

Edward SAID. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993. xxxviii + 380 pages.

In *Resistance Literature* (1987), an examination of literary productions emerging from national liberation struggles, Barbara Harlow states that literature and literary studies are being challenged by the cultural and ideological manifestations of resistance, liberation and revolution in those regions we know today as the Third World. Given the quick expansion in contemporary literary critical theory, Harlow wonders whether such theory can be used to analyse works that stand in direct opposition to the social and political organizations to which the theory responds. She expresses a particular dissonance with demands against «historical necessity» on the part of some Western scholars when in fact the literature she explores is grounded in specific socio-political circumstances. In the field of Anglo-American studies, Edward Said is one of the greatest exponents of a challenging historical and political criticism that goes beyond the idea of the literary work as a self-contained structure. In line with Barbara Harlow, in *Culture and Imperialism* Said argues that literary theory (deconstruction, feminism, new historicism) cannot be, as it has been for a long time, divested of the political analysis of imperial settings. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was a groundbreaking study whose influence has made itself felt in

other studies committed to breaking the silences underlying West-centered views on non-Western cultures, such as Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992). His latest *Culture and Imperialism*, is yet another important contribution to the field of post-colonial cultural studies and a necessary read for all those who believe in, practice and encourage responsible, political readings of literature. The perhaps least known side of Said's life as a member of the Palestinian National Council since 1977 is probably at the root of the link between literature, culture and politics we find in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. Behind his interpretation of culture and literature lies the assumption that literary texts and cultural productions are manifestations of power and authority. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said reinterprets the European writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on Africa, India, some parts of the Far East, Australia, and the Caribbean, and presents it as constitutive of the ideological discourse of European domination and representation of these lands and peoples during the modern Western imperialist periods.

In his first chapter, «Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories,» Said proposes an «expansive idea of history.» He argues, following T. S. Eliot, that the

past illuminates the present and the future, but not in the idealistic way Eliot conceived of history, tradition and culture. Said deems institutional power the most important factor in determining Western conceptions of history and tradition, and contends that the colonial structures of the past have not ceased to have a cultural impact on the present. Concentrating on the English and French empires, he states that domestic economic and social problems in the metropolis, together with the idea that there was a moral obligation towards underdeveloped peoples, helped constitute a national culture, which was in turn the means by which imperial authority was channelled. Within the colonial power structure the invention of a concept of national identity and tradition, of a past purified of unwanted «foreign» elements, became a means of self-assertion for both European and colonized nations. The imperial era is therefore characterized by a compartmentalized notion of culture, and by a discourse that takes the superiority of the West and the inferiority of non-Western cultures for granted. This cultural discourse, elaborated by the educated upper class and consequently a refined expression of authority, allows Western powers to present the subjection of other peoples and geographical expansion as a normal and necessary step towards domestic and social well-being, harmony and order. Only by rejecting this compartmentalized idea of culture, Said contends, can we actually avoid the pitfalls of a «rhetoric of blame» that has been common to the colonizer and the colonized. His interactive approach to cultural analysis is illustrated by an interpretation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Said invites us to see Marlow's experience as a narrator, not merely as that of a white imperialist, but as that of a white man with the ability to constantly question his perception of reality, see it as conditioned by time and place—and not

only by history—and become aware of how difficult it is to represent and speak for what one does not know. Said also proposes a contrapuntal or comparative analysis of culture that opposes the West-centered comparative literature studies of Auerbach and Spitzer up until the early 1970's. Through Said's contrapuntal method, we may understand discrepant individual experiences as we see them entangled in a complicated network of relations. Illustrative examples are Abd al-Rahman Jabarti's and Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier's different visions of Napoleon's occupation of Egypt and the media's portrayal of the Arab world as opposed to that of the writer Naguib Mahfouz. The case of the American literary critic Bernard Louis, afraid that including non-European texts in the literary canon will lead to the disappearance of Western culture and to barbarism, serves Said's argument that attempts at self-definition often lead to an atavistic rhetoric separation of cultures.

The second chapter of his study is an analysis of how cultural authority, science and ideology meet to create a «consolidated vision» about the empire. Through what he calls a «counterpoint» reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, and Albert Camus's *L'Etranger*, Said looks at how literature and cultural representations validate Britain and France and devalue other worlds. According to the critic, the works validate the ideological workings of the empire: the circular argument that dominant nations were superior because they had the power, the conviction that the imperial enterprise was a pleasurable adventure, the imperative that it was necessary to maintain the native under control. Said's most revealing statement is that such consolidation allowed the French and British imperial powers to see themselves as the opposite of what they defined the colonized to be. Given

the oppositional character of his contentions, Said argues that they are not to be interpreted as an affirmation that imperialism was «completely unopposed,» but rather that it was «largely unopposed,» especially before the end of the nineteenth century. With the rise of modernism and writers like Conrad, Forster, Malraux, T.E. Lawrence, Mann and Proust, the omnipotence of the West was shattered. And yet, much as they incorporated the other when they sceptically contemplated the domination that had been celebrated for two centuries, they ironically replaced political power by art in an attempt to find order.

After his study of the works of the dominant powers, «Resistance and Opposition» is Said's analysis of the new discourse that questioned the orientalizing, africanizing discourses of the imperialist ideology. If *Orientalism* was criticized by cultural critics like Homi Bhabha or James Clifford on the grounds that the colonized was presented as a passive recipient of the dominating discourse of the West, his latest work, as he himself states, is an attempt to remove the distinction between «us» and «them,» and to acknowledge the importance that a resistance discourse has had in the decolonizing process. Said insists that in these resisting attempts, the achievement of recognition and independence does not necessarily mean going back to previous pre-colonial circumstances that the colonized themselves might view with contempt. His examination of the works of Ngugi and Tayb Salih leads him to the contention that, in order to have a sense of past, the dominated culture must be a Caliban that both accepts subordination as part of that past, and considers development a possibility. Basing his arguments on the theories of Franz Fanon, he stresses the importance of liberation conceived not as nationalism, but as an essential human right. The later poetry of W.B. Yeats illustrates for the critic the

first political moment of anti-imperialist resistance of any colonized country, the awareness of the paradox of the horror and beauty of violence as a liberating force. As he sees it, only with the emergence of the literature of figures from the post-colonial world with truly liberating intentions (García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe) did a revisionist resistance to empire begin to simmer, a resistance that the first anti-colonial movements in Europe had not really carried through, since they had never questioned the superiority of the West.

In his last chapter, Said calls for «Freedom from Domination in the Future.» As he sees it, the age of empire is not yet part of the past. The North-South dilemma has been translated into American and Western power, and culture is still playing an important role in the unification of this domination. The USA military interventions have been given a philanthropic, messianic sense through a rhetoric of power that covers up American interests. The media, whose monopoly is held by American transnational corporations, creates consensus about other cultures as it did during the Gulf War with a desensitizing «video game» type of coverage where violence and destruction were absent. The Arab world is presented as pervaded by fundamentalism and tyrannical nationalism, while no mention of US support of militarism in certain areas is made. In a similar reductive fashion, in the Arab World the US are often portrayed as being responsible for anything that happens in the Middle East through some mysterious CIA conspiracy. Before this widespread ignorance of the other, Said's appeals to American citizens and intellectuals to adopt a responsible attitude before the imperialist intervention of the United States in Latin and Central America and the Middle East, place him within the very resistance movements he describes. The intellectual, Said argues,

is not to be a cliquish hermit detached from societal and political dynamics, but a cultural and social critic aware of the role that culture has always played and is still playing both in the national and international political scenes. It is up to the intellectual to reverse or to question some of the received assumptions of contemporary morality and thinking, and thus disclose the possible realities of oppression and domination behind them.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, as in *Orientalism*, Edward Said's point of departure is the fictional reality of geographical and political distinctions. Imaginary boundaries help us distinguish ourselves from others and thus acquire identity, but the traditional static notion of identity cannot hold in the contemporary world-scene, where increasing transnational migrations no longer allow us to speak of homogeneity, but of multiplicity. In disclosing the interdependence of cultures, *Culture and Imperialism* invalidates some of the currently prevalent reactionary and fundamentalist positions towards identity and nationalism, and,

in turn, describes some of the emerging narratives of emancipation as attempts by the excluded to revise human history and to incorporate new histories to it. While he never denies the individual writers and artists their authorship in a deconstructionist fashion, Said however demystifies culture and aesthetics by regarding them as historically and economically conditioned. By pointing at the imperial bias of Western literature, culture and criticism, he does not by any means intend to attack or underestimate the artistic merit of the works, but to enrich them with historical references that are pertinent to their value. When read as socio-economic products in the light of Said's contrapuntal method, cultural texts, without ceasing to be works of art, provide evidence that, as he says, today «nobody is simply one thing», and that, as Jonathan Swift put it, «nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison».

Ma. Antònia Oliver
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Elleke BOEHMER, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature. Migrant Metaphors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 305 pages.

Elleke Boehmer's introduction to post-colonialism discusses literature from the zenith of the British Empire to current neocolonialism. Significantly, this research offers a wide panoramic view of the field to a great number of unspecialized readers thanks to a simple style, a historically sequential order and a chronology of influential events and publications.

In the introduction, the author justifies the terminology that is currently used in the field and she explains to her readership why the U.S.A. and Ireland were excluded from her investigation. In the first four chapters, she deals with colonial and colonialist literature, with the

colonized's nationalism and with the consequences of the metropolitan ideology over the natives. She also covers the era of independence and neocolonialism in chapters five and six. The author ends up the volume throwing light on many literary works written during the 1990s and foreseeing a suggestive answer to the question: where is present-day English literature heading for?

According to Boehmer, it is vital for beginners to use the current terminology appropriately. In the introduction she explains the differences between *colonial* and *colonialist* literature. The fact that Charles Dickens is considered an example of colonial writing simply because he