

Introduction

Do you know, O beautiful of the beautiful,
My bayadera with eyes of jade,
If they could lend me their wings,
Say, do you know where I would go?

Without taking a single kiss from the roses
Across valleys and forests,
I would go to your half-closed lips,
O flower of my soul, and there I would die.¹
—Théophile Gautier, “The Butterflies”

In this poem, Gautier evokes the fragility and beauty of man's desire for escape. The longing to go somewhere strange and unusual conditions this flight. Pleasure is even delayed in anticipation of the fulfillment of one wish, extinction in the moment of apprehension. Gautier addresses his words to a bayadera, an exotic prostitute who dances in Hindu temples. Does he invoke her inherent poetic potential, or does she serve some other purpose in the poem? For that matter, why does the poet address his poem to a quintessentially exotic figure?

A dictionary definition of the term *exotic* offers an initial signification of “foreignness.” Invariably, it will also suggest that the exotic exerts a special force, that it can be strangely or unfamiliarly beautiful and enticing. This physical and (meta)physical identification at the heart of the exotic accounts for the tension often present between extraneity and the erotic.

What purpose does the exotic serve? Beyond its evocative and poetic possibilities, the exotic exists as a mode of self-definition. It does so in two respects. On the initial level, the exotic functions as a mode of escapism. Exoticism exhibits a “philosophical nostalgia” for a “traditional, binding, serenely fatalistic order.”² H. H. Wilson noted that his translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*

will be of service and of interest to the few, who in these times of utilitarian selfishness can find a resting place [sic] for their thoughts in the tranquil contemplation of those yet living pictures of the ancient world which are exhibited by the literature and mythology of the Hindus.³

The exotic also provides a fertile base for philosophical, religious, and literary speculation and serves as an exemplar justifying preexisting cultural trends. The satirical use of the exotic can provide a shield to protect authors from strict censorship. Fiction with an exotic allure can present in the most piquant and prudent manner conceptions that an author strives to render in an acceptable form. Elements of masquerade also enter into exotic formulations: “We need not become Brahmins or Buddhist or Taosze altogether, but we must for a time”⁴ Play-acting plays an important role in self-definition and self-realization. The exotic allows one to transform one’s own mediocrity.⁵ Most importantly, however, exoticism never realizes what it sets out to achieve. Henry H. H. Remak has remarked that the exotic quest does “not terminate with the exploration of a particular culture” but spins off “in search of a different set of cultural elements in order to satisfy psychic and/or physical *Wanderlust*.”⁶

The exotic is seen as a function of the “Other,” alterity, the “Female,” *différence*, and subalterneity. It has recently been suggested that Indological discourse “represents the Other in commentative terms as radically different from the Self. It is a gross distortion of Self or the opposite of Self.” Mother India can even represent Melanie Klein’s good mother toward which the West responds with the construct of India as the bad mother.⁷ Behind the “promise of Orientalist discourse of a unity of human nature,” it is suggested that there is really the “disturbing” hidden agenda of consolidating the hegemony of the “Euro-American Man”:

It is necessary for the Other to be the way he/she is because of its environment, its racial composition, or its (inferior) place

on the evolutionary scale. Once the reader comes to know the natural reason for the other's otherness, the threat of it is neutralized. The Explanation is, thus, one which restores the unity of Mankind, with Western Man as its perfect embodiment.⁸

In short, what we in this study term "the exotic" has entered critical debate in many forms.

Certain critical strategies, such as Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, seek to unsettle idealist quests for meaning, but are undermined by the polarities of intentionality. Orientalism holds to the belief that cultural differences were uniformly repressed in service of a hegemonic agenda. However, Said's presentation of Orientalism as discourse poses several problems from a methodological and conceptual point of view. In terms of methodology, Said's model of Orientalism demands a unified European/Western identity at the origin of history that posits an integral relationship between Ancient Greece and modern Western Europe. In the oldest European textualities, Said discovers an ideology of modern imperialist Eurocentrism already inscribed.⁹ In Said's transhistorical formulation, Europe, motivated by a unitary will to inferiorize, created its own identity by establishing the *différence* of the Orient. All European knowledges of non-Europe are thus tainted.¹⁰ Said focuses on the colonizers as repositories of power and the colonial subject as a fixed, passive object of discursive domination.

In Said's analysis, Western textualities about the non-West are viewed in isolation from how these textualities have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by intelligentsias of colonized countries.¹¹ The unidirectionality of his approach overlooks the inherent ambivalence of the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, a relationship that vacillates between the poles of power and subjugation, desire and disavowal, and idealization and rejection. As Aijaz Ahmad has shown, not only does Said presume continuous European literary textuality as immanent in a canon of Great Books, but he subscribes to the "idealist metaphysic" of Great Books (questioning the greatness of some of these great books). In this manner, he duplicates the very tradition he debunks,¹² the tradition of canonical texts from a comparative literature and philological canon and the narrative method for analyzing high canonicity. Modern orientalism is present in all authors who treat the Orient and modern imperialism, an effect of their discourse. Thus, Orientalism "delivered" the Orient to colonialism and colonialism begins to appear as the product of Orientalism.¹³

The Deconstructionist critique of Western Idealism or logocentrism assigns a marginal position of racial/cultural/historical otherness. Committed to the Derridean articulation of *différance* and *signifiance*, this criticism fixes “the place of otherness . . . in the west as a subversion of western metaphysics and is finally appropriated by the west as its limit-text, anti-west.”¹⁴ Critics of Western Idealism and colonialism, whatever their stripes, have fully embraced recent critical theory and incorporated it in various guises into their discourse. The Deconstructionist critique of Idealism and logocentrism, which subverts apparent meaning and conceptions of reality, particularly in its “decentering” of traditional focal points of power, has found very sympathetic readers in the Third World.

Gayatri Spivak, a translator of Derrida, seeks to deconstruct colonialist discourse and the position of indigenous peoples, especially women, within this discourse. Regarding Spivak’s project, Henry Louis Gates states: Spivak has merely renamed what Derrida calls “writing” with the term *colonial discourse* and added the necessary corollary that “all discourse is colonial discourse.”¹⁵ Spivak presents the text as unable to answer back to the epistemic violence of an imperialist project.¹⁶ She restricts the space in which the colonized can be written back into a text. In the words of Benita Parry, the virtual elimination of the colonized in Spivak’s theory is particularly ironic given the “interventionist possibilities” that “are exploited through the deconstructive strategies devised by the post-colonial intellectual.”¹⁷ The critic’s intellectual ability to “plot a story, unravel a narrative and give the subaltern a voice in history” stands in sharp contrast to that same critic’s deafness to the utterances of the native voice.¹⁸ To the contention that the Orient has always been silenced, one must ask, by whom? Voices are not silenced. Either the critic’s voice drowns them out or they just do not appear in the “archive” which the critic selects.¹⁹ The primacy which the critic assumes for him- or herself is due to their positioning themselves in lieu of the Other as object of discourse. Following the trend set by Said, the critic becomes the “orientalist subject” (with the variants “colonialist subject” and “post-Colonialist subject”). Ahmad has pointed out the hazards of such postures on the part of critics based in Western metropolitan centers who wield the tools of European cultural apparatus.²⁰

The Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson entered into the critical debate through a discussion of modern Third World literature. For Jameson, and to a certain degree, Spivak, Third World literature becomes a counter-canon, a narrative of authenticity, good faith, liberation itself.²¹ His comments have been criticized for their totalizing effect.²² His theory—which hypothesizes all Third World texts as national allegories in which the political and personal (libidinal) are conflated—seems to run

aground in its attempt to generalize the staggering diversity within Third World cultural waters. Jameson theoretically juxtaposes the cultural frameworks of the contemporary West, with its "radical split between the public and the private, between the poetic and the political"²³ domains, over against a Third World where public and private are enmeshed. Critics of his approach note that the Third World has never evinced such homogeneity, and that especially urban Third World writers experience the same alienation from their sociocultural context as Western writers do.²⁴

A difficulty for Marxist, post-Structuralist, and Deconstructionist theorists with respect to the exotic lies in their inability to confront the ambivalence within Orientalisms and their habit of seeing subjugated peoples as "unproblematized" victims "caught in the hinges of history."²⁵ It is here that the Subaltern critique intervenes. By focusing on the domain of politics in which the principal actors are subaltern groups and classes, "history from below" exposes the ideological character of traditional historiography, which it terms "elitist." The works of Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha, two of the most challenging writers of the Subaltern school, seek to strip away ideological and critical misrepresentations of the social and political situations within South Asian society. Their arguments stress the complexity of the societies in question and the forces working within them. Elitist historiography of either the colonialist or the nationalist type is criticized²⁶ and rejected in favor of a framework that stresses the intersection of popular consciousness with new forms of class domination shaped by the politics of the modern state.²⁷

Homi K. Bhabha has contributed significantly to the critical discussion by contesting the underlying presupposition of Orientalism that all power and discourse are possessed entirely by the colonizer. He believes that power and knowledge function ambivalently and that a variously positioned colonial object appropriates or mimics the terms of the dominant ideology and uses them to offer resistance. Bhabha's theory has, at face value, double attraction. He liberates the colonized from their "inscription as Europe's shackled other" and, *pace* Spivak, recognizes that the subaltern can, indeed, speak for him- or herself. Most refreshingly, however, Bhabha sets some limits on critical discursive power and problematizes the position of the professional spokesperson for the subaltern.²⁸

The work of Franz Fanon has been particularly useful in bringing to light the inherent complexities within the position of colonized peoples. In Bhabha's use of Fanon's work, we see echoed the conflicting impulses that define exoticism: the search for human origin, the origin of art and poetry, and racial purity and cultural priority in order to "nor-

malize" multiple beliefs. The narcissistic and aggressive projections onto the Other to compensate for a perceived "lack" in the European "individual" and context find clear parallels in exotic literature. Particularly useful to this present study are Fanon's perception of the subjugated as simultaneously fetish and phobic object. Bhabha speaks of the metaphorical masking of the fetish as a narcissistic object choice acting in relation to the metonymic trope that functions to figure a lack. Here Bhabha brings together Freud's concept of the fetish, Fanon's experience of the colonial subject as Other, and Lacan's schema of the "Imaginary." Important for both Bhabha and Fanon is Lacan's theory of the way individual subjects are constituted. Gates maintains that "Lacan's discourse exemplarily maps a problematic of subject-formation onto a Self-Other model that seems to lend itself to the Colonial Encounter."²⁹

As seen from the preceding summary of the critical discourse an initial irony presents itself: Orientalist, Deconstructionist, and post-Colonialist criticism are clearly bound to contemporary Western critical discourse. Western critical theory alone provides the language and ideological parameters within which this critique is developed. Moreover, Otherness, subalterneity, alterity, and Orientalist and Colonialist discourse are abstractions used to identity complex phenomena. In this present study, therefore, I will avoid this critical nomenclature, as it has been sapped of any connotative force, or, rather, overburdened with polyvalent significations. Instead, I use the traditional literary term *exoticism* to describe the object of my study. I have borrowed this term from the study of European national literatures, which I see to be the domain of my investigation and whose studies of the scholarly, literary, and philosophical employment of India I seek to supplement.³⁰ Moreover, I contend that the more recent critical terms support various ideological consensuses that are not necessarily or universally supported by texts outside what has become an Orientalist canon. The restrictive canonization that has developed in recent critical discussions inevitably involves a re-creation of the past through the invention of "precursors for the present."³¹ I am very suspicious of this critical tendency (indeed mandate), which sets out to examine literary texts as expressions of an underlying power relationship where some hierarchy is always imposed. Introduced with respect to language by Benveniste and codified with respect to the study of the apparatus of power within social institutions by Foucault, discussions of hegemony have come to dominate in an all-too-predictable fashion the critical discourse of East-West artistic relations. However, this study does not attempt to supplement critiques based on power relations. It attempts, rather, to problematize the specific narrative

that reads Romantic appropriations of India in literature and scholarship solely through the metaphor of colonization.

I would like to suggest that the appropriation of the Other is more complex than Said allows in his restrictions.³² As elucidating as a vision of Indological discourse in light of Gramsci may be, a reader encounters difficulties when confronting texts that do not support the current critical tendency and that present the East as superior and idealized. I am not denying those instances of East-West reception whose contours express political exploitation, but the present-day desire to subsume everything under a hegemonic agenda ignores the rich history of extra-political motivations.

Nothing much exists beyond Foucault's epistemic power, Derrida's logocentric thought, and Said's Orientalist discourse. All is viewed as repetition with *Différance*. While nihilistic tendencies in deconstruction have been questioned by critics who ask whether there can be any true representation of anything, the Manichaeic vision of post-Colonialist criticism has yet to be seriously challenged.³³ By halting the discussion at the concept of power, interweaving, imbricating, and embedding all discussions in multiple reveries concerning the variations of domination/dominated relationships, the critic's fantasies all too often promiscuously displace the consciously fictionalized objects of inquiry. Here, perhaps, lies the "postmodern" hegemonic discourse of criticism that theorists such as Parry and Ahmad have begun to investigate. Indeed, I take as a point of departure Parry's insight that the dissolution of the binary opposition (colonial Self/colonized Other) encoded in post-Colonialist criticism into a dichotomy necessary for domination posits a discourse of liberation and a call to arms.³⁴ As much as some critics would like us to believe, criticism is not an "act of insurgency."³⁵ The West not only has produced the colonialist, but also has informed most interpretations of colonialism.³⁶ Therefore, it may be of some value to begin this investigation with the following question: Which "politics of projects" are involved in the Orientalist and post-Colonialist critical processes? Not only do the motivating forces behind these theoretical positions warrant closer examination in and of themselves, but I suspect that the historical and ethical judgments that have generated recent criticism reflect upon the dynamics of the exotic project in general. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that exoticism, Orientalist/post-Orientalist criticism, and what might be termed "institutional esotericism" in the form of scholarship often arise from like motivations and fulfill similar desires.

Now, in literary critical circles, it has become a fairly prosaic task to question the presuppositions behind methodological dogmatism, as

witnessed by the recent Deconstructionist debacle. Furthermore, recent historical events have challenged the validity of Marxist interpretive models. Students of literary theory look on in apprehension as Deconstructionists and academic Marxists retool themselves as feminists and multiculturalists, their “politics of projects” being all too apparent. However, some disciplines that have borrowed heavily from the jargon and missionary zeal of literary theory have not undergone a similar rigorous scrutiny. In particular, the curious Western academic speciality, need, and pastime of making the Other one’s cause have avoided sociological and psychological evaluation. No one questions why the Western humanist’s and social scientist’s cultural “superiority,” power, and influence, rather than the quality of their work, skill, or insight, make their work acceptable to Indians and Westerners alike. Nor does anyone wonder why we are not reading a canon of scholarship and popular commentary on India written by Africans, Latin Americans, or visiting commentators from elsewhere in the Third World.³⁷

So the student with an interest in matters pertaining to India experiences an interesting phenomenon when confronted by volume after volume that purports to deconstruct normative texts. How can authors pretend to ferret out hegemonic processes, when their perception of the field consists of a jealously-guarded, limited repertory of acceptable topics and a particularly dogmatic refusal to engage alternative forms of inquiry? How can practitioners in a field that is notoriously homogeneous and conservative (its radical pretensions notwithstanding) deconstruct normative texts while they create their own “dominant fictions”? Having read their Foucault and Lacan, these scholars certainly know that to normalize is naughty. Nevertheless, they do so with impunity. They may call for “libertarian, non-repressive and non-manipulative”³⁸ studies of other cultures and peoples, they may read texts as a “form of power, a cultural instrument of political power,”³⁹ but ultimately their understanding presupposes a view of their subject as “simple-hearted victims of colonialism.”⁴⁰ Their position as Westerners making the East their speciality, with all the commercial and ideological enterprise of self-validation that this posture implies, stands at odds with the ideology of much of their discourse.⁴¹

How, then, do such politics of scholarly projects relate to the topic at hand? The preceding discussion would seem tangential were it not for the striking similarities between the behavior of the historical seekers after the exotic examined in this volume and that of practitioners of contemporary criticism and scholarship. Although what I am suggesting demands a detailed analysis in itself, for the purposes of my argument a few necessary observations must suffice.

Institutionalized “esoteric” scholarship, the critical theory dealing with Orientalism, and the exotic quest itself all evince a tendency to normalize the discourse that represents their objects of inquiry. This normalization has created a dominant fiction based not on what is included, but on what is excluded. In the case of scholarship, included are those studies that focus on discrete technical problems within language, translation, or reception of philosophical and religious concepts. Equally privileged are studies based on current critical theory. Cross-cultural studies are admissible if they accede to the parameters of the critique of Orientalism. Here the underlying assumption is that of the aggressive, sadistic colonizer over against the oppressed (castrated) colonial Other.

Excluded are studies that call for broadening the scope of linguistic/philological inquiry. Specifically, any opening of the discourse to include the Western subject acting through his or her desire and need to disavow is strongly discouraged. This includes examining the Western artistic/scholarly subject as he or she treats the Eastern Other as an object of consciousness. Equally rejected are studies that “problematize” the East-West encounter in a way that threatens to undo the imperialist/victim binary.

As we shall see in this volume, the East has historically functioned as an object of desire within scholarly and artistic reception. What I would like to emphasize is that little in contemporary scholarship contradicts this ongoing mode of apprehension. Desire is always for something but is engendered by an experience of lack within the subject for which the desired object provides imaginary compensation.⁴² As Homi Bhabha shows, the East “figures” this lack for the Western subject and sets in motion a complex, often contradictory process of idealization and rejection, desire and disavowal, on the level of the imaginary. The ego of the Western subject not only is implicated in, but in a real sense is determined by, this process as it binds problematic impulses to a normative structure. In the reception (and study) of the East, this process inevitably leads to the need to normalize the concept of the East within the world. The Western subject’s experience of adequacy within the world has always hinged on the mastery of desire and lack; consequently scholarship has always found itself within the ideological apparatus of the dominant fiction.⁴³

It is on the level of disillusionment following desire that an aporia exists, exposing an inadequacy within the dominant fiction that opens the possibility of refiguring the reception of the East. In present times, the normative function of this fiction is seen in the way scholarly approaches that challenge dominant assumptions are rejected not merely for mounting the challenge, but often because of the way race and gender

are inscribed within this challenge, that is, because the conceptualization of race and gender is polyvalent, refusing strict adherence to either traditional approaches or so-called cutting-edge methodologies.

As the above comments suggest, I view Orientalist/post-Colonialist criticism and some forms of "esoteric" scholarship as functioning as exoticisms in terms of their need to experience adequacy on the level of language. Since the object of my inquiry is to illuminate the process of exoticism, I shall not intentionally enact exoticism in my critical methodology. In other words, this present volume will not adhere to the dominant fiction of Indology or the master narrative of Orientalist criticism. It posits the existence of alternative readings and alternative exotic texts that do not affirm the hegemony of one culture over another. As opposed to imperialist exoticism, whose very presence in a canon of Orientalist and post-Colonialist criticism problematizes the versatility of those critical systems,⁴⁴ "exoticizing" exoticism primarily concerns itself with the privileging of other cultures,⁴⁵ where the exotic not only is fetishized but also empowers.

This study, therefore, only becomes exotic to certain specialist readers because of its literary methodology, cross-disciplinarity, and comparative perspective. Those who seek (or demand) a study focused on South Asian texts and experience will not find it here. To the institutional spokesman for the subaltern,⁴⁶ I must assert the validity of reading European literature in and of itself, even when it addresses a consciously fictionalized "Orient." As Nandy asserts, India is not the non-West, it is India.⁴⁷ However, I am not studying India, but rather that "non-West" that was positioned in India, where India becomes a projective text, inviting one "not only to project onto it one's deepest fantasies, but also to reveal, through such self-projection, the interpreter rather than the interpreted."⁴⁸ I agree fully with Nandy when he asserts that "all interpretations of India are . . . ultimately autobiographical."⁴⁹ I also agree with Naipaul when he writes that India encourages "the Outsider to build a monument to himself."⁵⁰ Whether scholarly or artistic, exotic fiction and nonfiction function as reifications of the Self, and the metaphorical India continues to exist as a geographical area one can love and a sociological space where real 'man' can find himself.⁵¹

As recent investigations of the workings of eighteenth-century anthropology have revealed, the movement to subjugate is not mutually exclusive of quests for understanding. I will focus therefore on the dialectic of self-understanding inscribed in the exotic quest. My model broadens to include a discussion of psychodynamics of appropriation. The Romantics did, indeed, "appropriate" rather than "understand"

India, but their aims were often contestatory rather than conservative, and the appropriation is part of negotiating the polarities of self-consciousness. The European either was genuinely trying to understand rather than repress cultural difference, or, in fact, attempted to do both.

Therefore, this study seeks to delineate the hermeneutical parameters of exoticism rather than adhere to negative critical stances that psychologize modern fantasies of alienation or problematize (and mystify) ideological perspectives. I offer a hermeneutical model partially drawn from Gadamer, which allows me to view the French and German appropriation of India as attempts at self-understanding rather than simple mastery. This perspective permits me to attach a positive value to exoticism by seeing it as embedded in individual rather than collective agendas. However, my investigation is more socially and culturally based than the Gadamerian hermeneutical model allows, as well as more psychologically inflected.

My approach is simple: I shall identify how the Gadamerian concept of prejudice in the form of specific exotic clichés elucidates the dynamics of exoticism. By isolating these clichés, I am, in fact, mapping out the “garden paths” along which artists and thinkers either were led or willed themselves to be led. In choosing this linguistic term, I commit an intentional *double entendre*. In nineteenth-century linguistics, the comparative rather than the historical method prevailed, which often led to error,⁵² the “garden paths” along which these thinkers strayed. Ironically, those linguists who neglected history were often inspired by the botanical model.

I have chosen this conceptual framework for an equally simple reason: Beyond the seduction they have in and of themselves, many critical concepts direct the reader no closer to certain texts or our continuing need for an exotic in our lives. Exoticism is not a discursive practice intent on recovering, “elsewhere,” values “lost” with the modernization of European society.⁵³ Although dreams of empire have been eclipsed, the exoticist project is alive and well.⁵⁴ For this reason, I have chosen to be guided by the hermeneutical concept of *Bildung*. What is at stake in exoticism is an act of recognition.

To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the fundamental movement of the spirit, whose being is only return to itself from being otherwise.⁵⁵

The structure of excursion and reunion defines *Bildung*, or what Paul Ricoeur identifies as the movement of hermeneutical understanding.⁵⁶ If

the circular structure of hermeneutical understanding is complete, the spirit moves to the strange and unfamiliar, finds a home there and makes it its own or recognizes what had previously been perceived as alien to be its genuine home. Hermeneutical understanding consists of a movement of self-estrangement in which one must learn to know the Other in order better to know oneself. In fact, in a reversal peculiar to *Bildung*, the movement of the spirit resembles a true homecoming; its point of departure was essentially a way station. The initial alienness was a mirage produced by self-alienation.⁵⁷ In reality, one only confronts aspects of the Self.

Hermeneutics, focusing as it does on the process that leads to a point of understanding, conceptualizes human subjectivity only to the extent necessary to illuminate this process. Therefore, prejudice and the circular movement of hermeneutical understanding are privileged concepts. The subjectivity that surrounds hermeneutical understanding cannot, in any case, be left out of account, as it is the locus of the failed hermeneutical quest. The nature of the failed hermeneutic is a subject to which I will return at various reprises throughout this volume. The striving subject seeks compensation in and through the exotic for experiences of alienation and emptiness that are perceived as a function of Western society and culture. But the view of the East that conditions the quest is a fantasy, which is seldom if ever understood as such. In many ways, it is the nature of illusion that will be explored in the poses that follow.

The hermeneutical model provides a useful conceptualization and is historically grounded in the period I cover. The dialectic of self-reflection is one that Gadamer himself derived from German Romantics. Hegel approaches the phenomenology of Spirit in terms of a movement involving the self-estrangement of the subject in the object, a movement that culminates in the folding back of the objective into the subjective. Here the terms are either epistemological (subject/object) or psychological (Self/Other). Significantly, the Hegelian phenomenology is the source not only of the hermeneutical model, but also of imperialist historiography that colonizes the Other and that is enabled by, and also qualified by, the hermeneutical dialectic. In fact, the hermeneutical approach that I advocate is not exclusive of Foucauldian historicism. German Romanticism is the conflicted origin both of the former and of those colonizations of the Other that have brought the latter (the cultural critique) into existence.⁵⁸

By projecting themselves through the Other, Romantic writers appropriate the Other for their own purposes, but they also rethink the Self through the Other so as to expand their own cultural boundaries and

those of their society. At the same time, in trying to understand the Other, they also appropriate it and colonize it, or at least create the conditions for its colonization. The result, as Foucault rightly asserts, is that, power and knowledge become entwined. However, I want to distinguish such a discussion of power from that found in Said and the grand narratives of “gender, race, nation” ideology of current criticism.

Of particular use to my investigation was Homi Bhabha’s Lacanian conception of the lack or primordial alienation that always accompanies a subject’s attempts to overcome the dichotomy of Self/Other: the individual over against the world. Bhabha holds that Colonialist discourse is disturbed at its source by a doubleness of enunciation. Bhabha asserts that this “doubleness does not articulate the violence of one powerful nation writing out another [but] a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes both the colonizing and the colonized.”⁵⁹ Equally useful will be Jameson’s insight regarding twentieth-century Third World literature, which I apply to the nineteenth-century context. Jameson asserts that cultural products of the East are misunderstood by the European mainstream as a result of the split between Western subjectivity and the larger sociocultural context. However, the failure of the exotic quest is not due to any short-circuiting of the exoticist project as it is grounded in history.⁶⁰ Rather, it is in the nature of exoticism itself, in what I term the “failed hermeneutics of the exotic quest,” that the irresolution of that quest is inscribed.

The exotic differs from the general interpretive venture by virtue of the fact that the “alien” aspect of the hermeneutical equation is indeed esoteric. When people who are world-weary or have lost faith seek a new system of belief in the exotic, they travel farther from home than the ordinary seeker for Self or Truth. The exoteric quest, like art, is democratic: It promises salvation to all seekers. The esoteric or exotic, however, derives from a personal experience of mystical consciousness. It is far less egalitarian. It fosters elitism. Quotidian truth does not suffice—one seeks the superordinate to invest one’s existence with greater intensity. The divine spark is present in all, but not everyone realizes it and seeks to reunite his or her spark with the Divine. For this reason, esoteric cults often emphasize service, to detract from their elitist tendencies. An interesting question then becomes: To what extent are those engaged in a Promethean flight attracted to the esoteric or exotic precisely because of its elitist potential? A partial answer is suggested by the controversial nexus that often occurs between Western esotericism and extremist politics. Connections can indeed be drawn between brands of the occult or spiritual philosophy and dubious political ideologies. For

example, Julius Evola's combination of Hermeticism, with its sweeping notions of race and valor, led to his active collaboration with the Nazis. A more ambiguous case is presented by the biography and work of Mircea Eliade.⁶¹ Some are zealots out of faith, others are mystics out of choice, and still others (who tend to dismiss contemptuously the former two categories) are elitist by discipline. All are equally absolutist, exclusionary, and dogmatic. While this study specifically addresses the first two types, in a larger sense its concerns apply equally to the philologist and area specialist as well.

I attempt to have my analyses weave back and forth between the scholarly/literary and the social text in ways that give my critique more historical specificity than that of hermeneutics. The European writer's quest Eastward in search of aesthetic models fluctuated between contrasting modalities: Indian culture could be an ideal locus for inspiration while simultaneously providing a rationale for pessimistic apprehension in the face of existence. The plethora of early translations attests to the fact that Europeans were interested in Indian thought. Critics urged Western writers to make formal use of Sanskrit literature as an inspiration for their work.⁶² However, there were also those who reacted more to its esoteric potential, flirting instead with the darker and perhaps richer prospect of Indian fatalism. The phantom India satisfied specific tendencies inherent in each modality. These contrasting modalities imbricated in the exotic quest serve a rhetorical function similar to Bhabha's discursive doubling or splitting.

Contrary to the supposition that "Indological discourse holds the essence of Indian civilization" to be "irrational,"⁶³ I maintain that it was the irrational in the West that impelled many thinkers Eastward to seek a grounding for their irrationality. Certain Westerners believe that the West is in a state of decline, spiritually spent, and that the East possesses some spiritual or aesthetic *élan vital*, of which they hope to partake. Hugo von Hofmannsthal expressed this phenomenon in *Das Tagesbuch eines Willenskranken*:

It is the individuals, who suffer the sufferings of the time and think the thoughts of the time. And books, that speak of such a pain of the time are the most tragic and become very famous, since they are the only ones that we are almost able to completely understand. What in us comes from vague pain, from hidden torture and effaced longing, each stifled desire for something else and all disharmonies that the will has stifled for preservation, these wake to an uncertain life

and flourish in sympathy with *Tat tvam asi*.⁶⁴ In suffering, “good Europeanhood,” the nationless clarity of tomorrow, is achieved; the path is too rough for the generation of yesterday and today, two generations of the irresolute and the half-resolute. The seduction draws backwards, the nerve conquering nostalgia, the longing for home. Back to childhood, to Fatherland, to the ability to believe, to the ability to love, to lost naivete, to the return to the irretrievable.⁶⁵

Repressed longing responds to the lure of some absolute, whether it be esoteric or politically mystical. In the case of Julius Evola, elitist politics grew directly out of esoteric metaphysics. Are there not others like him? This study will address how esoteric spiritual philosophy ends up as a rationale for political struggles that seem to contradict their core concerns. When core values (such as mercy or compassion) are disengaged from experience, fundamental distinctions (such as good and evil, illusion and reality) blur.

Nietzsche held that the most general type of decadence consists in believing that one chooses remedies.⁶⁶ This is why I have entitled the exotic a “decadent quest.” With the term *decadent* I suggest a metaphysical inquiry that holds no hope of recuperating the artificial object that it contemplates, but probes rhetorically what from the beginning has been rejected.⁶⁷ Thus, in being willed or devised, decadence has a literary quality to it.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as Remy de Gourmont noted, decadence implies a purely negative idea, that of absence.⁶⁹ The exotic also functions as “a cipher for the essential aporia of every experience.”⁷⁰

The process of appropriating Indian wisdom often brought about the miscegenation of specific issues and themes. Voltaire posited India as the land of reason. The Parnassians sought in India both the ideal locus of art for art’s sake as well as the gateway to the abyss. In the case of Germany’s reception of Indian religious thought, there developed over the years a filiation between Indian metaphysical concerns and those of Romantic Germany. In the interstices between a presumably original India and the pretense of a filial Germany, curious artistic graftings emerged. Goethe placed the poetic possibilities of Oriental thought in the service of his personal views of Christian morality. Schopenhauer reinterpreted Upanishadic theory of illusion as Kantian phenomenalism. An ethical overlap emerged between Stoicism and Buddhism. Nietzsche abusively reconciled India with Plato, and Wagner annexed Buddhism to a medieval mystical cycle. The ontological question concerning the metaphysical status of the neoplatonic One with respect to the notion of *nirvāna*

problematized German Romantic dilemmas of action in a revolutionary age. European pessimism, invigorated by Schopenhauer's distorted synthesis of Buddhism and Brahmanism, ebbed and flowed through the spiritual landscape of the nineteenth century. Many were those who immersed themselves in its floods. They saw pessimistic renunciation as an attribute of Indian thought and maintained that the human spirit could only realize itself by withdrawal from dynamic reality:

Today, two things seem to be modern, the analysis of life and the flight from it. One preserves the anatomy of one's own spiritual life, or one dreams. Reflection or fantasy, mirror image or dream image. The Buddha is modern.⁷¹

Others managed to struggle out of pessimism to an affirmative view of life prevailing over all pain. When confronted with exotic fatalism, European thinkers either openly embraced it or rejected it.

I will examine how Indian exoticism fluctuated between two poles—at times offering a model of inspiration, at others providing an alibi for despair. Occasionally these two agendas collided, with interesting repercussions. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 direct the hermeneutical model to instances of inspirational exotic quests. These chapters investigate how exoticism does not present examples of completed hermeneutical understanding, although the movement of the hermeneutical process—the excursion into the alien—is essential to any examination of the exotic. I will endeavor to show how the breakdown of the hermeneutical process or its absolute rejection, as in chapter 4, is a recurrent feature of the exotic quest. My discussion culminates in the chapters 5–7 with those quests where India is used in apparently decadent and undialectical ways. These chapters chart how, from the early to the late nineteenth century, Indian exoticism changed from an incomplete hermeneutical endeavor to a decadent denial of understanding and an alibi for cultural despair. The use of the Other as an alibi, and the refusal to put one's prejudices at stake either ideologically or artistically, closes off at the outset any attempt at understanding the Other (or understanding oneself through the Other).

Specifically, I will investigate Indian exoticism's relationship to Romantic primitivism in its different strains: chronological (*Urheimat*), geographical (Garden of Eden), psychological ("childhood of humanity") and ontological (nostalgia for the One). In addition to addressing historical and cultural questions, I will seek to show how this encounter worked itself out differently in France and Germany, the possible impact

each country had on the other, and which political and cultural circumstances might account for the difference in their emplotment of India.

My treatment of the material involves the restoration of the extralinguistic context, which includes the retrieving of allusions to sociocultural references and an understanding of the literary, scholarly, and artistic traditions in which the activity of the writer and the comprehension of the audience took place. The modern reader's task in restoration of the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts is important, since in both cases the authors are attempting to subvert tradition. It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand the cultural milieu and genre of the work itself, but also those of the conventions being echoed.

This study is based on certain premises. Examining the fictive India as a locus where the fantasies of Europe are enacted is not tantamount to a repetition of the intellectual follies of colonialism. The claim that such a recapitulation is inevitable betrays an ahistorical ideological conflation of past and present. It should be recognized as such and simply be put to rest. The critical inability to accept anything outside a particular ideological perspective and the terminology that supports it is a great failure of too much of contemporary scholarship.

I follow the ever-prescient Schopenhauer, who maintained that, from the beginning, the European understanding of Indian thought was flawed.⁷² However, contrary to Said, I do not believe these misprisions were static and uniform. I shall, therefore, chart the development of two specific Orientalisms and focus on the ways in which the French and Germans misunderstood India as part of their own personal, cultural, and philosophical agendas. At no point will I argue that the Romantics (let alone those who came after them) understood India. However, I do question whether the Romantics were indeed the cultural imperialists that New Historicism claims they were. In fact, I suggest that Romantic misprisions of India were not necessarily racist and conservative, but were sites of an imaginary contestation of the symbolic order of existing society. I support a reading of the exotic as a conflicted contestation of the existing order. The subversive character of the exotic reemerges or is written back into that order and destabilizes its boundaries.

Finally, I must also clarify my intentions vis-à-vis the Sanskrit material. Because the exotic clichés evolved from surviving "texts," the primary level of textual retrieval necessary is of the original semantic denotations and connotations. However, I do not include a modern scholarly interpretation of the texts in question, since it was never an issue of these Europeans' understanding of a "real" Sanskrit text. The ma-

terial with which they worked had already undergone distortion to several degrees in secondary or, most often, tertiary translations. Such “texts” defy the specialists’ need for a normative reading. They are “texts” in a broad sense, as literary criticism tends to define that term as a form of discourse. I have drawn these “texts” from a variety of sources, some conventional (travel narrative, poetry, and novel), others less so (opera, philology, university lectures, and political myth). The India examined in these examples is the India consciously inscribed within the French and German literary and religious imagination. By my choice of such texts, I imply, a feminist critique of the master narrative of Orientalism and the normative canon of Indology. The general statements concerning Hinduism and Buddhism that one finds in this volume, as well as the East-West unevenness inherent in the discourse, are not mine but reflect a lack of differentiation on the part of the authors in question. I have not focused upon the narratological and rhetorical devices that account for this imbalance. Given this project’s central concern with issues of translation and misreading, I have felt it unwise to insert contemporary norms of gender neutrality into nineteenth-century texts. Oftimes gendered language constitutes a significant aspect of the original and to render it otherwise would be remiss.