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Monk Lewis's *Timour the Tartar*, Grand Romantic Orientalism and Imperial Melancholy

Lars Eckstein

It is an academic truth universally acknowledged that the Romantic age had little to offer in the world of theatre; until rather recently, its artistic and ideological innovations were mostly found in poetry and prose, and if literary merits were attributed to dramatic writing, they tended to be ascribed to the closet drama of the likes of Byron and Shelley. Alan Richardson's influential *A Mental Theatre* (1988), for instance, perpetuates the idea that actual theatrical events of the era had little to offer except inferior entertainment and spectacle, and celebrates a dramatic tradition entirely emancipated from the stage. This dismissal is not new, of course, but echoes the dissatisfaction with British theatre expressed, for instance, by Byron after his brief involvement with Drury Lane theatre in 1815 and 1816, or Wordsworth and Coleridge, who famously ranted against their contemporaries' infatuation with "sickly and stupid German Tragedies" (Wordsworth 747). Only over the course of last two decades, roughly, has there been a gradual academic rehabilitation of the Romantic stage against such stark and prominent opposition, basically taking two routes: One the one hand, there has been a careful revaluation of the intellectual merits of 'legitimate' stage drama, facilitated not least by gendered approaches to the Romantic age and a renewed interest in the dramatic works of Elizabeth Inchbald or Joanna Baillie (cf. Burroughs 2000 for an overview). On the other hand, there has been a burgeoning interest in the recovery of the 'illegitimate' theatre scene, and a revaluation of its

cultural validity in Georgian England. Scholars like David Worall (2008), Jeffrey Cox (2007), Daniel O'Quinn (2005), Jane Moody (2000), Elaine Headley (1999) or Mark Baer (1992) have only begun to rescue a mass medium from oblivion which, in its own day, was closely followed by all social classes within and without London, passionately debated in publications from broadside ballads to newspapers and books, and thus offering comparatively representative insight into the ideological dynamics of an era that is invaluable for the study of Romantic culture.

The starting point for this essay is not only that a lot can be learned about Georgian England from its theatres more generally, but also that such knowledge can ultimately contribute to a deeper understanding of British (post)coloniality, given that many of the absolute smash hits of the period were Orientalist spectacles (cf. Hadley and Moody). The Orientalist dimension of 'illegitimate' Romantic theatre has not been extensively surveyed to date; of the above critics, only Elaine Hadley (in her excellent essay "Home as Abroad") and Jane Moody more or less explicitly deal with the cross-cultural implications of early melodramatic spectacle. Conversely, specialist approaches to Romantic period art in relation to Empire and imperialism such as Nigel Leash's *British Romantic Writers and the East* (1992), Saree Makdisi's *Romantic Imperialism* (1998) or Rajani Sudan's *Xenophobic Subjects* (2002) by and large exclude popular cultural forms of expression from their analyses. In this way, they perpetuate a neglect that already marks Edward Said's path-breaking approaches in *Orientalism* (as well as *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*) and *Culture and Imperialism.*

In this essay I will argue that aligning Said's version of Foucauldian discourse analysis with a sustained interest, first, also in popular cultural forms of

expression, and second, in the specific cultural performance and performativity of such Orientalist practices, may lead to productive new insights about the ambivalences of British (post)coloniality. My guiding example will be Matthew 'Monk' Lewis's play *Timour the Tartar*, subtitled *A Grand Romantic Melo-drama in Two* Acts, first staged at London's Covent Garden theatre in 1811. I will exemplarily revisit Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* from a postcolonial angle, and propose a reading of the play which sets two established tenets of postcolonial theory against each other. The first part, discussing *Timour the Tartar* as a dramatic *text* (especially in relation to its pretexts), offers a reading very much in line with the gist of Said's *Orientalism*, while the second, looking at *Timour* as a *performance* in the context of London's theatre culture, sustains and expands Paul Gilroy's more recent concept of 'imperial melancholy'. The juxtaposition of both the textual scope and the actual context of spectacular performance, here, is crucial for my argument, and intends to expose some of the blind spots in each tenet of postcolonial theory.

This first concerns Said's conception of Orientalism: In his seminal studies, Said lucidly exposes the ways in which the West constructed images of the Oriental Other which suited Western imperial interests across a wide range of disciplines. Yet neither Said nor many of his followers or critics have taken a sustained interest either in popular culture, or in how the Orientalist archive has been embedded in actual cultural practices at home. My argument is quite simply that there can be highly unpredictable discrepancies been textual designs and their perfomative outcome. As the example of *Timour the Tartar* illustrates, the performance of Orientalist fantasies and exoticist spectacles in the Romantic era in particular clashed violently with a sustained chauvinism and cultural

nationalism, and enhanced a rather wide-spread yearning for a pre-imperial, uncontaminated English 'character'. "Grand Romantic" Orientalism, I will argue, was capable of triggering a paradoxical nostalgia for an imperial England uncorrupted by its Empire, the emergence of which Paul Gilroy and others have so far only located in Victorian 'high' cultural discourses since around 1850. However, a similar 'imperial melancholy' is pervasive in Romantic debates, and especially so in view of a supposed decline of national theatre culture.

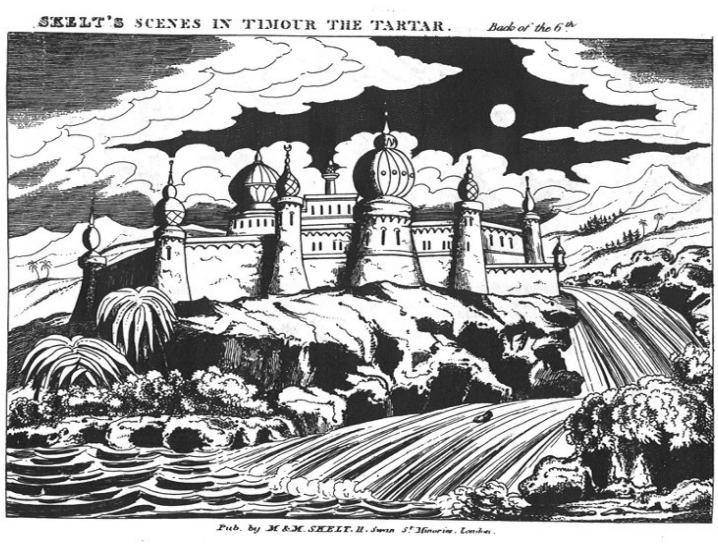
I.

To locate Matthew Lewis at the heart of such debates, and to propose a postcolonial reading of his work may come as a surprise, as Lewis is almost exclusively known today for his groundbreaking gothic novel *The Monk* which also gave him his famed nickname. However, gothic sensationalism was really only one facet of Lewis's work which was overwhelmingly written for the stage, and ranged from attempts at 'serious' drama to the Orientalist spectacle which concerns me here.[1] *Timour the Tartar* was the last play Lewis wrote, and he was specifically commissioned to do so by the management of Convent Garden around John Philip Kemble, who beckoned Lewis from retirement to produce an afterpiece to replace George Colman the Younger's play *Blue-Beard*, which was a sweeping, if controversial, success earlier in the year. Colman's *Blue-Beard; or Female Curiosity!*, originally staged at Drury Lane theatre in 1798, consequently also provided the template for Lewis's play. This concerns, first of all, a heavy reliance on the tradition of pantomime, a spectacular form of British operatic theatre that evolved from the commedia dell' arte and included elements of dumb

show, music and songs. Secondly, the revival of *Blue-Beard* at Covent Garden in February 1811 was the first show to include a parade of live horses on a National Theatre stage (the original show at Drury Lane only featured mechanical horses), and Lewis managed to top this by for the first time making horses an integral part of the actual dramatic plot. Thirdly, and crucially in our context, Colman chose to relocate the story of *Blue-Beard*, which is of course based on a French folktale, to the Orient, and Blue-Beard became Abomelique, a Turkish despot.

Lewis's Timour is indeed another petty tyrant like Abomelique. The basic storyline of the play is quickly told: Timour, "Khan of the Afgan Tartars," is an evil usurper who, among other things, annexed the kingdom of Mingrelia in the past by murdering the king, and incarcerating his son, Agib, as a pawn in his imposing castle surrounded by raging water and a sublime cataract (fig. 1). In the beginning of the play, Timour is intent upon further extending his powers by means of a political marriage to the heiress of Georgia, Zorilda, whose arrival at his castle he awaits. Zorilda indeed appears in the guise of an impressive Amazonian warrior queen with whom Timour instantly falls in love (fig. 2). Far from being the heiress of Georgia, however, Zorilda is in fact no other than the queen of Mingrelia, plotting to free her son and avenging her husband with the help of Georgian troops. She is betrayed, though, and Timour, still infatuated with her, proposes to marry her in exchange for the life of her son. For the remainder of the play, Zorilda intriguingly turns from powerful warrior queen into powerless mother, yet still refuses to submit. After some retarding action, involving, among other things, a spectacular duel scene between rivalling lovers in which a faithful horse saves the good man's life by bringing him his lost sword, only to be ruthlessly stabbed (the horse, that is) by the evil opponent, Timour's castle is

finally besieged by the Georgian army. Zorlida manages to escape to a tower during the siege, yet is intercepted by Timour and flings herself into the cataract. In a final heroic act, her son Agib leaps after her on horseback, and saves her from the waters.[2]



Figs. 1 and 2: Toy-theatre sheet "Skelt's Scenes in Timour the Tartar" (1812), and anon., "Mrs H. Johnston in the Melodrama of Timour the Tartar" (1811). Brady collection, Christ Church Library, Oxford.

In Lewis's imagination, the play's protagonist, Timour, is obviously a bogeyman, and offers two related interpretive options. The first is to follow numerous contemporary reviewers of the play who were generally appalled by its spectacular and melodramatic proportions, but found in it a fitting allegory on Britain's chief enemy. Thus, a reviewer in the *Examiner* described the play as a "most awful, but at the same time insidious attack on the reputation of Buonaparte" (qtd. in Moody 100). The other option, of course, is to pursue an Orientalist reading and identify Timour as a typical representative of the East, corrupted by sensuous decadence and lust for power and cruelty. Such an image would have strongly resonated with the recent ascent of Mohammad Ali Pasha in

Egypt, who had just succeeded in ousting the British from their strategic gateway to India – and here is the immediate connection – just a few years after they had wrested it from Napoleon at the turn of the century. In the eyes of contemporary British audiences, the leap from Napoleon to Mohammad Ali would indeed have been a relatively small one, and Lewis's Timour can thus be read as a dubious collage of those adversaries which most stubbornly challenged Britain's imperial aspirations.

Timour the Tartar is all the more stunning considering that Lewis basically inverted the ideological proportions and cultural capital with which his protagonist was invested in earlier dramatic versions of the same material. Lewis's Timour is loosely based on the historical figure of Tīmūr bin Taraghay Barlas, founder of the Timurid dynasty in the 14th century, and conqueror of much of Western and Central Asia. The historical Timour notoriously ruled with a combination of utter brutality and strategic calculation, often massacring the civil population of the territories he conquered while sparing the administrative elite; he was also known, however, as a generous patron of the arts. Persian sources derogatorily referred to him as 'Timur-e Lang', which translates into 'Timur the Lame', on account of a stiff right leg and shoulder. This was picked up in Western sources and changed into 'Tamerlane' or 'Tamburlaine', and Christopher Marlowe's two *Tamburlaine* plays are of course the first major British stage adaptation of the Timour tradition.

It is difficult to say whether Lewis indeed wrote back to Marlowe, but still, Marlowe's hero and Lewis's petty tyrant could hardly be further apart. Tamburlaine is a driven self-made man and uncompromising military leader of superhuman proportions, a megalomaniac whose contempt of weakness is starkly

exposed in his treatment of the Turkish emperor Behazath and his wife. Nevertheless he commands the unreserved respect of all, and in particular of Zorilda's counterpart, Zenocrate, daughter of the mighty Egyptian king, who falls in love with Tamburlaine despite his military advances against her father.

Much more than Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which was largely forgotten during the 18th and early 19th century, however, Lewis and his contemporary audience would have had another dramatic version of the same material in mind, namely Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane*. Rowe is today primarily remembered as the first modern editor and biographer of Shakespeare, yet he was also an established playwright and followed Nahum Tate as poet laurate in 1715. In his Whig play, he designed a Timour who is indeed worlds, if not galaxies apart from Lewis's petty tyrant. *Tamerlane* presents a merely thinly veiled allegory on William III and Louis XIV, with Tamerlane as William, while the Turkish emperor, Behazat, represents the despotic Louis. In the dedication to the 1702 edition of the play, Rowe wrote:

> Some People (who do me a very great Honour in it) have fancy'd, that in the Person of *Tamerlane* I have alluded to the greatest Character of the present Age. […] There are many Features, 'tis true, in that great Man's Life, not unlike his Majesty: his Courage, his Piety, his Moderation, his Justice, his Fatherly Love of his People; but above all, his Hate of Tyranny, and Oppression, and his zealous Care for the Common Good of Mankind […]. (Rowe)

Throughout the 18th century, *Tamerlane* was habitually performed on the 4th and 5th of November to commemorate the anniversary of William's landing at Torbay and thus counts among the most popular and most frequently performed plays in

British theatre history, despite the fact that more adamant observers like Samuel Johnson complained about a certain lack of historical verisimilitude.[3]

The transformation which Timour undergoes in Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* is thus both drastic and complete, even if a slight change in sympathy was already indicated in Georg Friedrich Händel's opera *Tamerlano* (which premiered in 1724 in the King's Theatre in Haymarket and endears audiences to Behazat rather than Timour). Indeed, Timour's career on the stages of London from Marlow and Rowe to Lewis perfectly confirms Edward Said's core argument in *Orientlalism*, which is predicated on the fact that since around the end of the 18th century, "general cultural pressures […] tended to make rigid the sense of difference between the European and the Asiatic parts of the world." The watershed, for Said, is Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the repercussions of which, as I already indicated, resonate in Lewis's play. Quite obviously, Rowe's allegory between an ideal Asiatic (Tamerlane) and British ruler (William III) became untenable under the new geopolitical paradigm, and also Marlowe's fascination with Timour's unparalleled power and greatness had become obsolete – after all, as Said continues, "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness" (Said 204). In short, it fully confirms Said's scenario that Lewis's post-1800 Timour is a decadent and corrupt Oriental petty tyrant who is rightfully put in his deserved place in the end, and what is more, not by an Ottoman or Egyptian, but by a non-Muslim force. It is far from accidental that Lewis's Mingrelia and Georgia are Christian nations, whereas the earlier plays largely staged conflicts within the Islamic world. And surely, no theatre

goer would have missed the reference to either the present King, George III, in the victorious Georgians, or to the patron saint shared by both Georgia and England.

. Nevertheless, it would be limiting to simply enlist Matthew Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* for a reading of Britain's discursive construction and, thereby, unambiguous domination of an allegedly inferior Oriental Other – limiting, not least, because it crucially overlooks the play's actual impact upon on the stage which was, to put is mildly, anything but unambiguous. Let me therefore try to complicate my own reading of *Timour* as a text – and by extension, of the Orientalist paradigm – and turn to its *performance*.

II.

In order to fully understand the impact that *Timour the Tartar* had on stage, it is necessary again to go back in time, not quite as far as to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, but to the re-opening of theatres after the puritan interregnum, when Charles II granted Thomas Killigrew and William Devenant the exclusive right to stage "tragedies, comedies, plays, operas, music, scenes and all other entertainments of the stage." The patent came along with the right to build "two houses or theatres with all convenient rooms and other necessities thereunto appertaining" (warrant dating to August 21, 1660, qtd. in Thomas 9), which over time became firmly associated with the Royal Theatres at Drury Lane (opening in 1663) and Covent Garden (1732). Only in these theatres, 'legitimate' spoken drama, i.e. tragedy and comedy, could be staged, while other stages had to resort to 'illigitimate' forms such as burletta, pantomime or, later, melodrama. The patent thus became increasingly burdened with the moral obligation to uphold a reputable and

distinctly national culture of performance, mainly capitalising on the genius of Shakespeare, in view of unlicensed houses which offered generically impure visual spectacles. As Jane Moody carefully shows, by around 1800, an "absolute opposition between authentic and spurious theatrical forms" was in place, "an opposition which soon begins to be imagined as a nightmarish confrontation between quasi-ethereal textuality and grotesque physicality" (Moody 12).

In the fist decade of the 19th century, however, this "absolute opposition" began to collapse, and it did so from both sides. On the one hand, there was a post-revolutionary boom of minor theatres which began to violate the received theatrical order by staging faithful or abusive versions of comedy and tragedy. On the other hand, the National Theatres were under such serious financial pressure that they were forced to copy the immensely successful spectacles at illegitimate stages like Sadler's Wells or Astley's Amphitheatre for their own programming. This move was immensely controversial and caused a public uproar which reached an early climax in 1811 when Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* was first staged at Covent Garden, right after Colman's *Blue-Beard*, and followed suit by another Orientalist pantomime titled *Harlequin and Padmanaba*, which topped the infatuation with horses by 'defiling' the holy boards upon which David Garrick and Sarah Siddons used to tread with a real life Indian elephant (cf. Saxon 1975, 304).

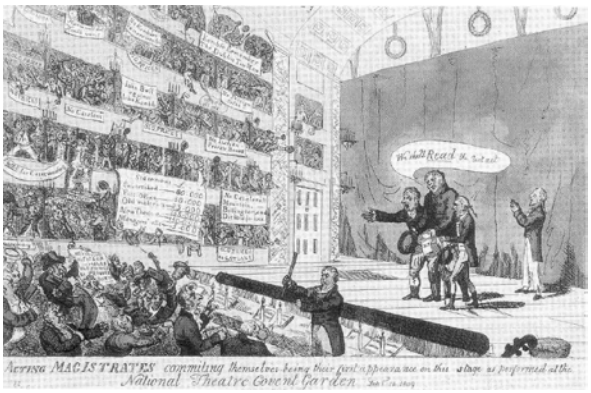
It is important to note in this context that Covent Garden, which was the only legitimate theatre standing in that year as Drury Lane had burned down in 1809 and only reopened in 1812, was still recovering from a dramatic theatrical crisis. The origins of this crisis lie in another tragic fire in September 1808 during which Covent Garden burned to the ground. The theatre was rebuilt in neo-

classical style in only a little over eight months; yet when it re-opened in September 1809, the audience was confronted with a number of significant changes (cf. Baer 20-27, Worrall 33-69, Moody 63-65): the New Covent Garden featured two additional tires of boxes, one of them exclusively reserved for private guests and to be rented for the season. To make room for all those boxes, the gallery audience had been positioned far from the stage, so that the one-shilling-seats allowed for little more than a remotely visual experience. The prices in the pit and boxes, moreover, were increased from three and a half to four, and six to seven shillings respectively. What was designed by John Philip Kemble as a "New Grand Imperial incombustable Theatre" accordingly came under serious attack from a formation of protesters who called themselves the OPs ('Old Prices').

Despite the collective label, the protesters' indignation was less fuelled by the new prices than by the notion that the New Covent Garden no longer complied with its obligations as a National Theatre. The introduction of private boxes, for instance, was seen not only as a means to further encourage prostitution in the National Theatres, but also as an affront against the idea of equal access for all citizens; foreign performers like the Italian star soprano Angela Catalani were greeted with suspicion; and the increasing introduction of foreign forms such as melodrama and opera was perceived as a threat to the English dramatic tradition. On the opening night, the audience remained mostly seated after the performance, bellowing "God Save the King – no Foreigners – no Catalani – no Kemble," and from the following night onwards, the rioters shouted down all performances, demonstrating banners and placards featuring slogans like "John Bull against John Kemble" (cf. fig. 3). Evidently, the OP riots were supported by members of all

ranks and social classes,[4] and by the end of the year, Kemble basically had to give in to all demands, which left the New Covent Garden on the verge of bankruptcy.

On these grounds, Kemble's decision to combine performances of legitimate drama with afterpieces catering to the fully illegitimate appeal of equestrian spectacle and Orientalist melodrama was a financial coup – yet it of course did little to redeem the chauvinist outrage at a supposed loss of the distinct 'Englishness' of National Theatre culture. Even though Kemble was careful to set illegitimate performances next to beacons of legitimacy – both the opening nights of *Blue-Beard* and *Timour the Tartar* featured Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* as the main play – the legitimate performances were soon upstaged, as it were, by the Orientalist spectacles. Thus, Lewis's *Timour* ran for more than 40 nights in its first season alone, which testifies to an absolutely exceptional popularity; by comparison, the most popular 'legitimate' new play of the period, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Remorse*, first staged in January 1813, can boast of no more than 20 nights, while the perhaps most critically acclaimed tragedy by any Romantic poet, Joanna Baillie's *De Montfort* (1800), did not make it beyond a respectable initial run of eight (Cox and Gamer, xii-xiii).



Figs. 3 and 4: Isaac and George Cruikshank, "Acting Magistrates commiting themselves being their

first appearance on this stage as performed at the National Theatre, Covent Garden" (1809), and toy-theatre sheet "Skelt's Characters in Timour the Tartar" (1812). Brady collection, Christ Church Library, Oxford.

Orientalist plays like *Blue-Beard* or *Timour the Tartar* were thus really the absolute smash hits of their time. It is difficult to imagine the investments which went into their staging, but the opulent grandeur of Covent Garden's *Timour* (fig. 4) can be surmised, at least, from Skelt's toy theatre sheets which give an idea of its Orientalist dimensions – Timour's grand car alone, here, may serve as evidence for the sheer fascination with exoticist splendour and oversized spectacle. Such demonstrative illegitimacy was enthusiastically greeted on the minor stages, but it caused widespread critical indignation when displayed so insistently on the National Theatre stage, as Jane Moody amply demonstrates (cf. Moody 71-72): The *Dramatic Censor*, for instance, lamented the public's "resolution to discountenance and proscribe the Legitimate Drama, and establish in its stead a kind of entertainment (forgive the misnomer) recognizable neither by the rules of critics, nor the laws of nature." Other reviewers decried a "prostitution" of the stage that resembled the decadence of imperial Rome, while broadside pamphlets accused the management of Covent Garden of cheaply gratifying "with singing and dancing, with monsters, eunuchs, or any other exotic rarity" (qtd. in Baer 50). Evidently, the resentment against patent house politics was not restricted to the conservative establishment, but crossed all classes and available media of protest.

III.

The focus on *Timour the Tartar* both as a text, in view of the Orientalist knowledge it enhances, and as a performance, in view of the debates which surrounded the actual theatrical event, thus suggests a rather ambiguous ideological outcome. There is no doubt that Lewis's play did sustain Britain's imperial aspirations and affirmed the hegemonic status quo in East/West relations. Yet it is also important to see that such apparently unambiguous ideological stances were capable of producing serious side effects which are not at all within the scope of an Orientalist reading of the text itself. The most ironic side effect of *Timour's* spectacular Orientalism certainly is that the play can be said to have in a way lastingly contributed to a democratisation of the British theatre scene. In the years following the performance of *Timour the Tartar* and other graphic Orientalist shows on the patent stages, both the wider public and the minor theatres began to seriously question the National Theatres' exclusive right to legitimate drama. Arguing that the patent houses had gambled their privilege themselves by 'contaminating' the legitimacy of spoken drama with the very crude spectacles they were meant to protect the national dramatic tradition from, the managers of minor theatres increasingly began to ignore the existing legislation and, for instance, staged versions of Shakespeare. With the public sentiment on their side, the resistance of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which involved, among other things, an elaborate system of spies recruited from the theatre staff by, among others, Edmund Kean which reported minor house violations that were then brought to court, was ultimately bound to fail. By around 1833, the theatrical monopoly was *de facto* no longer enforced, and it officially expired with the Theatre Regulation Act in 1843 (cf. Moody 42-46). Yet there is

another side-effect which a sole focus on textual properties forecloses that is more important for my core argument.

Even while celebrating the superiority of imperial Britain over an inferior and corrupt Orient, the public performances of spectacular Orientalist plays within the sanctity of National Theatres clearly triggered a sustained sense of nationalist nostalgia. Despite being huge popular successes, they elicited a furious craving for a theatre culture that is as yet uncorrupted by the exploits of Empire and the infatuation with graphic exoticism which had its supposedly rightful place in the exhibitions in Piccadilly and The Strand, yet not in the sanctioned spaces of theatrical Englishness. In other words, there was a sustained popular sentiment in Romantic London that the excessive mimicry of Oriental despotism, degradation and sensuous degeneration – in the patent theatres at least – would eventually also degenerate England's very own cultural identity, that it would corrupt and inevitably hybridise its purportedly native traditions. Evidently, the very triumphant and apparently unambiguous Orientalism of *Timour the Tartar* has been at the same time capable of triggering a widely-felt 'melancholy' not entirely unlike the one which Paul Gilroy assesses in later Victorian discourses.

According to Gilroy, some of the best Victorian minds, among them Matthew Arnold, began to realise not only that Britain's imperial exploits did nothing to successfully disseminate the sweetness of Hebraic ethics and the light of Hellenistic reasoning which, for Arnold, famously marked the best of English culture, but much worse, that the confusions and contaminations of the colonial contact zone eventually came to 'corrupt' the English at home. "The historic mission to civilize and uplift the world was England's unavoidable destiny," Gilroy paraphrases the speaker in Arnold's famous poem "Dover Beach," "but

[…] it would bring neither comfort nor happiness. That imperial mission re-created the national community in a modern form but then drew it immediately into a terrible web of war and suffering, polluting its beautiful dreams, confusing and destabilizing it" (Gilroy 98-99). Gilroy's notion of 'melancholy' remains somewhat undertheorised in his seminal *After Empire* (2004),[5] yet is, I think, compellingly contextualised in Simon Gikandi's earlier work on *Maps of Englishness* (1996). Gikandi essentially shows that a melancholy anxiety about Englishness can be traced from the Victorian rhetoric of Thomas Carlyle all the way to the 20th century rhetoric of Powellism, which prefers to insist that "an autonomous English character thrived beneath the culture of colonialism, untouched by alterity and uncontaminated by the imperial experience" (Gikandi 74).

IV.

The recognition of even earlier, Romantic bouts of such imperial melancholy may help us to rethink, I believe, some of the received tenets of *Orientalism*, and reconsider the ways in which Orientalism was productive, not only with regard to the discursive production of an Oriental Other, but also with regard to the often unforeseen ways in which it impacted upon, and manifestly changed, Britain and the West itself. Which are the conceptual lessons, then, to be gained from reading Lewis's *Timour the Tarter* for an updated Saidian approach to literary and cultural studies? By advocating the inclusion also of the popular, spectacular and melodramatic for a comprehensive study of Romantic culture and imperialism, I do not wish to simply reiterate accusations of cultural elitism;[6] rather, it is my

impression that the reception of *Orientalism* in particular has been overshadowed in so many ways by overtly ideologically motivated critiques (merely spearheaded by the notorious attacks of the likes of Bernard Lewis or Martin Kramer and fuelled by Said's self-conception as a public intellectual)[7] that some of the limits of Said's conceptual framework which invite more productive reengagement have been neglected.

My first concern, here, is that Said's pervasive recourse to Foucauldian discourse analysis, which seminally helps him to expose the ways in which the West constructed images of an Oriental Other, also comes at the cost of foreclosing what specific Orientalist texts actually 'did' in actual cultural practice. I should make it quite clear, here, that discrepancies between text and performance are not restricted to the world of theatre (in the narrow sense of performance as staging a play), as my guiding example may suggest.[8] While *Timour* presents a particular(ly) dramatic case, I would propose that it always merits closer investigation how texts and genres, fictional or nonfictional, perform (in an Austinian sense) in their specific arenas of cultural reception. This, however, requires a revaluation of the dialogicity and intersubjectivity of textual encounters against the notion of an anonymous textual universe.

My second concern, then, is that Said's retraction from Foucault's anti-humanist notion of discourse in favour of a notion of partial subjective agency really enhances, rather than counters, the neglect of the performative dimension. When Said writes in *Orientalism* that "unlike Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (23), he leaves little doubt that such "imprint" is

unlikely to be produced by "lesser work." Such writing, he later argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, "bears its historical affiliation more plainly; its worldliness is simple and direct, the way a jingoistic ditty during [...] the 1857 Indian Rebellion connects directly to the situation and constituency that coined it" (96). Indicating that Said never fully abandoned New Critical certainties about the value and integrity of literary 'works' (which marked his 1966 dissertation on Joseph Conrad), there is a unmistakeable assumption, here, that popular culture – because of its inherent lack of structural complexity and systematic organisation of knowledge – cannot contribute to the Foucauldian archive. "[E]ven though early orientalist melodramas [...] clearly rattle on about the Orient," Elaine Hadley summarises Said's logic specifically in view of the genre that concerned me here, "they cannot produce a *discourse* about the Orient" (Hadley 332). Hence, they do not need academic attention or interpretation.

This is a fallacy, I believe, rooted in the doubly de-contextualising dynamics of radical discourse analysis paired with assumptions about the integrity of the learned 'work'. By using spectacular Orientalist melodrama to illustrate the complex inferences between text, performance and contextual reception, I hope to have shown that popular cultural forms do not, or at least not necessarily, tend to produce simple jingoistic affirmations of Empire. On the contrary, they are capable of triggering – in their respective contexts of performance – ambivalences that are no less exiting or complex than those explored in the canonical 'works' of Joseph Conrad or Matthew Arnold.

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[1] It is worth noticing also that Lewis's family held large plantations in Jamaica which he inherited in 1812, and visited twice before his death in 1818. The travelogue that came out of these journeys, published posthumously as *Journal of a West India Proprietor* in 1833, is one of the most readable and engaging accounts of the contemporary Caribbean in its time, curiously hovering between Lewis's abolitionist sympathies and his cultural prejudices. Coleridge, for one, reviewed Lewis's journal as the product of "a much finer mind than I supposed before from the perusal of his romances, etc. It is by far his best work, and will live and be popular" (qtd. in Wilson, 1).

[2] Hadley argues that early Orientalist melodramas are less about the projection of the self upon an other, but of an archaic fantasy upon the self: "Insofar as these orientalist melodramas assert the centrality of home and family as the primary source of identification for its orphans and outcasts and among its audience members, it is surely telling an aging story about Europe, and perhaps especially aged for a radically modernizing England. The excessive estrangement that the staged Orient provides […] might have enabled English audiences […] to experience at least in a theatrical setting a sense of familiarity that their otherwise changing surroundings and social relations could not stage" (Hadley 347-348).

[3] "The virtue of Tamerlane seems to have been arbitrarily assigned him by his poet," he writes in *Lives of the English Poets*, "for I know not that history gives any other qualities than those which make him a conqueror" (Johnson 212).

[4] Checking the occupational background of the 161 rioters who were arrested between September and December 1809, Bear nevertheless lists 13 unskilled workers, 19 skilled workers and 10 apprentices next to 39 clerks and tradesman, 41 businessmen and professionals,

and 12 ‘gentlemen’ (Bear 1992, 142), clearly indicating that the outcry against the decline of theatrical ‘Englishness’ cut across class barriers.

[5] One problem is that Gilroy does not explicitly comment on the conceptual distinction he makes between ‘melancholy’ – which he apparently reserves for the imperial or colonial period – and ‘melancholia’ – which he uses in relation to the ‘postcolonial’ era. The *OED* defines ‘melancholia’ as a “pathological state of despondency,” while ‘melancholy’ rather points to a more general sentiment of “gloominess” that is less pathological than performative, in the sense of “a theatrical or aesthetic indulgence in reflective or maudlin emotion.” I am in fact rather hesitant about the idea that a more general ‘performed’ melancholy turned unambiguously and predominantly pathological after decolonisation. Gilroy anchors his notion of postcolonial ‘melancholia’ in “the pioneering social psychology of the German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich” (Gilroy 107), whose approach in *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* I find problematic, even if it sparked a highly important and timely debate upon its original publication in Germany in 1967. The core methodological problem certainly lies in the sweeping extension of insights drawn from individual psychology to the extremely heterogeneous and elusive body of the nation, without making any conclusive assumptions about the concrete medial processes which allow for the dissemination of presumably pre-discursive and pre-conscious affects. Like the Mitscherlichs, Gilroy seems not entirely disinclined to *a priori* put the whole of a nation upon a single Freudian couch; yet surely, there is good reason to very closely look at the discursive phenomena and their performative, medial and institutional framing *first* (as Gilroy then indeed does) before venturing to draw conclusions about larger patterns or social pathologies.

[6] Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, for instance, write: “One of the great paradoxes of Edward Said’s career has been the apparent conflict between his role as a cultural critic and those preferences which seem to locate him as a cultural elitist” (9).

[7] For a comprehensive overview, covering not only the English and German, but also the Arabic reception, cf. Markus Schmitz’s excellent *Kuturkritik ohne Zentrum*.

[8] When Said speaks about an Orientalist “theatre” (63) in *Orientalism*, he significantly does not do so in the sense of specific cultural performances, but in the sense of the Early Modern *Theatrum Mundi* as a metaphor for the textual production and strategic propagation of representational knowledge.