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Conor McCarthy

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Edward Said and Authority:
From Conrad to *Orientalism* and Beyond
Conor McCarthy

Abstract: This essay elucidates the nature and function of the concept of authority in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The term first emerges in *Beginnings*, though Said formulates it more fully in *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*. This essay explains how Said arrives at the concept of authority and develops it via thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, how the concept functions in *Orientalism*, and how it ramifies in later work, including *Culture and Imperialism*, *Musical Elaborations*, and *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. The essay concludes by suggesting that *On Late Style* offers a powerful auto-critique of the concept at the end of Said's career.

Keywords: Said, authority, molestation, empire

The concept of authority was crucial to Edward Said, and the term appears repeatedly in his work across his career, from *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966) to *Musical Elaborations* (1991) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said's writing on "late style" represents a significant revision of the concept of authority, or, more accurately, a new form of authority, which I will refer to briefly at the conclusion of this essay. One could reasonably argue that the fundamental theme of *Orientalism* (1978) is authority, though Said conflates the term with other phraseology in that text, as I will detail below. Authority is one of the primary concepts Said deploys to figure power as mediated or delivered in the realm of culture, yet the term has mostly been neglected in studies of Said so far. I will show here that the term is not only

important to Said's readings of literature, criticism, and music but is also one of the major continuities in his work.

This essay argues that Said develops his concept of authority both in and through his study of Joseph Conrad's life and career. In *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Said not only offers a study of the Polish novelist but also takes from his subject some of the central ideas and themes that he will go on to theorise more explicitly in his subsequent books.

"Authority" is not a term that originates with Said, but he gives it particular inflections and uses. The idea of authority has a well-known history in political theory, where its conceptualization goes back to Roman political thought. In modernity, thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Alexandre Kojève, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt have all contributed to the elaboration of authority. In his classic essay "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), Max Weber formulates various forms of authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-bureaucratic. Generally, authority is legitimate power or right. Said sees authority as related to power, but authority is richer, more subtle, and more capacious: he suggests it is "a more interesting and various idea than power" (*The World* 168). For a literary critic, of course, the relationship between "authorship" and "authority" makes the concept particularly useful and valuable, as this etymological link permits a connection to be established between literary and worldly power.

The importance of authority to Said is clear not only in the concept's longevity in his work (and this is no minor matter for a critic often seen as theoretically eclectic) but also in the ways it underpins Said's understanding of some of the largest frameworks he considers—matters such as the historical process, writerly and intellectual agency, and imperialism and radical resistance to it. Like any strong critical concept, authority produces in Said's work both blindness and insight, strength and weakness. The term permits Said to figure literary production as a balance of forces: "The realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women and social movements to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of

critics" (*The World* 5). Conversely, the same term, in an exorbitance of the realm of the literary, allows Said only a culturalist (as opposed to materialist) conception of the origins of imperialism, as I will show in this essay.

In *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (henceforth *JCFA*), Said does not yet use the term "authority," but he is deeply concerned with its creation. Accordingly, I argue that Said's study of Conrad is foundational for much of the rest of his work and career. Most studies of Said's work concentrate on what they consider his postcolonial criticism, namely *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, but a full understanding of these books requires a proper examination of the works with which he launched his career—*JCFA* and *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975)—and the essays (some of them collected in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* [1983]) that he published in the 1970s. In these texts, Said devises the theoretical equipment which would largely serve him thereafter.

The formulation of authority in Said's early works is also noteworthy in that *JCFA* and *Beginnings* are very rarely cited in postcolonial studies. But a crucial element of the intellectual apparatus with which Said would write those classic texts of postcolonial criticism is devised with the greatest richness in his earlier books. A close examination of those earlier books also shows that while Said's analyses of "postcolonial" texts—such as Conrad's short fictions, Conrad's *Nostromo* (subject to a long and brilliant reading in *Beginnings*), or T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (also in *Beginnings*)—have been overshadowed by the later overtly postcolonial work, clear hints of the later work are visible on the surface of the early studies.

JCFA is a reading of Conrad's short fiction and letters. Influenced by the phenomenological criticism of the Geneva School, Said argues that the dramatic narrative of Conrad's mind may be read in and through those texts. Such a criticism is dependent on a philosophical understanding of biography and a subtending model of the writerly subject, both of which are crucial for Said's reading of literary texts and to his understanding of his critical and intellectual selfhood. Said further develops this angle on Conrad through Conrad's own reading of the

pessimistic will philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). So Conrad is both the object of study in *JCEA* and a model of the author and hence authority, which Said spends much of the rest of his career using, developing, and ultimately dismantling.

The contexts of Conrad's life were unusually dramatic, including his geographical movement and felt exile; his linguistic shifts from Polish to French to English; his maritime career with its extraordinary travel, real physical dangers, and rigours of teamwork and hierarchy; the changing political scenes that he witnessed and experienced; and the exhilarating and terrifying conditions of modernity more broadly, culminating in the First World War. These elements made for a vision of life as a series of battles or struggles. Said shows how Conrad fought these battles, both with himself and in his relations with the external world. Most of all, Said displays how Conrad related his personal fate to the wider world in textual and linguistic terms. Citing Richard Curle's suggestion that Conrad was absorbed "in the whole mechanism of existence," Said suggests that the Polish writer "consciously felt a large measure of unrestful submission to the complexities of life, on the one hand and, on the other, that he remained interested in the submission not as a *fait accompli* but as a constantly renewed act of living, a *condition humanisée* and not as a *condition humaine*" (*JCEA* 5–6). Conrad's view of life—his own life—can therefore be described as dialectical, a constant interplay of inner and exterior self with each other and with worldly circumstances. Each self is made and re-made in a constant iteration and reiteration. Conrad's life, Said writes, is "a continuous exposure of his sense of himself to a sense of what is not himself" (9). Conrad had the courage to risk a full confrontation with what he regarded, mostly, as a threatening and recalcitrant world. This confrontation also has a literary analogy, for Said: "a habitual verbal exercise . . . whose purpose is to arbitrate the relations between a problematic subject and a dynamic object" (9). Truth was something to be won—or wrested—from this unfriendly world, with carefully chosen linguistic tools.

The struggle was at times shattering. For Conrad, the human condition is a tragic one, not because of its being the plaything of nature but because of its consciousness of the chaos of the world. In the end, Conrad

wrote to his close friend, the radical Scottish politician and traveller R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, that “[t]here is no morality, no knowledge and no hope: there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that, whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating experience” (qtd. in Said, *JCEA* 31). Conrad relentlessly cut down the younger Cunninghame-Graham’s philosophical optimism: “Into the noblest causes, men manage to put something of their baseness” (qtd. in Said, *JCEA* 32). This sense of idealism as undermined by base motive and of the proximity and even mutual inherence of good and evil was, of course, crucial for Conrad, but I will show how it was also productive for Said.

The most alarming and striking version of Conrad’s pessimistic vision is in his famous concept of “the knitting machine,” which also appears in his correspondence with Cunninghame-Graham. The knitting machine is Conrad’s model of existence and the world as abandoned by God and unmarked by humanity, without structure, principle, direction—arbitrary and indifferent, lacking in some grand design, *Geist*, or intention. Nowadays we might say that it is a negative vision of the historical process without a subject, so beloved of structuralism and post-structuralism. Conrad writes:

You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself: made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident—and it has happened. You can’t interfere with it. . . . It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions,—and nothing matters. (Qtd. in Jean-Aubry 216)

Against the knitting machine model, Conrad believed he must find and deploy resources of character or “claims of individuality.” To challenge the anonymous mindless authority of the knitting machine, he strove to create, in the form of his own character, a personal authority. It is in repeated grappling with the exigencies of the knitting machine that the writer forms his work and himself and makes his own authority.

But any attained authority is also constantly subject to erosion. In the preface to *JCEA*, Said notes “a curious phenomenon in Conrad’s life[:] . . . the creation of a public personality that was to camouflage his deeper and more problematic difficulties with himself and with his work” (xix). Furthermore, Conrad insisted that artistic distinction was most likely to be attained in brief works (his short stories or “tales”) and, more personally, that his life was composed of so many detached or semi-connected elements that he gravitated towards short narratives as a way to express himself most effectively. Conrad was also conscious that he had more control over his material in short works. Introducing the first chapter of *JCEA*, Said quotes a letter to Conrad from his friend Henry James, sent on the occasion of the publication of Conrad’s memoir *The Mirror of the Sea*: “No one has *known*—for intellectual use—the things you know, and you have as artist of the whole matter, an authority no one has approached” (3; emphasis in original). Yet *The Mirror of the Sea* should be read, Said suggests, as an unusually confident rhetorical performance by a writer whose mostly hidden inner sense, as revealed by the letters, is of a constant (though evolving), desperate struggle to attain meaning in language. Conrad’s solution to this struggle is more and more writing: “Je ne vois rien, je ne lis rien. C’est comme une espèce de tombe, qui serait en même temps un enfer, où il faut écrire, écrire, écrire” (“I see nothing, I read nothing. It is like a sort of tomb, which would be a hell, where one must write, write, write”) (Conrad qtd. in Said, *JCEA* 51).

Writing, for Conrad, is a search for meaning or for mimetic representation. Its perpetual failure can only call forth more writing. In existentialist terms, Conrad is “condemned to meaning.” But Said’s determination to read the Polish writer’s stories alongside his letters—which show Conrad’s inner life as it evolved, grew, and passed from crisis to crisis—might be understood as an attempt to read the struggle to live in dialectical relation to the struggle to find meaning in that living. Said takes from Conrad a profoundly subversive, modernist sense of the slipperiness, evasiveness, and density of language, its capacity to obscure as much as it reveals. In Andrew Rubin’s apt formulation, “[l]iterary activity is essentially a process of capturing the particularity

of words that disappear in a spectral opacity before they may be briefly embodied in any form at all” (xi). Or, as Said puts it in the later superb essay “Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative,” “what Conrad discovered was that the chasm between words saying and words meaning was widened, not lessened, by a talent for words written. To have chosen to write, then, is to have chosen in a particular way neither to say directly nor to mean exactly in the way he had hoped to say or to mean” (90).

If James sees Conrad as knowing things for intellectual use—with a certain authority—Conrad is aware of this knowledge, but for him it is always haunted, shadowed, hollowed by its opposite: Said writes that he was “bothered by the elegance of a rich narrative that went forward so smoothly and at the same time withheld its inner workings” (*JCFA* 8). Said’s interest in Conrad’s letters involved getting at the writer’s own felt but only privately revealed “inner workings.” For Said, “the real adventure of Conrad’s life is the effort to rescue significance and value in their ‘struggling forms’ from within his own existence” (*JCFA* 10). Crucial to Conrad was the need to make “character”—indeed to “rescue” himself—and such rescue is a major theme of his short fiction. But “[c]haracter is what enables the individual to make his way through the world, the faculty of rational self-possession that regulates the exchange between the world and the self; the more cogent the identity, the more certain a course of action” (*JCFA* 12). Character, that is, is what equips the individual to cope with the chaos of the world as he finds it and struggles with it. Said identifies three major phases in Conrad’s dramatization of this struggle in his letters and fiction. The first encompasses his most experimental writing, up to 1914. The second, an “interlude,” lasts from 1914 to the end of the Great War. And the final phase, in which Conrad attains a kind of resolution (at great personal cost), stretches from 1918 to his death in 1924. Said argues that in each phase, Conrad attains “character” in different ways, with differing results.

For Conrad, to build a character, both his own and a literary one, requires the acquisition of a kind of self-control, which delivers a form of power or authority. Conrad achieved this frequently through an act of will. Notably, Conrad’s experience in the Belgian Congo in 1890 was grim to the point of making him write that existence might become

bearable only by hollowing out the heart and emotion of his humanity (Said, *JCEA* 18). Rationality or a kind of rational will might help one bear the pain of existence, but such pain would also push that rationality up against its own limits. Self-mastery could be achieved, according to Conrad, through the discipline and self-abnegation of work. By the end of 1894, Said suggests, Conrad had “finally managed to create a spiritual and intellectual realm whose worth depended on his mastery of it” (*JCEA* 27). Yet there was a cost to this mastery: the Congo experience showed how fragile this sense of control might be and also how closely it might be affiliated with its loss.

To this vision Said attaches the idea of the will, as taken from Schopenhauer. The German pessimist’s thought is particularly relevant here.¹ Schopenhauer’s model of the subject provides strong underpinnings for Conrad’s need for mastery of himself and his materials. Said notes the importance to Conrad of such Schopenhauerian themes as subjective correlatives, the will to live, and art as a mode of play within the play that is life (*JCEA* 102): “We can see . . . how Conrad was able courageously to articulate, after the example of Schopenhauer, . . . the artistic cosmology of narrative fiction and its dependence on the recollecting subjective consciousness, in this way seeking salvation from the terrible will to live that enslaves every human being” (102–03).

Schopenhauer, as part of his break with the Idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, theorises the world as formed primarily out of “will,” a mindless, directionless impulse at the root of all being, devoid of all rationality.² Humans are aware of their own bodies as a primary object, but the body is encountered in two ways—as “will” and as “representation.” Will is the experience of self as lived; representation is the experience of that body as if from the outside. Schopenhauer held this double vision of his own body as a way of surmising the function of all objects and bodies—they are all to be thought of as both will and representation. The world as will is the world as it is in itself, a unity; the world as representation is the world of appearances. Schopenhauer’s will maps onto Conrad’s knitting machine, as an endless, directionless,

unconscious striving. In this model, there is no divine presence, and the world is inherently meaningless. For Schopenhauer, it is human striving that creates meaning, but this is effected in struggle and violence. Hence Schopenhauer's famous pessimism: we are the products of our own epistemological creation and can only ever produce a radically perspectival view of the world.

Said also surmises that Conrad was familiar with the work of British Idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley. For Bradley, all human action takes the form of self-realisation. Action cannot be explained a priori but must be understood in concrete human situations as a series of iterations—as what Said calls ways of “having’ the world” (Said, *JCEA* 108). Said compares this to Schopenhauer's distinctions between the intelligible, the empirical, and the acquired character:

We have a sense of ourselves within us (intelligible); when put into practice (empirical) this sense is modified; and when put within the framework of the society in which we live, it becomes further modified (acquired). As a result of the interplay between the individual and the world, we endow ourselves with a sense of ethical and psychological self-location (comparable to Bradley's “station”), which in most cases stays with us all our lives. But, according to Conrad, there may be a shocking unsettlement that disrupts the continuity of our hold upon life. Then we willingly fly into the new order we discern and try somehow to relocate ourselves in it. (108–09)

Said sees this mental drama played out in a number of Conrad's most famous earlier fictions, including “Amy Falk,” *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* and *Heart of Darkness*. In each case, an individual mind or group (the crew in *The Nigger*) encounter the action of an Other and attempts to make sense of it: “The categorizing sensibility, insufficiently prepared and uneasy in its sterile calm, rejects and modifies what it cannot manifestly accept” (Said, *JCEA* 111). The result is that “[t]he gradual withering of intellectual capacity for disinterested perception begins in outraged shame, moves to frenetic speculation, and ends in the

darkness of almost inhuman solitude” (111). Conrad’s reader is then led to ask: Does the mind seek order or truth? It would seem that attaining both at once may be impossible.

Said concludes from this that if the “categorizing mind” succeeds in imposing itself arrogantly on the surrounding world, then only emptiness will seem to be left outside. Yet this is not what the human ego wishes for: “every act of life, no matter how direct, natural and self-sufficient, demands intellectual recognition in the consciousness of every person who is involved in it” (112). And so

life is the egoistic assertion of one’s existence so that others will feel it. If the world is a conflict of wilful egoisms, as Schopenhauer saw it, then the need for recognition is the original egoism, the root from which everything else springs. In seeking the kinship of reflective understanding, however, the performer of an action inevitably is forced to reduce himself to a level below the normal limits of active human life. There is a draining of strength as the past action is sapped of all content by the reflecting present. Only the surrounding darkness remains substantially palpable. (112)

Though Said is not at this point writing a socio-historical criticism, it is important to note how he nevertheless reads wider social or even political implications in Schopenhauer. Said comprehends Conrad’s nightmare vision of the world’s mindless but relentless processes and activity in the knitting machine in Schopenhauerean terms. People become the machine’s unconscious servants, channelling its energies, “colonizing whatever is dark and different from them” (Said, *JCEA* 139). The machine creates individualities while also creating “the false ‘light’ with which these individuals illuminate, reform and reorder everything” (139). But the machine is man-made: it is “Conrad’s version of what Schopenhauer had uncompromisingly distinguished as the *principium individuationis*, the principle of differentiation that is man’s—and not the universe’s—power” (139). Said then glosses Schopenhauer’s gloomy portrayal of civilization as a product of ego:

Without thought, Schopenhauer had said, man is in almost mystic and passive community with shadowy truth. In that state man is at one with the unextended, unimagined and formless will to live. Yet as soon as man begins to use his intellect, he asserts his ego and becomes objectified will. The highest form of objectified will is civilized man; the most typical faculty of his mind is the power of intellectual differentiation (the *principium*); and the highest level of differentiation is the ability to say “the world is my idea.” (139)

In a hint of the culturalist critique of empire to come, Said then notes that the “trouble with unrestrained and militant egoism as Conrad saw it was that it becomes an imperialism of ideas, which easily converts itself into the imperialism of nations” (140). What will most interest Said in his readings of intellectuals, culture, and empire is the way that a writer or critic establishes authority over his or her materials. That authority will be based on the Conradian/Schopenhauerian model he delineates in *JCFA*. Though in later books such as *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, authority is more explicitly a political matter, Said’s thinking is still rooted in this earlier model of the writing subject and its efforts toward self-control and textual control.

In *Beginnings*, Said sets out his theory on authority without recourse to Schopenhauer, but he passes through a formidable range of other thinkers who meditate on the initiation of writing and cerebration, among them Søren Kierkegaard, Giambattista Vico, Erich Auerbach, Michel Foucault, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The problem of authority, however, is the same as the one he discusses in *JCFA*, and unsurprisingly, one of the centrepieces of *Beginnings* is a long and superb reading of *Nostromo*. *Beginnings* is also a highly reflexive text, in a way that *JCFA* is not. So it not only contains rich and powerful analyses of writers and intellectuals and their modes of beginning their projects, but it also represents a series of exercises or meditations by Said on his own act of beginning. It is here, most overtly, that Said anticipates, designs, and in a very strong sense *authorises* his career to come. Where *JCFA* had placed a premium on a phenomenological approach to the writing subject and

his authority, in *Beginnings* the stress is on textuality and the textual conditions of beginning. But to begin anything is to stake a claim to authority, and so the two terms—"beginning" and "authority"—are significantly linked. Said illustrates the book's purpose not merely through its argument but also through its form: it "begins by explicitly venturing a particular ambition for itself, an ambition that finally becomes intelligible only in the book's unfolding . . . and finally in seeking to learn from itself, to adjust to and change itself in progress" (*Beginnings* 4). *Beginnings* is a performative text that authorises its own discussions of beginning authority. Such a tautologous formulation is essential to Said's project, and it also accounts for some of the project's weaknesses.

At base, Saidian beginning authority turns on the act of will of a human subject to act in one manner (and therefore not in a whole range of other ways). The kinds of beginnings of greatest interest to Said are those which initiate critical, philosophical, or analytical projects (such as his own), as well as those embodied, dramatised, and enacted in the modern novel. *Beginnings*, in fact, though far too few critics have noticed this, offers a major theory of the novel form.³ According to Said, the novel—though not only the novel—expresses one's wish to create alternative realities, partly as a result of confronting empirical reality. Though *Beginnings*, in its first five chapters, moves through a roughly chronological pattern from the nineteenth century to modernism and then to postmodernism, it is not a historical study. This, for Said, is because of its focus on textuality, and indeed *Beginnings* is principally interested in the realm of writing as the zone in which acts of authority and authorisation take place. While *Orientalism* affiliates textual authority directly with authority beyond the text, in this earlier book the stress is on writing as a sphere with its own internal politics, a practice not only aspiring to representation but also having a density and materiality of its own. The writing act seeks to compete with reality for the reader's attention. Writing is a kind of displacement—texts dislodge other earlier or rival texts in a constant worldly battle for readerly consent, for supremacy or authority.

Said initially defines authority as "explicit and implicit rules of pertinence," which "[e]very sort of writing establishes . . . for itself" (*Beginnings*

16). Said uses “authority” both in its juridical sense and as meaning and permitting generation, continuity, paternity.⁴ Yet as we might expect from its Conradian/Schopenhauerean antecedents, Saidian authority is not without its discontents. These Said collects under the heading of “molestation.” Molestation is that which impedes writing and undermines authority, whether somehow internal to the authorising subject or a force or impediment from the outside, though this can have productive effects. No writing emerges entirely free, innocent, or unshackled: “In the movement from a dream of pure authority to a jolting molestation that brings writing back to its existence as a text, there is invention” (24).

Said’s linkage between authority and power becomes most obvious when he sets out, in the manner of Leo Spitzer or Auerbach, a learned and multilingual etymology for the term authority:

Authority suggests to me a constellation of linked meanings: not only, as the OED tells us, “a power to enforce obedience,” or “a derived or delegated power,” or “a power to influence action,” or “a power to inspire belief,” or “a person whose opinion is accepted”; not only those, but a connection as well with *author*—that is, a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements. There is still another cluster of meanings: author is tied to the past participle *auctus* of the verb *augere*; therefore *auctor* . . . is literally an increaser and thus a founder. *Auctoritas* is production, invention, cause, in addition to meaning a right of possession. Finally, it means continuance, or a causing to continue. Taken together these meanings are all grounded in the following notions: 1) that of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish—in short, to begin; 2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; 3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom; 4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course. (*Beginnings* 83; emphasis in original)

“Invention” is synonymous with Saidian authority, and so also molestation is synonymous with restraint. That restraint on authority can take various forms, but at its simplest, molestation is the awareness writers—or narrators—have that their authority is a sham or, as I note above, a necessary fiction: “Molestation . . . is a consciousness of one’s duplicity, one’s confinement to a fictive, scriptive realm. . . . [M]olestation occurs when novelists and critics traditionally remind themselves of how the novel is always subject to a comparison with reality and thereby found to be illusion” (84).

My argument, slowly accumulated, is that Said deploys the terms authority and molestation—owing their first iteration to his reading of Conrad and Schopenhauer—in a variety of related ways across the rest of his major writings. Sometimes the linkage is clear, even obvious. “Authority” in *Orientalism* has become, as Said notes in the 1985 preface to *Beginnings*, “hegemony,” Antonio Gramsci’s wonderfully labile term for ideological leadership and power. In this preface to *Beginnings*, Said elaborates the link between his study of the novel as a form of authority derived from a desire to mime in fiction the human life process (of birthing, continuity, and death) on the one hand and a theory of authority that highlights paternity, authorship, and power on the other. This link is “extendable,” he writes in 1985, to the social history of intellectual practices, including discourses of truth and power about the “Other.” And this extension, he says, led to a theory of hegemony in modern society (*Beginnings* xiii).

The isomorphism of authority and hegemony becomes explicit in *Orientalism*. This accounts for the much more overtly “worldly” (to use a term of Said’s) formulation of authority in the later book:

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental; it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions and judgements it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed. (Said, *Orientalism* 19–20)

In *Orientalism*, Said creates two new terms for discussing authority. “Strategic location” refers to “the author’s position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about,” and “strategic formation” is “a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large” (20). The second of these terms bears the traces of Said’s mobilisation of Gramsci at this stage of his career: the purpose of formulating and studying strategic formation is to show how Orientalist texts—as well as Orientalist concepts, motifs, themes, and frameworks—bleed into and form part of the overall hegemonic ideological bloc in a Western imperial or post-imperial society. But strategic location is effectively a synonym for authority as earlier theorized: he refers to the problem “every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions” (20). Crucial here for Said is the manner in which an (Orientalist) author gains by textual means a kind of grasp of the Orient:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. (20)

The problem delineated here—how writers approach, face, and master their material; how writers then address the reader on, about, and for this material; and finally, having attained mastery of their material, how their self-presentation amounts to a self-created position in the world—is exactly the issue Said traced so carefully in his study of Conrad.

Said uses this idea of authority to discuss and analyse a discourse that exists and has existed in a very particular proximity to political power. Here, we might say, we see the affiliation of “the imperialism of ideas” to

the “imperialism of nations” (to use two of Said’s phrases from *JCEA*). But it is important to attend closely to the manner in which Said describes this close relationship:

[Orientalism] is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power. (*Orientalism* 12; emphasis in original)

It is easy to see the inheritances here from the idea of authority as formulated in *Beginnings*: the stress on will and intention and the emphasis on the ontological level of being as against expression. Furthermore, there is the sense that Orientalism emanates as if from a subject, though it is a process without such a coherent centre. If this recalls Conrad’s knitting machine or Schopenhauer’s world of will, then so much the better. Said’s early discussion of Lord Cromer displays a particularly telling example of the Orientalist worldview. In the essay “The Government of Subject Races,” published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1908,⁵ Cromer meditates on the interplay between the local agent of the empire, with his close and specific knowledge, and the need for centralisation and regularity in government. The local agent may act in ways that run against imperial interests, but the central authority can obviate this problem: it can “ensure the harmonious working of the different parts of the machine” and “should endeavour . . . to realise the circumstances attendant

on the government of the dependency” (qtd. in Said, *Orientalism* 44). How is this to be ensured? As Said writes,

Cromer envisions a seat of power in the West, and radiating out from it towards the East a great embracing machine, sustaining the central authority yet commanded by it. What the machine’s branches feed into it in the East—human material, material wealth, knowledge, what have you—is processed by the machine, then converted into more power. The specialist does the immediate translation of mere Oriental matter into useful substance: the Oriental becomes, for example, a subject race, an example of an “Oriental” mentality, all for the enhancement of the “authority” at home. “Local interests” are Oriental special interests, the “central authority” is the general interest of the imperial society as a whole. (*Orientalism* 44)

This “machine” is surely a version of Conrad’s knitting machine, though now instrumentalised and working in a particular direction and posture.

This apparatus of authority, which helps produce the authority of the Orientalist at the same time as it produces the authority of an imperial system, appears again in Said’s 1985 essay “Orientalism Reconsidered.” Responding to the bewildering variety of reactions to *Orientalism*, Said sets out in this essay the metahistorical question underlying the book’s project. The discipline of Orientalism, he argues, has been underpinned by the intellectual tradition of historicism associated with Vico, Hegel, Karl Marx, Leopold von Ranke, and Wilhelm Dilthey. This tradition asserts that history has been made by human beings and can be understood in any given epoch as possessing a complex but ascertainable unity:

So far as Orientalism in particular and the European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism meant that the one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe or the West. What was neither observed by

Europe nor documented by it was, therefore, “lost” until, at some later date, it too could be incorporated by the new sciences of anthropology, political economics and linguistics. (Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered” 209–10)

Said’s point is that even radical and critical historiographic projects of more recent vintage—such as the world histories or world systems theory of Fernand Braudel, Perry Anderson, or Immanuel Wallerstein—have been oddly incurious about their own dependency on an Orientalist-historicist theoretical foundation, at the root of which is the mode of authority discussed in *Orientalism*. And so he is led to ask why there has never been

an epistemological critique of the connection between the development of a historicism which has expanded and developed enough to include antithetical attitudes such as ideologies of Western imperialism and critiques of imperialism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the actual practice of imperialism by which the accumulation of territories and population, the control of economies, and the incorporation and homogenization of histories are maintained. (“Orientalism Reconsidered” 210)

The result of the failure to ask such questions is that even the new radical historical approaches have been dependent on “the same percipient and historicist observer who had been an Orientalist or colonial traveler three generations ago” (210)—that is, the possessor of Orientalist authority. They also depend on a “homogenizing and incorporating world historical scheme,” which can assimilate “non-synchronous developments, histories, cultures and peoples to it” (210). And they block emergent or latent critiques of the “institutional, cultural and disciplinary instruments” that link the “incorporative practices” of world history to partial knowledges such as Orientalism on the one hand and the continuing Western domination of the global South on the other (210).

The “percipient and historicist observer” is what Said calls in the 1986 essay “Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World” a “meta-subject” located in the West, “whose historicizing and disciplinary rigor either took away

or, in the post-colonial period, restored, history to people and cultures ‘without’ history” (59). Said conceives this meta-subject in the same terms he derives from Conrad and Schopenhauer and then develops in *Beginnings*: it projects itself into the world, imposes its authority upon it, and can absorb and rework the resistances or molestations its will encounters so as to redevelop its “representation.”

One of the few texts in which Said comes closer to a more materialist vision of power and authority is his 1979 essay, “Reflections on American ‘Left’ Literary Criticism.” Said seeks to demonstrate in the essay that despite the force and brilliance of much modern American criticism—his main example is the austere and rigorous deconstructionist criticism of Paul de Man—it is trapped within a tendency towards refinement, which nullifies its radical or oppositional power. Fierce debates between M. H. Abrams and J. Hillis Miller obscure the fact that such critics share much more than what they dispute—in cultural preference, professional formation, and institutional location (Said, “Reflections” 160). Even Marxist criticism is circumscribed within a structure in which “[t]here is oppositional debate without real opposition” (160). This situation of an academicised opposition brings the risk that “Left” criticism contributes less to the dismantling of power or received knowledge than to its reinforcement (168).

Said’s approach to this problem is to deploy Gramsci’s ideas about the relationships between state power, hegemony, and intellectuals. To a great extent, Said argues, culture and intellectuals “exist by virtue of a very interesting network of relationships with the State’s almost absolute power” (Said, “Reflections” 169). He notes that “nearly everyone producing literary or cultural studies makes no allowance for the truth that all intellectual or cultural work occurs somewhere, at some time, on some very carefully mapped-out and permissible terrain, which is ultimately contained by the State” (169). For Gramsci, culture and ideas are produced to win the assent of their audiences and thereby form part of hegemony; to this extent they constitute a “quasi-autonomous extension of political reality” (Said, “Reflections” 171). Yet American “Left” criticism, Said claims, despite its formidable analytical equipment and its suspicious hermeneutics, has nothing to say about this linkage with the

state. Nowhere “does one encounter a serious study as to what authority is, either with reference to the way authority is carried historically and circumstantially from the State down into a society saturated with authority or with reference to the actual workings of culture, the role of intellectuals, institutions, and establishments” (Said, “Reflections” 172). What makes Gramsci especially appealing to Said is Gramsci’s sense, decades before Foucault, that authority as expressed through culture is not coercive or merely restrictive but rather “affirmative, positive and persuasive” (Said, “Reflections” 171). To this extent, “culture serves authority, and ultimately the national State” (Said, “Reflections” 171). So, as Said writes in *Orientalism*, authority must be analysed, which for him involves examining and bringing into relief the affiliative links that connect texts of even the most arcane or esoteric character to the social world, a process that also implicates the scholar who studies those texts. A criticism that fails to do this kind of work reinforces the “liberal consensus,” which is inattentive to the historical process that has produced and authorised the humanist as much as the text she studies and explicates (Said, “Reflections” 175).

I note here that though Gramsci was a Marxist thinker, he was hardly an economistic Marxist but rather a distinctly Hegelian and Crocean one. So the vision of the state that Said takes from Gramsci is sufficiently general and idealist to fit neatly with his prior adumbrations of the concept of authority. Indeed, it is not merely whimsical to suggest that with Said’s view of culture, criticism, and the state that I set out above, Said transported the Conradian knitting machine into the academy, just as he earlier discerned its presence and operation in Cromer’s embodiment of Orientalist authority.

Said’s readers and critics noted that with the publication of *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993, the Foucauldian influence which had been evident in *Orientalism*—chiefly in Said’s suggestion that Orientalism should be thought of as a discourse—was now almost entirely absent, but the presence of Marxist or quasi-Marxist critics such as Gramsci or Raymond Williams was considerably stronger.⁶ This was most obvious in Said’s interest in the geographical inscriptions of literary texts and the argument that texts such as Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Rudyard

Kipling's *Kim*, or the poetry of Yeats should be read for their affiliations to struggles over land and territory.

But Said's interest in empire remained lodged in the authority of texts and their function in contests over territory. One weakness of Said's vision of authority and the subject of power is its evident philosophical idealism—an idealism which is quite unable to examine empire in the structural, materialist, and ultimately economic terms that it requires. Accordingly, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said does not avail himself of the single most powerful tradition—both analytically and politically—for understanding and explaining empire: the Marxist tradition, running from Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg to David Harvey. Said declares repeatedly that “imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess” (*Culture* 5); that it is “supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (8; emphasis in original); and that “the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea of having an empire*” (10; emphasis in original). But he is left with oddly slack reasoning to account for the “initial . . . move toward empire from Europe to the rest of the world,” which he explains as “perhaps obscurely derived and motivated” (9). Even in this passage, the suggestion of “motivation” indicates a vision of empire as the expression of subjective will. Once Said confronts the issue of empire full square in *Culture and Imperialism*, his intellectual machinery transforms the “imperialism of nations” back into the “imperialism of ideas” (*JCFA* 140). Authority is a formidable instrument for analysing subject-positions within imperialist discourse, but it is too self-referential and subjective adequately to subtend generalisations about empire itself. This narrow focus on authority also leaves Said vulnerable to critique from Marxist theorists, most notoriously Aijaz Ahmad⁷ but also more recently Vivek Chibber. In “The Dual Legacy of Orientalism,” Chibber argues that *Orientalism* vacillates fatally between an argument that Orientalist discourse is the condition of possibility for Western imperialism and the countervailing view that Orientalist discourse is at best a reflection and post hoc justification for Western imperialism.

Accordingly, at the crux of *Culture and Imperialism* is a theory of the novel form that once again deploys the terms formulated in *JCFA* and *Beginnings*, though now the stress is more on authority than its molestations. Yet these ideas about authority and molestation are also re-coded. *Culture and Imperialism* is well-known for Said's deployment of a specific musical vocabulary to describe the kind of criticism he hopes to adopt—a "contrapuntal criticism." Such a criticism would attend, in the manner of music that contains many independent melodies, to the multifarious voices and ideological impulses in the literary text in question (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 59–60). This suggests a reformulated idea of authority and molestation—authority as always-already contested or resisted. But the structure of the two major central sections of the book, "Consolidated Vision" and "Resistance and Opposition," also suggests a redistribution of authority and molestation across major periods of cultural history—that authority came first and was followed by molestation.

Nevertheless, the Conradian model is still fundamental. Said makes a crucial statement of the book's thesis via the work not of a literary or political theorist but of a novelist. An early chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* offers "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*" (20–35). Said suggests that Conrad's great novella can be mined for two opposed approaches to understanding empire. On the one hand, Marlow acknowledges the inadequacy of all language to represent experience, let alone experience of the kind he has gone through; on the other hand, he still provides an overwhelming narrative of his journey up the great river to the "heart of darkness." As Said writes, "[w]hatever is lost or elided or even simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling recitation is compensated for in the narrative's sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward movement" (*Culture and Imperialism* 25). Within Marlow's tale of how he travelled to Kurtz's Inner Station, "whose source and authority he now becomes" (25), he moves backward and forward in recursive spirals, but these cannot gainsay the overall architecture of his story: all of these distractions—molestations—are incorporated into the forward trajectory, leading to the heart of it all, Kurtz's ivory-trading empire. Ultimately, Said argues, "Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's

great looting adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (25).

Yet as Said points out, Conrad's narratives and characters are never simply or overweeningly confident, correct, or "authoritative." Their authority is always compromised. Conrad saw his own narratives as "local to a time and a place, neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 28). Conrad "*dates*" (Said, *Culture* 28; emphasis in original) and locates imperialism, showing it to be specific to a historical moment and to emanate from a geographical location; to this extent, he demonstrates that imperialism would come to an end and was spatially limited, though he could not imagine or represent such an event. *Heart of Darkness* illustrates this situation principally in its form: Marlow's tale is itself staged, located temporally and spatially. Conrad's narrators tend to have a sense that language is slippery, obscuring as much as it reveals, and that this quality in the language of the ideals of empire causes those ideals to break down as fast as they are set up. Put more bluntly, the authority of empire—or of the imperial agent who narrates a Conradian story—is something that must be endlessly reiterated, such is the damaging anxiety hidden at its core: "For if Conrad can show that all human activity depends on controlling a radically unstable reality to which words approximate only by will or convention, the same is true of empire" (Said, *Culture* 33).

Setting out his conception of the relation of novel to empire more generally, Said notes that though Conrad's Marlow recognises that "the conquest of the earth . . . is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much," Marlow also suggests that what "redeems it is the idea only" (Conrad qtd. in Said, *Culture* 81). Said glosses this famous passage by arguing that "[r]edemption is found in the self-justifying practice of an idea or mission over time, in a structure that completely encircles and is revered by you, even though you set up the structure in the first place, ironically enough, and no longer study it closely because you take it for granted" (*Culture* 82). So Conrad captures two different but related aspects of imperialism: "the idea that is based on the power to take over territory, an idea utterly clear in its force and unmistakable

consequences; and the practice that essentially disguises or obscures this by developing a justificatory regime of self-aggrandizing self-originating authority interposed between the victim of imperialism and its perpetrator” (Said, *Culture* 82). From this analysis, Said makes the bold statement that “[w]ithout empire . . . there is no European novel as we know it” (82). Studying empire and the novel form together, according to Said, will reveal the “far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism” (82).

Said’s affiliation of novel and empire brings gains and costs. It elevates the importance and power of the novel as a genre (if it needed any further cultural validation), and it is perhaps the most trenchant expression of Said’s wish to argue for the “worldliness” of texts, including aesthetically refined literary texts. Not that Said had ever shown much doubt about this—in the original form of “The World, the Text, and the Critic,” published as an essay eighteen years earlier (in the same year as *Beginnings*), he points out that “texts are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange. They compel attention away from the world even as their beginning intention as texts, coupled with the inherent authoritarianism of the authorial authority . . . makes for sustained power” (*World* 45–46).⁸ But Said’s tendency to overstress the literary—as represented here by his wish to read empire more through Conrad than through Luxemburg or Arendt—is a reflection of his idealism and culturalism, which as I have already suggested, make him hard-pressed to explain the origins of imperialism except as a tautologically self-creating will to power, which constitutes either an individual writerly or intellectual subject or a national or metropolitan meta-subject that comprehends the world to dominate it.

In the last fifteen years of his life, Said developed a striking interest in and even identification with Theodor Adorno. This interest emerged in Said’s writing on music, most obviously in *Musical Elaborations*, but it has major implications for his prior theorizations of authority. Specifically, Said maps the earlier thematic of authority and molestation onto Adorno’s portrayal of the culture industry as an apparatus

of domination. Then, from the mid-1990s, Said starts to write about “late style,” a theme he ascribes to Adorno’s 1937 essay “Late Style in Beethoven.” The Adornian strain in Said thus comes in two phases. In *Musical Elaborations*, Said stresses Adorno’s gloomy view of even classical music as a cultural institution fully incorporated into the “culture industry,” and therefore as partaking of domination or, we might say, authority. Via resources taken from Gramsci, Said sets up a resistance to or molestation of Adorno’s grim prognostications. But in his work on late style—which encompasses not only the essays collected and edited by Michael Wood in the posthumous book *On Late Style* but also material such as the long essay at the heart of *Freud and the Non-European* and the magisterial essays “Travelling Theory Reconsidered” and “On Lost Causes,” both collected in *Reflections on Exile*—Said finds in Adorno an extraordinary resource for the most profound reformulation in his career of the writerly/intellectual subject.

Said opens the first chapter of *Musical Elaborations*, “Performance as an Extreme Occasion,” with a quotation from the brilliant American critic Richard Poirier, which dramatises Said’s Conradian-Schopenhauerean idea of authority in the most striking way: “Performance is an exercise of power, a very anxious one. Curious because it is at first so furiously self-consultive, so even narcissistic, and later so eager for publicity, love and historical dimensions. Out of an accumulation of secretive acts emerges at last a form that presumes to compete with reality itself for control of the mind exposed to it” (Poirier qtd. in Said, *Musical* 1). But performance is also “an action which must go through passages that both impede the action and give it form” (Poirier qtd. in Said, *Musical* 2). Here Said includes many of the elements that I note above—the act of power that is shadowed by self-conscious anxiety; authority eroded by molestation; the sense of a self-created and self-involved entity, which nevertheless seeks to project itself into and attain power over the external world, to replace reality in the perception of its audience. Said uses Poirier’s superb formulation to move into a discussion of Adorno’s severe critique of the fetishisation of the musical virtuoso—the idea that the audience for a great soloist, vocal or instrumental, is overwhelmed by what it hears and sees, overborne by technical accomplishment and skill

of a kind unattainable by any ordinary person, and rendered wholly passive by the special charisma of the master performer. For Adorno, the effect of late-capitalist commodification and reification of culture is such that it packages and sells not only the glittering concert, the record or CD, and the awe-inspiring concert hall but also the glamorous personae of the performers and in fact the performance itself. The combination of Poirier and Adorno offers a view of musical authority that is both authoritarian and ossified. For Adorno, Arnold Schoenberg's dodecaphonic system of atonal music represents both the extreme of music's social isolation after the death of Beethoven in 1827 and the potential for resistance as "new music casts a devastatingly critical light upon the degraded and therefore meaningless world" of monopoly capitalism (Said, *Musical* 13–14).

Against this stark image of classical musical production and performance as a dramatization of authority, which is exemplified at its worst by Arturo Toscanini and is both exceptional and heartless, Said sets the example of Glenn Gould, whose highly eccentric career and musical persona redefined performance. Gould worked within what we might call the "Toscanini paradigm" of overwhelming but reified musical authority, knowledge, and skill, so as to shatter it—in Said's terms, to molest it—from the inside. Gould entered the world of the classical concert but filled out the space available in highly unorthodox and heterogeneous ways. In pitching Gould against Toscanini, Said is theoretically confronting Adorno with Gramsci. The Italian Marxist sees cultural activity, including music production and performance, as contributing to the elaboration of civil society and social space: the concert shares characteristics with other cultural fields but also retains its specificity, most particularly in its performativity. A book or a poem may be read and re-read, but a performance is a unique event. As such, it endows social space with a special urgent, stressed, and inflected quality (Said, *Musical* xv). It is this space that Gould, according to Said, so radically reconfigured: he retired from concert performance while still a young man in 1964; he chose a repertoire that ran athwart the usual work of the classical pianist; and he wrote very extensively about his work. He was, in this sense, a meta-performer: "The paradox is that his

writings are nevertheless essential as the verbal counterpoint he provided for himself as a performer. Thus quite deliberately Gould extended the limited theatrical space provided by performance as an extreme occasion to one whose scope includes speech, time as duration, an interlude from daily life that is not controlled by mere consecutiveness" (Said, *Musical* 27). Gould, that is, created a mode of performance that Said suggests is *sui generis*, and it works by placing around the act of artistic making an array of other practices (writing, most importantly) that display the affiliations that are his work's conditions of possibility. So for Said, Gould's work moves in two directions simultaneously: it is both the acme of reified sequestration and refinement that Adorno so powerfully explains, and a radicalization and reconfiguration of performance from within those confining structures.

Said's early appropriation of Adorno makes for a set of isomorphisms between authority and molestation, Adorno and Gramsci, even Toscanini and Gould. But Said draws on a different set of Adornian ideas in his work on late style. Arguably, the most interesting presentation of these ideas comes in "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," originally published in 1994. In this essay, Said revisits and to a degree revises his famous 1982 article "Traveling Theory." In the earlier essay, Said shows how a major statement of radical philosophy, Georg Lukács' great essay on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," the centerpiece of *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), was picked up and used by Lucien Goldmann at the Sorbonne in the 1950s and then by Williams at Cambridge in the 1970s. Said's point is that the theoretical-political insights of the original essay become institutionalised and themselves reified as an academic method in the later writers. Whereas Lukács' original essay was the theoretical underpinning of insurrection, the later adaptations were domesticated, academicised, routinised.

In "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," Said returns to this argument but with two much more radical and irreconcilable inheritors—Adorno and Frantz Fanon. Lukács believed he had resolved the complex subject-object relation at the heart of Western philosophy since René Descartes and of German idealism since Immanuel Kant. In this long and formidable lineage, Lukács traces a gradual but ineluctable retreat of the subject

into isolation, contemplation, and passivity, when faced with the ever-greater atomisation and fragmentation of the modern capitalist world of frozen reified objects (recalling Said's description of Conrad's view of writing as mediating between "a problematic subject and a dynamic object" [*JCEA* 9]). Bourgeois thought, Lukács suggests, is paralyzed and can only approach the world in the mode of positivism, a philosophy whose very inner structures reflect the decline he describes. Yet the experience of crisis can reveal the qualitative aspect of things reified under capitalism to be the decisive factor for reified rational thought. At this moment, mind or subjectivity has a chance to escape reification by thinking through the process which has caused reality to appear only as a succession of unconnected lifeless objects. This is the moment crisis turns into criticism, in which the subject demonstrates victory over ossified objective forms, or attains an insurrectionary authority (Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" 437). Class consciousness, for Lukács, is thought thinking its way through fragmentation to unity. In Said's terms, class consciousness is thought rediscovering an activist authority, which bourgeois thought had gradually relinquished over the history of Western philosophy. Particularly radical in Lukács is the sense that the very process of reification (which might be mapped onto Said's concept of molestation) crucially enables this rediscovered authority. But Adorno, in Said's words, undoes Lukács' dialectical resolution, leaving this central problematic torn open, unreconciled. Adorno does this, in *Philosophy of New Music*, through the vehicle of Schoenberg: "Instead of social relevance Schoenberg's aesthetic chooses irrelevance; instead of amiability the choice is intransigence; instead of antinomian problematics being overcome (a central notion in Lukács's history of classical philosophy) they are vindicated; instead of class consciousness there is the monad; instead of positive thinking there is 'definitive negation'" (Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" 442).

Music thus becomes precisely that which Lukács' reconciled consciousness has relinquished—the very sign of alienation, which is also its social truth. For Adorno, Schoenberg's music takes alienation into itself and makes it its central concern. And so "music aspires to the condition

of theoretical knowledge. Of what? The contradiction” (Said, “Traveling Theory Reconsidered” 443). Adorno then, Said tells us, proceeds ferociously to dismantle Lukács’ thematics:

In Adorno’s descriptions here there is a breathtakingly regressive sequence, a sort of endgame procedure by which he threads his way back along the route taken by Lukács; all the laboriously constructed solutions devised by Lukács for pulling himself out of the slough of bourgeois despair—the various satisfactory totalities given by art, philosophy, Marxism—are just as laboriously dismantled and rendered useless. (“Traveling Theory Reconsidered” 443)

For Said, Adorno’s obsessive predication of resistance to reification on art can result only in an art that is so totally alienated from its social ground as to be—in the case of music—unheard.

Said’s Conradian-Schopenhauerean model of authorial authority comes earlier in his career than his full engagement with Lukács’ vision of consciousness coming to a radical and activist grasp of the world through a utopian reconciliation of subject and object, and the two models are not identical. Nevertheless, from *Beginnings* onwards, the two theories overlap in important ways. Said’s vision of the writing subject remains at root based in the earlier model, but his vision of the activist critical intellectual—of what he calls “critical consciousness” (Said, *World* 24–30)—involves a suturing of the Conradian-Schopenhauerean model and Lukács’ theory of consciousness attaining to criticism. In various forms, the Lukácsian model is interwoven with the Conradian-Schopenhauerean model in *Beginnings*, *Orientalism*, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, and *Culture and Imperialism*.⁹ Astonishingly, Said’s late invocation of Adorno (and this is generally unnoticed by Said’s readers) therefore radically revises—in some ways even undercuts—all of his previous positions on critical authority. The Conradian-Schopenhauerean intellectual subject, partaking both of egoism and anxiety, is now adjusted and subjected to the sternest self-analysis and re-reading, alongside the Lukácsian model of intellectual activism. Writing “On Lost

Causes”—and at a time when his own illness was pressing on him and the Oslo “peace process” was being exposed (by Said himself pre-eminently) as a cynical sham—Said re-reflects his sense of critical authority to take into account the wave of defeats (or molestations) which seem to beset both him personally and the causes and values he represents. Adorno’s example allows Said to revise his earlier philosophical position yet still refuse the comforts of mere resignation in defeat. To give in—to bow out gracefully, as the cliché would have it—would be to accede to the dubious and cynical rewards given to the flabby and lachrymose thought demanded by the reified world of great power politics. As Adorno writes, “[t]he sense of a new security is purchased with the sacrifice of autonomous thinking” (*Critical Models* 292). This turn Said was determined never to take, concluding that “[c]onsciousness of the possibility of resistance can reside only in the individual will that is fortified by intellectual rigor and by an unabated conviction in the need to begin again, with no guarantees,” except the confidence of even the most isolated thought that what has been cogently thought must be thought by someone else, somewhere (“On Lost Causes” 553).

Said’s extraordinary career—one of the most compelling examples of intellectual resistance and insurrection since the Second World War—was underpinned by a model of critical subjectivity and authorial authority, which he constructed dialectically from his readings of the pessimistic novelist Conrad and the pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer. From these unforthcoming materials, Said created resources for hope, which he also combined with the revolutionary energies of Lukács. Yet even if his causes suffered defeat, a late auto-critique filtered through Adorno allowed Said to offer perpetual resistance and to argue that no cause is ever entirely lost. For Said, even in the most dire personal and political circumstances, no molestation can ever finally shatter the authority of the critic.

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Notes

- 1 In *Castles in Spain and Other Screeds*, Galsworthy reveals that Conrad read and absorbed Schopenhauer's work (91).
- 2 Schopenhauer expounds these ideas on the will primarily in *The World as Will and Representation*.
- 3 Brennan, as one of Said's most valuable and penetrating readers, pointed this out many years ago. See his "Places of Mind, Occupied Lands."
- 4 For an important feminist appropriation and critique of Said's rather masculinist idea of authority, see Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, especially the brilliant early chapter "Towards a Feminist Poetics."
- 5 For this essay see Baring, *Political and Literary Essays 1908–1913*.
- 6 See Ashcroft and Ahluwalia's *Edward Said* and my *Cambridge Introduction to Edward Said* for a discussion of the differences between *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism*.
- 7 See Ahmad's *In Theory*, pp. 159–220.
- 8 The essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic" can be found on pages 31–53 of the book by the same name.
- 9 For further discussion of Said's appropriations of both Lukács and Gramsci, see my essay "Said, Lukács, and Gramsci."

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