Eastern Figures

Orient and Empire in British Writing

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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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1
Introduction

This is a book of literary history which examines the relationship between British writing and Asian people and places in the colonial period and later, by considering a number of tropes in texts which form part of an attempt to represent and understand the East. The scope of my study embraces Lord Macaulay and Redmond O'Hanlon, but it draws its examples chiefly from work by British writers of the late nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, a period when the British empire reached its fullest extent, and when writing about the East was extremely rich, varied, and contentious.

Each of the texts discussed here has as one of its topics the relation between East and West. In much of the Earl of Cromer's *Modern Egypt*, or in Hugh Clifford's memoir of the 'heart-breaking little war' in the Pahang region of Malaya, or in Flora Annie Steel's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, this topic is foregrounded and obvious enough. Each of these works ponders diegetically the question of East and West. But what about a fictional work — a work like Rudyard Kipling's short tale 'The Story of Muhammad Din', for example, in which an English narrator tells of his fondness for an Indian child, the son of one of his household servants, who falls ill and dies.[1] It is a slight tale. No portentous consequences hang upon the death or survival of this child, and the characters are not dressed in any rhetorical panoply signalling that they stand for something grand or abstract beyond themselves. And yet we can feel sure that this is not just a sentimental anecdote about a particular Indian infant, but that the story told is also Kipling's way of telling his readers something that matters about how he sees this relation between East and West, India and Britain (or Anglo-India). It can also be assumed that all of Kipling's readers — Indians, English, or anyone

1. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Story of Muhammad Din', *Plain Tales from the Hills* [1888], ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction and notes by David Trotter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 250–53. The story first appeared in the Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette*, 8 September 1886.

else, then and now — will have recognized this dimension of the tale. This is a way of saying that a tale like 'The Story of Muhammad Din', while going about its particular mimetic business as every story does, also participates in the British discourse about the East, even though the represented world in the story is confined to a single house and garden. If all Western writing (and painting, photography, music, film) about Eastern places and people is understood, and read, at one level as being about the relation between East and West, then every representation has potentially a quasi-allegorical dimension, as a trope in that Western discourse of the East. These tropes may be seen to have a figural as well as a literal meaning. I will be using the word *figure* to indicate an important and recurrent trope of representation, which can be shown to function not only as an element in the text in which it occurs, but also symbolically in the discourse, pointing beyond itself not to the East, but to a way of understanding the relation between East and West.

The essential parameters of the writings examined here are an Eastern object of representation, and a Western modality or point of view. The child Muhammad Din is a character, a human image in a story, the representation of an Indian person. He is also figurative, in that we construe his friendship with the English narrator in the story as in some way representative of a way that relations between India and the ruling British can be imagined and understood, or were imagined and understood by Kipling at least. He is also an instance of a trope of infantilization which is fairly common in the British imperial imagination, by which subject peoples are thought of as immature and incomplete, and therefore in need of protection and control by a more historically adult people, which is how the British thought of and represented themselves. And this is the point about Muhammad Din, that the image of the Indian child, or of India as a child, elicits or evokes a cluster of related images. These include the environment he lives in (a household in India belonging to an Englishman), the benign English adult who patronizes him, and also his own Indian father, his natural parent, who lacks the knowledge and resources that might perhaps have saved the boy's life if applied in time. We can find traces of these same figural *dramatis personae*, though with a different and redemptive narrative and a provisionally happy ending this time, almost a century later in James Fenton's poem 'Children in Exile' (1983), about refugee Cambodian children, fleeing from their lethal patrimony under the Pol Pot regime, and forming tentative surrogate parent-child relations in the West. The child, then, is an 'Eastern figure' in my sense.

As a matter of fact, there is not a chapter here on the figure of the child (though there might have been). But there is one about the Eastern crowd, and this can furnish another example of what this book is looking for. Asia is often first and most vividly experienced by the outsider, whether intrepid trailblazer or belated tourist, in the form of a crowd. The crowd is a figure of the East which

comes into focus through difference: to see the East as a crowd means, for the Western observer, to think of himself or herself as outnumbered; surrounded by a sea of indistinguishable foreign faces, the interloper is made acutely aware of his or her singularity by contrast, a heroic or beleaguered individuality. Or perhaps foreigners, arriving in the East with a sense of their own singularity sharpened by their travels, see the people they have come among as both legion and uniform, the overwhelming fact of these people's difference from himself or herself blinding the traveller, at least at first, to any difference or particularity among them. It hardly matters, and may not be possible to say, which comes first, the image of the singular West or the collective East, because they adduce each other and neither means much without the other. But the figure of the Eastern crowd is already halfway to becoming a *story* about East and West; one of the chapters that follow will trace that story through a number of examples.

Each figure considered here then contains a relationship of difference, yet never a static and rarely simply a conflictual or polar one, but always in some sense a mutual constitution, in which each is disclosed, precipitated and modified by its other or others. If the East occurs in the figure of a jungle, this is reinforced by, and brings into focus by contrast, memories and feelings about Western instances of both natural scenes and a modern urban habitat. The relationship is constitutively dialogic but not simply binary. The figure of the missionary, for another example, relates by difference to a number of figural partners or interlocutors — the convert, the unconvertible, and the apostate, the rival priest of a local religion or another church, the secular educator or official with whom missionaries often had an uneasy relationship, even the natural scene which must be converted to grace.

'Rule', the subject of a chapter here, is a figure that is not confined to concrete images like the policeman or the governor or the courthouse, but is dispersed in various institutions and ideas under whose aegis the Europeans — but particularly the British — in the East were pleased to think of theirs as a culture of law, and their imperial activity as guaranteeing and bequeathing the rule of law to Asia. It is a figure which encouraged them to imagine and represent the East as, by contrast, essentially lawless, or subject to rival corrupt, decayed, or barbaric customs and jurisdictions. (The implications of this figure still reverberate perilously today.) I want to show how the operation of these figures in the Western imagination of the East generates narratives about and dialogue between these figural partners — literally so in many cases, such as in the chapter on figures of rule, which ends with three face-to-face conversations between rulers and ruled. Each of these figures has its own history, and while this book will examine each in texts which embody it in what seem to me to be particularly interesting ways, it will also suggest something of the figure's fortunes in other earlier or later representations.

I do not propose to make any particular distinction between representations that purport to be portrayals of actual people and places and events, and those that are frankly imaginary. This is not to suggest there is no difference between fact and fiction. But my interest is in the way these representations are constructed; there is as much to learn from the 'character' of Christopher Isherwood, who was certainly a real person, as we see it in his China travel diary of 1938, as from the 'character' of Muhammad Din, who, as far as I know, never existed outside Kipling's imagination. It is representations that are examined here, and I am interested in the rhetoric and textuality of these representations, rather than in how accurately they might be said to correspond to an authentic original, wherever this might be found. In this way my project takes up the invitation of Edward Said, who in his examination of discourse about the Orient recommended attention first to its tropology. 'The things to look at,' he says, 'are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.'[2] (Though I do not take issue with *Orientalism* until my final chapter, and though in dealing chiefly with the Arab world its Orient has a very different compass from my own, *Orientalism* is important to this book, which would not have been written without it. While the theoretical provocation of Said's book, published in 1978, continues to generate a huge literature, its methodological challenge has not been nearly so comprehensively met.)

I have found it useful to think in terms of *tropes*, not just as the figures of speech of classical rhetoric but in the wider application given to the term in the work of Hayden White.

> Tropology centers attention on the turns in a discourse: turns from one level of generalization to another, from one phase of a sequence to another, from a description to an analysis or the reverse, from a figure to a ground or from an event to its context, from the conventions of one genre to those of another within a single discourse, and so on.[3]

In this wide sense these moves or 'turns' can include images and ideas, and structures such as emplotments. This study foregrounds the representational tropes which are my chosen figures, because they have seemed to me particularly powerful and interesting. But the field of this book is the totality of all kinds of tropes that form the basic grammar and vocabulary of the British discourse on the East. And I have been mindful that this book, in its turn, is a part of that discourse; I have no modality outside it.

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2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 21.
3. Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 10–11. See also Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 1–25.

The term *modality* is also used here in a fairly commodious sense. Modality is point of view.[4] It is concerned with speakers' or writers' or narrators' attitudes and perspectives towards the propositions they express or the things they represent. In grammar, modality is expressed in modal verbs such as *will*, *may*, or *should*, carrying the speaker's judgement of things like necessity, possibility, certainty and uncertainty, permission and obligation; crucially, modality is also imbricated in the question of the authority with which things are spoken of. Modality is present in a sentence in the marks of who is (or is supposed to be) speaking and to whom, where, and when, and in judgements carried in diegetic comments like 'of course', 'unfortunately' or 'at last'. There is no representation without modality, the point of view or attitude — spatial and ideological — from which something is brought into vision and becomes an object. This book deals with a Western modality on the East. We know of Muhammad Din through the eyes, judgements and feelings of the English narrator, and behind him (for modalities can be multiple, and embedded) those of Kipling. We cannot know how Muhammad Din's story might have appeared to his father, and still less of course to the child himself, except that it would certainly have been different. Much of the business of postcolonial discourse has been a struggle over modalities, the effort of the colonized and formerly colonized to represent themselves and get their point of view across.

One way this book tries to navigate its daunting theme is by anchoring frequently in specific instances and the close reading of particular texts. Close reading, as Edward Said argued eloquently in a late essay, is fundamental to humanist enquiry, a procedure for doing justice to the specific and the general and moving between them, that 'will gradually locate the text in its time as part of a whole network of relationships whose outlines and influences play an informing role *in* the text';[5] in the process, if it works, the text and the network bring each other further into the light.

My aim has been to build up a gallery of figures, each telling a story that glosses the grander narrative of the interaction between East and West that is likely to continue to be the most important theme of our modern history. The scope is broad, but not nearly as broad as the subject. My 'East' is a wide one, in geography and experience. It stretches from the Egypt of Lord Cromer to the Pacific of Robert Louis Stevenson, though its centre of gravity is in the Indian subcontinent, as it always was for the British. It might be argued that this is an

4. There is a useful description in Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1990), 302–03. See also the use of the term in Michael Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 64–79.

5. Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 62. Challengingly, Said also enjoins 'taking final comradely responsibility for one's reading' (66).

absurdly heterogeneous and unmanageable category. The British, however, were in the habit of speaking of 'the East' — or being or going 'out East' — as of a self-evident location, though it might prove in practice to be Cairo or Colombo; the word, like 'Orient' itself, suggests an intuition that in the imagination at least it was its own place. In political and commercial terms too, 'the East' was a vague but serviceable category, and a man (like Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations*) working for an Eastern house of business might be in Smyrna or Batavia, while colonial civil servants, especially senior ones, were posted around Asia and expected to know how to cope, experience in Malaya being convertible into seniority in Ceylon, and so on. If the objection is still made that 'the East' is a homogenizing and artificial concept, a verbal gesture hopelessly inadequate to categorize or contain the experience of alterity supposed to constitute it, I can only say I agree: this is one of the principal strands of my argument.

The texts I choose to discuss all recommend themselves, in my opinion, for literary *and* historical interest, but of course they are a tiny fragment of the available literature; I cannot deny that good writers and texts have been left out, and those chosen for discussion reflect my personal feeling for the field. The figures selected are themselves diverse, but certainly not comprehensive; indeed there is an arbitrary quality to the choice, which indicates how my own reading has fallen into place, but also flags a resistance to the more familiar and rather formulaic patterns sometimes imposed on this kind of material. The sequence of the following chapters moves from relatively straightforward figures of imagery, like the Hinterland and the crowd, to more abstract figures which are kinds of story or storytelling; in the figure of rule, in a late chapter, my subject is not just forms of authority but something like the master trope of representation itself. But in truth to think about even an apparently simple figure, like the space of Hinterland, in this context is already to be involved in thinking about narrative structures, modes and genres — in this case the structure of mystery and revelation, the modes of realism and romance, the genres of topography, adventure, the psychological and supernatural tale.

These chapters are essays, attempts; they are inter-related but each can also be free-standing, and together they represent an incomplete methodological project. Plenty of other tropes could be summoned and examined, other texts adduced, and a far wider range of experience sampled. My examples have an overwhelmingly masculine modality, for one thing (there are historical reasons for this, though I admit that the arrival of Maud Diver, in Chapter 6, is a welcome change). I have nothing to say about Japan, for another (Japan appears simply too *sui generis* to sit comfortably in a British-oriented account of the East with its centre of gravity in India; it seems to require a book of its own).[6] These and

6. Such as Ian Littlewood has written in *The Idea of Japan: Western Images, Western Myths* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1996).

other absences seem rather scandalous even to me, but a book twice this length would still be far from comprehensive; and I suppose that at least these omissions are an egregious proof of the difficulty (I would add, the undesirability) of trying to grasp such a fiction as 'the East' as a whole. There are enough examples, examined in this book, of the grim consequences of claiming a total and inclusive authority over the Orient.

In the pages that follow there is a cumulative if sometimes underground argument that counsels against a too monumental and unfissured idea of knowledge of the Orient. I have described these chapters as essays, but their sequence is not random. It begins with an account of the broaching of Hinterland, the step into the Eastern unknown. It ends with figures of ignorance, the recognition that the Hinterland always has its own Hinterland, and the East is a horizon that can never be reached. You trudge, lift your eyes, and it still lies ahead of you. The writing of this book has been rather like that too. It seemed fitting to end with the image of the young Kipling narrator in 'The City of Dreadful Night', poised atop one of the minarets of the Mosque of Wazir Khan in Lahore, contemplating the unknown life of the city before him and ready, just as the story ends, to begin his enquiries.

Earlier versions of parts of this book have appeared in the *Conradian*, *Contemporary Literature*, *English Studies*, *Essays in Criticism*, *The New Zealand Journal of Oriental Studies*, and in *W. H. Auden: A Legacy*.[7] I am grateful to the editors for permission to re-present this work here in revised form. My thanks to the staff of the Hong Kong University Library and the British Library for always courteous and efficient service, and to the Hong Kong University Committee for Research and Conference Grants for support. This book has benefited immensely from the help and criticism of Julia Kuehn, and of Elaine Ho as ever. I would also like to thank my Hong Kong colleagues, especially Christopher Hutton and Tong Qingsheng, for their support, encouragement and patience.

7. *W. H. Auden: A Legacy*, ed. David Garrett Izzo (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2002).

9
Not Knowing the Oriental

Useful ignorance: Orientalism and Cromer's *Modern Egypt*

Three decades have passed since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In no trivial sense, we are all after Said. His work was never uncontested and continues to be controversial: Robert Irwin is only one of Said's hostile critics, with his blistering attack on *Orientalism*'s representation of the scholarly work of Orientalists.[1] But Said's work has also been enormously productive, in propagating an understanding of Western discourse about the East as a system of knowledge/power, whereby control over a part of the world is brought about, exemplified and stabilized by knowledge and its institutions. Through 'Orientalism', Said was the first to argue, the West authors the East and becomes its authority. The prevailing understanding of postcolonial resistance is predicated on an acceptance of the same intellectual architecture. Power enables knowledge, knowledge legitimizes power.

But how much knowledge is enough? For everyone except God, there is always a horizon or frontier of knowledge, behind which stretches the great Hinterland of ignorance. This is an idea memorably expounded in a poem published in the year in which Britain acquired the island of Hong Kong, a known and chartered quantity that might be the gateway to a mainland of sublime vastness.[2] For Tennyson's Ulysses, experience, what we know, is an arch, 'wherethrough / Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move'. The great imperial melancholy of that poem was to find an attenuated echo more than fifty years later in Rudyard Kipling's 'Recessional', with its call to humility and contrition, and a seemly national

1. Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 277–309.
2. The Treaty of Nanjing was signed in 1842 and ratified the following year. Tennyson's 'Ulysses' appeared in his *Poems* of 1842.

modesty in recognition of one's own limits. Tennyson's hero recognized that no amount of travel and discovery will reduce the 'untravelled world' to known space, since the margin of our own ignorance travels with us and ahead of us, forever out of reach. There is always more to be ignorant of.

Furthermore, there are certainly occasions when it is more prudent not 'to follow knowledge like a sinking star', as Ulysses admitted in another rather defeatist metaphor, for, as he confessed to his mariners, 'It may be that the gulfs will wash us down', and the quest may end in disaster and drowning. This chapter is about expertise. It considers tropes of both knowledge and ignorance of the Orient, and it will return in the end to Kipling, to consider ignorance of the East in this most knowing of writers (and it is interesting that 'knowing', as an adjective in English, has a distinctly disreputable odour). My chapter title refers to this ignorance. But it is also an intertitular revision of the first chapter of Edward Said's *Orientalism* — which is entitled 'Knowing the Oriental' — and in the first part of my chapter I will consider the powerful thesis of that book, with its argument about the place of Western 'knowledge' of the Orient in the history of Western domination of the Orient, specifically by looking at one of Said's chosen examples.

Said begins the Introduction to *Orientalism* with the civil war in Lebanon in 1975–76, a couple of years before the book was published. But he begins the first substantive chapter, entitled 'Knowing the Oriental', in June of 1910, when the House of Commons in London listened to a speech by Arthur James Balfour, leader of the Conservative Party and former Prime Minister, on the problems of Egypt. While Egypt was not formally a part of the British Empire, Britain had had very important financial and strategic interests in the country since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Anglo-French dual control was established over the Khedive's finances in 1876. Britain intervened to save the Khedive from the Arabi revolt in 1881–82, and Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer) was put in place to reform Egyptian finances. British administrators and troops remained in the country.

Now that Egyptian nationalism was admitted to be on the rise, there were some who questioned whether the British presence should be maintained there, and Balfour's speech of June 1910 is an eloquent defence of British involvement in Egypt's affairs.[3] He pays due tribute to the greatness and antiquity of Egyptian civilization, and disclaims any superiority to it on the part of the relatively youthful

3. The speech is reprinted in A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies* [1959], 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1985), 359–62. For its intellectual context, see Jason Tomes, *Balfour and Foreign Policy: The International Thought of a Conservative Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The matter was settled when with the outbreak of war in 1914 Egypt was made a British protectorate.

civilizations of Europe. But his Western knowledge of the Orient also tells him that Egypt is a country that has never of its own motion established self-government, and that the same may be said of all other Oriental nations; it is on this knowledge, and on the record of their administrative success, that Balfour bases his defence of British *de facto* government of Egypt. For Said, this is a first instance of the way knowledge of the Orient legitimizes power over it.[4]

It is significant for the autobiographical dimension of *Orientalism* that Said's first witness is the future author of the Balfour Declaration proposing the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine.[5] But he soon goes on to focus on a figure more centrally identified with 'England in Egypt': one of the great imperial proconsuls, the Earl of Cromer, the former Sir Evelyn Baring, of whom, when he retired as Consul General in Egypt in 1907, Balfour himself said: 'Lord Cromer's services during the past quarter of a century have raised Egypt from the lowest pitch of social and economic depredation until it now stands among Oriental nations, I believe, absolutely alone in its prosperity, financial and moral.'[6] While Balfour's theses on Orientals pretended to be objective universality, Said observes, Cromer spoke about Orientals 'specifically as what he had ruled or had to deal with, first in India, then for the twenty-five years in Egypt during which he emerged as the paramount consul-general in England's empire'.[7] It is with the example of Cromer that Said expounds fully his own thesis of empire as essentially a cybernetic system, dealing in the control and communication of knowledge. 'Once again, knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control'.[8] Orientalism — Western knowledge of the Orient — was a rationalization of colonial rule, and colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism.

It seems appropriate then to ask just what the Earl of Cromer thought he knew about Oriental people. Much of the answer is to be found in the two volumes of his *Modern Egypt*, published in 1908, the year after he retired from his job as *de facto* ruler of Egypt, and Said makes extensive reference to this text. In this book, which is scholarly enough with its citation of French and German as well as English Orientalists, Cromer nevertheless insists that the knowledge he deploys

4. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 31–36.
5. The 'Balfour Declaration' was actually drafted by Leopold Amery, 'after Milner had tried his hand', on 2 November 1917. See the discussion in Thornton, 167. Balfour was Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George's war cabinet.
6. See Denis Judd, *Balfour and the British Empire: A Study in Imperial Evolution 1874–1932* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 286.
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* 36.
8. Ibid.

is not that of a learned man but is empirically derived from his twenty-five years working career in the country — it is the knowledge of experience (and it is this knowledge, rather than the more textual knowledge of the scholarly profession of Orientalism, that is my topic here).

In the middle of *Modern Egypt*, between its narrative history and its political analysis, is an ethnographic and sociological account which has acquired some notoriety. Interestingly, it is presented under the sign of ignorance, being subtitled 'The Egyptian Puzzle'. This part of the book is informal, sometimes jocular, and it describes the 'Dwellers in Egypt' from the point of view of 'the Englishman', such as Cromer himself perhaps, who has come to the country equipped with ideas about individual justice, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and similar notions, with the mission that he is to benefit the mass of the population. Cromer's 'Englishman', unassuming, ironic, bureaucratic, is actually a powerful rhetorical figure in his discourse on modern Egypt. This slightly comic, haplessly well-intentioned individual, in Cromer's account, has his work cut out in the confusing and exasperating conditions of modern Egypt, formed over sixty centuries of misgovernment and oppression. 'In fact, the Englishman will soon find that the Egyptian, whom he wishes to mould into something really useful with a view to his becoming eventually autonomous, is merely the rawest of raw material',[9] and the Englishman, wishing to point out what is to be done by way of improvement and then to step back and leave the Egyptians to do it, will find that 'to fulminate against abuses, which were the growth of centuries, was like firing a cannon-ball into a mountain of mud' (556). The cannonball, Cromer's emblematic projectile of Western modernity, could be expected to make a decisive impression on any manufactured structure; but fired into a mountain of ignoble mud, it would just disappear. Mud in Egypt is, to be sure, no ordinary mud, but acknowledged to be an enriching, chthonic, generative material;[10] still, Cromer is uncompromising in his characterization of his modern Egyptians as low, formless, undistinguishable, made from a different element when compared to their Northern would-be benefactor.

Cromer has much to say about the Oriental character — as Said points out, he appears to make little distinction between the Indian and the Egyptian Oriental, both being poles apart from the European in temper and disposition. 'Want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness, is, in fact, the main characteristic of the Oriental mind' (573). And there follows the catalogue of arrogant and racist denigrations — irrational, silent, stagnant in mind,

9. The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt* [1908], 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1911), 561–62. Page references in the text which follow are to this volume.

10. 'Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile.' (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act II sc vii, 29–30)

improvident, unorganized, cunning, and so on — of which Said's *Orientalism* offers so many depressingly similar examples from various places and times. Rather than elaborate on these essentializations, I want to draw attention to the use they are put to by Cromer. For the radical difference of the Egyptian, presented as a difference in nature rather than merely in institutions, religion, ideas of government, or social customs, constitutes a barrier which, he says categorically, 'prevents the Englishman and the Egyptian from understanding each other' (579).

The difference of the Egyptians makes them essentially unknowable. And if you add to this essential difference the strangeness, from a Western point of view, of their language, arts, religion, and their most ordinary customs and expressions, it becomes clear that there is an insurmountable epistemological stumbling block between the Englishman and the object of his knowledge and government. These differences may be explained by professional Orientalists, but such explanations are beside the point for the man of practical experience, the Englishman who is 'only a diplomatist and an administrator, whose proper study is also man, but from the point of view of governing him rather than from that of scientific research into how he comes to be what he is' (586). For such a person, for whom the Orient is not an academic discipline but a practical daily problem, acknowledging that essential unknowability is the beginning of prudence, if not of wisdom. Cromer was doubtful whether 'even those Englishmen who have been actively engaged in the work of Egyptian administration have always recognized to the full that, in taking in hand Egyptian reform, they had to deal with a society which was not only in a backward state of civilization, but which was also, from their point of view, well-nigh incomprehensible' (587).

After hundreds of pages parading his expertise, Cromer's swerve into a profession of ignorance is a trope that needs an explanation, especially if we are working with a model of discourse in which knowledge and power are the same thing. If knowledge supports and justifies power, and the power wielded by the British over Egypt was absolute as Balfour described it, why this strange insistence on the unknowability of the Oriental in Cromer's book? For this is more than just the rhetorical equivalent of a good-humoured acknowledgement of the strange ways of foreigners. Part of the strategy of thematizing the cultural and natural distance between English and Egyptians is certainly to make a point about the magnitude of the task undertaken by Cromer and his English subordinates, and consequentially the magnitude of their achievement. But Cromer's insistence on the unknowability of the Orient is overdetermined, and needs also to be seen in the light of his theory of imperialism, and his ambitions for the direction of British imperial policy in the years to come.

Modern Egypt is far from reticent in its delivery of an account of what Egyptians are like, in terms of an inventory of fixed essential national characteristics, and yet this is accompanied by, and at odds with, a language of

incommensurability, featurelessness, darkness, mud. Cromer shows and shows off his knowledge of the Orient but then, in an unexpected turn, declares its inadequacy and defeat; the Orient must remain unknown. I believe the explanation of this contradiction can be sought in the contemporary debate about imperialism, in which Said in *Orientalism* showed not much interest.[11] In 1908 Cromer's task of governing Egypt was finished. But he still had a part to play in influencing policy, and *Modern Egypt* intervenes powerfully in the debate about empire which had been going on for more than a hundred years in Britain. Britain was a global power. What were its obligations and interests? Cromer, not surprisingly, had views on this matter, which were supported by his unsurpassed reputation as the engineer of what he himself called 'the regeneration of Egypt' (587),[12] the greatest success story of imperial administration. After a quarter of a century, what should the British do now about Egypt? In more general terms, what should they do about their empire in the East?

Some people — nationalists in Egypt, and anti-imperialists in Britain — were of the opinion that the Egyptians, and others of what Cromer called the 'subject races', should be allowed to direct their own affairs as an independent nation, or — to put it less flatteringly — that Egypt should be left to 'stew in its own juice' (904).[13] Others felt that it was high time that Egypt was formally incorporated into the British empire. The first alternative was, in Cromer's view, simply impractical. A British withdrawal from the country would see Egypt slide back from the modernity he had so painstakingly conferred upon it, and soon be given over, he feared, to despotism under 'a retrograde government, based on purely Mohammedan principles and obsolete Oriental ideas', and then become the prey of one of the less benevolent of the European powers. As for the option of bringing Egypt fully into the empire, 'I never have been,' he says firmly, 'nor am I now in favour of the British occupation of Egypt' (904).

The incompatibilities between British and Oriental people were frankly too large to sustain a permanent relationship, the Earl of Cromer maintained. In the absence of 'community of race, religion, language, and habits of thought, which ordinarily constitute the main bonds of union between the rulers and the ruled' (908), only artificial bonds could be forged, and these could never be reliable. 'Neither by the display of sympathy, nor by good government, can we forge bonds

11. The charge was often made that in *Orientalism* Said presented the hegemonic discourse as more monumental, unitary, and unchallenged than it actually was. Some of these criticisms are met in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
12. This language of Britain's mission of secular redemption in the Orient was, as we have seen, at least as old as Macaulay.
13. Similar arguments were being made at this time about India, though it was not until after the Great War that the cause of independence for India began to attract significant support in Britain.

which will be other than brittle' (909). His quarter-century of Egyptian experience had left him unsentimental about the imperial family of races. The British, he conceded, were not liked by their Oriental subjects, and never would be. And although the trade advantages of empire brought with them the burden of good government, it had never really been British policy or practice to get very close to their subject people.

He expatiated on this view in an address to the Classical Association a couple of years later, which was published as *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*. It is hard to imagine a more exemplary imperial occasion, as the great proconsul deploys his classical learning[14] and his Oriental experience to deliver his views on a comparison of the British with the Roman Empire, one of the favourite themes of English imperial discourse. It is a comparison made, to very different ends, in such fictional works as Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness', but the assimilation of the colonial to the classical paradigm went back to Renaissance times. 'Europeans knew the world through its signs and correspondences to things known. The exploration of the terrestrial world was being carried out at the same time that Europeans were exploring their own origins in the pagan past of Greece and Rome.'[15] The acknowledged correspondence between imperial Rome and imperial Britain was one of the ideological underpinnings of the classical curriculum studied by the sons of the governing classes.

Cromer's lecture, then, dealt with a very familiar topic indeed, but he reached some rather unexpected conclusions. There were many similarities, he said, but the chief difference was that the Romans assimilated their subject peoples, in a way that none of the modern European empires had managed or attempted. 'There has been no thorough fusion, no real assimilation between the British and their alien subjects, and, so far as we can now predict, the future will in this respect be but a repetition of the past. [. . .] From this point of view, therefore, British Imperialism has, so far as the indigenous races of Asia and Africa are concerned, been a failure.'[16]

He argues that this is because modern imperialists face barriers of religion, racial antipathy, and language loyalty, unknown or insignificant to the Romans.

14. Unlike his contemporaries Lord Milner (Kings College School, London, and Balliol) and Lord Curzon (Eton and Balliol), Cromer's educational path had taken him at the age of fourteen to Woolwich to train for the Royal Artillery. This did not indicate underprivilege. After active service and a spell at the War Office, in 1872 he became Private Secretary to the Viceroy of India, Lord Northbrook, who was his cousin.
15. See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 79.
16. The Earl of Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (London: John Murray, 1910), 88, 89. In the post-imperial world the debate about assimilation has shifted its ground to that of ethnic relations in the former 'home country' of the empires.

The British had to deal with 'subject peoples' who were just too unfathomably different. Indeed, whereas Latin may be assumed to have united the empire under Rome, the acquisition of a European language by modern Orientals more often than not does nothing to inspire political sympathy, but on the contrary 'furnishes the subject races with a very powerful arm against their alien rulers'.[17] The alienation that exists between the rulers and subjects of the modern Orient is a gulf that cannot be overcome; the antipathies that exist between them would make it dangerous to try. And this is why Cromer sets a limit on British knowledge of 'the dwellers in Egypt', and on British power. The aim is indeed eventual British withdrawal, and Egyptian autonomy, though this will take at least another generation to come to pass, he believes. This is of course the familiar mission of liberal imperialism, with the usual deferral attached; for several generations, liberals had been saying much the same about India.

Meanwhile 'the Englishman' in Egypt can deploy his detailed knowledge of the Oriental mind to help him govern wisely, and with sympathy; but he will recognize and even welcome the fact that his knowledge runs only up to a point, and beyond that point the Oriental remains unknowable in his radical difference. This, as Cromer sees it, is no reason to repine: on the contrary. Assimilation is not possible, or desirable, and the Englishman's authority and identity are guaranteed by what we might call a prophylactic ignorance. The close contact of intimate knowledge is dangerous, and the enquirer, like Hunter on the brink of Bubbling Well, runs the risk of being swallowed up in that dark, muddy and alien interior, and disappearing into it for good. An aloof, even philistine refusal to know plays an important part in the discourse of colonial experience, and suggests that in some circumstances power may be served by not knowing as well as by knowledge. The trope of ignorance, the disclaimer of knowledge, could be a shield and protection.

What Strickland knew: Kipling's policeman and dangerous knowledge

The Orient was a network. Cromer had been on the Viceroy's staff in India. The programme of administrative reform under his leadership in Egypt was carried out by British officials and technicians trained in India, and its dominant theme was the introduction of techniques, institutions and projects based on their own Indian experience.[18] British Egypt was created out of the experience of British

17. Ibid., 107.
18. Robert L. Tignor, 'The "Indianization" of the Egyptian administration under British rule', *American Historical Review*, 68 no. 3 (April 1963), 636–61.

India. And knowledge was certainly thought of as power in British India,[19] as many instances in Kipling's fiction can attest. In *Kim* (1901), the Ethnological Survey is a covert state apparatus for surveillance — Saidian Orientalism in its ideal form. But there are hundreds of less institutional instances in Kipling's fiction where information is crucial for control of a situation, and correspondingly where ignorance exposes its possessor to impotence, failure and ridicule. Kipling was enamoured of intelligence in the military-political sense, an enthusiasm not very surprising in a journalist, and his whole career testifies to his appetite for expertise — the combination of intelligence and experience — preferably of an arcane and professional kind. Expertise sustained the personnel of British India, where a relative handful of white officials exercised hegemony over a huge and varied population, and there and elsewhere in the empire it conferred on them a sort of class identity.

Who is more knowing than Kipling's Strickland? Strickland is an English police officer in India, a character who recurs in a number of Kipling's stories, and always with the authority that comes not only from his office but more importantly from his knowledge of India.[20] The tale 'Miss Youghal's Sais' (1887) gives us most information about him. 'He held the extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves.'[21] He has spent seven years educating himself to this end, and is a compendium of linguistic knowledge and ethnographic lore, for he has not only witnessed but also participated in various cults and occult ceremonies, of which Kipling gives a preposterous catalogue with his usual relish.

> He was initiated into the *Sat Bhai* at Allahabad once, when he was on leave. He knew the Lizard-Song of the Sansis, and the *Hálli-Hukk*

19. C. A. Bayly has extended understanding of this issue in important ways, and corrected a tendency to oversimplify it, in his study of the 'information order' of pre-imperial British India, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The period in question in *Empire and Information* is pre-Kipling and pre-Cromer, but Bayly touches on many of the issues raised here. Of particular relevance is his contention that the information revolution and the accumulation of institutional knowledge on which British authority depended in India were punctuated by knowledge gaps and 'information panics'. C. A. Bayley, *Empire and Information,* 165–79.
20. Strickland first appeared in 'Miss Youghal's Sais', in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 25 April 1887, reprinted as the fourth story in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. He also figures in 'The Bronckhorst Divorce Case', 'A Deal in Cotton', 'The Mark of the Beast', 'The Return of Imray', and *Kim*, and finally in 'The Son of his Father', in which he has acquired a small son even more knowledgeable than he is. Rudyard Kipling, *Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides* [1923] (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1926), 205–36.
21. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1890) ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction and notes by David Trotter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 51.

> dance, which is a religious can-can of a startling kind. When a man knows who dance the *Hálli-Hukk*, and how, and when, and where, he knows something to be proud of. He has gone deeper than the skin. But Strickland was not proud, though he had helped once, at Jagadhri, at the Painting of the Death Bull, which no Englishman must even look upon; had mastered the thieves'-patter of the *chángars*; had taken a Yusufzai horse-thief alone near Attock; and had stood under the sounding-board of a Border mosque and conducted service in the manner of a Sunni Mullah.[22]

And much more besides. Here indeed is the Orientalist as agent, the man of fieldwork experience, in the know. Baroque elaborations of this fantasy of incorporation and control were to appear in Jim Douglas, the hero of Flora Annie Steel's Mutiny novel *On the Face of the Waters* (1896),[23] and in a later generation in the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, and in John Buchan's *Greenmantle*. There were two well-known real-life precedents for Strickland. One was the legendary 'thug-buster' W. H. Sleeman, who was credited with extirpating *thuggee* in a vigorous campaign of intelligence-gathering and policework in the 1830s.[24] It is a thoroughly Kiplingesque (and of course Foucauldian) story, for the campaign depended on the creation of a body of Western knowledge about a shadowy Oriental 'mystery' — in the double sense, for *thuggee* was seen as both an enigma and something like a trade guild — and then a transformation of existing legal structures of authority to master it. Sleeman's agents had to create a knowledge of *thuggee* in order to bring it under control, and his apparent success in this perilous enterprise made him one of the heroes of British India in the East India Company days.[25]

Another real-life precedent for Strickland was Richard Burton, who famously made the pilgrimage to Mecca in Oriental disguise and wrote a book about it, and whose writing is discussed in *Orientalism* as the history of a consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture by virtue of having successfully absorbed its system of information and behaviour. 'Burton's freedom was in having shaken himself loose of his European origins enough to be able to live as an Oriental. Every scene in the *Pilgrimage* [*to Al-Medinah and Meccah*] reveals him

22. Ibid., 51–52.
23. Steel's Jim Douglas is less successful in his disguise than Strickland, for 'there was a trick in his gait, not to be orientalised, which made policemen salute gravely as he passed disguised to the tent'. Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters* (London: Heinemann, 1897), 61.
24. This achievement is credited to the fictional Rodney Savage's father, William Savage, in John Masters' *Nightrunners of Bengal* (1951) and *The Deceivers* (1955).
25. See Radhika Singha, '"Providential" Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation', *Modern Asian Studies* 27:1 (1993), 83–146. Singha's conclusion is that the success of the campaign was very much inflated.

as winning out over the obstacles confronting him, a foreigner, in a strange place. He was able to do this because he had sufficient knowledge of an alien society for this purpose.'[26] Said adds, though, that Burton's knowledge is informed by a European's self-awareness of society as a collection of rules and practices. 'In other words, to be a European in the Orient, and to be one knowledgeably, one must see and know the Orient as a domain ruled over by Europe.'[27]

This is obviously also the case with Kipling's policeman Strickland. When he solves the mystery of the disappearance of Imray, a government official (in 'The Return of Imray'), he is able to reveal not only that he was murdered by his Indian servant, but also why — the servant believed Imray had cast the evil eye on his child, who subsequently died. Strickland concludes that Imray lost his life 'simply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental'.[28] If anyone knows the nature of the Oriental, it must be Strickland. He knows how to interrogate Imray's servant and trick him into a confession, because his knowledge makes Strickland an insider to the discourse of the Indian irrational, what the modernizing British dismissed as 'superstition'. 'Only such as are served by devils,' says the culprit admiringly, 'only such could know what I did.'[29]

In another and yet more Gothic story from *Life's Handicap*, called 'The Mark of the Beast', it is again Strickland's knowledge of the East that tells him that his friend Fleete's lycanthropy is the result of a spell cast upon him by a leper he has inadvertently insulted in a drunken escapade in the temple of Hanuman. Strickland (this is very much to the point) also knows *what to do*, and his police experience again comes in useful when the leper is captured, interrogated, tortured, and forced to lift the curse, after which Strickland closes the case by returning to the temple to offer redress for the pollution of the god. His expertise is specifically in those areas of dark alterity where the irrational, religious and superstitious life of the Orient makes it most mysterious, and closed, to Western eyes.

Strickland then ought to be a great asset to British authority over India. He is, as Dante says of Aristotle, *il maestro di color che sanno*, a master of knowledge. However, he has acquired his expertise, at some personal risk, through a kind of transgression, and at a price. For he has developed an 'outlandish custom of prying into native life'.

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26. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* 196. Before famously taking part in the pilgrimage to Mecca, Burton while serving in the Indian Army had gone undercover to investigate the Indian underworld, submitting a report to the government of India. The adventure seems to have led to a mistrust by his superiors that damaged his career prospects.
27. Ibid., 197.
28. Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap* (1891) ed. A. O. J. Cockshut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 203.
29. Ibid., 202. It is another instance of the magical powers attributed to the cultural transgressor.

> When a man once acquires a taste for this particular amusement, it abides with him all his days. It is the most fascinating thing in the world — Love not excepted. When other men took ten days to the Hills, Strickland took leave for what he called *shikar* [hunting], put on the disguise that appealed to him at the time, stepped down into the brown crowd, and was swallowed up for a while.[30]

Like his almost exact contemporary, Stevenson's Dr Jekyll (1888), Strickland's clandestine excursions on the wild side arouse suspicion in his professional colleagues.

To acquire his knowledge of the Orient, Strickland has had to become part of it, to be engulfed in the brown crowd. He acquires Orientality, literally leaving behind the uniform of his office and the complexion of his ethnicity. But although he thereby becomes an authority, he does so at the price of a double alienation. For he alarms his own people, who cannot see why he does not sit in his office and write reports like everyone else, while at the same time earning the animosity of Indians. 'Natives hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much.'[31] He has sacrificed or lost a part of the ethnic identity which sustains his kind. He has turned something of a witch-doctor himself, and is accompanied by a huge dog alleged to speak to him in a language of her own and believed by 'the natives' to be a familiar spirit.[32]

When Fleete bays at the moon, the English doctor diagnoses hydrophobia; but Strickland knows that it is magic. The English doctor, if it were left to him, would have continued to treat the case as a medical — that is, scientific — problem and Fleete would have died, another casualty of the white man's burden. Strickland undoubtedly saves the life of the lycanthropic Fleete, when he recognizes that his friend is the victim of the leper's magic, and forces the leper to lift his curse. But for Strickland, to accept the challenge of the Silver Man's magic, which is the only way to save Fleete, is also to be interpellated as an Oriental subject, so that when he competes with the leper's magic he has already capitulated to the leper's vision of the world, his Eastern modality, and agreed to play the deadly game according to his rules, admitting the inadequacy or irrelevance in this case of the enlightened discourses and practices of Western medicine, godliness and law, all three of which are scandalized by Strickland's unorthodox measures. To combat the Silver Man's magic and save Fleete, Strickland Orientalizes himself, and in doing so he makes the narrator his accomplice. 'Then it struck me,' says the narrator, ' that we had fought for Fleete's soul with the Silver Man in that room,

30. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 52.
31. Ibid.
32. Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, 193.

and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen for ever . . .'[33] This knowledge has led to a fall.

Here we are back in the presence of a recurring theme of Kipling's Indian writing, a chronic problem that besets his English characters, and it meets us in familiar terms. In order to control their subject people, they need to know them. Power depends on knowledge, and knowledge is acquired at close quarters. Yet they cannot afford to abolish the prestigious distance that sustains their authority. They must keep a certain aloofness, even at the price of allowing an epistemological no-go area into which their enquiries cannot reach.[34] The Earl of Cromer, with his views on mud and what it is apt to do, would no doubt counsel Strickland against his taste for stepping down into the brown crowd. (And likewise the prudent Captain Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness' declines to go ashore from his steamer to join in the African dance, or to enquire about the rituals of the cult of Mr Kurtz.) Strickland's superiors certainly feel his researches have gone too far; consequently he is considered 'a doubtful sort of man' (as Burton was), and passed over for promotion. When he marries an English girl, it is 'on the strict understanding that Strickland should drop his old ways, and stick to Departmental routine, which pays best and leads to Simla' — in other words, to promotion.[35]

At the end of 'Miss Youghal's Sais', we are told that Strickland is losing his knowledge of the Indian underworld, 'the slang, and the beggar's cant, and the marks, and the signs, and the drift of the under-currents'; to fit into the career environment of British India, he has naturally selected to become a conventional bureaucrat, dutifully filling in his Department returns, and renouncing his wanderings and his discoveries. The circulation of paperwork has replaced the acquisition of ethnographic experience as his speciality, and his bureaucratic duties, as well as the disapproval of Mrs Strickland, presumably keep him in the office and insulated from the brown crowd. We must assume that now he will smoothly ascend the ladder of promotion towards a higher and higher ignorance. Too much knowledge is surplus to requirements. The acquisition of knowledge can effect a kind of assimilation; it puts separation, and therefore power, at risk. It may be better not to know. In other words, it is not only those who want to dissociate themselves from the imperial will-to-power who are likely to renounce any claim to a penetrative expert knowledge of the Orient. This renunciative move may also be a useful gambit for those who want to exercise control over others, unencumbered by compromising ties to them.

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33. Ibid., 190.
34. See Chapter 6, and Douglas Kerr, 'Three ways of going wrong: Kipling, Conrad, Coetzee', *Modern Language Review* 95:1 (January 2000), 18–27.
35. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 56.

We might add digressively that the traffic of knowledge in the other direction is equally problematic, as we have seen in Kipling's unremittingly hostile representation of Western-educated Indians. Balfour too was to maintain that Egyptian nationalism was the unfortunate consequence of Orientals' acquisition of Western political ideas, a knowledge that was in a fundamental sense foreign to them, unoriental. By the end of the nineteenth century most imperialists deplored the policy of modernization through English sponsored by Trevelyan and Macaulay in the eighteen-thirties, on the grounds that it led to the acquisition of inappropriate knowledge. 'For more than half a century,' Cromer warned, 'we have, perhaps unavoidably, been teaching English through the medium of English literature, and that literature, in so far as it is historical, may easily be perverted from a disquisition on the advantages of steady progress achieved by a law-abiding nation into one which eulogizes disrespect for authority, and urges on the governed the sacred duty of throwing off the yoke of unpalatable Governors.'[36] The argument, which we find with variations again in early twentieth-century contemporaries including Lugard and Clifford, represents a quite widespread view among the imperial class that liberal educational policies, intended to strengthen the loyalties of the subject peoples, might have had the opposite effect.

Strickland, in the interest of his career, executes a trope of ignorance, turning back from the frontier of knowledge. Had he pressed on, the gulfs might indeed have washed him down. Kipling gives us an example of the Faustian damnation awaiting a man who pursues knowledge of the Orient too far. This is McIntosh Jellaludin in 'To be Filed for Reference', the last story in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. He is a man who has sacrificed everything — career, status, reputation, prosperity, friends, health — to pursue knowledge, and is thoroughly assimilated and 'sunk' into the East, adopting an Oriental name, wife, and religion, and living in poverty and dirt as a Mahommedan *fakir*. 'He used actually to laugh at Strickland as an ignorant man — "ignorant West and East" — he said.'[37] The point about McIntosh Jellaludin is that his knowledge takes away his Englishness (which survives in scraps of classical learning and a pompous way of speech), and destroys him. In the end he is wasted, helpless, on his deathbed, and he entrusts 'the Book' of his experience to the narrator, who is quick to disclaim responsibility for it: 'McIntosh Jellaludin and not I myself wrote the Book of Mother Maturin'.[38] In the end, Kipling never published the book whose paternity he denies in this story, and which was to contain his knowledge of the Indian underworld. It seems his father advised against it.

36. The Earl of Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*, 106.
37. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 275.
38. Ibid., 277.

Not knowing the Oriental

'Knowing the Oriental' was essential in order to control the Orient. But knowing the Oriental too well weakened that epistemological and political barrier whose function was to keep people, rulers and ruled, in their proper places; to put it a little differently, as Bart Moore-Gilbert does, 'the very forms of knowledge which imperialism generates and on which it relies depend on a dialogue with native culture, which allows the native subject to turn those discourses back against the dominant power'.[39] Ignorance, and a protestation that the East was fundamentally unknowable, might be a strategy for avoiding too assimilative a contact, and too symmetrical a dialogue, with it. Here those most anxious to preserve their authority over the East found common ground with those who wanted no such authority in the first place: Eastern ways were none of their business. And yet the very strangeness of that other world was an irresistible provocation; and so the dialectic sways through the discourse, the desire to trope, the risk of being troped in turn. There the East was, in its fascination, seemingly wanting to be known, not just textually but experientially. If a character like Strickland risks a Faustian fate, his courage and curiosity also make him a hero, faced with a temptation of the kind Tennyson's (and Dante's) Ulysses was familiar with.

Who could resist? Not Trejago, in Kipling's 'Beyond the Pale', who gains access to the world of the pretty Indian widow Bisesa through his knowledge of Oriental topography, language, and customs. He stumbles at night, in the Oriental disguise of a boorkah, up a dark alley where Europeans never go, and woos her in her own language at the bedroom window through which he will be given access to her. Trejago knows Bisesa, penetrating in secret into the sequestered world where he has discovered her. Yet when tragedy strikes and her family take a terrible revenge, Trejago does not know *enough* to rescue her. The window is barred against him, and he cannot even find the front door of the house where she is being kept, and punished, 'in the City where each man's house is as guarded and as unknowable as the grave'.[40]

It had seemed Trejago's knowledge had opened the mysteries of the Orient to him, but in fact he had scarcely broached it, gaining access instead into a potentially infinite regress of the unknown, a *mise-en-abîme*. Bisesa's voice speaking poetry in the darkness, which at their first encounter he had understood and answered, is at their last encounter just an inarticulate sobbing, one of those horrifying uninterpretable sounds — we could also adduce the echoes in the Marabar Caves and in Bubbling Well — described by Homi Bhabha as 'the

39. Bart Moore-Gilbert, 'Reading Kipling, Reading Bhabha', *Writing India 1757–1990*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 117.
40. Ibid., 167.

inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate'.[41] Beyond the reach of Trejago's Orientalist knowledge, out of his sight, stretches the Oriental interior — the inside of Durga Charan's house, where the mutilated Bisesa must spend the rest of her life, being a spatial figure here for that vast Hinterland of experience forever receding before Trejago and his kind. Knowing the Oriental too intimately could be risky; on the other hand, the Oriental can never be known *enough*.[42] The desire to know, and the self-protective swerve from knowing, alike produce an inadequacy of knowledge.

This area of darkness, immeasurable and invincibly strange, is the other kind of ignorance — we might call it sublime ignorance — that besets Western writing about the experience of the Orient, punctuating it with blind spots, indecipherable signals, untranslatability, impenetrable thickets of the unknown, beyond representation, gestured at throughout colonial and Orientalist discourse with helpless capitulations to the mysterious, the inscrutable, the ineffable, the veiled East. The mapping (not the filling in) of these blank spaces is a project that could tell us a good deal about the history of Western attempts to know the Oriental. The vaunted imperial gaze, usually taken as a trope of complacent possession, is often contemplating something it will never know and cannot represent, something that always escapes into its own life beyond.

Kipling, again and finally, gives a sort of emblem of this in one of his earliest stories, 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1885), an atmospheric piece in which the narrator, one sweltering sleepless night, wanders the city of Lahore, taking in its sights. 'The pitiless Moon shows it all.'[43] He climbs one of the minarets of the Mosque of Wazir Khan, which affords him a panoptic view of the moonlit scene exposed before him. We may recognize this as a variation on the triumphalist 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' vantage, influentially analyzed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*.[44] This is a story about appropriation and knowledge. The city is converted into Western discourse, textualized and rebaptized with the title of a

41. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Articulating the Archaic', *The Location of Culture,* 123–38; 124.

42. 'Beyond the Pale' is presented as a cautionary tale about a man who 'knew too much' (the same phrase as was to be applied to Strickland) and 'saw too much' (ibid., 162), but complicated by the fact that the narrator who makes these judgements is manifestly at least as knowledgeable about 'native life' as Trejago, since otherwise he would not be able to tell the story properly. See Bart Moore-Gilbert's discussion in his 'Introduction' to *Writing India 1757–1990*, 12–17.

43. *Life's Handicap*, 273. There are extremely interesting similarities between this scene of the contemplation of moonlit Oriental sleepers, and Chapter 3 of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, in which Jim on the bridge of the Patna looks down on the Muslim pilgrims asleep on deck.

44. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 201–08.

fashionable Victorian poem: Kipling, or his narrator, seems to make the city his own. The minaret itself is a modality. Up there, the colonial interloper occupies the commanding perspective of one of the mightiest religions of the East. The inhabitants of the city exist in the story as a spectacle for his contemplation, and in the moonlight they seem ghostly, like the dead, less fully human than their observer. But while this tale, written at the very beginning of Kipling's career, is a story of the authoritative colonial vantage, it is also about ignorance, not knowing the Oriental.

> The Muezzin stumbles down the dark stairway grumbling in his beard. He passes the arch of the entrance and disappears. Then the stifling silence settles down over the City of Dreadful Night. The kites on the Minar sleep again, snoring more loudly, the hot breeze comes up in puffs and lazy eddies, and the Moon slides down towards the horizon. Seated with both elbows on the parapet of the tower, one can watch and wonder over that heat-tortured hive till the dawn. 'How do they live down there? What do they think of? When will they awake?'[45]

His exalted viewpoint endows him with knowledge of the East only in the form of questions to which he has no answers.

45. *Life's Handicap*, 275.

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