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Reconstructing Englishness: Cultural Scission within the European Self

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The “Self-Other” dichotomy that so permeates discussions surrounding colonial cultural studies mirrors the European imperialist’s construction of a reductive identity for his colonial subject.[1] However, such a dichotomy fails to consider another cultural Other: that dissonance that exists within an ostensibly coherent English or French identity.[2] Robert J. C. Young, in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, describes an inevitable and internal discord that prevents the Englishman from grasping his own underlying or essential self. Imperialism’s creation of an oppositional Indian or Egyptian identity, Young claims, reveals anxiety not about the first Other but the second; to identify the Indian was to come a step closer to locating the Englishman. Thus the development of a decidedly English or French culture becomes a process of continual reconstruction in which the European expels his own inner dissonance by projecting its variant elements upon the colonial subject.

This paper positions Young’s theory of cultural antagonism as a framework within which to read historiographical writings on European self-representation. The six authors here critiqued-Young, Ronald Inden, Gauri Viswanathan, Timothy Mitchell, Donald Malcolm Reid, and Sara Suleri-are ultimately concerned with imperialism’s efforts to resolve a split within the European Self. The Orient, as they demonstrate, functions as an ontological space in which to fashion a homogenous imperialist identity.[3]

I have divided this paper into four sections. First, I discuss Young’s theory of cultural development as the product of internal scission, as well as his analysis of Herder’s paradoxical model of civilizational advancement. The second section positions the arguments of Inden and Viswanathan as two alternative accounts of the British attempt to resolve cultural incoherence; the third reads Mitchell and Reid as responses to intercultural mixing. Finally, I apply Suleri’s criticisms of the traditional

Self-Other binary to Young's thesis with the intention of recognizing the limits of any argument built upon dichotomy.

Young's Cultural Scission

In his contrarian account of imperial England's obsessions with transgressive racial hybridity and inter-racial sex, Young puts forward a notion of culture as characteristically and necessarily dialectical. While culture (national culture in particular) maintains an appearance of cohesion, Young argues that it is inner dissonance that produces and advances culture. The fixity of British identity, he claims, is a superficial illusion: "The whole problem-but has it been a problem?-for Englishness is that it has never been successfully characterized by an essential, core identity from which the other is excluded." Rather, it has always "been divided within itself, and it is this that has enabled it to be variously and counteractively constructed."[4] Englishness as an identity is defined by its composite of conflicting and contrasting constituents. The imperial power simultaneously expels and embraces its own alterity; this tension, Young asserts, is demonstrated by the colonial interest in incorporating the Other via hybridity and sexual fantasy.

Young draws from Herder's *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1791) to present cultural dialectics in contrast to the modern conception of secular human progress as linear. For Herder, cultural development is, paradoxically, both global and local: culture develops indigenously but only advances as a result of interaction between civilizations. While he attributes history to "the situation of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the nature or generated character of the people,"[5] he also recognizes that European nations have only become "polished state[s]"[6] by borrowing writing, mathematics, and religion from the Romans, Greeks, Arabs, and Jews.

Still, Herder warns against hybridization, stating, "Nothing appears so directly opposite to the end of government as the unnatural enlargement of states, the wild mixture of various races and nations under one scepter."[7] Thus he articulates the central paradox of imperialism: interaction between colonizers and colonized-particularly those of different races, religions, genders-is both destructive threat to and a necessary prerequisite of cultural achievement and advancement. Young

terms this inconsistency "cultural scission." He articulates the central paradox of Herder's argument:

Cultures develop organically into nations by virtue of their homogeneity, attachment to the soil, their traditions and single language, but on the other hand, the 'golden chain of improvement that surroundest the earth' tells a different story, namely that the progress of culture works by a regenerative development between cultures, in which one nation educates another through mixing and migration.[8]

As cultures develop locally and homogeneously, hybridization is fatal to cultural unity and coherency; yet cultural diffusionism, whereby cultures borrow and build off of each other's achievements, is an integral element of human progress. Thus the European, Enlightenment-era plot of civilization-a linear path toward cultural perfection-is overlaid by a complex and multi-stranded dialectic. One cannot pinpoint or totalize culture; driven by internal scission, culture is continually reconstructed to respond to innate difference. Young affirms that "culture must always operate antithetically. Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference."[9] European society has measured itself through comparison with some imagined cultural antagonist-a foreign Other constructed to lend the European Self a sense of coherence. Its history is not one of cultural cohesion or fixity; instead it continually remakes itself by inscribing and externalizing cultural difference.

Herder's paradox functions as a lens through which to read conceptions of the European Self (as opposed to the colonial Other). European self-representations ultimately embody the inner struggle of European culture-the appeal of and aversion toward cultural mixing, the linear and dialectical models of progress, and the dueling images of imperial Europe as both homogeneous and heterogeneous. While Inden, Viswanathan, Mitchell, Reid, and Suleri do not specifically reference Young's theory of culture, I argue that their texts-all historiographies of the Other-aim toward an understanding or reconciliation of cultural scission. I begin with a discussion of essentialism in Inden's *Imagining India* (1990), which offers a useful example of European efforts to achieve cultural solidity via a dialectical, culturally heterogeneous process.

Responses to a Conflicted Englishness: Essentialism versus Diffusionism

Inden's historiographical analysis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Indology highlights imperialists' attempts to distinguish a coherent English identity when confronted with the colonial Other. His argument rests upon a criticism of Indology's adherence to an ordering of ideas more suited to the natural sciences, a favoritism for a mechanical model that discerns fundamentally separate and independently constituted agents. In envisioning colonial India as a machine-a system in which the colonizer and the colonized behave as disparate parts, firmly maintaining their own identities as they interact in rote, mechanized fashion-British Indologists have (intentionally) overlooked the dialectical nature of British-Indian relations. Not only, Inden argues, have the British colonizers profoundly shaped the identity of the Indian colonial subjects, but India has played an equally important role in constituting Englishness.

This framework's mechanical organization draws hard and fast lines between political actors. Affirming that the identities of the English and the Indians, as separate entities, remain intact as they interact, Indology seeks a "ghost in the machine," some underlying and fundamental property that drives the behavior of these actors. As such, Inden concludes, Indologists reduce the actions of Indians to the manifestations of Indian essences; certain immutable features (specifically caste, Hinduism, oriental despotism, and the rural political economy) come to function as "the substantialized agent of Indian society."[10] Indian actions are not actions in themselves, nor are Indian actors exercisers of their own will. Rather, the agency of Indians is displaced onto the driving powers of these essences. Such a reduction allows Indologists to characterize the "Hindu mind" as effeminate, passive, irrational, and dream-like; these adjectives are then employed to describe Indian action.[11]

The mechanical model operates the same in the inverse: English power is attributed to the driving force of particular "Western" essences. However, English essences were constructed to embody agency rather than deflect it. In contrast to passive, feminine, and irrational India, the actions of English imperialists as outlined by Indologists were manifestations of rational thought, individuality, and organization (as exemplified most clearly by the imperialist-capitalist system.) Inden describes the effect of such essentialism:

Indology was as a discipline not merely reflective but agentive; it actually fashioned the ontological space that a British Indian empire occupied. Its leaders would, as had others before them beginning with the Aryans, inject the rational intellect and world-ordering will that the Indians themselves could not provide.[12]

As the Indians were incapable of "making their world,"[13] the English took upon themselves the task; they were obligated to introduce rationality and order to correct India's world chaos and effeminacy. In attributing to India an essential passivity, England displaced Indian agency not only onto "imagined" essences, but also onto themselves.

Identity, Young notes, is constructed "to counter schisms, friction, and dissent. Fixity of identity is sought after in situations of conflict."[14] One may read the English imagining of India, as Inden describes it, as an attempt to counter cultural scission. Inden writes of Indology's essentializing process:

The consequence of this process has been to redefine ourselves [the Euro-American Self.] We have externalized exaggerated parts of ourselves so that the equally exaggerated parts we retain can act out the triumph of one over the other in the Indian subcontinent. We will be unhampered by an otherworldly imagination and unhindered by a traditional, rural social structure because we have magically translated them to India.[15]

Here Inden describes Indology's dual practice of inscribing and expelling cultural difference. The essentializing process is one of projection; Inden argues that the Englishman self identifies his own weak or undesirable characteristics, projects or imposes those traits upon a cultural and colonial Other, and ultimately overcomes them in the "ontological space" created by imperialism. Applying Young's notion of cultural scission to Inden's thesis, we see that to essentialize is to grapple with the instability of Englishness and seek fixity of identity by conquering internal dissonance on the imperial stage. The English colonist employs the Indian subject to personify certain few of his own traits, then subjugates and humiliates that personification; the Indologist buttresses the colonist's assertion of identity by placing both English and Indian actors into his mechanical framework, thus presenting the active Englishman and passive Indian as inherently so.

This analysis of the English construction of the Indian Other undercuts the imperialist vision of human progress as linear. Certainly, the English "hierarchy of essences" was designed to assert that vision. In depicting India as "static" in history (as Inden explains, India was seen as "eternally ancient," virtually identical from the pre-Mughal period through British rule), Indologists present a linear mode of history through which Europe is propelled by its active, rational essences. India, in contrast, remains distinct, passive, and inert. This linear conception of cultural development responds to Herder's paradoxical fear of cultural mixing. Not only does Indology assert a coherent, active, and masculine Englishness in the face of cultural conflict-it also envisions a means of progress that explicitly expels cultural difference. Rejecting the clearly dialectical course of the development of Englishness, the colonist instead avows the eternal fixity of his English self.

For Inden, the English approach to rectifying internal scission was to insist upon coherence of identity. Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest* (1989), offers an alternative account. Exploring cultural tension as represented in English literary studies curricula in colonial India, she argues that the English responded not with essentialism, but diffusionism. The English self-representations examined in Viswanathan's text seek to diffuse English identity by presenting the English intellectual as a counter to the colonizer.

Viswanathan positions the institutionalization of English studies in colonial India as a tool of cultural domination meant to demonstrate British intellectual, moral, and aesthetic superiority. Denigration of Indian literature went in tandem with the elevation of British intellectualism. The British subordinated the study of classical Indian literature, deeming it aesthetically and morally deficient, while elevating English literature as the embodiment of the moral and intellectual principles of the Enlightenment. Viswanathan claims that English studies in colonial India functioned not only to further the aims of the colonial administration, but also presented an opportunity for the imperial power to further define the idea of Englishness-both for itself and for its Indian subjects. Unsurprisingly, this definition was presented in binary terms: English literature reflected the underlying moral quality of English culture, while Indian literature merely revealed the weakness of the Indian mind. Viswanathan identifies a microcosmic example of

Inden's notion of essences in which literature points to an inherent cultural hierarchy.

As she demonstrates, however, even as English studies worked to essentialize Indian culture, the discipline failed to produce a coherent Englishness. Viswanathan identifies the overriding inconsistency in the imperialist's conception of the Self: the Englishman is political subjugator and moral exemplar, the agent of military force and political/economic exploitation and the embodiment of Christian virtue. In distinguishing between the real Englishman-the instrument of colonial domination-and the idealized Englishman-the producer of enlightened and morally exalted knowledge-the colonist's self-representation

to native Indians through the products of his mental labor removes him from the place of ongoing colonialist activity-of commercial operations, military expansion, and administration of territories-and deactualizes and diffuses his material reality in the process…His material reality as subjugator and alien ruler is dissolved in his mental output; the blurring of the man and his works effectively removes him from history.[16]

Here Viswanathan suggests that British efforts to present the idealized Englishman as intellectually superior sought to counteract the actuality of the Englishman as an agent of exploitation. Faced with two conflicting faces of Englishness, the colonist chooses to wear the mask provided by English literature, thus externalizing his own actions as an imperial agent. The Englishman, as Viswanathan describes him, was fully conscious of the morally culpable nature of his "material reality" as a colonist; as a result, he sought to deflect that reality with a constructed likeness of himself as "the reflective subject of literature."[17] For Viswanathan, the solution to cultural scission is not essentialism but diffusionism. In refusing to claim his material impact as his own, the Englishman exists only in the abstract moral and intellectual realms.

Building upon Viswanathan's analysis, I appropriate the example of English studies to illustrate the English response to internal, conflicting forces that cannot be attributed to geographical, racial, or religious difference. Rather, the distinction is between material action and intellectual production, both carried out ostensibly by agents who share an identical culture. Yet the Englishman as colonist proves the alterity to

the more sympathetic Englishman as literary figure, and thus the solution is to expel that alterity. This expulsion has the opposite effect of Inden's essentialism, as it bifurcates or diffuses rather than solidifies English identity. Viswanathan presents an instance in which the Englishman actively rejects cultural fixity and instead uses culture's inherent malleability to his advantage, highlighting its more appealing and downplaying its less appealing elements.

Viswanathan's discussion of English diffusionism carries implications for Herder's paradox. In seeking to diffuse their own identity by drawing attention to an elevated literary canon and away from imperialist practices, the English colonists were also reacting to the uncertain prospect of cultural development in the face of cultural mixing. What would become of Englishness when relocated to a foreign, intellectually suspect, morally inferior colony?

While the exclusionary nature of English studies precluded the incorporation of Indian intellectualism into English culture, Viswanathan demonstrates that true cultural definition is only achieved through dialectic. The insistence upon a hierarchy of essences is a product of dialectic in the sense that interaction between British and Indian cultures compels the British to continually and selectively reconstruct both Englishness and Indianness. Similarly, I contend that English insistence on the "purity" of western literature does not result from its inherent or essential superiority, but from dialectical and intercultural interaction. English studies underwent sanctification in response to the threat of cultural difference. A historiographical assessment of English studies undercuts the European model of linear progress by pointing to a reactive re-imagining of English culture. English literature is not superior to its Indian counterpart because it is innately so, or because English culture is progressive while Indian is stagnant, but because the interactions of the two malleable entities under particular political circumstances fashion one self as moral and intellectual and the other as its opposite.

Inden and Viswanathan explore two alternative British reactions to cultural schism. Whereas Inden's Englishman seeks cultural coherence through essentialism and affirmation, Viswanathan's Englishman practices diffusionism and denial. Both responses have the effect of elevating English culture (expressed through essence of character, in

Inden's case, and literary achievement in Viswanathan's) above that of the cultural "intruder." Thus the English imagine or claim cultural progress independent of cultural mixing; in reality, Inden and Viswanathan argue, the British achieved the illusion of cultural advancement by positioning Englishness at the top of a constructed dichotomy. Moreover, even this illusionary progress was achieved through intercultural interaction rather than through the popular mechanical model of separate and eternally fixed agents. Having examined European efforts to smooth internal cultural scission, I move to a discussion of Herder's paradox as applied to European responses to cultural hybridity.

Ordering the Colonial World

Viswanathan discusses English scholars' problematic method of analyzing Indian literature. Noting that these scholars' critical lenses were stained with an Orientalist political agenda in the first place, she explains that British readers criticized the use of allegorical descriptions of distasteful social customs in Indian texts. When allegorized, British scholars argued, morally reprehensible customs were inappropriately sanctified; consequently, allegorical representation in Indian literature contributed to the Indians' "insufficient sense of decency." Exposing the circularity of this British argument, Viswanathan problematizes such literary analysis as introducing "a literalism that was paradoxically allegorical in effect, for it assumed that every sign had to have a meaning."[18] In critiquing the Indian use of allegory as inappropriate and morally repugnant, the British misapply allegory themselves, appropriating literalized details to demonstrate a fundamental Indian inferiority. Viswanathan highlights the imperial power's tremendous emphasis on the signifier and signified, and the eagerness with which the British turned every detail into an essentializing signifier. The signified, however, had long ago been determined; the British merely marshaled signifiers as further evidence of Indian irrationality, stasis, and amorality.

In his 1992 essay "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," Timothy Mitchell describes how the imperial project, in its efforts to determine its own place in the modern world, positioned the Orient as the ultimate signified. Mitchell explores the world exhibition as an apparatus of representation, detailing its impact on the construction of the colonial Other. The Orient offered the ultimate subject matter for the European organization of what he terms "the object-world," a world set up as a

spectacle or a picture carrying meaning graspable by the external viewer. The nineteenth-century world exhibitions, for example, "ordered it [the world] up as an object on display to be investigated and experienced by the dominating European gaze."[19] In reducing the cultures of the Orient to objects of study-for example, Mitchell describes the simulation of a medieval Cairo street at the 1889 Stockholm Orientalist Conference, complete with bazaars, minarets, and Frenchmen dressed as Orientals-European scholars presented the Orient as orderable and comprehendible to the European mind.

This knowledge-power relationship, however, can only be achieved through application of the allegorical analysis described by Viswanathan to the Oriental object-world. Mitchell writes of the allegorical reading of the exhibition:

The effect of objectness was a matter not just of visual arrangement around a curious spectator, but of representation. What reduced the world to a system of objects was the way their careful organization enabled them to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress…Everything seemed to be set up before an observing subject into a system of signification, declaring itself to be a mere object, a mere "signifier of" something further.

In claiming to exactly replicate an authentic external reality, these exhibitions lent a sense of objectivity to imperialism's larger claims about History or Empire or Progress. The exhibition set up Oriental "objects" as pieces of evidence that inevitably point to a particular conclusion. In fact, the exhibition did the exact opposite: it imposed an allegorical reading onto objects, positioning them to represent Oriental essences already constructed by imperialist scholars. The ostensible truth or certainty of the exhibit both paralleled and enabled the political certainty of the imperial age. Mitchell points out that the spectacles of exhibition were "not just reflections of this certainty but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering imperial truth and cultural difference in 'objective' form."[20]

In painting the Orient as an allegorical picture, as an "enframed totality, something that forms a structure or a system,"[21] the European takes on an ambiguous position as both external observer of and participant in the Orient. Mitchell describes how the appeal of the exhibition (as

opposed to the "real" Orient) was in its enabling the European to remain separate from the object-world he observed. He could "know" the Orient without actually setting foot in it; moreover, he could observe the Orient as it existed without intervention of the European Self, essentialized and exotic. In that sense, Mitchell writes, the imperialist's ideal point of view "was not just a place set apart, outside the world or above it. Ideally, it was a position from where, like the authorities in Bentham's panopticon, one could see and yet not be seen."[22] The European wished to gain intimate knowledge of the Orient as untainted by European presence, requiring him to maintain his distance and invisibility.

Here Mitchell points out the paradox of the panoptical position:

At the same time as the European wished to elide himself in order to constitute the world as something not-himself, something other and object-like, he also wanted to experience it as though it were the real thing…There was a contradiction, therefore, between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within the object-world and experience it directly.

The exhibition, then, provided the solution to this paradox. It offered all the exotic detail necessary for the European to feel that he had "experienced" the Orient while still reminding him of the clear divide between viewer and exhibitionary object. Yet its perspective is problematic, as the viewer-simultaneously aware of his distance from the objects of study and actively attempting to grasp them-projects upon the objects the principles of his relation to them. He conceives of the Orient as an object-world meant for his cognition, a world as a picture rather than a reality that stands apart from an observer. Mitchell writes, "The world is grasped, inevitably, in terms of a distinction between the object… and its meaning, with no sense of the historical peculiarity of this effect we call the 'thing itself' or of this realm that we call 'meaning.'"[23] To read the Orient as though it were a pictorial or literary representation enabled the European to impose upon it his own interpretations of what it "is" or "means;" he could point to particular objects as signifiers relating to larger, European-constructed signifieds.

The exhibition's epistemological implications hold significance for Young's discussion of intercultural mixing. I position Mitchell's

exhibition as a possible solution to Herder's paradox. How might the Europeans approach Oriental culture-including its undeniable intellectual and artistic achievements-without threatening the supremacy of western culture? How might imperialist scholars harness the cultural diffusion of the Orient to the benefit of Europe's imperial project? The world exhibitions demonstrated the ways in which Europeans sought to organize the new multi-cultural world. They did so not by ignoring Oriental culture as an object of study, as was the case in colonial India's English studies curriculum, but by positioning it as solely that. Like Inden's hierarchy of essences, the exhibition transforms Oriental culture, displacing the intrinsic meaning of objects or actions onto some greater concept or essence. Mitchell's Other is subjugated not by the blatant denigration of its culture, but on an insistence on its knowability.

The nature of the European observer is one of ambivalence: at the same time that he wishes to remain an outsider, observing an untouched, essentialized world, he also craves to experience the "real" Orient as though he were a native himself. Mitchell relates the story of Edward Lane, author of *Manner and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), who adopted the dress and religious practices of local Muslims in Cairo. Thus disguised, Lane was able to inhabit Bentham's panopticon-he saw without being revealed as a foreigner. However, as Mitchell notes, Lane continually reminds his reader of his Englishness. He is only wearing a disguise; he is careful to communicate that he is not one of "them," and as such demonstrates allegiance to his identity as viewer rather than participant. The ambivalence of the observer parallels that of Herder, who cannot reconcile the importance of maintained cultural homogeneity with the desire to mix cultures.

The exhibition offers a medium between these two extremes, a method by which the European can peek into the Orient from the safety of his own homogenous community. It reveals itself as an indulgence of Herder's forbidden cultural mixing, a product of the European's innocuous flirtation with hybridization. Still, in depicting the Oriental object-world as a set of signifiers pointing to an essential difference, the exhibition also bolsters the linear model of cultural progress. Thus the European observer experiences heterogeneity from within Bentham's panopticon, from which position he could "grasp" the Orient while still insisting upon his own cultural homogeneity.

In allegorizing the Orient, the exhibition confirmed Inden's hierarchy of essences and ordered the newly hybridized world as such. However, it did not resolve Herder's paradox entirely. Egyptology, for instance, posed a counter to Herder's claim that culture develops locally and homogeneously; ancient Egypt's influence on Europe's Greco-Roman origins was undeniable. In *Whose Pharaohs?: archaeology, museums, and Egyptian national identity from Napoleon to World War I*, his 2003 account of Egyptian nationalists' usages of Orientalist histories, Donald Malcolm Reid articulates the predicament of the nineteenth-century European Egyptologist. While scholars like Lane explored the interactions of Roman and Egyptian culture, they did so from within the framework of the imperial project, which insisted upon a particular trajectory of cultural progress. Reid describes a problematic interplay between

imperialism on the one hand and the ideal of objective, universal science on the other. Neither Westerners nor Egyptians had much success in resolving the dilemma of being good citizens simultaneously of two imagined communities-one political and particularist (either Western imperialist or Egyptian nationalist) and the other internationalist.[24]

He offers a quote from Captain E. de Verninac Saint-Maur's 1835 *Voyage de Luxor* to explain the imperialists' "internationalist community:"

France, snatching an obelisk from the ever heightening mud of the Nile, or the savage ignorance of the Turks . . . earns a right to the thanks of the learned of Europe, to whom belong all the monuments of antiquity, because they alone know how to appreciate them. Antiquity is a garden that belongs by natural right to those who cultivate and harvest its fruits.[25]

Reid identifies an inconsistency within the imperial notion of culture. Culture necessary develops locally, yet transcends national boundaries, offering itself to whoever may comprehend it. Much as the observer of Mitchell's object-world asserts his control over the Oriental signified, Saint-Maur describes culture as rightfully belonging to those who ensure its advancement.

In aligning Reid's observations with of Young and Inden, I find that Saint-Maur's conception of culture enables the Egyptologist to reconcile cultural diffusion with imperialism's essentializing hierarchy. Reid

analyzes J.B. Fourier's preface to Edmé-François Jomard's *Description de l'Égypte* (1809), in which Fourier recognizes Egypt as the intellectual center of the ancient world; the French scholar acknowledges Egypt's influence on Homer, Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato, as well as its fascination for Alexander, Pompey, Caesar, Mark Antony, and Augustus. Yet at the same time that Fourier celebrates the cultural achievements of ancient Egypt, he depicts modern Egyptians as barbarians. While Fourier's conflicting descriptions illustrate the Egyptologist's dilemma-he must straddle both national imperialist and international communities-Reid points out that Egyptology both distinguishes and conflates the ancient and modern Egyptian. In accordance with imperialist models of civilizational advancement, Egyptology affirms Egypt's stagnation (in opposition to Europe's progression into modernity.) Reid's Egyptians, like Inden's Indians, are eternally ancient. Egypt's glorified past, however, cannot challenge European modernity; Egyptology's depiction of a civilization frozen in time barbarizes Egyptian colonial subjects as anachronisms in the modern world.

Reid identifies Fourier's conflation of ancient and modern Egypt as characteristic of nineteenth-century Egyptology:

A disquieting note on definitions: Egyptology was, and still is, the study of ancient Egypt. This definition implicitly slights Islamic and modern Egypt. Another Western trope that emphasizes continuity rather than discontinuity in Egypt is also unsettling-the assumption that quintessential fellahin have not changed since ancient times. This assumes an unchanging Orient juxtaposed to an evolving, dynamic West. [26]

Thus imperialist Egyptology balanced Egypt's role as a forerunner and contributor to Western civilization by emphasizing its cultural stasis and anti-modern position. Even Europe's appropriation of Egyptian and Oriental influences in its own nineteenth-century cultural production was framed by the contrast between an inert East and a vigorous West. With the establishment of the French Commission of Historic Monuments in 1837 and the British Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments in 1877, the nineteenth-century saw an increasing appreciation for early Islamic art and architecture. However, Reid notes a coinciding change in the terminology used by the era's Egyptologists to describe Islamic cultural contributions. Whereas the

1809 *Description* had classified Islamic monuments as "modern," erected after Greco-Roman antiquity, mid-century scholars redefined them as "Arab antiquities" produced during the Islamic medieval period. "Perhaps," writes Reid, "Europeans' appreciation of Islamic art and architecture could not flourish until they had historicized it and reconceived it as 'medieval'"[27]-"medieval" being subordinate to Europe's "modern."

Whether making use of the "ancient" or "medieval" labels, Egyptology insisted upon the cultural backwardness of nineteenth-century Egypt so as to temper the region's claims to historical grandeur. The depiction of Oriental anachronism not only cemented Greco-Roman culture's hegemonic position in Herder's "golden chain of improvement," but it also enabled nineteenth-century Europeans to participate in cultural mixing-via Islamic architectural revivalism, for instance-while still affirming a hierarchy of essences. Egyptology's internationalist conception of a culture that advances by transcendence of its origins gave imperialists license both to plunder Egypt for its obelisks and to borrow stylistic inspiration for their own artistic and intellectual products. Reid's Egyptologist straddles both the nationalist imperial project, which requires the delineation of a coherent and culturally hegemonic British or French identity, and the internationalist ideal of a malleable and hybridized culture. However, his allegiance ultimately allies with the former; the Egyptologist's internationalist perspective merely serves to bolster the conception of a cohesive imperialist culture as defined in opposition to the colonial Egyptian.

Mitchell and Reid reveal imperial Europe's strategic responses to Herder's paradox. Mitchell's exhibition offers a solution to the transgressive European desire to absorb and become absorbed in its cultural Other. In tandem, Reid's assessment of Egyptology demonstrates how imperialist scholars refashioned their participation in cultural mixing to fit within imperialism's model of civilizational development. Despite the clearly dialectical relationship between European and Oriental culture (manifested in Saint-Maur's claim that the French owned ancient Egyptian culture "by natural right") imperialist rhetoric succeeded in conflating localized and heterogeneous conceptions of culture.

Reconsidering the Other

Inden, Viswanathan, Mitchell, and Reid offer varying accounts of imperialism's response to cultural dissonance. All posit that the imperial project in large part aimed to affirm a coherent self by expelling inner scission; India, Egypt, and other sites of colonial conquest served as stages upon which to ontologically order the European Self in a heterogeneous world. Young explains his notion of cultural scission by offering a double-layered explanation of the Other. He deals with two alterities: the Oriental Other-whose difference is measured by geography, race, religion, etc.-and the Other within. The latter cannot be pinpointed, but manifests itself in imperial Europe's anxiety surrounding its own lack of a cohesive and fixed identity. As Young reminds us, Englishness has never successfully located its essential or core character. The Other within-those gaps that inhibit Europeans from determining their identities *in se*-in fact hinders the European Self from recognizing any external alterity, as the standards of homogeneity by which one might be excluded are ambiguously defined. Thus the European, unable to articulate his own internal scission, seeks a cultural and geographical Other in an attempt to define himself by negation. He positions one alterity as the stand-in for the other.

In positing a doubled Other, Young offers an alternative to the Western Self/Eastern Other dichotomy that so permeates the traditional discourse on colonialism. However, the criticisms that undercut the traditional self/other distinction carry implications for Young's thesis, as well as for the claims put forward by the other four authors discussed here. Sara Suleri, in 1992's *The Rhetoric of English India*, criticizes postcolonialism's reliance upon the notion of alterity to give voice to the colonial subject. She begins her argument with a discussion of romanticism in the writings of Edmund Burke, who, she claims, relied on the trope of the romantic sublime to paint mystical and irrational India as entirely remote and obscure. In presenting the Indian as impermeable, Burke also deemed him an inexorable challenge to English authority; the great critic of empire in fact employed the same epistemological claims to subvert the imperial project as the British did to further it. Thus Suleri identifies romanticism, while in opposition to Mitchell's "knowable" exhibition, as an equally powerful tool in the creation of the colonial Other.

Yet for Suleri, Burke is not the only hypocritical champion of the colonial subject. Contemporary colonial cultural studies, she argues, often falls into the same trap by positioning alterity as the driving force behind imperialist rhetoric; in doing so, scholars (unintentionally) bolster rather than subvert postcolonialism's overriding dichotomy. While an expansion of the parameters of the colonial subject is essential to the study of empire, Suleri affirms that "there are limits beyond which an articulation of otherness could cause the discourse merely to ventriloquize the fact of cultural difference." She describes the precarious corollary between Burke and the contemporary scholar of colonialism:

Once the disturbing centrality of alterity has been established as a key area of interpretative concern, a rehearsal of its protean manifestations leads to a theoretical repetitiveness that finally entrenches rather than displaces the rigidity of the self/other binarism governing traditional discourse on colonialism… the very insistence on the centrality of difference as an unreadable entity can serve to obfuscate and indeed to sensationalize.[28]

Thus the language of binarism mirrors that of Burke's romance: the centrality of intransigent difference to colonial studies reduces alterity to the familiar conflict between "the historical and the allegorical."[29] Suleri demonstrates her claim via critiques of the standard postcolonialist readings of Naipaul's and Rushdie's oeuvres. While her analysis explicitly refers to the binary between the self and the external Other (rather than the internal Other), her anxiety surrounding postcolonialism's emphasis on intransigence implicates Young's doubled Other. Suleri's critique challenges the notions of a bifurcated European self as presented by the authors assessed in this paper, and the arguments of Viswanathan and Mitchell in particular.

Viswanathan's explanation of the conflicted English colonist lends itself most to Suleri's criticisms and exposes the limitations of any argument based in the notion of self and other. I find several problems in Viswanathan's thesis, the most significant being her insistence on a hard and fast binary between material and intellectual production. I question the broad line she draws between British political/economic and educational/cultural agendas. Viswanathan suggests that the process of self-diffusion was purposeful on the part of the colonist, who saw his own

behavior as "rapacious" and "ruthless." Yet she neglects to provide adequate support to show that the colonist actively constructed such a split "between the material and cultural practices of colonialism."[30] She fails to discuss the alternative: that cultural representation instead furthered the same contemporary ideologies the English put into material practice in the forms of political and economic policy. Viswanathan never offers an explanation as to why one should view English studies as a mask for colonial objectives rather than as a concentrated manifestation of those objectives.

A similar critique may be applied to Mitchell's representation of the European observer-participant. Mitchell depicts the visitor to the world exhibitions as straddling the material world of European society, which he experiences directly, and the picture-world of the Oriental exhibition, which he experiences via allegory; this visitor simultaneously asserts his distinction from and desire to participate in the Oriental culture represented. However, Mitchell, like Viswanathan, fails to thoroughly historicize his analysis and instead relies too heavily on the observer-participant binary. While for many Europeans the spectacle of the exhibitions certainly served as a surrogate for extra-European travel, Reid notes that, unsurprisingly, the primary purpose of world exhibitions was to demonstrate the might of the British and French empires.[31] With British and French powers now claiming these ancient Indian and Egyptian works for their own, the exhibitions were explicitly designed to provide a catalog of cultural conquest rather than point to the essential natures of contemporary India or Egypt. The exhibition's effect of offering up the Orient as a picture may not invite the European to participate in Oriental society, but rather may enforce his distance from those exotic cultures. A world constructed from objects frequently adds up to an anesthetized list of imperialism's achievements rather than an opportunity for "virtual" travel.

Suleri's assessment as applied to Young's notion of the doubled Other points to the inappropriate or reductive imposition of a binary determinism on imperialist cultural representations. Such a determinist structure, Suleri suggests, runs the risk of reiterating or reinforcing that same cultural inflexibility that postcolonialist scholars have endeavored to undermine. If pursued without adequate consideration of the political and economic policies that went hand-in-hand with imperialism's

cultural and scholarly production, Young's framework of inner scission similarly misappropriates the language of alterity. An examination of British and French efforts to understand their own inconsistent identities without sufficient discussion of imperialism's ruthlessly exploitative political and economic agendas does little to restore the agency of the colonial subject. Like any discussion that operates upon an understanding of the binary, Young's theory is susceptible to a misleading ahistoricism and reduction.

With these difficulties in mind, readings of Inden, Viswanathan, Mitchell, and Reid through the lens of Young's cultural dissonance offer an alternative to the typical dichotomy drawn between imperial agent and colonial subject. British and French colonies provided the ontological spaces in which to assert the coherence and homogeneity of the individual colonist's own culture via one of two approaches: the essentializing of his subjects' colonial cultures, or the displacement of his own material reality as an agent of imperial exploitation. While the British and French attempted to construct a cultural hierarchy by asserting a linear model of cultural progress-in which, per the same mechanical model Inden seeks to undercut, the colonizer and colonized remain separate and independently constituted agents-Young's framework instead asserts the dialectical development of English or French culture in tandem with colonized cultures at the sites of colonization. Imperialism's response to cultural mixing, which it recognizes as necessary to achieving cultural advancement, best illustrates the antithetical transmutations of an ostensibly unified Englishness or Frenchness. Not only is the British or French identity continually and dialectically remade by its interaction with the colonial Other, but it also responds most dramatically to its own inner Others. The colonialist is a dependent and mutable agent in regards to relationships with both its colonial subject and its divided self. The imperial project represents the colonist's effort to resolve his own inner scission.

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[1] For a comprehensive explanation of the self-other debate, refer to Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York:

Columbia University Press, 1998) or Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Of course, the seminal and representative analysis can be found in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

[2] This paper uses the terms "British" and "English" to refer to the British Empire. While both terms, particularly "British," are nebulous, the scholars reviewed in this paper seem to use both interchangeably and, as such, I conform to their usages as closely as possible. These terms, however, do not signify an aggregate identity inclusive of the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh components of Great Britain, but instead an English population agentive of imperial expansion.

[3] Specifically, my paper will examine: Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995); Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*(Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990); Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*(New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Timothy Mitchell, *Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: archaeology, museums, and Egyptian national identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[4] Young, *Colonial Desire*, 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, 38.

[6] *Ibid.*, 41.

[7] *Ibid.*, 38.

[8] *Ibid.*, 41.

[9] *Ibid.*, 53.

[10] Inden, *Imagining India*, 35.

[11] G. W. F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837) offers perhaps the best example of Indology's attribution of an essential irrationality or dream-like quality to the Indian mind: "Now it is the interest of Spirit that *external* conditions should become *interior*ones; that the natural

and spiritual world should be recognized in the subjective aspect belonging to intelligence; by which process the unity of subjectivity and (positive) Being generally-or the Idealism of Existence-is established. This Idealism, then, is found in India, but only as an Idealism of imagination, without distinct conceptions;-one which does indeed free existence from Beginning and Matter…but changes everything into the merely Imaginative…we may say that Absolute Being is presented here as in the ecstatic state of a dreaming condition", (G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2007. 139).

[12] Inden, *Imagining India*, 128.

[13] Inden, *Imagining India*, 5.

[14] Young, *Colonial Desire*, 30.

[15] Inden, *Imagining India*, 3.

[16] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest,* 20.

[17] *Ibid.*, 21.

[18] *Ibid.*, 125-26.

[19] Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 293.

[20] *Ibid.*, 295-96.

[21] *Ibid.*, 304.

[22] *Ibid.*, 306.

[23] *Ibid.*, 307-08.

[24] Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 12.

[25] *Ibid.*, 1.

[26] *Ibid.*, 131.

[27] *Ibid.*, 220.

[28] Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 11.

[29] *Ibid.*, 13.

[30] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 20.

[31] Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*, 191.

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