism especially as it regards the work of the postcolonial literary critic.

Conrad and Exilic Isolation in the Work of Edward Said

Hussein's account of Said's engagement with Conrad relegates the experience of exile to a purely personal realm and suggests that Said's primary interest in the novelist's work is political: Said, he argues, is interested in Conrad because of their shared appreciation for the broadly felt effects of imperialism not, he insists, the more private issue of individual exile. This account, however, considers the notion of exile to be too individual an experience to be useful for politics, and it neglects the way in which the personal and the political are routinely intertwined in Said's work. It also fails to account for the intensely personal character of Said's approach to Conrad in some of his occasional essays, especially "Reflections on Exile" and "Between Worlds." In each of these essays, Said foregrounds the dilemma of exile as he draws parallels between his life and intellectual project and those of Conrad. These two essays, published fourteen years apart, are properly considered *occasional* essays in that they are ruminations on an issue of concern (exile and death, respectively) without a full scholarly analysis of the issue (or texts) at hand. They, therefore, do not present fully developed analyses of the literary or philosophical texts they address, and they do not appear in redeveloped form in Said's

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explicitly scholarly work. In short, they are personal reflections on the predicament of exile and the related matter of death. Both essays take Conrad, and especially his little-studied short story "Amy Foster," as a touchstone for their rumination on these subjects.

In "Reflections on Exile," first published in 1984, Said accounts for the difference between modern forms of exile and earlier, romantic, forms of exile by insisting on the traumatic experience of mass migrations and genocide that have shaped contemporary geopolitics. It is in this context that he evokes Conrad's short story "Amy Foster" which he describes, somewhat grandiosely, as "perhaps the most uncompromising representation of exile ever written." "Conrad," he goes on to say, "thought of himself as an exile from Poland, and nearly all of his work (as well as his life) carries the unmistakable mark of the sensitive émigré's obsession with his own fate and with his hopeless attempts to make satisfying contact with new surroundings" (179). It is the latter obsession, with the "hopeless attempts to make satisfying contacts with new surroundings," that occupies Said's attention in this essay.

"Amy Foster" is a brief story that has received less attention than Conrad's longer and more well-known works, but it is one to which Said repeatedly returns in his discussions of the experience of exile. It is the story of a young peasant from somewhere in Eastern Europe named Yanko Goorall who, having left his home for a new beginning in America, finds himself instead shipwrecked on the English coast. Unable to speak English, he is treated as an alien by the small community that nonetheless takes him in. Still, he meets a young woman, named Amy Foster, whom he marries, and together they have a child. However, when he comes down with a fever, Amy panics, takes the child, and leaves him to die utterly alone. It is the exile's fear of isolation, death, and the

inability to communicate and thereby make connections with others, that draws Said's attention. "Conrad" he says,

> took this neurotic exile's fear [of isolation and death] and created an aesthetic principle out of it. No one can understand or communicate in Conrad's world, but paradoxically, this radical limitation on the possibilities of language doesn't inhibit elaborate efforts to communicate. . . . Each Conradian fears, and is condemned endlessly to imagine, the spectacle of a solitary death illuminated, so to speak, by unresponsive, uncommunicating eyes. (180)

Like most critics, Said treats "Amy Foster" as an autobiographical exploration of Conrad's experience living as a foreigner in England. Nico Israel, to cite one instance, draws out the explicit parallels between Yanko's experience and that of Conrad. He notes that the story is set only a few miles from Conrad's home; Yanko is from the same area of eastern Europe (the eastern range of the Carpathian mountains) which includes parts of native Poland and Ukraine where Conrad is from; and just as Conrad struggled to master spoken English, Yanko's inability to speak fluently in English causes his isolation and ultimately precipitates his death (28). These remarkable parallels, Israel points out, appear to contradict "Conrad's overtly enthusiastic, even patriotic claims about life as a British subject, and [undermine] the confident tones of his above-it-all English prefaces" (29).

Said neglects this contradiction between Conrad's representation of the pain of exile and his willingness to assimilate to English cultural life preferring, instead, to focus on Conrad's extreme description of exilic homelessness. For him, "Amy Foster" represents the near impossibility of communication between individuals isolated from

each other by culture and language. Israel describes the paralysis brought about by the linguistic isolation of individuals as "the Conradian sublime." In Conradian moments of communicative failure, he says, "the interpretation or representations of cultural difference generates a cognitive vertigo in which narrative description is rendered inefficacious or even impossible" (35). In Conrad's story, "'exile' signifies not only alienation, isolation, and transcendental homelessness but also, more pressingly, cultural terror over the limits of speech and identity" (39). It is this most pessimistic view of Conradian exile, as a kind of "cognitive vertigo" which Conrad's characters experience when they encounter the limits of language, and it prevents them from communicating across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Said draws on this conception of exile to refute those who would trivialize the experience of exile by romanticizing its privileges and ignoring the pain it causes. The absolute trauma of exilic isolation (what Israel calls "the sublime immensities of exile") depicted in Conrad's story suggests the lengths to which the exile must go in order to interact with the social world that surrounds him and that, even then, those efforts may not prove sufficient.

It is with this image in mind that Said returned to a reconsideration of his earlier descriptions of Conradian exile in the 1998 essay "Between Worlds." In that essay, he develops his reading of Conrad's vision of exile in "Amy Foster" by making more explicit the relation between exile and language that is only implied in the earlier essay, but because he returns to the story with the newly acquired personal awareness of death brought on by his own cancer diagnosis, he draws an even more direct personal connection between his reading of Conrad's exilic experience and his own as a displaced Palestinian. This new context adds an intense personal sympathy to Said's understanding

of Conrad's experience of the trauma of exile: "It is difficult to read 'Amy Foster' without thinking that Conrad must have feared dying a similar death, inconsolable, alone, talking away in a language no one could understand" (555). Again, Said reads the story as a representation of Conrad's personal experience of exile, and because of the severity of that exilic isolation, Said identifies with Conrad as he contemplates his own death. That is why he says, "I have found myself over the years reading and writing about Conrad like a *cantus firmus*, a steady groundbass to much that I have experienced." Exilic isolation is a feeling he can relate to, especially as he contemplates his own death. After relating some of his first attempts to write a memoir of his early life, Said concludes by asserting the necessity of writing as a way of coping with exilic fear of isolation and death, even if those fears cannot be fully alleviated: "One achieves at most a provisional satisfaction, which is quickly ambushed by doubt, and a need to rewrite and redo that renders the text uninhabitable. Better *that*, however, than the sleep of self-satisfaction and the finality of death" (568). Writing, here, is a temporary salve for the pains of exile, one that, while inadequate to the task of overcoming exilic isolation, is preferable to mere silence in the face of death.

The emphasis on exile as a predicament that cannot be romanticized and that, therefore, must be simply dealt with in "Reflections on Exile" and the personal musing on the fate of exile in "Between Worlds" foreground the problem of exile in Conrad's work and suggest exile as an explanation for the problem of language. The problem of language, however, is the focus of his earlier work on Conrad which took the form of more traditional literary analysis. In Said's more analytical treatments of Conrad, exile is only addressed implicitly, but where in the occasional essays "Reflections on Exile" and

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"Between Worlds" the problem of language in exile is only brought up to illustrate the emotional trauma of exile, in the essays "Conrad and Nietzsche" and "Conrad and the Presentation of Narrative," Said examines the question of Conrad's famously difficult style in literary and philosophical terms which nonetheless echo directly his descriptions of the exilic predicament in "Amy Foster." For example, in the 1977 essay "Conrad and Nietzsche" Said argues that the novelist and the philosopher share a "common cultural patrimony," particularly consisting in an ambivalent relationship to the philosophy of will developed by Arthur Schopenhauer, a relationship which centers on what Said calls "the radical attitude toward language" (71,72). This attitude is the result of Nietzsche's and Conrad's intense and paradoxical awareness of the inadequacy of language to represent human experience. The paradox lies in the fact that language both exceeds the human need for communication and yet fails to satisfy that need. Human desire for communication in language has produced infinite interpretations, but each of these interpretations is inadequate to representing the world. In this way, language is "at once poverty and excess;" it is infinite and yet futile for communication. Like Nietzsche, Said argues, Conrad's work is obsessed with this discovery about language. Thus, he says, "[t]he virtuosity of Conrad's language, even when it has offended critics by its untidy sprawls and rhetorical emptiness, regularly carries with it eloquent indications that language is not enough" (77).

In "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative," Said again focuses his analysis and praise of Conrad's work on the question of the novelist's style as it relates to the question of language. However, instead of discussing Conrad's style in the largely philosophical terms of "Conrad and Nietzsche," he focuses on the complex interplay of language and

intention in Conrad's narratives. First, he makes a claim about Conrad's achievement as a

novelist which is nearly identical to his evaluation of Conrad's work in "Conrad and

Nietzsche." He specifically credits the novelist with a commitment to representation in

the face of representation's impossibility:

> Conrad's fate was to write fiction great for its presentation, not only what it was
>
> representing. He was misled by language even as he led language into a
>
> dramatization no other author really approached. For what Conrad discovered was
>
> that the chasm between words saying and words meaning was widened, not
>
> lessened, by a talent for words written. To have chosen to write, then, is to have
>
> chosen in a particular way neither to say directly nor to mean exactly in the way
>
> he had hoped to say or mean. (90)

This achievement is the product of both Conrad's sensitivity to the inadequacy of

language for representing the world and his commitment to try anyway. This, Said

argues, led him to pay special attention to the motivations for his stories, to dramatize the

context of their telling – the occasion, the audience, and the teller, as he does with the

story of Marlow on the *Nellie* which frames his narration of *Heart of Darkness* – as a way

of justifying their existence. If written words are doomed to fail the task of

representation, it was all the more important to approximate the setting of the spoken

word. In this way, he says, "Conrad's writing tries overtly to negate itself as writing"

(107).

Said attributes this sensitivity to language in part to the contrasting attitudes

toward communication which Conrad encountered as a sailor and as a novelist. As a

sailor, "a working community and a shared sense of what is useful are essential to the

enterprise." In this setting, language is both "useful" and "communal." For the novelist who shares no clear relationship with his audience, however, "solitude and its uncertainties override everything," and the novelist's art is "essentialized" and "solitary" (100-1). This shift in setting required a shift in attitude towards communication which forced Conrad to pay ever closer attention to the medium of language with which he delivered information and thereby account for his own doubts about the usefulness of the information provided by his narratives. Therefore, Conrad had to "ground narrative epistemologically in utterance" – by paying special attention to their language and by dramatizing the conditions of their telling – in order to compensate for the lack of a clearly defined community for his stories which would justify them (101).

However, instead of producing an adequately compensatory replacement for the narrative community that he had known while a merchant sailor, Conrad only ends up with a proliferation of contested narratives presented from irreconcilable perspectives. Both Conrad and his characters

> having everywhere conceded that one can neither completely realize one's own nor fully grasp someone else's life experience, Jim, Marlow, and Conrad are left with a desire to fashion verbally and approximately their individual experience in terms unique to each one. Since invariably this experience is either long past or by definition almost impossible, no image can capture this, just as finally as no sentence can.

> Nevertheless the utterance is spoken, if not only to, then in the presence of, another. Words convey the presence to each other of speaker and hearer but not mutual comprehension. (103-4)

Thus, the desire or the intent to communicate, what Said calls "wanting-to-speak," is frustrated by the insufficiency of words to satisfy that desire. Conrad's style, therefore, dramatizes "the disparity between verbal intention grammatically and formally apprehendable and possible on the one hand, and, on the other, verbality itself as a way of being in the world of language and with other human beings" (104). This disparity, argues Said, is the "fundamental divorce [Conrad] stood for as a writer": a divorce between verbal intention and the concomitant desire for adequate expression and the possibility of human community promised by the comprehension between a speaker and a hearer. This divorce is a permanent one, but it remains a division that each Conradian hero attempts to reconcile, even when failure seems certain.

"Conrad and the Presentation of Narrative" and "Conrad and Nietzche" approach the problem of language in Conradian narrative from a perspective that is different from the later occasional essays on the predicament of exile, but they arrive at strikingly similar conclusions: the earlier essays consider Conrad's struggle with language in more or less abstract and general terms – as philosophical and aesthetic, or perhaps cultural, problems common to many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century writers and thinkers – while the later essays discuss Conrad's struggle to communicate in concrete and existential terms – as a representation of his particular experience as an exile. Mohammad Salama explains the difference between Said's earlier readings of Conrad and the latter ones this way:

> Early Said reads Conrad too abstractedly and, like Jameson, critiques him too
> methodologically to 'see' any personal connection or suffering in the act of
> reading. Late Said reads and 'sees' a different Conrad, a Conrad who could also

be a solace for personal suffering, for death and destitution, a Conrad beyond

criticism, yet a Conrad who could be understood through the practice and

exhaustion of criticism. (249)

This is, he says, because of an evolving understanding of exile in Said's work such that

he comes to understand exile as "primarily an experience, a constant preoccupation with

a state of out-of-placeness." Thus, Said came to appreciate Conrad not for his

representations of exile, since exile is not amenable to linguistic representation, but for

his textual embodiment of the experience of exile in fiction.

Similarly, Ranajit Guha notes a "turn" in Said's understanding of Conrad's

depiction of exile away from a critical understanding in "Reflections on Exile" to a

sympathetic understanding in "Between Worlds." Guha contends that Said judges Conrad

unfavorably in "Reflections on Exile" by suggesting that Conrad exaggerates the

pressures of exile as they are represented in "Amy Foster," but he finds in "Between

Worlds" that Said's "judgment tilts favorably to highlight Conrad's stubborn refusal to

allow exilic pressures to empty his past of its content" (427). This shift in judgment, he

explains, is because of Said's awareness of his own death which was brought about by his

leukemia diagnosis. From this perspective, Said moved from a view Conrad which saw

his version of exile as self-serving and exaggerated in its depiction of exilic isolation to a

view which saw Conradian exile from the perspective of a sympathetic fellow-sufferer

who also must confront the consequences of a self-willed isolation. Said's later

identification with Conrad, then, is an attempt to come to terms with his life of

"cosmopolitan itinerancy" in the American academy. While Guha's reading neglects the

way Said uses Conrad in "Reflections on Exile" – in that essay, Conrad is presented as a

primarily as a counter to the romanticization of exile common in modern literature – his point that Said shifts from a general appreciation of the Conradian figure of exile to an intensely personal identification with his predicament is useful because it suggests the increasing emphasis Said places on the *experience* of exile and the ability of Conrad to contend with that experience through writing.

Politics and the Problem of Language in Conradian Exile

It is the Conradian view of exile as an experience of isolation which cannot be ameliorated by written language with which Said identifies his own experience of exile. However, this deeply pessimistic view of exile (which Said first draws out to counter romanticized views of exile) seems, in some important ways, to contradict Said's own invocation of exile as a figure of oppositional criticism. Indeed, the very example of Conrad, with his praise of British imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* to cite one instance, seems to run counter to the political commitments which Said has staked out for himself as a postcolonial intellectual. How, that is, does Said reconcile his identification with Conrad and his view of exile with the strong view he presents of the practice of criticism? In what ways does the example of Conrad advance Said's argument for "critical consciousness"? If exile is, as both Conrad and Said here suggest, an experience of utter isolation which language is powerless to improve, how can it be made into a metaphor for the work of the politically engaged intellectual?

These are questions that are only implicitly addressed in most of Said's discussions of Conrad. However, in a brief section of *Culture and Imperialism* entitled "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*," he confronts directly the political implications of Conrad's famous novella and relates them specifically to Conrad's experience of exile.

In the context of a discussion of the self-protective posture assumed by many defenders

of the "West" in the years following the American war in Vietnam and the Iranian

revolution, Said invokes *Heart of Darkness* as an earlier instance of an "imperial attitude"

which "assumes the primacy and even the complete centrality of the West" that he finds

present in contemporary political discourse about the postcolonial world (22). Conrad's

novella, he argues, brings together the "tragic [Conradian] predicament of all speech," –

its inadequacy to the task of representing experience and, therefore, its inability to re-

form human community outside of a shared cultural context – and the "redemptive

forces, as well as the waste and horror, of Europe's mission in the dark world" (23).

Conrad, as Said is quick to point out, is no typical European imperialist. What sets

him apart from his contemporary colonial writers, he says in a remark which recalls his

description of Conrad's exilic predicament and its relation to language, is his extreme

self-consciousness about the problem of language, a self-consciousness which was the

result of his "extraordinarily persistent residual sense of his own exilic marginality" (24).

Conrad's extreme self-consciousness manifests itself in the same narrative practices

which Said outlined in his earlier work on Conrad, especially in his insistence on

dramatizing the speaking situation. Instead of a "straightforward recitation of Marlow's

adventures," Conrad situates Marlow in the middle of a group of British businessmen at a

particular time and place. In so doing, Said argues, Conrad exposes the historical

contingency of European imperialism:

> Although the almost oppressive force of Marlow's narrative leaves us with a quite
>
> accurate sense that there is no way out of the sovereign historical force of
>
> imperialism, and that it has the power of a system of representing as well as

speaking for everything within its dominion, Conrad shows us that what Marlow

does is contingent, acted out for a set of like-minded British hearers, and limited

to that situation. (24)

Conrad, that is, by placing his characters in a historical context, imbues them with a

particularly exilic provisionality, a "provisionality which came from standing at the very

juncture of this world with another" and thereby suggests the presence of limits to the

apparently overarching system of European imperialism. Because of his "self-

consciousness as an outsider," he goes on, Conrad was able "actively to comprehend how

the machine [of imperialism] works" (25).

This is an important, but very limited, form of criticism. Although Conrad can

suggest that the ideological system of imperialism is not limitless, he cannot pinpoint the

location of those limits; nor can he imagine what might exist outside of them. This, Said

says, is because the politics and the aesthetics of *Heart of Darkness* are, at base,

imperialist. Relying as the novella does on the interpretive power of someone like

Marlow to represent his own experience of imperialism in Africa, Conrad could only

offer a world-view which was available to him and most Europeans at the time: an

imperialist world view that posited Europe as its political, cultural, and even

epistemological center. Said concedes that Conrad recorded the "differences between the

disgraces of Belgian and British colonial attitudes" (24). Nonetheless, he "could only

imagine the world carved up into one or another Western sphere of dominion."

According to Said, the split between Conrad's critical ability to suggest the

contingency of European imperialism and his inability to imagine an alternative to that

system of domination allows contemporary readers of the novella to derive two possible

"visions" from *Heart of Darkness* which continue to have purchase in the contemporary postcolonial world. The first vision follows from the notion that European imperialism did not end after the countries colonized by Europe gained their independence, and thus, this vision suggests that Europe has maintained a totalizing control over its former colonies through its continuing to monopolization the system of representation. That is, European imperialism persists in the absence of a physical system of empire by maintaining control over the narratives which justify the centrality Europe and the marginality of the former colonies. From this perspective, Europe retains the ideological structure of imperialism, and it "focuses not on what was shared in the colonial experience, but on what must never be shared, namely the authority and rectitude that come with greater power and development" (25). Paradoxically, Said argues, it is also a vision shared by some later thinkers associated with radical politics, thinkers like Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault. Both thinkers, he says, turned away from a systematic and oppositional criticism of Western imperialism and capitalism because of a shared disappointment in the "politics of liberation" (26). Instead, they chose to focus on specifically local issues, Lyotard's micro-narratives, and in the case of Foucault, the "microphysics of power that surround the individual." What these much later thinkers share with Said's first vision of imperialism is a sense of the totality of the systems of representation controlled by power and a related lack of faith in the power of narrative to plot a course outside those systems. On this view, Said says, "There is nothing to look forward to: we are stuck within our circle" (27).

The second vision that can be drawn out of *Heart of Darkness*, Said says, "is considerably less objectionable." As Conrad saw his narratives as specific to a time and

place and therefore contingent – "neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain" – this vision of the contemporary postcolonial world sees the contemporary political situation as similarly contingent:

> Since Conrad *dates* imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste (as in *Nostromo*), he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens of European colonies, even if, for his own part, he had little notion of what that Africa might be. (26)

Even though Conrad could not imagine an alternative to the ideological system of imperialism, he did suggest the *possibility* of an alternative. Imperialism from this Conradian perspective has historical boundaries, both temporal and geographic, outside of which its power is not able to reach. The mere existence of this position outside the system indicates that resistance to that system is possible.

By suggesting the possibility of a resistant position outside of the reach of imperialism, Conrad and his characters, Said contends, are ahead of their time, clearing the ground for the generations of postcolonial writers who would come after them to critique imperialism more explicitly. But, he goes on, they "are also creatures of their time" because

> they cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European "darkness" was in fact a non-European world *resisting* imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not as Conrad reductively says, to reestablish the darkness. (30)

It is this inability to imagine that the "natives," not the "darkness," lie outside of the reach

of European imperialism and might, therefore, be able to resist it on their own which Said

calls Conrad's "tragic limitation."

Said's evaluation of the politics of *Heart of Darkness* represents an attempt to

chart a middle-ground position between those critics who have read Conrad as a

vociferous critic of imperialism and those who have found Conrad to be, at the very least,

an imperial sympathizer. Indeed, these two poles have dominated Conrad criticism for

several decades, especially since the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe denounced Conrad

as a "thoroughgoing racist" who was both unable and unwilling to see Africa as a

"human element" ("An Image of Africa" 257). Conrad's defenders have rushed to point

out his explicit criticism of Belgian imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* while his critics

have sought to illustrate how, in spite of his apparent distaste for the business of

imperialism, Conrad's novella nonetheless bolsters the case for imperial expansion by

reinforcing the narrative of European racial and cultural superiority.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said wants to have it both ways. He concedes that the

aesthetics and politics of the novel are imperialist in that they present a Eurocentric view

of the world which posits everything outside of the empire's boundaries as "darkness."

However, he also contends that by acknowledging that European imperialism even has

boundaries Conrad performs an important critical service. It is only a failure of empathy

and imagination, Conrad's "tragic limitation," that prevents him from going beyond this

critical insight. While this is not unmitigated praise of Conrad from Said, it suggests that

Said has, as least partly, let Conrad off the hook for his imperialism even though there are

numerous other writers whose imperial sympathies, because they occur after the advent

of anti-colonial political resistance, he would not excuse (notably V.S. Naipaul who is the subject of my next chapter). This might be partially accounted for by Said's personal identification with Conrad as a figure of exile, but Conrad and his exilic narrative practice are so important to Said and especially his attempt to articulate a robust, political definition of criticism and intellectual practice that there must be more to Said's treatment of him than mere sympathetic identification.

Another way to account for Said's even-handed approach to Conrad is to understand it as a part of his larger attempt in *Culture and Imperialism* to go beyond what he calls the "politics of blame" and "the even more destructive politics of confrontation and hostility," to avoid, that is, creating neat divisions between cultural allies and cultural enemies (18). To do so, Said advocates a "contrapuntal criticism" which, as Jonathan Arac notes in his essay, "Criticism between Opposition and Counterpoint," is a notion which "complicates—ramifies and nuances—the notion of oppositional commitment" (67). This notion of criticism suggests a connection between opposed forces – between colonizer and colonized, for example – which cannot be obliterated by ideological conflict. Arac describes this complication of Said's notion of criticism this way: "the direction of meaning here [in the term 'contrapuntal criticism'] seems to me quite different from adversarial opposition. One could map the terms onto the polarity of late Freud: Oppositional criticism is aggressive; it cuts. Contrapuntal criticism is loving; it joins" (67).

By advocating a "loving" form criticism, Said in *Culture and Imperialism* seeks to avoid the erection of barriers between cultures which might facilitate a choice between polarized "sides." Because cultures are so intertwined with each other, even or especially

the cultures of the colonial and postcolonial world, lines cannot be neatly drawn to separate foes from friends. "Who in India or Algeria," Said asks, "can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?" (15). Conrad, from this perspective, becomes a part of the shared history of the colonial encounter whose contributions to postcolonial cultures cannot be merely excluded on the basis of his imperialist associations and sympathies. Partly, what Said does with Conrad is to assert the hybridity of culture of postcolonial culture to blunt, though not refute, the political charges against him. As Arac points out, in *Culture and Imperialism*, "[t]he complexity of culture is adduced to criticize a political choice" (69). Conrad and his work, like Said and his work, are enmeshed in conflicting and contradictory cultures and ideologies, and therefore, no simple political judgment is possible.

Nevertheless, Conrad's failure to imagine a world outside the dominion of imperialism which could resist it, even as he makes a space for that world, seems to be more than just a "tragic limitation" when considered in light of Said's description of critical consciousness in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, a notion which is decidedly more oppositional in character than Said's "contrapuntal" criticism. In that text, especially in the well-known essay "Traveling Theory," Said argues that among the critic's chief responsibilities is the very production of alternatives to systems of domination, a goal he admits in *Culture and Imperialism* that Conrad failed to achieve. What, then, does Conrad contribute to Said's understanding of criticism that makes him a useful, if "tragic," example? What kind of critic, and therefore, what kind of exile is

Conrad? The answer to that question may be drawn out of the definition of critical

practice which Said advances in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*.

At the end of "Traveling Theory," Said poses a rhetorical question around which

all of the essays in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* turn: "What then is critical

consciousness at bottom if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives?" (247). In

that essay, critical consciousness, which attempts an historical understanding of the

world, is placed in opposition to theory or system, which create ahistorical accounts of

human activity. Theory, from this view, is something to be avoided because it deals in

abstracts and totalizations rather than concrete and particular historical realities. In fact,

theory must be subjected to the historicizing vision of critical consciousness if it is to be

of any use at all. This, he says, is the job of the critic:

> to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward
>
> society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances
>
> drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area
>
> necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory"
>
> (241).

This insistence on the historical realities which escape the reach of theory is what,

elsewhere, Said has described as "worldly" criticism. In *The World, the Text, and the*

Critic, he suggests what such "worldliness" might mean for an understanding of written

texts:

> My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even
>
> when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world,

human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and

interpreted. (4)

Worldly criticism, too, is an event which takes place in an historical field of

circumstances which shape its production. Therefore, it refuses theoretical abstraction

and generalization in favor of acknowledging its own historical specificity.

Read in light of this definition of critical consciousness, Said's description of

Conrad's critical achievement begins to seem remarkably consistent with his general case

for "worldly" criticism. Just as the "worldly" critic exposes the limits of theory to the

light of historical reality, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* reveals the limits of imperialism by

grounding it in its particular historical context. This is also closely related to the problem

of language addressed in the two literary-philosophical essays on Conrad, "Conrad and

Nietzsche" and "Conrad and the Presentation of Narrative," and the two essays on exile,

"Reflections on Exile" and "Between Worlds," in which Conrad plays a crucial role. In

each of those essays, Conrad's narrative style is presented as a response to the twin

problems of his exilic isolation and the inadequacy of written language to create human

community outside of a clearly-defined, shared culture.

However, Said's advocacy for "critical consciousness" and his own practice of

criticism would seem to indicate that he does not share Conrad's extreme skepticism of

language even if he identifies with aspects of Conrad's experience of exile. In order for

criticism to achieve its political ends, it would seem the language of criticism must be

adequate to communicate its claims and that human community must be possible in the

absence of shared cultural traditions and language. Yet, in both *The World, the Text, and

the Critic* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Said invokes Conrad's self-conscious, exilic

narrative style as a way of describing a certain kind of critical activity which he

associates with Conrad's experience of exile. If, as Said suggests in both texts, the style

and form of Conrad's narratives have at least a limited critical component, the character

of that critical component is in Said's description of the "worldliness" of written texts and

his constant invocations of Conrad's (as well his own) *experience* of exile. That is,

because Conrad's texts are what Said might call "worldly events," they do not present an

argument (or, at least, they do not "merely" present an argument) against imperialism in

the way that humanistic persuasive writing would, but instead, they inscribe Conrad's

experience of the social and political world of imperialism onto a material object, the

literary text. As he explains in "Criticism and Exile," "To value literature at all is to value

it as the individual work of an individual writer tangled up in circumstances taken for

granted by everyone, such things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language,

friends and so on" (xv). In Conrad's narratives, then, Said finds neither a clear and strong

oppositional critique of imperialism nor an unequivocal endorsement of it. Instead, he

finds a writer "tangled up in circumstances" with which, through the act of writing, he

must deal.

This vision of Conradian exile represents a corrective to the romanticized notion

of exile as a position of objectivity, a position which is apparently free from ideological

entanglements, with which Said is sometimes associated. Instead, it suggests that exile is

a condition in which the exile is caught up in multiple entanglements that preclude the

possibility of full objectivity. The work of the exilic critic, then, is not to render final,

unqualified judgments about the world, but rather to articulate the experience of existing

on the borders of multiple worlds and to imagine possibilities inaccessible to a single

cultural perspective. In so doing, the exilic critic inhabits both "oppositional" and "contrapuntal" positions, or, to return to Arac's phrasing, her work is alternately "aggressive" and "loving."

In this way, Said's reading of Conrad may be called an 'exilic reading.' Said demonstrates an affiliation maintained in conjunction with criticism. Also, as a Palestinian who has made a life in the West, he identifies, if only partially, with both sides of the imperial conflict which Conrad's work marks. It is useful to recall that "Two Vision in *Heart of Darkness*" is a key passage from the book Said called his "exile's book." The version of exile that he describes as his own experience contrasts starkly with the deeply pessimistic version which he finds in Conrad's work:

> Yet when I say "exile" I do not mean something sad or deprived. On the contrary, belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide enables to you to understand them more easily. . . . Perhaps all this has stimulated the kinds of interests and interpretations ventured here, but these circumstances certainly made it possible for me to feel as if I belonged to more than one history and more than one group. (*Culture and Imperialism* xxvii)

In Said's experience, exile is an enabling, if not ennobling, experience because it allows him a sense of multiple belonging which is connected to his sense of the permeability of cultural boundaries. Even the boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized are not hermetic. However, for Conrad, whose work suggests both that language, especially written language, is inadequate for communication and that cultural differences are ultimately insurmountable, there can be no sense of multiple belonging without the utter

dissolution of the self. From this perspective, to belong to more than one culture is to belong to none at all.

Conrad's failure, then, is not just the failure noted by Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, a failure to acknowledge the human agency hidden in the colonized "darkness." It is also a failure to imagine a human community separate from the sharp cultural boundaries which his work does so much to locate. This is the least "worldly" aspect of Conrad's work. If he was able, in part due to his experience as an exile, to see the historical contingency of European imperialism – to note its temporal and geographical borders – he is nonetheless unable to imagine a world in which such borders are not as clearly defined as the difference between light and darkness. He subjects the system of imperialism to a "worldly" examination, but he neglects to consider the "worldly" context of his own attitudes toward intercultural relationships and dialogue. Conrad cannot, then, be said to make an affirmative contribution to Said's notion of exile as a critical perspective. Instead, he offers a stark reminder that the condition of exile is not universally experienced as a privilege.

What Conrad can be said to add to Said's theory of exile is a commitment to the work of writing in spite of its inadequacies as a mode of coping with the pain of exilic isolation. Even though his work expresses grave doubts about the possibility of human communication across cultural boundaries, it also painstakingly develops a narrative form that attempts to compensate for this impossibility by recreating a coherent cultural context in which language makes sense. If his insistence on the inexorable isolation of exile is an indication of a lack of faith in the ability of his own efforts as a writer to overcome that isolation, he cannot be said to be utterly defeated by his doubts. He goes

on writing even as his fear of isolation and death reminds him of writing's futility. It is this commitment, ultimately, with which Said identifies.

Chapter Three: Making a Home of the Writing Self: V.S. Naipaul and a
Theory of Exilic Writing

V.S. Naipaul has one of the more contested literary reputations in contemporary

literature. Few writers from the postcolonial world have received more accolades from

the metropolitan literary establishment. Largely on the basis of his reputation as a bold

truth-teller and interpreter of the postcolonial world, Naipaul has secured a position of

cultural authority in England and America especially on the subjects of Islam and

postcolonial independence and garnered the 2001 Nobel Prize for Literature. At the same

time, however, he has been the object of pointed criticism from his fellow postcolonial

writers. Derek Walcott famously dubbed him "V.S. Nighfall" for his pessimistic

portrayals of the political potentials of postcolonial countries. Kwame Anthony Appiah

has described what he calls the "Naipaul fallacy." It is a fallacy, common to metropolitan

writers, which assumes that Africa, and the postcolonial world in general, can only be

understood when framed by a Western perspective. From the perspective of these

postcolonial writers, Naipaul has become a metropolitan writer, turning his back on his

postcolonial roots to earn the praise of Western elites who are comforted by his

descriptions of a hopelessly disordered postcolonial society. This is the perspective which

Said adopted in a 1994 *Salmagundi* forum when he criticized Naipaul for being a

"witness for the Western prosecution" ("Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World" 53). It

is worth quoting Said's critique of Naipaul at length because its vehemence is typical of

so much criticism of Naipaul and because it seems to gloss over the fact that many of the

claims made against the writer of fiction can be turned against the academic critic as well.

Naipaul, he says, has become a "standard-bearer" for a host of writers who

> specialize in the thesis of what one of them has called self-inflicted wounds,
> which is to say that we "non-Whites" are the cause of all our problems, not the
> overly maligned imperialists. Two things need to be said about the small band
> whose standard bearer Naipaul has become, all of whom share the same
> characteristics. One is that in presenting themselves as members of courageous
> minorities in the Third World, they are in fact not interested at all in the Third
> World—which they never address—but in the metropolitan intellectuals whose
> twists and turns have gone on despite the Third World, and whose approval they
> seem quite desperate to have. Naipaul writes for Irving Howe and Joan Didion,
> not for Eqbal Ahmad or Dennis Brutus or C.L.R. James who, after noting his
> early promise, went on to excoriate Naipaul for the scandal of his "Islamic
> journey," and more important, what is seen as crucially informative and telling
> about their work—their accounts of the Indian darkness or the Arab
> predicament—is precisely what is weakest about it: with reference to the
> actualities it is ignorant, illiterate and cliché-ridden. (53)

In his later work, Said softened his criticism of Naipaul by exempting the representations

of exile in some of his early novels (such as *A Bend in the River*) from the general

critique of Naipaul as a figure of complicity with metropolitan imperialism: "To some

degree the early V.S. Naipaul . . . *was* a figure of modern intellectual exile"

(*Representations* 54, emphasis added). Naipaul's travel writing, however, remained a

consistent target of Said's criticism. While it would be difficult to take exception with

Said's claim that Naipaul's descriptions of India and the Islamic world are often given more credit as cultural analysis than they deserve, his point, that Naipaul ignores the postcolonial world because he writes only for the approval of the western literary establishment and not for the more politically interested postcolonial intellectual, seems to overstate the case in such a way that undercuts Said's own position as postcolonial intellectual. Said has certainly enjoyed similar acclaim in western circles. Further, few writers have devoted as much intellectual and, through travel, physical energy to writing about formerly colonized countries and cultures. Nevertheless, throughout Said's work Naipaul represents a peculiarly pernicious example of the kind of free-floating intellectual who, ignorant of the historical and political realities of the postcolonial world, passes judgment on it from the confines of the metropolis and whose services are for sale to the highest bidder.

Where a conservative figure like Joseph Conrad plays an implicit, if also necessary, role in Said's articulation of exile as critical displacement, Naipaul would seem to represent the opposite of the Saidian perspective. Despite the fact that Naipaul shares with Said a personal history of exilic displacement (as well as a deep admiration for Conrad), Said often views him as merely a representative of a reactionary postcolonial politics. Yet the work of no other writer so fully embodies the tensions of the exilic perspective which Said describes and inhabits as does that of Naipaul. Both Said and Naipaul utilize what Abdirahman Hussein, following Said's own description of Foucault's method, calls a "technique of trouble" (4-8). As Hussein describes it, Said's work is marked by "an activated confrontation between agonistic dialectic and archaeology/genealogy" (4). This involves constant consideration and reconsideration of

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the dynamic paradoxes of modern life in conjunction with the investigation of "mental, textual, and cultural archives which have hitherto been considered sacrosanct or otherwise simply taken for granted" (7). This "technique" serves to allow Said to uncover ideologically suppressed material from the historical record of cultural texts without incorporating that material into a new totality. Naipaul's literary version of this "technique of trouble" likewise allows to him to uncover that which has been suppressed in the historical record. However, he employs this technique, even more explicitly than does Said, in the investigation of his own position as a postcolonial subject. Naipaul's work thus describes a dynamic relation between the public and the private or, to use a phrase shared by both Naipaul and Said, the writer and the world, a relation which allows him to uncover evidence which will help him to achieve self-knowledge. This self-knowledge, however, is not easily achieved, and once achieved, it is often found wanting as Naipaul continually investigates earlier versions of himself in order to refine and revise his self-knowledge. Further, this often takes the form of self-eviscerating revelations that shamefully expose his own prejudices and ignorance in the process of revising his personal narrative. In his relentless attempt to come to terms with himself as a postcolonial subject, Naipaul, perhaps more than any other contemporary writer, enacts in his writing the dialectical tensions of the exilic predicament, and he pursues a project of self-knowledge quite similar to that which Said has described as the critical project of exile.

Thus, in spite of Said's intense criticisms of Naipaul, Naipaul represents an important case for the development of a Saidian notion of exile because both figures rely for their rhetorical authority on their cultivation of exilic identities. In accusing Naipaul

of writing for Western intellectuals, Said repeats the kind of criticisms that have been

directed at him by critics like Aijaz Ahmad, and more importantly, at the very notion of

exile which he champions when he approvingly cites exilic figures like Erich Auerbach

and Theodor Adorno, figures who like Said and Naipaul make the tensions of the

predicament of exile productive in their work.[3] Any attempt to address the ultimate, and

important, political differences between Said and Naipaul must begin with the striking

similarities in the ways in which both writers make use of exile. For both, exile is a

disposition, a method, and most importantly a mode of living in the face of the trauma of

homelessness. Indeed, Said's experience of exile has been, in some senses, more secure

and privileged than Naipaul's, but nonetheless, Naipaul is held out by Said and the critics

who follow him as a disingenuous exile while Said's account of his own exile is taken to

be an authentic experience which shapes a disinterested intellectual project. Naipaul's

exile, these critics suggest, provides evidence of an opportunist attempt to gain the favor

of the metropolitan intelligentsia.[4] Rob Nixon's book, *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul,*

Postcolonial Mandarin, advances this characterization of the novelist, and in it, he offers

the most thorough account of the role of exile in the shaping of Naipaul's position as an

expert on the postcolonial world. In a chapter titled "The License of Exile," he contends

that Naipaul's account of his displacement has "a reversible lining." That is, it is "quite

possible to turn the conventional account of [Naipaul's] life inside out and discover not

Vidia the exiled victim of historical mischance, but Vidia the beneficiary of a narrative of

dislocation that ultimately bolsters the myth of detachment" (18). In Nixon's view,

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[3] See my discussion of Aijaz Ahmad's critique of Said in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* in Chapter One.
[4] For other critics who take this view, see Fawzia Mustapha, *V.S. Naipaul* and Selwyn Cudjoe, *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*;

Naipaul's exilic self-portrait is a rhetorical move that exaggerates his "homelessness" by which the novelist accords to himself an aura of detachment that, in turn, validates his claims about the postcolonial world. It should be added to Nixon's account that this rhetorical move grants to Naipaul two specific kinds of validation: 1) the validity of objectivity: by virtue of his exilic detachment, Naipaul is taken to be an impartial observer of events rather than one who is ideologically motivated, and 2) the validity of being a cultural insider: not only are his statements given more authority because of his supposed objectivity, but they are validated further because Naipaul often seems to be writing against his own cultural self-interest as a postcolonial figure. Therefore when he criticizes postcolonial figures, cultures, or nations, his claims seem all the more truthful for their apparent dissociation from ideology.

In contrast to what they see as the accepted view of Naipaul, critics like Nixon and Said portray the novelist's self-presentation as both deluded and self-serving. Thus, they attempt to refute the metropolitan critics who accept Naipaul's self-presentation without skepticism. In the words of Fawzia Mustapha,

> [b]y examining Naipaul's career through the framing device of authorial intent
> and its subsequent realization in the chronology of his publications, many readers
> choose to understand Naipaul as a writer in search of his subject whose voyages
> of discovery function within an empirical realm where "The world is what it is"
> and nothing else. (19)

Mustapha describes an uncritical attitude towards Naipaul that was common among many of his first reviewers and critics. Though this understanding of his work continues to be the basis for a large body of criticism that focuses on the intersection of Naipaul's work

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and his biography, it is perhaps most clearly expressed in two early responses to his work: that of the American writer Paul Theroux, who once considered Naipaul a friend and mentor, and the critic Alfred Kazin. Each sees Naipaul as utterly free from the confining pressures of tradition and cultural bias. According to Theroux, Naipaul is a writer "in whom there are no echoes or influences" (7), and for Kazin, Naipaul's "migratoriness" makes him "totally without ideology" (7,22). In each case, these defenses characterize Naipaul's appeal as a disinterested observer and interpreter of the postcolonial world.[5]

Most defenses of Naipaul's work, especially those by metropolitan critics, take up this less skeptical stance towards his work and give him the benefit of the doubt concerning his descriptions of and judgments about the postcolonial world. As it is for critics like Nixon who see Naipaul's appropriation of exile as an ideological deception, the central concern of Naipaul's defenders is the degree to which Naipaul's claims can be said to be true and to what extent his interpretations of the postcolonial world are prompted by ideology or crass self-promotion. His metropolitan defenders assume that his claims are those of a disinterested observer of the world while his critics tend to assume that his claims are either ideologically motivated or blatantly self-serving. The divide between Naipaul's metropolitan defenders and his postcolonial critics repeats a political narrative common to much postcolonial theory and literary criticism: it posits a necessary divide between metropolitan and postcolonial politics and assumes that an

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[5] This is the approach of much of the early work on Naipaul, but it is an approach that persists in recent Naipaul criticism. For more examples of this approach see Andrew Gurr's "The Freedom of Exile in Naipaul and Doris Lessing" and *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*; Richard Kelly, *V.S. Naipaul*; Bruce King, *V.S. Naipaul*; and more recently Lillian Feder's *Naipaul's Truth: The Making of a Writer* and Gillian Dooley, *V.S. Naipaul, Man and Writer*.

oppositional solidarity exists (or at least should exist) between postcolonial figures. In Naipaul criticism, this narrative produces a largely irresolvable critical divide, which turns on questions of Naipaul's moral character and his willful complicity with colonialist ideology, fails to address the internal complexities of his work, and therefore threatens to turn him into a kind of *tabula rasa* onto which any critic can write his or her own ideological interpretation. A similar pattern persists in much of the work on Said. Both his critics and his defenders take his position as an exile, both in and out of culture, as their starting point for their considerations of his authority, or lack thereof, as an interpreter of culture. That is, they base their arguments on the degree to which Said can be said to be sincere and knowledgeable on the basis of the authority accorded to him by his ambivalent relationship to postcolonial cultures, and they proceed from there either to defend or to critique his claims. Inasmuch as Naipaul's and Said's critics have taken the legitimacy of the exilic positions claimed by these two writers as the basis for an approach to their two separate projects, Naipaul and Said can be said to have suffered (and sometimes benefited) from the same critical misperception.

A notable exception to this critical divide in Naipaul criticism comes from Sara Suleri, who offers a defense of Naipaul from a postcolonial perspective that attempts to account for the "profound ideological ambivalence" of his work (150), an ambivalence about literary authority which, she says, is produced in the relationship between Naipaul, postcolonial history, and the English literary canon. From this perspective, Suleri sees him as a figure caught at the juncture of a colonial past and a postcolonial present, and his narratives, therefore, have "little to do with definitive statements about postcolonial history, and more with a perception of the writer's guilty involvement in the construction

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of his own plots" (150). That is, Suleri suggests, Naipaul's work in fiction and travel

writing should not be read as strictly speaking *for* or *about* postcolonial cultures, and

instead, they should be taken primarily as personal attempts to negotiate his own

relationship to colonial history and the English literary canon. This shift in focus sets

aside the question of the validity of Naipaul's descriptions of the postcolonial world in

favor of examining his project on its own explicitly literary and autobiographical terms.

In this way, Suleri unintentionally suggests a key similarity between Naipaulian and

Saidian appropriations of exile. While these two postcolonial figures more often than not

reach dramatically different judgments about their colonial and postcolonial subjects,

they share remarkably similar experiences of postcolonial displacement, but more

important than their shared historical experience is their shared exilic project. They both

find in exile the occasion and the structuring experience for a project of self-knowledge.

Just as Said found in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* an opportunity to

understand his own postcolonial positionality,[6] Naipaul finds through the act of writing a

field in which he may locate himself in relationship to his own postcolonial history. In

both of these cases, exile is the experience which both necessitates and becomes a project

of self-knowledge represented by postcolonial writing in the forms of academic criticism,

fiction, and travel writing. What is a subdued, although consistent, strand in Said's work,

writing about the postcolonial world as an attempt at self-knowledge, Naipaul develops

into an entire literary project devoted to the writing of artistic autobiography.

      Naipaul and Said share more than their attempts to use writing to map their

postcolonial identities; they also partake of the dialectical tensions of exilic displacement

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[6] See my discussion of Said's exilic self-mapping in Chapter One.

in that their projects alternate between a number of different perspectives on their own experiences. In her article, "V.S. Naipaul and Edward Said: A New Cosmopolitanism?" Joan Cocks argues that Naipaul and Said represent a new cosmopolitanism, one that dissociates itself from the imperial history of the term, in that their work "[incorporates] the tensions between particularism and universalism into their thought and feeling," (47). She contends, that is, that both Naipaul and Said attempt to bridge the gap between what are seen as defensive particularisms – nationalism, for example – and an apparently ungrounded cosmopolitanism. Specifically, Cocks argues that Naipaul shares with Said a project that "undermines the nationalist idea of absolute rootedness and the old cosmopolitan idea of absolute detachment" (58). Cocks labels this attitude towards displacement a "new cosmopolitanism," but the Saidian term "exile" seems a more apt label for a disposition that so thoroughly registers the pain of displacement even as it makes use of the freedom it provides. As Cocks rightly notes, many of the criticisms of Naipaul's privileged experience of exile can be turned back on Said, so she concludes that they are divided more by their political allegiances than they are by their personal privileges. In Naipaul's wide-ranging subject matter and his willingness to encounter directly various areas of the postcolonial world, Cocks finds that he offers a nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism that resists the imperial hubris and superficiality with which the term is usually associated. That is, "he dispels any necessary contradiction between cosmopolitanism and populism, and any necessary connection between cosmopolitanism and a haughty disdain for the countryside" (51). She credits Naipaul with seeing that the apparent conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism indicates "a split in the twentieth-century personality" rather than seeing them as terms in

necessary contradiction (53). His cosmopolitanism, however, she describes as a "negative cosmopolitanism" because it is tainted by a bleak view of "humanity as a differentiated whole" (50). What redeems Naipaul, if only partially, is a sensitivity to the "mobility of others" that resists the easy "consuming attitude toward local settings" that would make him little more than a tourist.

Cocks, like most defenders of Naipaul, is willing to note and then disregard Naipaul's primary affiliations with Western culture, what she calls his "racial ontology" which privileges Europeans over Arabs, Asians, and Africans, and his description of the world as divided between the polarized blocks of civilization and barbarism. All of these tendencies which "smack of old-style cosmopolitan hubris," she says, are undermined by the strain in Naipaul's work that suggest that the condition of exile is one that is generalized in the split between nationalism and particularism (52). While this conclusion too easily clears Naipaul of the charges she lists, it suggests how Naipaul and Said might be productively read against each other. However, instead of bracketing the politics of the two thinkers, as Cocks does in order to place emphasis on the philosophical similarities between Said and Naipaul's view of exile, any reading which offers an account of their philosophical similarities must also account for the relationship between their philosophies of exile and their political stances. That is to say that what remains to be considered in a comparison of Said and Naipaul is the question of how their views of exile, as an attempt to negotiate the gap between cultural particularism and ethical universalism and thus to achieve self-knowledge, have come to be associated with such different political visions. While Said has used exile as a way of describing an intellectual practice that attempts to negotiate individual particulars and normative generalities

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without privileging either perspective, Naipaul develops an exilic aesthetic that privileges the immediacies of exilic experience at the expense of potential normativity.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

V.S. Naipaul's writing career spans a vast literary and geographical territory, and his work has evolved out of a consistent set of concerns about writing and the postcolonial world. As a young writer recently out of Oxford in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he made a name for himself as a writer of comic, so called "Dickensian," novels of life in the colonial Carribean world of his home in Trinidad. This mode of writing began with *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), his first publication, and *Miguel Street* (1959), a collection of stories about street life in Trinidad.[7] His 1961 novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, which is often said to be his masterpiece, is the chief achievement of this period in Naipaul's career, but he also produced a number of other novels in this vein. In the 1970s, Naipaul's focus shifted from comic novels to fiction and non-fiction based on his travels in the formerly colonized nations of Africa, South America, and especially his ancestral homeland of India. It was in this period that he produced his most controversial writing, the work that cemented his reputation among postcolonial thinkers as a native informant confirming for Western audiences their own prejudices against the postcolonial world. Travel books like *An Area of Darkness*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *The Return of Eva Peron, with The Killings in Trinidad* as well as books of fiction such as *In a Free State*, *Guerillas*, and *A Bend in the River* served to paint a

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[7] *Miguel Street* actually contains Naipaul's first writing, but because his publisher wanted a novel, *Mystic Masseur* was published first.

portrait of a permanently chaotic postcolonial world resistant to the civilizing work of Western culture.

Naipaul's work of the 1980s and early 1990s began to take a decidedly more personal emphasis in work such as *Finding the Center* and *The Engima of Arrival* that served to articulate the relation of Naipaul's exilic, postcolonial biography to his project as a postcolonial writer. In these works, all of which articulate an autobiographical account of his literary project, he confronts the legacy of his father, a journalist of some note in Trinidad who had aspired to be a "writer," his relationship to metropolitan literature and colonial education, and the vexed project of postcolonial writing. Each of these subjects had been addressed to a lesser extent in his earlier fiction, with the exception of the 1967 novel *The Mimic Men* which was his first novel to take these subjects together as constitutive components of his own project. In that novel, Naipaul presents a view of exilic writing as a clarifying process of narrative reflection that is central to his own attempts to understand and write about the postcolonial world and thus achieve self-knowledge. In *Enigma of Arrival*, he presents a more dynamic theory of exilic writing than that presented in *The Mimic Men* and applies it directly to his autobiography and the achievement of his own literary reputation.

This brief sketch of Naipaul's career should illustrate the remarkable consistency of his exilic project. Across a number of genres and topics, he has repeatedly made use of an exilic perspective to address the forces and events that have come to shape him as a postcolonial subject, and without fail, he has placed great faith in the act of writing as a tool for mapping these forces and thereby coming to an understanding of himself, even though the process can involve intense self-evaluation, even self-evisceration. In this

way, Naipaul's literary project can be seen as an extension and intensification of the same postcolonial project of exile which structures Said's critical project. This is not meant to suggest, however, that Said's and Naipaul's projects should be seen as having parallel political implications, nor that there exists some happy middle ground in between the two perspectives that might be profitably inhabited. Instead, I would suggest that, to borrow Suleri's paraphrase, there has been "commerce" between Said and Naipaul and that examining the appropriations of exile in these two writers' works will reveal the limits of an exilic perspective for postcolonial criticism. The remainder of this chapter will consider the relationship between the Naipaulian view of exile and the Saidian view of exile as a condition requiring and facilitating continuous cultural and ideological renegotiations which I outlined in Chapter One. As a way of describing this relationship, I will examine the development of Naipaul's aesthetic autobiography by focusing on the two novels that constitute his literary self-portrait: *The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival*. In the same way that Said uses exile as a model for intellectual critical practice, Naipaul thematizes his own exile, depicting it as a necessary precondition to his "vocation" as a writer. An examination of these novels will show, however, that Naipaul's appropriation of exile also departs in significant ways from Saidian exile where it concerns an ethical relationship between the exile and the world or the relationships between writer, subject, and audience. Where a Saidian view of exilic writing requires it to be dialectical, both an attempt at self-knowledge and an act that engages the world outside of the text and author, Naipaul's view of exilic writing is predominantly concerned with making a textual space outside of the world in which the writer may

escape the pressures of history and, in so doing, fashion a liveable life in the face of often implacable exilic realities.

"Emancipation is not possible for everyone": The Writer in Exile in *The Mimic Men*

If Naipaul's intellectual project can be seen to be a consistent attempt to achieve self-knowledge through the narrative reflection of exilic writing, it is because of the reliably autobiographical nature of its content. This is as true in his fiction as it is in his travel and non-fiction writing: the settings of his fiction often resemble his home island of Trinidad, and even those texts that take another historical place for their setting often can be linked directly to Naipaul's personal travels. Just as often, his narrators seem to be fictionalized versions of Naipaul himself or, at the least, representative fragments of his hybrid biography. *In a Free State*, for instance, is a short story sequence in which each story is presented through the consciousness of a different character representative of a variety of postcolonial experiences – travelers, postcolonial immigrants in the metropolis, and tourists – each of which corresponds to a different perspective on Naipaul's own life. In this way, Naipaul's explicitly autobiographical explorations, which come much later in his career, are consistent with his earlier fictional work because both modes of writing allow him to constitute himself as a postcolonial writing subject.

The Mimic Men stands at a pivotal point in Naipaul's project as it moves from fictional explorations of biographical material to more explicit autobiography, from the comic novels about the Caribbean with which he began his career to the travel writing and nonfiction which have come to dominate his reputation. It is a novel that partakes of the intellectual impulses that drive both of these periods of his work. It resembles the comic novels, such as *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *Miguel Street*, in its Caribbean setting

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and its portrayal of the disorder that attends postcolonial independence, and it links the experience of exile with the act of writing as do the autobiographical explorations of *Finding the Center* and *Enigma of Arrival*. *The Mimic Men* takes the form of a memoir written by Ralph Singh, formerly a businessman and politician on the fictional Caribbean island of Isabella, who has come to be exiled from his home island as the result of political turmoil, and so, the novel is structured through Singh's retrospective consciousness. At the age of 40, living in a small London hotel room to which he has retreated, he reflects on his life and "the shipwreck," he says, "which all my life I had sought to avoid" (7). From this vantage point, he attempts to explain and to impose order on the apparently chaotic experiences of his life for, as he describes it, "to be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, was to be born into disorder" (118). Thus, the narrative oscillates between past and present and between Singh's biographical narration and his commentary on and analysis of the events which have led him into exile. This associative movement of the narrative is meant to reflect the very chaos which he describes. Even as he attempts to order his life, the events of his narrative defy that order. Thus, as he recounts the episodes of his life, he vacillates between conflicting interpretations of his own motives and actions as well as the events of his island.

Specifically, he vacillates between a cynical, deterministic view of his (and his island's) fate, one that suggests that both he and the people of his home country are doomed to disorder by their marginality, and a view that suggests that they may have at least some limited influence on their fates. For Singh, this is expressed in two alternating views of his own life: he sees himself as both a marginal figure, outside the real world

represented by the metropolitan center of London, and as a figure of such cosmic importance that he is watched by a "celestial camera" which has singled him out as special from "the camouflage of people." Central to this narrative ambivalence are the closely related experience of exile and the practice of writing. It is from the distance of exile that Singh feels he is able to separate himself from personal and political entanglements and, in the act of writing his own narrative, to reconstruct and investigate his life. It is through the exilic writing of his memoir that he hopes to "impose order on [his] own history" (243) and thereby constitute himself as a subject in his own narrative. So what Naipaul presents us with in *The Mimic Men* is a view of the struggle to appropriate exile for the purpose of achieving self-knowledge and the difficulties and misapprehensions that necessarily befall such a project, and instead of the exile as a figure of objective detachment, he gives us Ralph Singh, the exile hopelessly bound by both his past and his fantasies of fresh starts.

Critics have seen in *The Mimic Men* and its narrator what are now considered standard Naipaulian criticisms of postcolonial societies and their political potentials, especially his notion of colonial mimicry. Nixon describes the Naipaulian view of mimicry this way: "If for Naipaul, 'primitives' experience the false security of living in relatively closed cultures, the 'mimics' who inhabit the partly Westernized societies of the Third World have learned the security of living off the creativeness of others. By languishing in the idleness of that dependency, they dehumanize themselves" (130). As Nixon goes on to explain, Naipaul employs the term "mimicry" as both "explanation" and "accusation." That is, he sometimes uses it to describe with some sympathy for its victims the forces of colonialism which have led to a widespread sense of cultural

insecurity in postcolonial societies, and sometime he uses it as a critical bludgeon with which to blame the postcolonial world rather than the structures of colonialism and imperialism for the disorder he finds there. For Nixon, this is a critical evasion that neglects the persistent effects of colonialism on postcolonial societies and which aligns Naipaul with the metropolitan center against the postcolonial periphery. "Naipaul's account of 'colonial mimicry'," he says, "is consistent with his general tendency to be less incensed by the imperiousness of the powerful than by the ideals and self-delusions of the largely disempowered" (131).

Nixon's account of Naipaulian mimicry points to the ambivalent way in which Naipaul deploys one of the most common terms in his cultural lexicon, and yet he dismisses that ambivalence by reducing it to its most ideologically questionable formulation: mimicry as accusation. Indeed, Naipaul often uses mimicry as a way of dismissing postcolonial political movements, especially those which coalesce around identity, but he also uses the term to describe his own development as a writer as a movement away from mimicry toward authenticity. It is deeply unfortunate that Naipaul reserves for himself this ability to break free from the patterns of mimicry and denies it to many of the postcolonial societies he has written about, but this can be partially explained (if not excused) by the lofty conceptions of writing and the writer and their relationship to mimicry outlined in *The Mimic Men* and throughout his work. Specifically, Ralph Singh develops an exilic theory of writing as a way of escaping the cycle of mimicry and achieving authenticity, and he presents exilic writing as a preferable alternative to racialist attempts to reclaim authenticity through common ethnic or racial identity.

Singh describes a relationship of mimicry between the metropolitan society of London and his teachers at Isabella Imperial School and the multi-racial society of Isabella through an ambivalent contrast between the "real" world outside the island and the fantasy which is island life as he sees it. This is initially established by his experiences as a student. Writing of the contrast between the education he received and the world in which he lived (as well as the contrast between his teachers' metropolitan experience and the provincialism of his fellow students) he offers mimicry as the general mode of their education:

> There in Liège in a traffic jam, on the snow slopes of the Laurentians, was the true, pure world. We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. (146)

Feeling cut off from the world of romance and history that was represented to him by his expatriate teachers and their lives, Singh suggests that the marginality of the students of Isabella Imperial School relative to the metropolis prevents them from achieving reality. Further, he posits the metropolitan world as one of ideals, "the true, pure world," while the colonial world of Isabella is characterized by "corruption." By so idealizing the metropolis, he neglects and even erases both the physical and cultural worlds of his home country. "My first memory of school," he recalls, "is of taking an apple to a teacher" (90). It is a puzzling memory because it points to the degree to which he has internalized the cultural perspective of the metropolis at the expense of a perspective fitting with his

island: "We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have." His very memory is so thoroughly colonized by his idealization of the metropolis that he can only accept the denial of his own experience.

For Singh, the problem of mimicry is not simply the result of a colonial education system that privileges metropolitan subjects and perspectives, but it is also the result of the mixed cultural history of the Caribbean "slave island" of Isabella. His sense of cultural integrity, "feeling [himself] as a whole person," as well as that of others born in the colonial periphery, proves to be thoroughly tenuous in this setting. On this island, even in its most primitive areas, there are no sources of cultural continuity to which one might turn for a sense of security. While on a family vacation away from the city, he remarks on this lack of indigenous culture:

> Now the Caribs had been absorbed and had simply ceased to be. We were not far from the city – the little shops stocked familiar goods and carried familiar advertisements – but it was like being in an area of legend. The scale was small in time, number and area; and here, just for a moment, the rise and fall and extinction of peoples, a concept so big and alarming, was concrete and close. Slaves and runaways, hunters and hunted, rulers and ruled: they had no romance for me. Their message was only that nothing was secure. (121)

In fact, the only romance which the island holds for him is its connection to figures like Columbus and Stendhal, the great figures of European history and literature.

This profound lack of cultural authenticity leaves Singh feeling "shipwrecked," his word for the condition of the entire island cut off from the cultural traditions which

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might legitimize it. In the face of this feeling of shipwreck, Singh retreats into a private world of fantasy in which he imagines himself as the lost leader of Central Asian horsemen who seek him to no avail. It is the fantasy of a cultural heritage to which he cannot lay claim because his family's migration to Isabella has severed him from it. This is also the condition in which he finds his fellow students each of whom are cut off from cultural traditions by migration or, in the case of his friend Browne, by a history of slavery. Divorced from their cultural roots by the movements of colonialism, abandoned by the metropolitan center, and unable to fully conform to English culture, Singh feels that they are incapable of authentic agency and can only imitate the exemplars given them by a cultural past to which they can no longer lay legitimate claim or to follow imperfectly the paths prescribed by their colonial educational system. With no cultural tradition to legitimate their identities, they are each driven to the only option available to them, colonial mimicry.

From this perspective, Singh holds out precious little hope for the possibility of cultural or political change that might lead to a new sense of cultural security. In fact, he offers a terribly bleak view of the potentials of postcolonial politics and especially political independence. Since postcolonial societies are trapped in their mimicry of colonial norms, he finds that they are fundamentally incapable of controlling their own fortunes and that the efforts of colonial politicians to change this situation are doomed at the outset. "The career of the colonial politician," he says paraphrasing Hobbes' famous description of life, "is short and ends brutally." And this, he explains, is because

We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power; as soon as our

bluff is called we are lost. Politics are for us a do-or-die, once-for-all charge.

Once we are committed we fight more than political battles; we often fight quite

literally for our lives. Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us.

There are no universities or City houses to refresh us and absorb us after the heat

of battle. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only

one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and

the home counties. (8)

Not only, then, are these societies cut off from cultural ties; they lack the kinds of

institutions that might facilitate a less chaotic political culture. In this setting, politicians

are left with the situation in which Singh finds himself at the beginning of the novel:

metropolitan exile.

The defeatist tone of this passage and the attitude toward colonial politics and

toward the metropolitan center, which he now describes as "the greater disorder" even as

he thinks of it as the "home counties," are typical of Singh's retrospective analysis of his

political career and active life, but as a young man, Singh looked to London as a symbol

of order. So, he resolved to make an escape from the chaos of Isabella. He only came to

accept his fate as a mimic man after he had fled the island for the security of the city of

"miraculous light." What he encountered in the city, however, only led him to a passive

acceptance of his powerlessness, what he would later call an attitude of "placidity," so

that he cynically embraces mimicry as a way of getting along in the world. Instead of

order, in London, he only finds further confusion which denies his ideal of the city. He

offers this grim view of the city and human interaction in general:

How right our Aryan ancestors were to create gods. We seek sex, and are left with

two private bodies on a stained bed. The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded

us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of

ourselves. It is with cities as it is with sex. We seek the physical city and find only

a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that

we are individuals, units. Yet the idea of the city remains; it is the god of the city

that we pursue in vain. (18)[8]

Seeking in London order and "the flowering, the extension of [himself] that ought to have

come in a city of such miraculous light," Singh tried to "give [himself] a personality," but

without a guide to legitimate that personality, he finds himself longing for the certainties

of his home island from which he previously had only sought escape (27). With the

realization that the metropolitan city offered no more security than Isabella, he is

disabused of his notion of being "marked," for in the city "No celestial camera tracked

[his] movements" (30). So he embraces the mimicry which he had once fled choosing to

play the role of the "dandy, extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship" (20). With

this new passive attitude toward his own identity, Singh leaves his life to the whims of

chance and avoids the entanglements of other human relationships, preferring, for

instance, to travel the Continent to pursue relationships with women whose language he

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[8] Richard Kelly notes that this passage recalls T.S. Eliot's description of the city in *The Wasteland* and that the title of the novel echoes the title of Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men." This leads him to ignore the specifically postcolonial historical context of Singh's (and Naipaul's) theories of mimicry and authenticity. Likewise, Bruce Kelly contends that the disorder described by Singh has "other, deeper roots" in "an existential vision of an absurd, meaningless universe, a world populated by mankind without any god or purpose" (69). Locating Naipaul's theme of "shipwreck" in the tradition of "Sartrean existentialist philosophy," Kelly misinterprets the direction of Singh's theory of identity. Naipaul should not be seen to be using a postcolonial setting to illustrate modernist themes or Existential philosophy; instead, his work demonstrates the correlations between colonialism and modernity.

does not speak. "Intimacy," he says, "the world holds horror" (25). Still, he found comfort in Sandra, an English woman, who like Singh had rejected her connections to her family and past and whom he would eventually marry but as the result of the actions of others rather than his own desire. Like Singh, Sandra sought escape from her "common" past through education and the "pursuit of culture," but after twice failing a qualifying examination, she turned to Singh for escape, demanding "with a look of almost total hatred: 'Why don't you propose, you *fool*?'" (46).

In the face of this powerful demand and the equally forceful personality behind it, Singh finds himself surrendering himself both to Sandra and to the events of history which were unfolding around him. This surrender brings about a feeling of "placidity," a kind of internal detachment from the external world, which proceeds from his decision "never [to] allow [himself] to be damaged again" (57). This feeling of placidity, he felt, walled him off from the rest of the world and gave him, through indifference, control of his identity: "so that at last my 'character' became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained" (57). Now with the assurance of security this withdrawal seemed to promise and a wife who could share in his feelings of displacement, Singh could once again flee, this time from the metropolitan city, and face the "failure" and "humiliation" of returning to the Island which he had hoped to leave behind. On Isabella, though, Singh and Sandra do not attempt to integrate themselves into Singh's family life but instead associate with the group of expatriates for whom the island was a mere "setting" and who shared the couples' lack of "complicating loyalties or depths" (55). And indeed, Singh and Sandra flourish in this new life. Singh sells the land of his inheritance and becomes a real estate developer while Sandra becomes the center

of their glamorous expatriate social circle. All of this, Singh recounts with his

characteristic diagnostic tone, neither bragging about his success nor lamenting its

eventual failure. Instead, he sees in his business success, which came too easily, and in

his marriage, the repeating pattern which would eventually lead to his downfall, the

playacting of mimicry. As he says later of his political life, "From playacting to disorder:

it is the pattern" (184). His marriage to Sandra and their place in the social circle of rich

expatriate professionals disintegrates as she begins to share his feelings of "being flung

off the end of the world" (69). In the midst of building a Roman house, with its

suggestions of order and stability, Singh begins to frequent prostitutes only to realize,

with some surprise, that Sandra might be seeking similar company as well. In the same

passive way that he accepted Sandra's demand of marriage, he waited for her to leave,

and after which, through the "purest accident," his political life would begin (41).

Crucial to this new political life were Singh's relationship with his father and the

discovery of writing. In the years before Singh left Isabella the first time, his father had

separated himself from the family, and after leading a dockworkers strike, he had

retreated to the wilderness where he became kind of itinerant preacher with the new name

Gurudeva. His father's explicit rejection of his family was both a point of shame and

some pride for the young Singh. At school, the working class students, like his friend

Browne, now saw him as someone who sided with them against the students of the

wealthy and aloof families like the Deschampneufs. For the young Singh, this

"assumption that [he] was *one of them*" was terrifying (133). It implied that he was being

enlisted for "a new stage in the old war between master and slave," something for which

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he had no desire. At the time, he felt that"[his] chieftaincy lay elsewhere," in London, and he wanted no part of the conflicts of the island (138).

After his return to Isabella and the dissolution of his marriage to Sandra, Singh found himself once again, somewhat unwittingly, enmeshed in the politics of the island. His friend Browne, whom he had once lumped together with all the other mimics in his school, had left for London as well, but he had returned to a career as a kind of renegade, a pamphleteer, sometime publisher, and editor. Browne enlisted Singh now to invest in his paper *The Socialist* as a way of commemorating the dockworkers' strike led by his father Gurudeva and that Singh would write the main article. Although this reminder of his father gave Singh some uneasiness, Browne's certainty reassured him because it gave him a renewed sense of himself as a whole person. In the intervening years, Browne had maintained a view of him as a "total person," and offering Singh this view of himself, this role, he again looked to others for his identity and reentered the world through politics. So, the Roman house which was to have been a stabilizing structure in his marriage and business life would become the center of the political movement that he and Browne would lead.

From Singh's later perspective, the results of Singh's and Browne's political endeavors are predictable enough because the movement lacked any direction or philosophy. Instead, it was defined by contempt for the people they sought to motivate and the courage to destroy the prevailing order of the island society whose place they sought to take though they had nothing with which to replace it. This, however, is not something that they could have seen at the time; mired as they were in the present, they could only see the failures of the generation of politicians who had come before them,

small businessmen who mainly sought accommodation with the colonial authorities. He

laments, "how could we see when we ourselves were a part of the pattern. The others we

could observe" (191). Their movement succeeds in bringing drama to Isabella, an

achievement sufficient to gain them the votes needed for political office but not sufficient

to sustain them once they gained power. Browne sets himself apart from his movement as

he takes up residence in the governor's mansion, and Singh, despite some attempts at

small policy changes (a paper about reforming the police force, for instance), finds

himself disillusioned once again. They rely on the very expatriate professionals whom

they had promised to deport because they haven't the skills and expertise to run the

government. They become mere placeholders waiting for the next revolution.

Singh's political life, corrupted by the essential mimicry of his marginal, colonial

island, inevitably ends in his political failure and, ultimately, in his exile in England.

There he finds others who have dissociated themselves from their home countries. This

exile is a repetition of his early withdrawal, his placidity. It is from the relative calm and

order of his hotel life as an exile that he sits down to write the memoirs which constitute

the novel, but he insists that the instinct to write has been with him for some time. The

difficult writing he does now, however, contrasts with his first piece of writing, *The

Socialist* essay about his father which came so effortlessly, because it seems to give him a

clearer view of himself rather than perpetuate his self-delusions. Of that first essay he

says,

> The essay about my father for *The Socialist* wrote itself. It was the work of an
>
> evening. It came easily, I realized later, because it was my first piece of writing.
>
> Every successive piece was a little less easy, though I never lost my facility. But

at the time, as my pen ran over the paper, I thought that the sentences flowed, in sequence and without error, because I was making a confession, proclaiming the name, making an act of expiation. The irony doesn't escape me: that article was deeply dishonest. It was the work of a convert, a man just created, just presented with a picture of himself. It was the first of many such pieces: balanced, fair, with the final truth evaded, until at last this truth was lost. The writing of this book has been more than a release from those articles; it has been an attempt to rediscover that truth. (189)

The difference, Singh would have us believe, between the easy writing of his political essays and the more difficult writing of his memoir is that he now writes from the distance of exile and time. He expected that the writing of his memoirs would have been similarly easy, "the labour of three or four weeks," and that it might lead him to a career as a freelance expert on colonial issues, but instead, he found it a much more demanding task, one that would allow and require him to reconstitute his sense of self. In the past, Singh had thought of writers as "incomplete people, to whom writing was a substitute for what it then pleased me to call life" (244). But in this new setting, he comes to the realization that the act of writing his memoirs has "become an end in itself, [and] that the recording of a life [has] become an extension of that life" (244).

While the impulse to write, particularly to write history, had been with him from the beginning of his political career and though he had done much writing for political purposes, he was so enmeshed in the corruptions of mimicry that he could not detach himself and thereby gain access to the truth of his experience. This accounts for the numerous narrative hesitations and self-questionings that interrupt his narrative as well as

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the disjointed structure of its plot. Where the sentences in the essay about his father came easily and in sequence, Singh's narrative is fragmented and out of chronological sequence; in this way, it resists the comfort of a simple sequential cause-and-effect explanation of his life. Singh's narrative also disrupts and causes him to revise his own view of himself and the events of his life. "As I write," he says, "my own view of my action alters" (183). Writing, and especially the exilic writing that makes up his memoirs, has allowed him to escape the cycle of mimicry in which he had felt trapped and achieve a sense of self that is coherent. In the concluding remarks on his experience, he says

> It does not worry me now, as it worried me when I began this book, that at the age of forty I should find myself at the end of my active life. I do not now think this is even true. I no longer yearn for ideal landscapes and no longer wish to know the god of the city. This does not strike me as loss. I feel, instead, I have lived through attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me joy to find that in so doing I have also fulfilled the fourfould division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been student, householder and man of affairs, recluse. (250-1)

So, Singh finds that his writing has allowed him to re-integrate his self into a cultural narrative that legitimizes his view of himself, and he can thus begin afresh to re-enter the world as an agent in control of his own desires and actions: "I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of the free man" (251).

From Singh's perspective, he has become a prime example of the exile who has freed himself from his own self-delusions as well as the entanglements of relationships and ideology, and numerous critics have accepted this description of him. Indeed, it is a

reading of the novel that fits quite nicely with the exilic self-portrait that Naipaul has painted of himself as one who has achieved self-knowledge, has accessed the truth of his experiences. Lillian Feder, for example, takes this view when she says that

> Unlike Naipaul, Singh, having evaded self-knowledge for much of his life in compromise and betrayal, faces his deceptions only in writing his memoir. He approaches the truth regarding his personal and professional life warily, sometimes contradicting himself, changing his position, and in the end he has earned the perception he shares with his creator that "writing, for all its initial distortions, clarifies and even becomes a process of life." (184-5)

From this perspective, Naipaul's portrayal of Singh is a perfect example of a kind of heroic intellectual exile, one who has risen above the worldly considerations of filiation and affiliation to achieve clear and reliable self-knowledge. Feder, here, credits both Naipaul and Singh with extraordinary gifts of insight into the workings of their own lives, insight that Naipaul has by virtue of his lifelong devotion to writing and that Singh earns as writing allows him to overcome the "compromise and betrayal" of his life. This has allowed him the possibility of a fresh start, the chance to begin his life again without the impediments of ideology and personal loyalties.

Any reading of *The Mimic Men*, however, must take into account the intense skepticism with which Naipaul treats all of the fresh starts of the novel. For both Singh and the island of Isabella, fresh starts always prove to be false starts; they end as mere repetitions of the pattern of mimicry that Singh describes and that so often appears in Naipaul's work. Each time Singh believes that he has left his past behind for something new, either by leaving Isabella for London or his return with an attitude of placidity,

events impinge upon him and draw him back into the world. At the end of the novel, Singh claims to have broken this cycle and "cleared the decks for fresh action," though he does not know what that action might be. From his lengthy discussion of the pleasures of writing, one presumes that it will involve a continuing of that "process of life." And certainly the routine of writing seems to have given him comfort and a sense of order he had not had; it has allowed him to reconstitute himself as the subject of his own narrative.

However, while Singh believes that this will be the last word on the matter (he closes the book with the Latin, "*dixi*," suggesting that there is nothing more to be said) his reversion to cultural fantasy suggests that the self-knowledge to which writing has given him access may not be as certain as he believes. His exile, he says, has been "fruitful" in that it has freed him from attachments and allowed him to "simplify" his life, and these feelings are confirmed when he realizes that his life has fulfilled the "fourfould division of life prescribed by [his] Aryan ancestors" having lived as a student, a householder, a man of affairs, and finally a recluse. This recalls his father's escape from the family into the wilderness. It also echoes the young Singh's fantasies of origins, of being a chieftain among Central Asian horsemen in a land of mountains and snow. He claims that he no longer desires such fantasies ("I have seen much snow. It never fails to enchant me, but I no longer think of it as my element. I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of reality."). But his reincorporation into the narrative "prescribed by his Aryan ancestors" suggests not that he has gone beyond attachment but that he still harbors a desire for his view of himself to be confirmed by an authority outside himself (10).

In this sense, the writing life to which the work of composing his memoirs seems to have led him is less an escape and a revelation of self-knowledge than it is another delusion, a repetition of the dependence on others for legitimacy that culminates in mimicry, a continuation of the trouble his life has always been. *The Mimic Men*, then, could be said both to construct Naipaul's view of the writing life and undermine that view. It presents a view of exilic writing that purports the writer's transcendence of his worldly encumbrances which is the view of Naipaul's writing project that he has consistently promoted, but the deep skepticism he expresses towards the possibility of such transcendence calls into question the very premise of the attempt to use exilic writing for such a purpose. Naipaul and Singh, of course, reserve for themselves the ability to write themselves out of their entanglements. It is the special gift of the writer committed to writing as a vocation that they share. "Emancipation" Singh says, "is not possible for all" (209). But, his memoirs show, it may not even possible for the writer.

Homi Bhabha has described Naipaul's translation of English literature, especially Conrad, into postcolonial settings as "an attempt to transform the despair of postcolonial history into an appeal for the autonomy of art" (107). *The Mimic Men* takes this appeal one step further: not only does it represent Naipaul's appeal for the autonomy of art; it is his appeal for the autonomy of the very artist. Nonetheless, it is an appeal that leads only to a particularly exilic disappointment. While Singh seeks to replicate the freedom of physical exilic displacement in the psychic self-displacement of exilic writing, he fails to realize that exilic writing, like exilic living, involves more than displacement. It also involves an emplacement in a new setting which requires a renewed engagement with the world. Naipaul would have the artist in exile, "existing within a walled, impregnable

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field," and Singh believes he has achieved such autonomy; the novel suggests, however, that such freedom, if not impossible, is reserved for those with even greater powers of vision than either novelist or character possess.

Naipaul's Transparent "I/eye": The Writer's Vision in *The Enigma of Arrival*

Where *The Mimic Men* ends with a vision of the writer who, having been hemmed in by the circumstances of his marginality, seeks to escape through exilic writing the world of history and politics, *The Enigma of Arrival* picks up with a vision of the writer who has achieved great success in spite of his marginality and for whom exilic writing represents an attempt to come to terms with this success and what it might mean for his understanding of the world. However, where Singh's narrative is characterized by skepticism about the possibility of starting afresh, a skepticism that is apparently overcome in the ordering process of narrative reflection, the unnamed narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* displays an uneasy humility about his exilic life and the writing it has produced. It is a peculiar novel, if indeed it can be called that. It consists of five sections narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator who bears an uncanny resemblance to V.S. Naipaul. If not for some notable omissions in the narrative, most notably the absence of Naipaul's wife, one would be tempted to call the book an autobiography, but those omissions as well as Naipaul's insistence on calling it a novel reinforce the notion that it is less an autobiographical account of his life than it is a carefully constructed work of art meant to shape the writer's conception of himself.

When it first appeared, it was greeted by critics as heralding a new Naipaulian vision, one that eschewed the harsh judgments of his earlier work. None less than Derek Walcott, as he recalls in his review of the novel for *The New Republic*, upon reading an

advance portion of the novel that did not include its final section, "cherished [it] as the tenderest writing Naipaul had ever done" (28). However, after reading the complete text, he instead found that Naipaul was once again up to his old tricks portraying Caribbean society as hopelessly trapped in superstition and ignorance. The question of whether the novel is, ultimately, a departure from Naipaul's standard formula remains fertile ground for debate among his critics, but it is agreed that *The Enigma of Arrival* is one of the key achievements of a writer who has struggled to come to terms with his identity as a postcolonial writer. Specifically, it illustrates an attempt to record a more dynamic relation between Naipaul and his world than that described in earlier work such as *The Mimic Men*. Like Ralph Singh who finds that writing allows him to see the world from a new perspective, the narrator of *Enigma of Arrival* finds that his initial impressions, which often turn out to be the romantic impressions of a colonial outsider, are wrong almost as often as they are right. In this way, the vision laid out by Naipaul in the later text is a further development of the exilic theory of writing he first presented in *The Mimic Men*. What distinguishes the later novel from its predecessors is the novelist's more skeptical attitude toward the possibility of achieving self-knowledge through writing.

While *The Mimic Men* anticipates the exilic writing of *The Enigma of Arrival*, the groundwork for its investigation of Naipaul's career as a writer was laid in "Prologue to an Autobiography," the first of two narratives that make up *Finding the Center*, two "pieces about the process of writing . . . [which] seek in different ways to admit the reader to that process." Intended not as a traditional autobiography, "a story of a life or deeds done," but as an account of Naipaul's "literary beginnings and the imaginative

promptings of [his] many-sided background" (vii), "Prologue to an Autobiography"

explores the novelist's relationship to his father, Seepersad Naipaul, who had given him

his initial encouragement to be a writer. In addition to urging his son to take up writing as

a profession, Seepersad Naipaul gave his son a particular idea of what it means to be a

writer. As Naipaul explains,

> From the earliest stories and bits of stories my father had read to me . . . , I
>
> had arrived at the conviction—the conviction that is at the root of so much
>
> human anguish and passion, and corrupts so many lives—that there was
>
> justice in the world. The wish to be a writer was a development of that. (31-2)

This sense of justice, he goes on to say, is not that of a specific ethical or political

philosophy but the sense of a cosmic justice that bespeaks the ability of the writer to

overcome death – "this wish to be a writer, this refusal to be extinguished, this wish to

seek at some future time for justice" – which explains why he would see such a

conviction as a cause of anguish and corruption (32).

      This "refusal to be extinguished" was especially important for the young writer

from colonial Trinidad who felt he lacked access to an abiding literary tradition that could

sustain him, and this sense of writing as a quest for justice – for permanence – he insists

was particularly difficult for a writer with his unsettled, colonial background. As a young

writer come to England, he struggled to discover his subject. Unlike the English and

French writers whom he had studied at Queens Royal College in Trinidad and at Oxford,

those writers who "had grown up in a world that was more or less explained," he felt that

he lacked "a background of knowledge," and because of this lack, he could not write with

the same confidence that his experiences constituted a suitable literary subject (19).

The very act of writing would be what allowed him to overcome this insecurity because it would draw out the subject that had evaded him and lead him to self-knowledge. As he describes this process,

> So step by step, book by book, though seeking each time only to write another book, I eased myself into knowledge. To write was to learn. Beginning a book I always felt I was in possession of all the facts about myself; at the end I was always surprised. The book before always turned out to have been written by a man with incomplete knowledge. (19-20)

The discovery of his subject required him to come to terms with his life on Trinidad and the understanding of the world that life had given him, especially the relationship between his life in Trinidad and the "real" world that seemed to lie outside its shores. This involved a new grasp of history. As a child, he "grew up with two ideas of history, almost two ideas of time" (46). "There was," he says, "the history with dates. That kind of history affected people and places abroad." He learned this history in school where he studied ancient Rome and nineteenth-century England. It also encompassed the contemporary political world of his family's home country of India. Alongside this view of history, however, he also learned from his family life to understand history as "undated time, historical darkness." As recent migrants from India, memories of their home country constituted their history, but instead of the historical India of nationalist figures like Gandhi and Jawharal Nehru, their India was mythical: "The India where Ghandi and Nehru and the others operated was historical and real. The India from which we had come was impossibly remote, almost as imaginary as the Ramayana, our Hindu epic" (46). To be a writer, to discover his subject, Naipaul would have to learn to look past this

mythical history and see his life as connected to that world that is "historical and real."

As a young man, the only way this seemed possible was to escape the circumscribed life of Trinidad and his migrant Indian community. Instead, through writing, he learned it was necessary to discover that world as a subject in itself.

The self-portrait that Naipaul paints of himself as a young man who wished to be a writer recalls the description of the limited world of *The Mimic Men*. Like Ralph Singh, the young Naipaul conceives of the world outside of Trinidad, especially the metropolitan world of London, as "real" while he views his own experience as "the interlude, the illusion" (47). And both texts suggest that writing can offer a mechanism for understanding and dealing with the "unreality" of colonial experience. Certainly, Singh's attempt to write order into his life is presented as analogous to Naipaul's own attempt to achieve self-knowledge. In fact, Naipaul implicitly describes the process of discovering his subject as a movement away from mimicry and towards self-knowledge. Having felt the marginality of being a colonial and having a romanticized notion of "the writer," he had "without knowing it fallen into the error of thinking of writing as a kind of display" (18), and his first story, written on the typewriters in a BBC freelancers' room, appeared to him to be the work of "an innocent, a man at the beginning of knowledge both about himself and about the writing career that had been his ambition from childhood" (20). In short, Naipaul views his younger self as a mimic man, bound by his desire to imitate the great writers of English literature, writers who did not share in his marginal experience.

In this way, he is very much like Ralph Singh who finds that writing can both give him a subject as well as make him a subject. Unlike Singh, however, Naipaul here seems to urge against withdrawal and exile as a means of achieving the detachment

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necessary for self-knowledge: "To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge" (34). This discovery, however, is made with a tone of regret for, in fact, Naipaul had left his home only to return for rare, occasional visits. The only way for him to "go back," then, is through the process of writing, and the writing of the essay represents just such an attempt to go back to recover a memory of his father which might explain why the writing vocation holds so much sway over him: "But without having become a writer," he recalls, "I couldn't go back. In my eleventh month in London I wrote about Bogart. I wrote my book; I wrote another. I began to go back" (72). So, while apparently denying the necessity of exile for the project of achieving self-knowledge through writing, Naipaul assumes that such writing will take up an exilic perspective because it involves a reflective return, a going-back.

In "Prologue to an Autobiography," Naipaul initiates his investigation into his beginnings as a writer through a discussion of his family history and his first attempt at writing which lead him to a description of exilic writing as a returning home. *The Enigma of Arrival* takes up this investigation from the perspective of someone who has through writing returned to his home and thereby discovered his subject, and it extends this investigation to consider the historical movements which have allowed him this discovery. In fact, some sections of the later text explicitly rework the same autobiographical material that figures into "Prologue." Where "Prologue" attempts to negotiate Naipaul's literary relation to his father and to his home, *The Enigma of Arrival* is primarily concerned with his literary relation to the metropolis, and Englishness in particular. The novel is divided into five sections, each narrated by a narrator who seems

to be Naipaul himself, but Naipaul insists on maintaining narrative distance between himself and his subject by refusing to name him explicitly. Each section represents the narrator's reflections on a different period of his life and the attendant arrivals and departures that have marked those moments. He finds, in each instance, that life is dynamic (he eventually settles on the term "flux" as a way of describing this dynamism), that change is a constant: no arrival is permanent. This conclusion, though, is arrived at through a process of vision and revision that is worked out through exilic writing which allows him to construct a narrative "I/eye" that is responsive to the dynamism of life by reducing the writer to a passive observer of life.

The majority of the novel concerns the arrival of Naipaul's narrator in the English countryside at a time of personal and professional apprehension. Having struggled as a writer while still achieving some successes, he has come to take up residence in a small cottage on an old imperial estate where he hopes to recover in the solitude provided by the rural landscape. This provides him with a starting point from which to investigate his relationship to the English literary tradition and to Englishness itself. The novel's first section, entitled "Jack's Garden," is a meditation on the narrator's arrival in and eventual acclimatization to the English countryside. This is illustrated in the narrator's slow acquisition of a new "way of seeing" the countryside to which he has come and which eases the anxiety of his "stranger's nerves." The narrator's new way of seeing comes about as a result of his close attention to his surroundings and his adaptation to those surroundings. This pattern of vision and revision is reiterated throughout the novel, and it is established in the novel's opening sentences:

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For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was. Then it stopped

raining and beyond the lawn and outbuildings in front of my cottage I saw fields

with striped trees on the boundaries of each field, and far away, depending on the

light, glints of a little river, glints which sometimes appeared, oddly, to be above

the level of the land. (5)

Just as the rain, which initially obscures the narrator's vision but lifts to show a full

landscape beyond his cottage, his initial impressions are repeatedly replaced with

apparently clearer understandings of the world around him as his relationship to it

becomes more intimate. As he becomes increasingly familiar with the English

countryside, he loses his sense of strangeness and learns to see with increasingly

"English" eyes.

In "Jack's Garden," this is illustrated as a shift in the narrator's perceptual

framework, a framework which, initially, is derived from his colonial education in

English art, literature, and history but later comes from a new sense of belonging to the

landscape. When the narrator first arrives in Wiltshire, his experience and education have

prepared him to view the English countryside through a romanticizing lens. From this

perspective, he sees the landscape and the people who inhabit it as remnants of English

antiquity, and he turns to his knowledge of literature and art to aid him in interpreting

what he finds this way. "So much of this," he says, "I saw with the literary eye, or with

the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of the stranger, and yet with a

knowledge of the language and history of the language and the writing, I could find a

special kind of past in what I saw; with part of my mind I could admit fantasy" (18).

Thus, he knows of Salisbury "from the reproduction of the Constable painting of

Salisbury Cathedral in [his] third-standard reader" and that the two words that make up the name of the village in which he now resides (Waldenshaw) both meant "wood" (7).

This knowledge provides him a framework in which to place what he sees, but it is a framework that proves misleading. He sees an ancient forest where trees have only recently been planted, and he misunderstands the mundane actions of the people he meets as the continuation of long traditions of rural life and the special connection of these rural people to the land. Seeing himself as a stranger intruding on these ancient grounds, he initially sees stability where, he comes to learn, there is constant change. So, while his familiarity with English literature has given him a framework in which to place his experiences in Wiltshire, he comes to realize that it is the framework of a specifically literary, colonial fantasy that romanticizes the English countryside as central to the idea of Englishness.

This new knowledge, however, is arrived at incrementally as the narrator becomes acquainted, first, with the landscape and, then, with Jack, the gardener on the estate where he rents his cottage. He familiarizes himself with the landscape as he takes extended walks on the different paths and roads that lead around the estate, and as he sees more and more of the landscape, he is able to replace his literary fantasy of the English countryside, a fantasy that suggests timelessness and antiquity, with a dynamic history of the land on which he has come to live. Likewise, he comes to see Jack not as he first saw him – "I considered [him] to be part of the view. I saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting: man fitting the landscape. I saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my own presence portended)" – but as an individual with a manner of living all his own (15).

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The narrator's first impressions of Jack not only suggest the romanticized way of seeing his literary education had given him, but they also suggest his anxiety about being a stranger among the natives, about his unfittingness for the English landscape. He imagines that, as a foreigner in this landscape, his arrival represents the end of the timeless world which he has found. This provokes feelings of nostalgia for the lost stability of English rural life and for the very empire which had produced and supported the now decaying estate. The idea of decay, however, had not resulted from his encounter with the rural English landscape. Instead, it was, like his literary knowledge, an idea he brought with him:

> already I lived with the idea of decay. (I had always lived with this idea. It was like my curse: the idea, which I had even as a child in Trinidad, that I had come into a world past its peak.) Already I lived with the idea of death, the idea, impossible for a young person to possess, to hold in his heart, that one's time on earth, one's life, was a short thing. These ideas, of a world in decay, a world subject to constant change, and of the shortness of human life, made many things bearable. (23)

So, while he saw in Wiltshire a world untouched by time and history, he felt that it was a vanishing world and that its landscape and its people were but remnants of a long lost past to which he was denied access by his late, marginal birth.

Jack, however, would come to suggest for the narrator a different way of seeing this world, not as a decaying world but as a world in flux, and this would allow him space to claim the landscape as his new home. This new way of seeing coalesces around the events of a Sunday afternoon when he sees Jack driving back from the pub on the "rutted

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droveway" instead of the paved road intended for cars, events which he would later learn were evidence of Jack's preparations to face his own death. In Jack's garden, the narrator had seen only what he had been prepared by his literary education to see, "appropriate things," and Jack had been for him equally appropriate, "fitting." However, after getting to know Jack better, he came to see him not as someone who belonged to the countryside and its ancient history, but instead, he was able to imagine that Jack might have once been a foreigner, like himself, who had made a home for himself amongst the "superseded things" of Wiltshire:

> it did not occur to me that Jack was living in the middle of junk, among the ruins of nearly a century; that the past around his cottage might not have been his past; that he might at some stage have been a newcomer to the valley; that his style might have been a matter of choice, a conscious act; that out of the little piece of earth which had come to him with his farm worker's cottage (one of a row of three) he had created a special land for himself, a garden, where (though surrounded by ruins, reminders of vanished lives) he was more than content to live out his life and where, as in a version of a book of hours, he celebrated the seasons. (15)

However, the awareness of Jack's possession of a personal history that this passage suggests is slow to arrive. Even here, he mistakes Jack's contentment for a literary cliché – the man of the earth living in tune with the seasons as in a book of hours – and he wonders at Jack's "fulfillment."

On that Sunday afternoon, however, the narrator's feelings toward Jack turn from feelings of wonder to feelings of envy. Seeing Jack return from the pub, jovial and drunk,

he interprets Jack's behavior as evidence of the joy given him by his freedom from the anxieties of strangeness that have so bothered the narrator since he first came to the estate. "The pleasures of beer on a Sunday!" he marvels, "They were like the pleasures of work in his garden as a free man" (32). Along with this envy of Jack and his freedom comes a nostalgic resentment of the changes taking place in the countryside. New workers for whom the "land was merely a thing to be worked" and real estate development threaten the narrator's romantic view of the land which supports the fitting freedom he sees in Jack's life (56).

This understanding of Jack, of course, proves to be another misinterpretation in which the narrator has failed to see that his own anxieties are obscuring his ability to see Jack and his world. Jack had not been just enjoying a beer as if it were any other Sunday any more than he had lived as if he had always belonged to the landscape. Instead, his behavior that afternoon was an example of his willful attempt to live deliberately. The narrator only comes to learn this after Jack's death, when Jack's wife informs him that Jack had been ill and that Sunday afternoon trip to the pub had been one last afternoon spent with friends. This revelation leads him to revise his understanding of Jack and of the others who lived on the land:

> My ideas about Jack were wrong. He was not exactly a remnant; he had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent. But the world about him, which he so enjoyed and used, was too precious not to be used by others. And it was only when he had gone, when the town workers who had replaced him had gone, it was only then that I saw how tenuous, really, the hold of all these people had been on the land they worked or lived in. (92-3)

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Instead of seeing, on one hand, Jack as a man "fitting the landscape," and on the other hand, himself and other newcomers to the countryside as intruders threatening the freedom Jack's "fittingness" had given him, the narrator sees that he and Jack and the others share a tenuous hold on the land and that Jack's habits were not remnants of an ancient cultural tradition but willful efforts to lay claim to the land for himself. Jack, he says, "had sensed that life and man were the true mysteries; and he had asserted the primacy of these with something like religion. The bravest and most religious thing about his life was his way of dying: the way he had asserted, at the very end, the primacy not of what was beyond life, but life itself" (93).

This perspective on Jack's life eases the narrator's anxieties about being a stranger because it allows him to imagine an entry into the world of the English countryside (and, thereby, Englishness itself) from which he had felt alienated. Jack represents, then, the very struggle for "justice" Naipaul describes in "Prologue to an Autobiography." Naipaul envies the writers of the English canon who share in its long-abiding traditions in much the same way that the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* initially envies Jack's union with the landscape and its ancient history. Jack shows that such long histories and traditions are tenuous, contingent things, not to be romanticized to the point of fantasy. Jack, then, gives the narrator a new vision of his own place in the English landscape and opens up the possibility that he, too, may claim belonging in it.

Markers of the narrator's identity are largely suppressed in "Jack's Garden." The narrator's past in Trinidad and his occupation as a writer figure only briefly to illustrate the literary character of his vision in his encounters with the people of the countryside and his descriptions of the landscape. The second section of the novel, "The Journey,"

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makes explicit the connection between his uneasy acclimatization to rural English life and his writing life by retracing his very first arrival as a student and aspiring writer in England. It, therefore, covers much of the same autobiographical material Naipaul had previously examined in "Prologue to an Autobiography." The narrator's investigation of his initial arrival, however, is framed and informed by the circumstances surrounding his arrival in Wiltshire. Specifically, it is informed by the narrator's apprehension over his work as a writer. Having had one book rejected by his publisher (just as Naipaul's 1969 travel book about Trinidad, *The Loss of El Dorado*, had been rejected by his publisher) and working on another more violent book about Africa (perhaps recalling Naipaul's short story cycle *In a Free State*), his nervousness as a stranger in England is exacerbated by his uncertainty about his ability to "arrive" as a successful writer.

The narrator explains this by way of an allegorical story entitled "The Enigma of Arrival" which he had begun as a diversion from his African story but which he had never actually written. The inspiration for the story came from a collection of paintings he found in his Wiltshire cottage which included a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, a painting that later had been given the title "The Enigma of Arrival" by the French poet Apollinaire. Of the painting and especially its title, he says, "in an indirect, poetical way the title referred to something in own experience" (98). It depicts a sparse scene: "A wharf; in the background, beyond walls and gateways (like cutouts), there is the top of the mast of an antique vessel; on an otherwise deserted street in the foreground there are two figures, both muffled, one perhaps the person who has arrived, the other perhaps a native of the port." "The scene," the narrator goes on, "is of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of arrival" (98).

This scene of mystery and desolation provides the framework for a story ("more a mood than a story," he says) the narrator imagines he might have written:

My story was to be set in classical times, in the Mediterranean. My narrator would write plainly, without any attempt at period style or historical explanation of his period. He would arrive—for reasons I had yet to work out—at that classical port with the walls and gateways like cutouts. He would walk past that muffled figure on the quayside. He would move from that silence and desolation, that bleakness to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city (I imagined something like an Indian bazaar scene). The mission he had come on—family business, study, religious initiation—would give him encounters and adventures. He would enter interiors, or houses and temples. Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. His feeling of adventure would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and ship. But he wouldn't know how. I imagined some religious ritual in which, led on by kindly people, he would unwittingly take part and find himself the intended victim. At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cutout walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship is gone. The traveler has lived out his life. (98-9)

This unwritten story, the narrator would come to realize, was not just a diversion from the story about Africa which had caused him such anxiety but a version of that very story and

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also an allegory of his own writing life. Just as his imagined traveler had come to feel lost in the classical city, he had expected to arrive at a point of confidence and certainty as a writer ("a state—or competence, or achievement, or fame, or content—at which one arrived and where one stayed"), but instead found "a special anguish" that prevented him from enjoying the success of his work (100-1). Writing that might have given him a sense of accomplishment instead caused him to question his ability to go on to other projects. "It was," he says, "as though the calling, the writer's vocation, was one that could never offer me anything but momentary fulfillment" (104).

This awareness of the ephemerality of writing and the fulfillment it can provide recalls for the narrator his first arrival in England as a young student and aspiring writer with naïve ideas about what constituted suitable literary subjects. Just as the young Naipaul of "Prologue to an Autobiography" had been given by his colonial education a romanticized understanding of the writer's life, Naipaul's narrator leaves Trinidad behind, pen in hand, in search of "metropolitan material." Rather than being open to the material all around him, he sought material that matched his vision of the writer as someone "possessed of a sensibility . . . writer was someone who recorded or displayed an inward development" (146). He looked for material that would allow him to display his "knowingness," material that confirmed what he felt he already knew from his colonial, literary education. This led him to ignore the dramatic historical changes of which his migration to England was a part and to neglect the profound changes that such a view of the writer had inflicted on his understanding of the world and himself. "Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality," he recalls, "I did both my material and myself much damage" (146).

Specifically, he claims, this conception of the writer created an internal division, "a separation between man and writer" that prevented him from accessing his true subject: the vast movements of peoples that had followed colonialism. This was not only the context for his personal story of arrival, but it was also the material that was readily available to him when he first came to London. His ability to see all of this and, as a writer, to record it honestly were prevented by his desire to "match" the writers he had encountered in English literature:

> If I had had a more direct, less unprejudiced way of looking, if I had noted down simply what I had seen; if in those days I had had the security which later came to me (from the practice of writing), and out of which I was able to take a great interest always in the men and women who were immediately before me and was to learn how to talk to them; if with a fraction of that security I had written down what passed before me, frankly or simply, what material would I not have had!
>
> (142)

Overcoming this inability to record simply and directly the world as he encountered it would become the chief objective his writing project, and the act of writing itself would be central to achieving that objective.

He would only begin to achieve this goal once he put aside his quest for metropolitan material and his desire to display a writing personality, and that would require a return to a consideration of his own experiences in Trinidad. With his first work about street life in Port of Spain, Trinidad, work that recalls the short stories of *Miguel Street*, he began to redefine his vision of himself and of the writer. Speaking of that early work, he says, "out of work that came easily to me because it was so close to me, I

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defined myself, and saw that my subject was not my sensibility, my inward development, but the worlds I contained within myself, the worlds I lived in" (147). With this new sense of subject, he comes to see that both his own experience as a colonial migrant and the broader history of his home country and the peoples of the Caribbean are suitable literary subjects. Instead of writing to display his writer's personality, he chooses to represent the world around him so that the subject of his work is no longer his own personality but an account of the changing world that he inhabits.

In the novel's next two sections, "Ivy" and "Rooks," the narrator returns to his life in Wiltshire and turns to a consideration of two figures who suggest alternative, if ultimately undesirable, possibilities for the narrator's writing life: the landlord of his aging imperial estate and fellow writer named Alan. He feels sympathy for his landlord who, despite his wealth and security, has, like the narrator turned to the aging imperial estate and the English countryside as a place of escape from the pressures of the world outside. Although he initially imagines his landlord to be a kind of clichéd aging aristocrat, he comes to learn that that his landlord has suffered with a lasting depression, "acedia" he calls it, that is not unlike his own anxiety. They also share an appreciation for writing. Although they never met, and rarely even saw each other, the narrator's landlord would send him poems about Krishna and Shiva which suggested both the security of the social position from which he viewed the world as well as the static nature of his understanding of the world. His Indian romance "was rooted in England, wealth, empire, the idea of glory, material satiety and a very great security," and the extravagant way in which he signed the poems "spoke of someone still savoring his personality" (212, 213). So, while the narrator could appreciate his landlord's desire for withdrawal and even have

sympathy for him, he could not accept his landlord's passivity toward change, which had led him to allow his estate to deteriorate, as his own. Unlike his landlord who could rely on the protections of privilege and wealth to escape the changes going on around him, the narrator has confronted changes which have forced him to alter his views of himself and his world. While he can sympathize with his landlord, he feels compelled to construct more active mechanisms for dealing with the changes he must encounter.

Chief among these mechanisms is a revision of his attitude toward change, a theme to which he returns throughout the novel: "I lived not with the idea of decay—that idea I quickly shed—so much as with the idea of change. I lived with the idea of change, of flux, and learned, profoundly, not to grieve for it. I learned to dismiss this easy cause of so much human grief. Decay implied an ideal, a perfection in the past" (210). Exchanging the disappointment implied by an ideal image of the world for the realism of a world in constant flux gives him the comfort of knowing that there is nothing to mourn in the passing of the English culture which had been supported by empire and which he had admired from afar as a young writer. Closely connected to this fatalistic view of change that denies both hope for improvement and nostalgia for lost grandeur is his understanding of writing as a necessary burden to be born in the face of such constant change. He says,

> The noblest impulse of all—the wish to be a writer, the wish that ruled my life— was the impulse that was the most imprisoning, the most insidious, and some ways the most corrupting, because refined by my half-English half-education and ceasing then to be a pure impulse, in that colonial setting, had been the most hobbling. To be what I wanted to be, I had to cease to be or to grow out of what I

was. To become a writer it was necessary to shed many of the early ideas that went with the ambition and concept my half-education had given me of the writer.

So the past for me—as colonial and writer—was full of shame and mortifications. Yet as a writer I could train myself to face them. Indeed they became my subjects. (245)

Writing, then, serves to allow him to accept the inevitability of change by forcing him to confront the changes that occur within himself. In order to achieve self-knowledge, he would have to engage, with harsh clarity, his own understandings of the world and himself.

The dangers of avoiding the burden of writing are made evident in the description of the narrator's writer friend, Alan. Alan is exactly the kind of writer of sensibility with easy access to an abundance of "metropolitan material" because of his social position whom the narrator had wished to imitate as a young writer. Nevertheless, the narrator finds that "Alan seemed to have as much trouble with his idea of the writer and his material as I had had with mine" (287). Instead of revealing the truth about himself, Alan's writing, like that of the young narrator before the discovery of his subject, masks his anxieties and only inadvertently reveals their presence instead of confronting them in such a way as to deal with them. Alan hints at a book that will reveal his "true personality," but that book never materializes. Instead of producing his own work, he retreats into solitude and contempt for "those writers in whom he saw versions of himself—mimics, people doing what others had done in social chronicles and wishing to show that they could do it too" (291).

His inability to access his true personality also produces a split in his psyche similar to the split between "man and writer" that the narrator had found in his earlier self. Seeing Alan's deteriorating condition, the narrator speculates "it was as if (this was the idea that came to me) the man that one knew had been subjected almost to a moral attack by the unacknowledged personality within; that the man had been pulled down by this inner personality, which now sat like a watchful guardian on the man's shoulder and was the only entity with whom Alan could now have a true dialogue" (293). The narrator notes Alan's apparently inevitable suicide without a hint of surprise, and instead reports only the vapid responses of his supposed friends who only saw the surfaces which Alan had presented in his writing. It is a fate the narrator sees himself avoiding because he has chosen to face his "inner personality" with all its "shame" and "mortifications."

The remainder of "Rooks" concerns the narrator's final days in Wiltshire as he comes to see that he has lived there so long that he has now surpassed middle-age. With the death of Alan and Mr. Philips who had been the caretaker of both the estate and the landlord, he falls ill and into a general melancholy that is in part due to his awareness that the pastoral world of the manor was finally coming to an end. Having stayed too long in the comfort and seclusion of his cottage, he had sacrificed his health and his active life for the gift of what he calls his "second life." Not even his walks through the pastoral countryside can sustain him any longer. Even though he had adjusted to seeing the world in flux rather than decay as a way of avoiding grief, his connection to the land, made over years of careful observation, had allowed him to begin to feel at home in what had once been an alien landscape, and the changes in it caused him pain: "But philosophy failed me now. Land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we

breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories. And this end of a cycle, in my life, and in the life of the manor, mixed up with the feeling of age which my illness was forcing on me, caused me grief" (335). While thinking of change (and the death that implies) as constant had been a comforting thought when he considered others' lives and homes, it offered him little aide in dealing with his own death.

In the novel's final section, "A Ceremony of Farewell," Naipaul returns, with this new awareness of death, to the story of Jack and the first impulses that his story had provided for the novel that would become *The Enigma of Arrival*. "Death," he says, "was the motif; it had perhaps been the motif all along. Death and the way of handling it—that was the motif of the story of Jack" (344). Jack's death and, more importantly, his manner of handling death would provide the frame and the mood of Naipaul's novel, but the impetus for it, the fact which would necessitate its writing, was the death of his sister Sati. She had remained in Trinidad with her family while the narrator had escaped to England. He returned to Trinidad to be with his family and remained there to witness the religious ceremony which "was complementary" to her cremation (346). The ceremony initially strikes him as out of place: it is performed in a suburban house instead of in the country setting with which he associated it; the pundit called upon to perform the ceremony does so in an "ecumenical" way unlike the pundits the narrator had remembered, even using an English translation of the Gita; Sati's son asks the pundit questions which reveal his ignorance of karma and Hindu doctrine. All of these seeming inconsistencies suggest the changes that have occurred not only since his ancestors traveled from India to Trinidad but also those changes that have occurred in the very recent past, especially as a result of the money that had come to the island and the family.

These changes were in part the result of the movements of history – decolonization and independence – and in part the results of active attempts to deal with those movements. With this ceremony, the narrator comes to terms with the death that such changes imply:

> But we remade the world for ourselves; every generation does that, as we found when we came together for the death of this sister and the need to honor and remember. It forced us to look on death. It forced me to face the death I had been contemplating at night in my sleep; it fitted a real grief where melancholy had created a vacancy, as if to prepare me for the moment. It showed me life and man as the mystery, the true religion of men, the grief and the glory. (354)

It is with these words that recall the narrator's early description of Jack's death that he returns "to write very fast about Jack and his garden." The return to writing at the end of the novel signals Naipaul's appropriation of the lessons of Jack's life and death. Where Jack had cultivated his garden among others' ruins as a way of claiming space for himself and thus constructing a home of his own, the narrator now turns to writing as a means of claiming literary and historical space for himself. In recounting his acclimatization to the English countryside, he documents the end of end of the idea of English culture which, through the movements of empire, had both incorporated and excluded him. He describes this ending, moreover, not as merely the decline of the ideal of English culture, but as the inevitable death of all human creations. In so doing, he makes space for himself in that culture by illustrating its instability, its historical contingency. Thus, he is able to make a home of his self-imposed exile.

In addition to allowing Naipaul to claim English (literary and physical) space as his own, *The Enigma of Arrival* also serves another of his literary objectives: to escape

the consequences of moral and political judgment. Like Ralph Singh, the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* imagines himself capable of assessing his own understanding of himself and the world. Their willingness to repeatedly shame themselves by revealing their own misconceptions and personal shortcomings burnishes their claims to such honest self-representation. In the later novel, this is specifically achieved by the pattern of vision and revision that is repeated throughout the novel. By insisting on vision as the writer's primary mode of relating to the world, Naipaul reduces the writer to a bodiless eye, to appropriate Emerson's famous phrase for a new purpose, "a transparent eyeball." Naipaul imagines himself, as do many of his metropolitan defenders, as having special access to the truth of his own experiences as well as those of others by virtue of the unrelentingly critical vision that he has brought to bear in his writing. *The Enigma of Arrival* adds to this vision of Naipaul by presenting the anxieties that lead to the writer's misperceptions and by making a show of his willingness to overcome those anxieties. Naipaul apparently opens himself up to the world in such a way as to make him an active participant in it, but his relationship to the world remains a passive one in which he refuses to take responsibility for his role in shaping it. The autobiographical tone and content of the novel serve to further this critical evasion. They suggest that Naipaul is revealing himself, "warts and all" as the saying goes; however, by insisting on the novel's fictionality, he reserves for himself a literary space inaccessible to his readers which might allow them to gauge the reliability of his vision of the world. Naipaul would have his reader believe that he is a passive receiver of data, observing with indifference the dynamic changes going on about and inside him.

*   *   *

In an oft-noted essay, "Conrad's Darkness and Mine," Naipaul describes the way in which the work of the "first modern writer" to which he had been introduced had paved the way for his own literary explorations. Conrad, he remarks, "had meditated on my world," and it seemed, "had been everywhere before me" (170). This is, in part, a comment on Conrad's wide-ranging oeuvre which covers much of the same geographical terrain covered by Naipaul's work, but it is also a claim of affinity between Naipaul and Conrad, the affinity of a shared "panic." Conrad had offered a vision of a world of "half-made societies" which Naipaul found echoed in the England to which he had come seeking refuge from the instabilities of his home in Trinidad. "I suppose," he says, "that in my fantasy I had seen myself coming to England as to some purely literary region, where, untrammeled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for myself as a writer. But in the new world I felt that ground move below me" 170). More important for Naipaul than his sense of panic at the instability of the world around him was the writerly commitment to express that panic which he found in Conrad. This commitment, according to Naipaul, expressed itself in Conrad's highly anxious style which sought "to draw all of the mystery out of a straight-forward situation." "Conrad," he says, "aimed at fidelity," and this "required him to be explicit" and to show an "unwillingness to let the story speak for itself" (166). Conrad's commitment to fidelity is for Naipaul both the source of his difficult style as well as his achievement. In words that would seem to apply as well to his own project as they do Conrad's, he describes the achievement this way:

Nothing is rigged in Conrad. He doesn't remake countries. He chose, as we now
know, incidents from real life; and he meditated on them. "Meditate" is his own,
exact word. And what he says about his heroine in *Nostromo* can be applied to
himself. "The wisdom of the heart of having no concern with the erection of or
demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no
random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of
integrity, tolerance and compassion." (173)

This is a generously selective reading of Conrad's achievement as a novelist (Naipaul
admits to "reservations" about Conrad, but these mostly relate to his inability to achieve
fully the lofty goal of fidelity), but it is one that tracks Naipaul's view of his own literary
project. It also suggests a surprising relation between Naipaul's exilic theory of writing
and Said's description of the exilic intellectual: central to both of these exilic projects is
an anti-ideological commitment to fidelity to individual experience. Said's advocacy of a
"worldly" "secular" criticism which partakes of the multiple perspectives provided by
exile is largely analogous to the novelistic commitment to fidelity which Naipaul finds in
Conrad and which likewise animates his own work. Naipaul attempts to come to terms
with former versions of himself by representing those earlier selves with all of their faults
and prejudices. This offers him, at the cost of self-eviscerating clarity, the opportunity to
disentangle himself from the ideological burdens which had prevented him from
achieving self-knowledge. In the same way, Said's exilic critic is called on to maintain
affiliations "in conjunction with critique," to carefully consider, that is, the cultural and
ideological underpinnings of even one's own perspective. Exilic criticism, then, attempts

to negotiate a position among a field of ideological and cultural affiliations from which criticism is possible.

Said and Naipaul share this view of exile as a position of being-in-between, a position that affords a certain degree of freedom at the cost of the security of belonging. They part ways, however, when it comes to the question of how the exile relates to this condition of homelessness. For Said, the exile has experienced a traumatic separation from the filialations of a home culture, but Said's exilic critic makes use of the limited freedom this offers by taking the opportunity to form new, albeit more tenuous, affiliations. Naipaul, however, sees little hope for establishing new affiliations; his view of all affiliations is too jaundiced for that. Instead, he finds in the writing life a solace for the pain of exilic homelessness. For both Said and Naipaul, exile is a permanent condition to be lived with, but for Naipaul, living as an exile means living without others. Where Said's exilic criticism attempts a reengagement with the world, Naipaul's exilic fiction represents an attempt to create a space outside of the world in which the novelist can see clearly the world and himself without the impediments of culture and ideology. His writing, with its Conradian fidelity to immediate, individual experience, repeats the displacement of physical exile without imagining an exilic emplacement in a new context. All homes are fleeting moments of refuge from the experience of homelessness which only serve to remind him of his exilic condition. Writing for Naipaul, therefore, allows the exile to cope with his loss by defining precise limits of the self. Using the autobiographical/fictional mode to map himself in relation to the world, he also attempts to map out a space where the world cannot touch him, where the pain of exilic homelessness can no longer be felt.

This is the ultimate difference between Saidian and Naipaulian conceptions of exile and accounts, in part, for their significant political differences. Said sees exile as both a gift and a burden; it is an experience of pain that leads to a certain amount of intellectual freedom. Likewise, he sees being-at-home as both a privilege and an impediment; the security of living in a home culture is offset by the lost ability to see from multiple perspectives. Therefore, his work attempts to recover the benefits of home without relinquishing the intellectual freedom of exile which requires him to reengage the world around him, to construct new affiliations with a critical awareness of their provisionality. Naipaul, too, sees exile as a painful experience which grants freedom, but instead of leading to new worldly connections, it is a freedom that ultimately leads to insularity and paralysis. The pain of Naipaul's exile is so great that it can be salved by no new home. What Naipaul and Said can be said to share, then, is an appreciation for the benefits of home as well as the freedom of exile. This can be seen in their description of exile as a condition of pain following the lost comforts of tradition and culture. They differ, however, on what is to be done about this situation. Said, although he shares with Naipaul a generically conservative appreciation for the benefits of home, contends that the loss of those benefits implied by exile constitutes an improvement, a broadening of perspectives that can lead to a more expansive sense of belonging. Naipaul, on the other hand, sees the loss of home as evidence of a permanent decline precipitated by the cultural ruptures of colonialism that persists into the postcolonial present. In the face of the threat of dissolution presented by exile, instead of expanding his sense of belonging, he refuses to reconstitute a home in the world and, instead, chooses to reconstitute a home out of his writing, the only place where the world cannot touch him.

Chapter Four: Migrancy and the "unstoppable predilection for alternatives":
Salman Rushdie and the "Newness" of Exilic Displacement

>How does newness come into the world? How is it born?
>Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?
>How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what
>deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the
>exterminating angel, the guillotine?
>Is birth always a fall?
>Do angels have wings? Can men fly? (*The Satanic Verses* 8)

Unlike Joseph Conrad, for whom Said held an ambivalent admiration in spite of

his political affiliations with imperialism, and V.S. Naipaul, who, despite their many

similarities, represented for Said the most pernicious kind of metropolitan exile, Salman

Rushdie is a figure with whom Said identified almost completely without reservation.

Rushdie's rise as a figure of international acclaim trailed that of Said by only a few years;

their works chart much of the same cultural, religious, political, and philosophical

territories; and each was well-aware of the other's work. To cite just a few instances: Said

cited Rushdie's work in *Culture and Imperialism*, and Rushdie cited Said in some of his

essays. Rushdie interviewed Said for the *New Left Review* in 1986. They reviewed each

other's work. Even more noticeable was Said's strident support for Rushdie during the

events which have become commonly known as the "Rushdie Affair," the period of time

during which Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* and the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah

Khomeini became the center of a debate about blasphemy and free speech for scholars,

politicians, and clerics around the world. Said even served as an external reviewer of the

novel prior to its publication. As M.D. Walhout has noticed in his detailed account of

Said's efforts to defend Rushdie, at the time, this was a somewhat ironic pairing: "this

has to be one of the more intriguing ironies in the history of literature: Edward Said, the world's foremost critic of Western representations of Islam, vetting the novel destined to provoke more outrage in the Islamic world than perhaps any other book in history" (191).

Despite their apparently ironic affiliation, Said and Rushdie share the position of postcolonial migrant intellectual living in the West, and both of their separate projects reflect a distinct concern with this position. Walhout points out some of the broad similarities: "both were immigrants from former British colonies with a smouldering hatred of Western imperialism; both were masters of English prose style with a flair for literate invective; both were confirmed humanists with a deep suspicion of religious fundamentalists" (192). More important than these relatively coincidental similarities, however, were the shared experience of and response to postcolonial displacement in the West. They share a common view of what, in a review of Said's *After the Last Sky*, Rushdie called the "internal struggle" with "the anguish of living with displacement, with exile" ("If I forget thee. . ." 11). Perhaps more than any other contemporary figure, Rushdie has attempted to instantiate a project of exile as it is described by Said. Rushdie sometimes uses the term "exile" interchangeably with the terms "migrant" and "expatriate" and sometimes as a term with which to criticize conservative notions of postcolonial subjectivity. However, when he describes the work of the migrant writer and the experience of migrancy, the connections with what, following Said, I have called exile become readily apparent.

With the number of similarities that appear in their life and in their work, it is unsurprising that Rushdie and Said have been criticized in similar terms by similar opponents. Aijaz Ahmad, for example, has suggested that the class positioning of

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postcolonial exiles who, like Rushdie and Said, choose to live in metropolitan cities has caused them to valorize the experience of exile, a condition that, he says, is often experienced differently by those who come from lower classes. Of such exiled intellectuals, he says,

> The fact that some of these intellectuals actually were political exiles has been taken advantage of, in incredibly inflationary rhetoric, to deploy the word 'exile', first as a metaphor and then as a fully appropriated descriptive label for the existential condition of the immigrant as such; the upper-class Indian who *chooses* to live in the metropolitan country is then called 'the diasporic Indian', and 'exile' itself becomes a condition of the soul, unrelated to facts of material life. Exile, immigration and professional preference become synonymous, indeed, mutually indistinguishable. (86)

Thus, Ahmad argues that postcolonial exiles in the mold of Said and Rushdie have repressed the question of class and turned the position of migrant or exile into an ontological condition. Because they originate in nations where they belong to the upper-class and, from there, take up residence in the metropolis, they take for granted the security that their upper class positions afford them and turn exile into a fetish of movement. This, he adds in a tone of derision, is what allows Rushdie "to partake, equally, of the postmodernist moment and the counter-canon of 'Third World Literature'" (125).

In a similar vein, Timothy Brennan argues, in his critical reading of Rushdie's position as a postcolonial literary celebrity, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, that because Rushdie's fiction is intended for a metropolitan intellectual audience, he cannot

be said to speak from a "Third World" position or on behalf of peoples of the third world. In another book, Brennan contends that Rushdie's is a "convenient" cosmopolitanism because it is not explicitly oppositional (*At Home in the World* 306). Although Brennan approvingly cites Said's critique of the Western romantic view of exile in the essay "Reflections on Exile," it is hard to imagine a logic by which Rushdie is included in such a critique and Said is not. It may be that Said's strong advocacy for the people of Palestine absolves him of some of this criticism, but to so absolve him would be to ignore not only the similarities between his position in the American academy and Rushdie's position as a literary celebrity but also the strong similarities in their treatments of exile. Said may have a stronger personal and political connection to the postcolonial world than does Rushdie, but that should not negate the fact that the two have strikingly similar ideas about what form opposition can (and should) take in a world in which the boundaries between the "third world" and the metropolis are unclear.

What both Ahmad and Brennan suggest is that intellectuals from formerly colonized societies who live in the Western metropolis and who take on the mantel of exile do so in order to exploit their exotic (from the perspective of the Western intelligentsia they court) provenance without regard for the real peoples whom they have left behind. They cannot speak for the "real" peoples of the postcolonial world – those who continue to live in postcolonial nations and the global underclass – because they no longer belong to that world; they are metropolitans, and their appropriation of exile is disingenuous. Writing from within the Western metropolis, so the argument goes, they are unable to criticize it from an oppositional position. This argument relies on static notions of subjectivity and belonging as well as a limited sense of the kinds of resistance

which might be available to postcolonial subjects. For such critics, the lines between colonizer and colonized are not only neatly drawn but remarkably persistent. There is only opposition and accommodation.

These are notions which are challenged in the work of Said and Rushdie, in both an attempt to negate a polarized view of postcolonial politics and out of a desire to fashion a new mode of belonging in a world of unsettled cultural boundaries. What Said suggests in his description of "contrapuntal" criticism, Rushdie practices in a theory and art of exilic writing. As Rebecca L. Walkowitz argues, Rushdie offers "an alternative to the opposition between accomodation and antagonism [the framework in which critics like Ahmad and Brennan insist on placing Rushdie]. But he is not offering a heroic alternative: national distinctiveness and cultural assertion are the purposeful targets, rather than the accidental or collateral victims, of Rushdie's fiction" (133). That is, Rushdie's work, with its multiple affiliations, is not simply the result of Rushdie's choice to selectively affiliate with the west. Instead, he actively seeks to chart a complex relationship between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery, a relationship so complex that it threatens to dissolve the distinctions between them. This complex relationship is represented most explicitly by Rushdie's notion of migrancy.

Ahmad and Brennan dismiss out of hand the possibility of a complex relationship between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery because, to them, such a relationship precludes the possibility of oppositional critique. Said and Rushdie, however, reject the notion that sides can so easily be drawn, and yet they are not cowed by the complexity of their relationship to the metropolis. Instead, their work aims to map this complexity in order to create a practice of criticism which does not rely on a clearly

marked line between metropolitan enemies and non-Western allies. This "contrapuntal" practice is the result of an experience of cross-cultural displacement the complexity of which negates a simple choosing of sides. Instead Rushdie's work, in a way very similar to Said's work, seeks to map out the network of filiations and affiliations which overlap on the exilic/migrant subject.

The complex relationship between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery as it is embodied by the postcolonial exile/migrant is the subject of two of Rushdie's most famous essays, "Imaginary Homelands" and "Outside the Whale," the second of which approvingly cites Said's *Orientalism* in a critique of what Rushdie called "Raj revivalism" in the work of filmmakers like Richard Attenborough and David Lean and novelists like Paul Scott. It is also the subject of Rushdie's most famous novel, *The Satanic Verses*. In these texts, Rushdie offers a description that is not only a practical example of the kind of critical, exilic writing which Said advocates but is also a further development of Said's theory of exile. Unlike Conrad, Naipaul, and to a certain extent, Said, who each describe exile as primarily an experience of loss that must be coped with through the practice of exilic writing (even if, as in the case of Conrad, such coping is completely inadequate), Rushdie attempts to equally balance the privileges lost with the benefits gained in the experience of displacement. Specifically, in Rushdie's view, exiles gain the freedom to affiliate with the cultures and traditions of their own choosing. As he says, during one of the authorial digressions in the novel *Shame*, "Roots, I sometimes think are a conservative myth designed to keep us in our places" (84). Rushdie, therefore, describes exile as a flight in the sense that it is a "flight from" cultural roots, "a conquest of the force of gravity" (85). The sensations brought about by the experience of exile as

"flight" – a sense of freedom and historical weightlessness, indeed, of new birth – are often seen to be advantageous, but they do not come without costs. As Gibreel Farishta, himself an exile in the euphoria of flight, says at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses* as he hurtles from the sky toward the ground below, "To be born again, . . . first you have to die" (3). In this way, Rushdie suggests that the loss of an exilic home is both traumatic and productive of new possibilities.

The view of exile presented in Rushdie's work, especially the two essays "Imaginary Homelands" and "Outside the Whale" and the novel *The Satanic Verses* but much of his other writing as well, is a view that insists that exilic displacement enables the freedom to affiliate oneself with new cultures and traditions, but, *contra* the criticisms of Ahmad and Brennan, it is also a view that is mindful of the limits of exilic freedom. Rushdie's work does not take the fact of exile as an excuse to capitalize on the divisions between the postcolonial periphery and the metropolitan center, nor is it an attempt to float above the fray of such political conflicts. Exile, from this perspective, implies both flight, an escape from the gravity of filial connections, and a fall, a return to worldly affiliations. The exile's fall is an example of what I have called exilic emplacement which grounds the exile in a new place, a new dwelling if not a new home. It is neither a return to the old space of a filial home (such a return would be impossible), nor is it an accommodation to the alternate space of the metropolitan center. Instead, Rushdie's exile forges a new home in the unstable land of migrancy and displacement, and in so doing, he lives out what, in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said calls the "unstoppable predilection for alternatives" which is the hallmark of "critical consciousness."

In this chapter, then, I will proceed by first examining the view of exile which Rushdie expounds in "Imaginary Homelands" and "Outside the Whale" and consider how this view relates to the very similar notions which Said has offered throughout his work. I will conclude with a targeted reading of his great novel of migrancy, *The Satanic Verses*, as part of a consideration of the complex relation between the exile/migrant and home which Rushdie's fiction charts.

Living in a "whaleless world": "Imaginary Homelands" and "Outside the Whale"

In the essay "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie offers an account of the personal and cultural pressures which motivated some of his stylistic choices in his novel *Midnight's Children*, and he attempts to head off the kind of criticisms I have identified in the arguments of Ahmad and Brennan. In so doing, he presents an account of exile which centers on the question of memory as a sign for what is lost and what is gained in the experience of exile. He says,

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do it in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

The "profound uncertainties" of exilic memory, Rushdie goes on to argue, are what motivated his choice to make Saleem, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, unreliable,

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"suspect in his narration." Saleem's memory, like Rushdie's and, more generally, the "Indian wrier who writes from outside India," is fallible, fragmented, and partial. They deal in "broken mirrors" which offer them only limited views of the past; they "can't lay claim to Olympus, and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day" (13). This particularist perspective, however, is not something to be lamented, Rushdie argues, because the "broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (11). That is to say that the loss of a whole view of life in India that results from the displacements of exile can be compensated for by the heightened sense of importance which the fragmented "remains" of a life left behind gain in memory.

Rushdie, here, turns from a discussion of the value and character of exilic memory to a consideration of the political responsibility of the "Indian writer who writes from outside India" and what, if any, special insights such a writer might bring to the political world of India. The writer, he says, is the natural enemy of the politician because they are both concerned with redescribing the world and thereby changing it, but what role is there for writers who are not part of the immediate political context of India?

> So literature can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts. But is this a
> proper function of those of us who write from outside India? Or are we just
> dilettantes in such affairs, because we are not involved in their day-to-day
> unfolding, because by speaking out we take no risks, because our personal safety
> is not threatened? What right do we have to speak at all? (14)

Rushdie's response to these admittedly defensive questions is to assert what might be called the dual prerogatives of literature and exile. Writing, he contends, is not justified

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by the cultural or political affiliations of the writer but by the quality of the writing. Therefore, he argues, writers who have migrated from India should not be excluded from writing on the subject of India simply because they no longer live in the country. Although these writers "are now partly of the West," they retain the right to claim the heritage given them by their home country (15).

Even though Rushdie asserts the right of migrant writers to write about their home countries, he admits that such writers do so "through guilt-tinted spectacles" and that the experience of belonging to multiple cultures is alternately enabling and paralyzing. "Sometimes," he says, "we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (15). Instead of the "whole sight" available to writers who have remained in their home countries, these writers offer a "stereoscopic vision," a double perspective which allows them to see from multiple points of view even if none of those perspectives are "whole." Finally, Rushdie contends that Indian writers living in England should not be forced to choose among the two perspectives offered by either their homeland or their country of migration. Instead, he suggests they affiliate themselves with "the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group." "Swift, Conrad, Marx," he therefore argues, "are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy" (20).

"Imaginary Homelands" describes an experience of and a response to exile in terms that are remarkably Saidian. In place of a stable, single cultural perspective, the exile is gifted with an ability to see from multiple perspectives which both facilitates new affiliations ("it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents" Rushdie says) and necessitates a narrative form which is

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highly self-conscious of the particularity, and thus the contingency, of its descriptions. Apart from the fact that Rushdie's essay is directed specifically at writers who have migrated from India rather than the more general condition of intellectual exile which Said describes, there is little here that distinguishes this aspect of their understandings of exile and migrancy.

Rushdie's essay, "Outside the Whale," builds on the consideration of the political prerogatives of migrant writers in "Imaginary Homelands" and presents an exilic description of the role of the writer as a cultural critic. Rushdie draws his title from Orwell's 1940 essay "Inside the Whale" which takes the Biblical story of Jonah as a metaphor for the proper relation between the writer and politics. In that essay, Orwell argues that writers should "get inside the whale," that is, stay out of the world of politics and passively accept the political events of the early twentieth century because the political world is so full of lies and distortions that writers have no hope of altering its direction. Jonah's whale, then, is a mechanism for political quietism, an escape from the futility which is any attempt to live in the world of politics. Accounting for this embrace of quietism, an embrace which seems surprising coming from a writer as intelligent about matters of politics as Orwell, Rushdie explains "that Orwell's intellect, and finally, his spirit were broken by the age in which he lived" and that, therefore, "he turned his talents to the business of constructing an escape-route" (96).

While Rushdie declines to "judge" Orwell for his choice to live "inside the whale" in the age of Hitler and Stalin, he notes that the lessons of Orwell's quietism have become deeply absorbed in contemporary political discourse:

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In an age when it often appears that we have all agreed to believe in entropy, in the proposition that things fall apart, that history is the irreversible process by which everything gradually gets worse, the unrelieved pessimism of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* goes some way towards explaining its status as a true myth of our times. (97)

Thus, Orwell's quietism is paired with rise of conservatism in England and America represented by the political rise of Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and by the cultural revival in England of literary and cinematic works on the empire both of which motivate Rushdie's essay. Passive quietism, he insists, always favors the status quo because "if resistance is useless, those whom one might otherwise resist become omnipotent" (97).

It is apparent from this that, although he excuses Orwell's choice to some degree, Rushdie finds the choice of political quietism unfit for the present moment, but he also finds the theory of literature which would exclude it from politics generally unsatisfying. The story of Jonah which structures Orwell's argument, from this perspective, provides a false choice between escape and involvement, a choice, Rushdie insists, that does not exist. "The truth is," he proclaims, "that there is no whale. We live in a world without hiding places: the missiles have made sure of that" (99). He goes on, "So in place of Jonah's womb, I am recommending the ancient tradition of making as big a fuss, as noisy a complaint about the world as humanly possible" (99). Such a position, for Rushdie, is not only politically necessary for resisting the conservative impulses of Thatcherite Britain, but it is also a response to historical reality in a world that "lacks not only hiding places, but certainties" (100). Thus, the writer who seeks to engage with the world, to live "outside the whale," must "accept that he (or she) is part of the crowd, part of the ocean,

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part of the storm, so that objectivity becomes a great dream, like perfection, an unattainable goal for which one must struggle in spite of the impossibility of success" (101). Living "outside the whale," then, can also be seen as an application of the kind of "worldly" criticism which Said consistently advocates to the specific political context of the postcolonial novelist. Just as the Saidian intellectual must see both the texts he reads and the texts he writes as bound up in political and cultural contexts, Rushdie's novelist "outside the whale" can fathom no escape route which would safely deliver him from the world of politics.

Thus, Rushdie presents the omnipresence of politics as an argument for the active political involvement of writers. If politics cannot be escaped, he argues, it must be actively engaged if we are to avoid becoming mere characters in the politically manipulated narratives of the powerful. Taken together, "Imaginary Homelands" and "Outside the Whale" expound a theory of exile which rejects both the view that exile is an escape from political consequences and responsibility and the related view that physical displacement grants the exile access to an objective view of reality. The view of exile which Rushdie advances is decidedly *not* transcendent. Instead, because the exile has only an "imaginary" access to her homeland through memory, her vision is necessarily particular to her idiosyncratic experience. This, however, is not presented as an argument against writing about the "real" homeland. Instead, it suggests that the exile's partial view might add a useful perspective which has been missed by those who possess a more holistic perspective on their home cultures.

The Alternatives of Migrancy in *The Satanic Verses*

If, as Gayatri Spivak asserts, a "mere reading of [*The Satanic Verses*] is impossible" because the novel has been "intercept[ed]" by the "praxis and politics of life," by the events of the so-called "Rushdie affair," then it is nearly as difficult to read the two essays on the question of migrancy and writing which I have been discussing absent that same context (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 217). *The Satanic Verses* is, indeed, a vivid example of the attempt to live in a world without the security of Jonah's (and Orwell's) whale and a migrant writer's attempt to write about his "imaginary homeland." Ironically enough, Rushdie had no choice but to hide after the pronouncement of the *fatwa*, but his novel remained thoroughly enmeshed in the political contexts which it addressed.

The furor that rose up in response to the novel was a conflict which centered on the question of the difference between blasphemy and artistic freedom. It was, therefore, a cultural conflict between a secular Western notion of freedom of expression and a religious, fundamentalist even, Islamic notion of blasphemy. As Nico Israel notes, "the vast majority of journalistic responses to the declaration of the *fatwa* – of both the hagiographic and vilifying varieties—revolved around binary conceptions of censorship and free speech, sacredness and blasphemy, archaism and modernity, and human rights and tyranny" (126). Rushdie himself has advanced this understanding of the conflict generated by his novel even as he has defended the novel's original subject as migrancy: "If [the novel] is anything" he has said, "it is a migrant's eye view of the world" ("In Good Faith"394). However, the understanding of the novel which was promoted by those

who participated in this binary conflict, an understanding which was more the result of a popular response to the novel than the product of critical analysis of Rushdie's text, obscured the novel's chief target. The primary object of critique in *The Satanic Verses* is not Islam, and therefore, the novel is not intended to initiate a cultural conflict between East and West or the postcolonial world and the metropolitan center. Instead, the novel takes aim at a political conflict which is internal to postcolonial politics, a conflict which is central to the two essays on migrancy that I have already discussed. That is, *The Satanic Verses* is less a fictional critique of fundamentalist Islam, though it does attempt such a critique, than it is an attempt to negotiate a what might be called an "exilic" postcolonial politics oriented toward the unstable experience of exile/migrancy rather than the polarities of the colonizer/colonized and center/periphery dialectics.

Rushdie's attempt to negotiate an exilic postcolonial position is illustrated throughout the novel but most noticeably in the repeated conflicts between different attitudes toward migrancy. As Spivak notes, "*The Satanic Verses*, in spite of all its plurality, has rather an aggressive central theme: the postcolonial divided between two identities: migrant and national" (219). Another way of putting Spivak's description of the novel's theme is to say that Rushdie presents two models of the postcolonial subject: one which is paradoxically endorsed by both the racist attitudes of conservative English society and by the nationalist anti-colonial left and one which, just as paradoxically, is condemned by these adversarial groups. The first of these models, the postcolonial national, operates on the assumption that cultural identity is stable, and, therefore it functions within the polarized structures of the dialectic between the center and the periphery. Although the postcolonial national resists the metropolitan center by taking an

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oppositional stance towards it, the postcolonial national inadvertently perpetuates the conflict by operating within the system of colonial/anti-colonial conflict. Rushdie's second model, the postcolonial migrant, represents an attempt to imagine an alternative to the conflict between the center and the periphery by breaking down the boundaries which separate the opposed sides. Further, Rushdie's conception of postcolonial migrancy attempts to erase the lines which divide the exile/migrant (as metropolitan traitor) from the national (as authentic cultural loyalist).

In the novel, these two versions of postcolonial subjectivity which Rushdie sees as in conflict are refracted through a number of different scenes and characters, but they are most consistently, and complexly, represented by the two main characters of the novel: Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta. Gibreel Farishta, born Ismail Najbuddin to a poor family and orphaned at an early age, is an actor whose specialty in Bollywood cinema is playing a variety of deities in the "theologicals." However, he has recently experienced a crisis of faith, and as a result, his sleep is constantly interrupted by dreams in which he imagines himself as the Archangel Gibreel. Saladin Chamcha, born Salahuddin Chamchawalla to wealthy parents who sent him from Bombay to boarding school and university in England, is also an actor, but he specializes in radio voice-overs for English radio and is known as "the man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice" for his unique ability to mimic any number of accents and voices.

The novel opens on the scene of Gibreel and Saladin in mid-air, as they hurtle toward the ground after the Air India jet on which they had been travelling to London has been blown-up by Sikh terrorists. Shortly after they land, Gibreel develops an angelic halo while Saladin begins to grow horns, hooves, and a tail. As Israel notes, Gibreel and

Saladin "seem, *initially*, to represent diametrically opposite principles, the former [Gibreel] a militant outsider, prone to spout Fanonian maxims, and the latter [Saladin] an assimilated sycophant or 'spoon,' likely to propound Tory party rhetoric" (165, emphasis added). Gibreel, the representative of nativist anti-colonial resentment, and Saladin, the representative of metropolitan accommodation and mimicry, exist in an oppositional relationship to each other. However, this oppositional relationship, like most relationships in the novel, is unstable and susceptible to repeated reversals.

Gibreel comes to London, an idea he had previously detested, out of love for the Jewish-English mountain-climber Alleluia Cone and out of a desire to recover from the emotional trauma caused by his abandonment of Islam. Saladin, on the other hand, considers his return to London a return home after he was reprimanded for his mimicry of English culture, for being a "chameleon whiteskin mongrel." Chamcha's arrival in London promises to be a return to the security of his middle class English life. Once they arrive, or land, in England their expectations and the oppositional relationship between migrant and national which structures them are turned on their heads. In Israel's words, the "rigidified, binary divisions between resister and toady, nationalist and sellout begin to unravel" as the "physical and psychical transformations [brought on during their descent to Earth] commence" (166).

Gibreel, with his radically anti-British notions, more or less settles down with Rosa Diamond on her palatial estate, but Saladin, the master of colonial mimicry whose return to London was a return home, is arrested for being an illegal immigrant by aggressive border police and taken to an immigration detention center. There, he encounters other immigrants who suffer from the same effects of "demonaisis" which he

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is beginning to experience as he physically transforms into a devil. "Demonaisis" has transformed them into beasts and monsters, physical manifestations of the caricatures of white racism. When he asks one of his fellow migrant-monster prisoners "how they do it," how the guards have managed to transform them, he replies "They describe us. . . . That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (168). This experience radicalizes Saladin; his horns become a symbol of immigrant militancy in London. Meanwhile the formerly radical Gibreel has escaped the exoticized dreamland of Rosa Diamond's past to find Alleluia Cone, only to be thrown out of her apartment because of his uncontrollable jealousy. The repeated reversals described by the plot of Gibreel and Saladin's arrival in England suggest the binary structure of opposition and accommodation is made unstable by the experience of migration. Migration, from this view, becomes the occasion for a new structure of identity.

The migration of Gibreel and Saladin is, therefore, presented as an occasion for new beginnings. Gibreel specifically interprets their fall as a form of reincarnation, new birth, and upon their landing Saladin "coughed, spluttered, and, as befitted a new-born babe, burst into foolish tears" (10).This prompts the often noted passage in which Rushdie's narrator announces the general theme of the novel:

> How does newness come into the world?
>
> Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?
>
> How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine?

Do angels have wings? Can men fly? (8)

The novel, then, turns repeatedly on the question "How does newness come into the world?" This is, of course, the question which Homi Bhabha famously cites in the essay "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation." In that essay, Bhabha argues that the "'newness' of migrant or minority discourse has to be discovered *in medias res*; a newness that is not part of the 'progressivist' division between past and present, or the archaic and the modern; nor is it a newness that can be contained in the mimesis of 'original and copy'" (227). Rushdie's conception of the "newness" of migration, that is, instantiates new understandings of time and history and of postcolonial identity which take their places outside of the familiar binary opposition between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery, between East and West, or between secular modernity and religious primitivism.

In the novel, the most often repeated answer to the question "How does newness come into the world?" is the one offered by Gibreel in the first line of the novel "In order to be born again, . . . first you must die." It is a claim which recalls the Christian narrative of resurrection as well as the Hindu narrative of reincarnation as explanations for the advent of new cultural formations. Israel suggests that among the many allusions evoked in this line of the *gazal* Gibreel sings as he falls to Earth lies an allusion to the work of Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci. It is, he notes, referred to as the "old Gramsci chestnut" later in the novel (161). Citing Gramsci's essay "State and Civil Society," Israel argues that the repeated line "In order to be born, first you must die" both invokes Gramsci's notion of a "crisis of authority," in which the ruling class must resort to force to maintain their power because they can no longer rely on the faith of "the great masses" in

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traditional ideologies, and re-orients the notion to the contemporary political context of

Thatcherite England with its population of postcolonial immigrants.[9] He says,

> Writing of late-1980s Britain, Rushdie seeks to expose a "wave of materialism
>
> (Thatcherism run amok) and its simultaneous "crisis of authority" (an often brutal
>
> police force exercising "coercive force"). In so doing, he deviates from the
>
> standard British cultural studies reading of Gramsci (shared by figures from
>
> Williams to Eagleton), with which he is apparently familiar, and translates
>
> Gramsci's concept of "great masses" to signify the large number of immigrants
>
> and refugees who, detached from their "traditional ideologies," challenge the
>
> apparent fixity of national traditions and class relations. *The Satanic Verses* can
>
> be viewed as an extended meditation on the morbid symptoms of just such a
>
> crisis, the death throes of the old commingling with the birth pangs of the new.
>
> (162).

That is to say, Rushdie "translates" the Gramscian insight that old ideologies refuse to die

(they hang on through the use of force) even while new ones seek to be born for the

purposes of criticizing the racial politics of Britain. This is a useful observation because it

illustrates the "explicitly *political* framework" of the chief question of the novel: "How

does newness come into the world?" Not only is Israel's reading perceptively attuned to

the English political context which Rushdie's novel attempts to critique, but it also notes

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[9] Here is the entire passage from which Israel suggests Rushdie draws his allusion to Gramsci:
> the aspect of the modern crisic which is bemoaned as a "wave of materialism" is related to what is
> called the "crisis of authority." If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer "leading"
> but only "dominant," exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses
> have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to
> believe previously, etc. *The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new
> cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid systems occur*. (ctd. in Israel 218 n.
> 75, emphasis added by Israel).

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how the invocation of Gramsci's insight about the intransigence of old ideologies is also turned against the postcolonial national in the novel. In so doing, Rushdie ties his exploration of newness (and the attendant death of the old) to the experience of migrancy.

If Israel provides a useful political context for understanding the inflection of Gibreel's refrain, another useful context for it can be found in the description of exile/migrancy, especially its relation to time and memory, which Rushdie expounds in "Imaginary Homelands." Writing of the relation between exilic displacement and the forward movements of history, Rushdie says,

> It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; and I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal appeal. (12)

In these speculative and general remarks, exile, the experience of physical, geographical displacement, is analogized to the experience of the temporal displacement, the passage of time. To be an exile, and especially a writer-in-exile, is to have an unusually keen sense of the pastness of the past, the sense that what is left behind in the home country or in the past cannot be fully recovered.

This comparison between geographical and temporal displacement is not intended to justify nostalgia, especially the dogmatic nostalgia represented by the Imam of Gibreel's dream and his denial of the dynamic, historical present, but instead, Rushdie

argues that this is a useful position from which to deal with present. Nonetheless, the comparison masks some of the trauma of physical and temporal displacement, or to discuss this in more visceral terms, the trauma of exile and death, which is suggested in Gibreel's refrain that "in order to be born again, first you must die." It is a trauma that provokes responses which may be productively dynamic or obstinately reactionary.

The obstinately reactionary response to the trauma of exilic displacement is, perhaps, made most explicit in the opening section of the "Ayesha" section of the novel. There, Rushdie's narrator, in a thinly-veiled portrait of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the sanctuary of his London apartment, a portrait which likely did as much to generate the *fatwa* as did Rushdie's supposed blasphemy, explains how displacement is experienced from the perspective of the postcolonial national: "Exile is a soulless country. In exile, the furniture is ugly, expensive, all bought at the same time in the same store and in too much of a hurry . . . In exile all attempts to put down roots look like treason: they are admissions of defeat" (208). Exile, in this sense, as Israel points out, is "associated with anachronicity" (164). It is a longing for stasis in the face of the dynamic rush of history. It is a view of displacement which privileges a static past, with its implication of a stable cultural home, to such an extent that it cannot imagine the possibility of a home that exists in the present. Thus, the Imam is described as "a massive stillness, an immobility" who hates all reminders of the passage of time – calendars, newspapers, and even novels – because they are reminders of the impassable distance of time which prevents his return home. Rosa Diamond, in the "Ellowen Deeowen" chapter, presents a similarly anti-historical response to the predicament of exile. She clings to a vision of an idealized, imagined past in much the same way as does the Imam, but unlike the Imam, she

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preferred her exilic "banishment" to her life in her home country. She romanticizes her former life in 1930s Argentina to the point that it becomes an erotic/exotic fetish.

Neither the Imam's nor Rosa's vision of exile is Rushdie's preferred attitude toward displacement because they romanticize a cultural past which is no longer accessible and because it insists on a static and totalizing view of history which negates the possibility of new knowledge and cultural formations. For example, the Imam of Gibreel's dreams actively opposes such an historical possibility. "History," from the Imam's point of view,

> is the blood-wine that must no longer be drunk. History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of lies— progress, science, rights—against which the Imam has set his face. History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound. (210)

From this perspective, newness is neither possible nor desirable. Read in light of the Imam's denunciation of history, the real blasphemy of Rushdie's novel is that it suggests that religious revelation is incomplete and open to revisions, in short, that it is an historical text. To suggest that such a thing as "secular history" exists is an affront to the fundamentalist notion of the sacred as timeless and unchanging. As Bhabha writes, "Rushdie's sin lies in opening up a space of discursive contestation that places the authority of the Koran within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism" (226).

This is also the thrust of Gibreel's dreams which reproduce the story of the "original" Satanic Verses, the infamous "Mahound" and "Return to Jahilia" chapters that offended so many religious believers. Gibreel's first dream takes place in the city of

Jahilia, a place whose very existence is owed to a fight against the forces of historical change. Jahilia (the name means "ignorance") was

> a miracle worked by its citizens, who have learned the trick of transforming the
>
> fine white dune-sand of those forsaken parts,--the very stuff of inconstancy,--the
>
> quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form, --and have turned
>
> it, by alchemy, into the fabric of their newly invented permanence. (94)

The barely implicit critique of the fundamentalist attitude toward history in this passage recalls Said's argument, in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, for a "secular" criticism which is attuned to the "worldliness" of the literary text as opposed to "religious" criticism which is ossified into dogma and unresponsive to historical change or context. Indeed, it has become a commonplace among secular liberals that fundamentalism, and, for some, religion in general, negates any historical understanding of human activity. Fundamentalist religion, from this perspective, is "ignorant" because it constructs a static, anti-historical narrative which allows it to ignore the realities of historical change.

The critique of fundamentalist religion as "ignorant" is part of Rushdie's more general critique of static understandings of identity, understandings which would deny the validity of the "newness" of migrancy, in *The Satanic Verses*. This connection can be seen in the example of the "rash, bad girl" Zeeny Vakil, a Bombay doctor and art critic who becomes Saladin's lover and attempts to "reclaim" him from England. She is described as an unrepentant critic of the kind of identity represented by the oppositional dialectic which structures the relationship between England and India:

> She was an art critic whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folk-
>
> lorist straight jacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically

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validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle

of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-

best-and-leave-the-rest?—had created a predictable stink, especially because of its

title. She had called it *The Only Good Indian*. "Meaning, is a dead," she told

Chamcha when she gave him a copy. "Why should there be a good, right way of

being a wog? That's Hindu fundamentalism. Actually, we're all bad Indians.

Some worse than others." (52)

The joke contained in the title of Zeeny's book, *The Only Good Indian*, is an ironic

appropriation of the racist joke about Native Americans: The only good Indian is a dead

Indian. She reverses the direction of the joke as a way of criticizing the very notion that

there is such a thing as a "good' Indian: A dead Indian is the only good Indian. Zeeny's

ironic play on the joke suggests not only that "good' Indians do not exist (by the logic of

the joke, they would all be dead even if they did exist) but also that dead Indians are

"good" because they can no longer change. Dead Indians are "good" Indians because,

unlike living Indians, they are not a moving target. On the other hand, living Indians,

especially Indians who have migrated from their home country, change (or at least

possess a potential for change) as they continually enter into new and complex cultural

relationships which blurs the lines between home and exile.

In the same way, notes Walkowitz, "Defending *The Satanic Verses* as a

celebration of 'our mongrel selves,' Rushdie appropriates racist metaphors by affirming

the impurity of metropolitan culture" (139). It should be added, however, that such

appropriations are not intended as criticisms of migrant culture, but, rather, they are

intended as *defenses* of it. This is the intent of what Walkowitz calls "one of Rushdie's

most common and effective strategies: a purposeful, often shocking use of racist aphorisms." In the case of Zeeny's joke, "Rushdie opposes racism as a system of moral distinctions" by refusing to be a "good" Indian. This also enforces the novel's critique of the notion that the migrant is necessarily a cultural traitor. If there is no such thing as a "good" Indian, migrant Indians certainly can't be "bad" Indians, but more than that, Zeeny's appropriation of a racist joke implies that the system of policing cultural authenticity implied in the idea of the "good" Indian operates on the same racial lines which structure white racism. More than just a critique of anti-immigrant racism in England, then, Zeeny's joke is also a critique of the entire system of racial identity, a system which assigns individuals permanent, static identities based on race as a way to keep them in their proper place.

This, in many ways, is the fundamental question of *The Satanic Verses*: How does the migrant/exile relate to the "system of moral distinctions" which structures both white racism and the oppositional dialectic of postcolonial nationalism? The answer, repeated in numerous iterations, seems to be that the migrant/exile opens up this system to alternative possibilities, alternative understanding of what makes a "good" postcolonial subject. From the related perspectives of white racism and postcolonial nationalism, the exile/migrant is by definition a "bad" postcolonial subject: she betrays her own people by leaving her home for a new land in which she is necessarily alien. However, from the exilic/migrant's perspective which Rushdie charts between the poles of center and periphery, the experience of exilic displacement or migrancy opens up the possibility for new, hybrid cultural formations which selectively partake of the old cultural formations that they leave behind. Rushdie's migrancy, then, is a description of the process of

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cultural (and political) change in a world where the borders between cultures are so permeable as to be non-existent.

It is useful to consider Said's critical evaluation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in *Culture and Imperialism* in relation to Rushdie's use of exilic experience/migrancy to critique the system of cultural authenticity which supports white racism in England and which structures the relationship between metropolitan center and postcolonial periphery. In Said's reading, Conrad's novella represents a useful, if tragically limited, example of critical, exilic consciousness because, by historicizing the system of imperialism, the novella (and particularly Conrad's narrative structuring of the speaking situation) displays its contingency and implies the possibility of a resistant alternative to it. It, perhaps unwittingly, opens a space for a new relation between the imperial colonizer and the colonized natives.

The new relation implied in Said's reading of *Heart of Darkness* is certainly oppositional in nature. The possibility that the novel implies but fails to imagine is the possibility of a political, as opposed to ontological, resistance to imperialism. Nonetheless, this oppositional possibility represents a complication of, a layer of complexity added to, the relationship between colonizer and colonized as Conrad and his imperial contemporaries imagined it. In addition to the complication of the relationship between colonizer and colonized which is implied in the novella, there is Said's own "contrapuntal" affiliation with Conrad which adds yet another layer of relational complexity. In place of an oppositional relationship between the postcolonial critic and his imperialist subject, Said maps out a relationship of selective, critical affiliation that allows him to acknowledge Conrad's achievements and contributions as an artist as well

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as the significant and, in light of his contributions to culture, "tragic" political and ethical limitations.

Rushdie's insistence on the variety and dynamism, the "newness," of migrancy serves a critical purpose similar to that served by Said's contrapuntalism. If Conrad could suggest the possibility of an oppositional alternative to imperialism, even though he could not imagine the character of that alternative, Rushdie imagines a proliferation of alternatives, alternatives which might be called "contrapuntal" alternatives because they emerge out of a complex relationship between the center and the periphery.

It might be best, then, to think of the oppositional structure of center/periphery as a *strategic* cultural formation, one that serves the purposes of a specific kind of postcolonial resistance which might not be appropriate to the contemporary context where, as a result of mass migrations and the forces of global capital, the boundaries between the center and the periphery are not only less clear, but less useful. That is, the critiques and subsequent reformulations of the structure of opposition which both Rushdie and Said advance are not simple, wholesale disavowals of opposition as a political tool. Indeed, Said's criticism alternates between an oppositional mode (his attack on Naipual, for instance) and a contrapuntal mode. Rather, they represent critical attempts to select the most appropriate tool for advancing political change in the contemporary political context. This is not mere ambivalence or confusion about the possibility of resistant politics. Instead, Said and Rushdie marshal the twin theories of exile and migrancy to illustrate a form of political change which is sensitive to the varieties of postcolonial experience. They privilege the displaced postcolonial subject only inasmuch as the exile/migrant is open to more possibilities, more alternatives, than

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is the oppositional model of postcolonial nationalism. They are not interested in policing the moral distinctions between various kinds of postcolonial experience. The oppositional structure of postcolonial nationalism is the object of critique only because it has outlived its historical moment. It has hardened into a rigid system which pits "good" postcolonial subjects (the oppositional postcolonial nationalists) against the "bad" ones (the multiply-rooted postcolonial migrant/exile) in a contest for cultural authenticity which ultimately serves to perpetuate the structure of white racism which postcolonial nationalism is intended to resist.

The attempts of Rushdie and Said to chart a complex relationship to the metropolis through trope of exile/migrancy, then, are examples of "newness" entering the world.

Conclusion: Exilic Loss and Exilic Emplacement: The Twin Impulses of Said's Project

The term "exile" acquires a number of meanings in Said's work. It is a physical experience with which individuals and in some cases, like that of Palestinians, entire peoples have had to live. It is a description of the crisis of filiation which is the hallmark of modern life. It is a model for the kind of historically and politically sensitive mode of literary criticism which Said practiced. It is a metaphor for the work of the intellectual standing against ideology and power. It is both personal and political. It is both traumatic and enabling. Each of these meanings overlaps the others in his work. The personal and political are intertwined in a critical and intellectual practice which I have described as exilic because it attempts both to mimic the unsettled experience of exile, its tenuousness and contingency, and to cope with that experience.

The works of the three novelists I have discussed exhibit some of the same exilic tendencies I have I identified in Said's work. In their language, their forms, and their themes, the predicament of exile is encountered and made productive in different ways. Joseph Conrad's anxious style and his insistence on recreating the speaking situation are attempts to reconstruct a meaningful narrative community out of the fragments of his own exilic experience and across the distance between the novelist and his audience. The entirety of V.S. Naipaul's fiction can be read as an attempt to make a home for himself which, unlike the one he left behind in Trinidad, is secure from the humiliating pressures of politics. Salman Rushdie's work celebrates the exile, his varied experiences and the potential for a new beginning which exilic emplacement represents.

Like Said, each of these writers turns to writing as a mode of coping or engaging with the exilic experience of a lost home. Writing as it is practiced, indeed, lived by these writers becomes both a personal sanctuary and an attempt to reach outside of the self, to establish new affiliative relationships in the absence of a natural home. Said is fond of quoting an aphorism from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* which describes beautifully the exile's desire to live in writing:

> In his text, the writer sets up house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents untidily from room to room. They become pieces of furniture that he sinks into, content or irritable. He strokes them affectionately, wears them out, mixes them up, rearranges, ruins them. For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. (87)

Indeed, Said's own "reflections on exile" (both the essay that goes by that title and the more general reflections on exile which appear throughout his work) recall the evocative subtitle of Adorno's book: *Reflections on a Damaged Life*. The life of the exile is, indeed, a damaged life, a life in need of the repair which the comforts of writing offer.

It is possible, then, to identify two impulses contained in Said's descriptions of exile which are also the two impulses which have driven this dissertation. The first impulse might be called the impulse of exilic loss. It is primarily a desire for home which can never be completely satisfied. It is a desire represented in this dissertation by the repeated attempts by Said, Conrad, Naipaul, and Rushdie (as well as numerous figures to whom I have given less attention) to use writing as the material out of which to fashion a home. This impulse is existential in character; it is a concern with the individual exile's

experience of pain and loss. It is an impulse, a commitment, to carry on the work of living in a world that offers no sanctuary outside the confines of the self.

The second impulse which drives Said's explorations of exile as well as this dissertation is both political and moral (or, rather, political *because* moral) in character. It might be called the impulse of exilic emplacement. This impulse is less a concern about what is lost in the experience of exile than what is gained. Specifically, what is gained is a limited kind of freedom that opens up possibilities unavailable to someone who rests secure in the idea of home. Led by this impulse, the exile can begin the process of "setting up house," to borrow Adorno's phrasing. The exile can selectively establish new affiliations, but even as these new relationships are initiated, the exile is aware of their ultimate provisionality. As Said says in "Reflections on Exile," "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both" (185).

Exile prompts a desire for a home which has been lost, but it also destabilizes the very notion of home. Therefore, the exile cannot rest easy in any new home. Instead, he stands apart from this new home even as he desires the belonging it offers because it, too, is a home that can be lost. Another line which Said often borrows from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* illustrates this impulse. "It is part of morality," Adorno says, "not to be at home in one's home" (39). "To follow" Adorno's directive, Said says, "is to stand away from 'home' in order to look at it with the exile's detachment" ("Reflections" 185). To not be at home in one's home, then, is to be vigilantly aware of the contingency and the insecurity of one's place in the world. What I have called the impulse of exilic

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emplacement, then, is the commitment to use the limited freedom provided by exile in order to establish new affiliations, new forms of collectivity and solidarity, without becoming too settled in the new home such affiliations provide.

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This dissertation began as an intervention in the project of postcolonial theory which I felt was necessary if postcolonial theory is to fulfill its moral and political promise. The kind of postcolonial theory which has become popular (even dominant?) in the American academy appeared as part of the so-called "rise of theory" that began in the late 1960s and reached its apex in the 1980s, and it is, thus, permanently affiliated with the other theoretical approaches that appeared during this period, most especially with poststructural theory and postmodernism. This affiliation has largely been accepted, uncritically, as a given, and the consequences of this relationship have not been made as clear as they need to be. What postcolonial theory gains in the affiliation with poststructural theory and postmodernism are allies in the fight against the forces of racism and imperialism. This is no small thing. Racism and imperialism remain real threats, even today, as they continue to take on new forms in an increasingly globalized political and cultural system. All hands on deck.

However, there is also something lost in postcolonial theory's relationship with poststructural theory and postmodernism. Specifically, what is lost is a theory of human agency which allows resistance in the form of criticism to the forces of racism and imperialism. While poststructural theory and postmodernism have provided a number of tools for resistance – discourse analysis, deconstruction, new theories of the self – these tools should not be utilized uncritically by theorists who seek to participate in the

postcolonial project of resisting racism and imperialism. Postcolonial theory, if it is to be a political project, needs theories of human agency which enable numerous kinds of resistance to the forces it opposes.

This dissertation, then, is an intervention which is intended to restore the importance of human agency in the postcolonial project. I have argued that the work of Edward Said advances the political project of postcolonial theory not only in his opposition to specific instances of racism and imperialism, but also in his insistence on the importance of human agency, human will, and human experience in his theorization of postcolonial exile. This is most plainly evident in Said's "contrapuntal" relation to the apparently opposed projects of humanism and poststructuralism. As an exile selectively affiliates himself with new homes without completely being at home, Said navigates between humanism and poststructuralism taking what he needs to advance his postcolonial political project along the way without being bound to either project. From humanism, he takes the understanding of the importance of justice and freedom – of morality, in short – and from poststructuralism, he takes both the sense that power works in surreptitious ways (especially in the narrative structures which mask its impact) to limit freedom and deny justice and the analytical tools with which to root power out. Said privileges his relationship to humanism over his relationship to poststructuralism, but he does not place them in opposition to each other. His is a poststructuralism in service to a humanistic postcolonial project.

Finally, in Said's "contrapuntal" relationship to humanism, we can see the twin impulses of exile (loss and emplacement) being worked out. Humanism promises a utopian horizon of justice of which exilic emplacement is an emblem. Just as the exile

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seeks new affiliations that are always provisional, the Saidian humanist continually works to create a just world even as that project proves to be continually incomplete.

It is my small hope that I have contributed to this project.

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Vita

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After graduating from Navasota High School in May of 1995, Shaun attended Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas where he majored in English and was among the school's first class to graduate from the Honors College, as an Honors College Graduate with Distinction, in May 1999. In August of 1999, he began graduate study at the University of Tulsa. He earned his M.A. in English Literature and Language in May 2001. In August of 2001, he moved to Knoxville, Tennessee to earn a Ph.D. in English at the University of Tennessee, specializing in postcolonial literature and critical theory. As a graduate student, Shaun taught composition courses, tutored in the University Writing Center, and served as Editorial Assistant for *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

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