Chapter 5

Culture as Imperialism

Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* is both an elaboration and modification of many of the ideas described in *Orientalism*. *Culture and imperialism* seeks to broaden the discussion of the relations between culture and the political history of imperialism. It covers a wider range of geographical spaces, social structures and cultural forms and gives more attention than *Orientalism* to developments in the contemporary world. Said’s focus shifts from non-literary texts and there is a more detailed engagement with the major figures of metropolitan culture rather than comparatively obscure work such as Philology and Anthropology in the colonial period. *Culture and Imperialism* gives more attention to non-Western forms of cultural practice, an area fully ignored in *Orientalism* which views the colonised as the silent “other” of the hegemonic discourse. In the latter volume, there is discussion of Latin American poetry, African novel, and Subaltern studies historiography.

In *Culture and Imperialism* Said speaks directly of the
connections of power and artistic productions. There can be no doubt about the underpinnings of cultural production by the worldly plays of imperial power. *Culture and Imperialism* begins from this basic argument that the social, economic and political operations of imperialism are both preceded and supported by the culture that maintains them. As Said puts it:

Culture comes to be associated, often aggressively with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. [. . .] The trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one's own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. Most professional humanists, as a result are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of such practices
as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction and philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other.

(CultureXIII-XIV)

Said's boldness lies in his willingness to connect these two aspects of contemporary life—culture and imperialism—that many would argue are in no way related. But, we need to note that at the very outset Said distances himself from the position that would take cultural production to be automatically and inevitably some sort of conspiratorial reflection of imperial needs. As he says in the introduction,

I do not believe, that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history but authors are, I also believe, very much in the history of their society, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure". (CultureXIV)

If dominant aesthetic production is not fully or automatically imperial, it is not ever fully removed from the
world of imperial activity. Conjoining of art and politics enacts a rich and joyful expansion of both, a salutary relation of the ways issues of worldliness come to be given imaginative shape. As Said says:

The novels and books I consider here I analyse because first of all I find them estimable and admirable works of art and learning, in which I and many other readers take pleasure and from which we derive profit. Second, the challenge is to connect them not only with that pleasure and profit but also with the imperial process of which they were manifestly and unconcealedly a part; rather than condemning or ignoring their participation in what was an unquestioned reality in their societies, I suggest that what we learn about this hitherto ignored aspect actually and truly enhances our reading and understanding of them. (Said, *Culture* XV)

As Foucault has shown, the struggle for domination can be both systematic and hidden. There is an unceasing
interaction between classes, nations and regions seeking to
dominate and displace one another. Here the important thing
is that apart from the struggles explained, a struggle of val­
ues is involved. The difference between modern European
empires and Roman or the Spanish or the Arab empire is that
the modern empires are systematic enterprises. They do not
move into a country, loot it and then leave. Excuse for their
continued presence in the colonial country is explained by no­
tions of their “civilising mission”. By this notion the impe­
rial nations have not only the right but also the obligations to
rule those nations and civilise them. Imperialists worked
with an intense sense of their right and obligation to rule,
which was present in and supported by European Culture.

Imperial assumptions were built upon deeper concepts
so that they never entered into discussions of social reform
and justice. The ideology of empire remained unchallenged
even by social reform movements such as the liberal move­
ment, working class movement or feminist movement. Though
these movements were well aware of the historical and social
contexts of their respective ideologies, they were blind
to the injustice of imperial rule and ethos of colonisation. These reformist movements within colonised countries were by and large imperialist in their assumptions. Some of these attitudes might have stemmed from ignorance or uninterest but it was largely the result of the culture of the nineteenth century Europe, which was largely confident, and authoritative. Even those who work in the social reformist movements and class organisations could not question the centralising of European life and its connivance in the civilising mission of empire.

The dominant themes of *Culture and Imperialism* are: one, an analysis of the worldwide pattern of the imperial culture; second is the historical experience of resistance against the empire. In the analysis of the pattern of imperial culture, the assumptions used to justify and reinforce the empire and the attendant exploitation and repression has been explained in great detail.

We see that various modes of engagement with imperial power are active and continuous from the very moment of colonisation. One decisive shift in Said's vision between
Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism is clear in relation to the question of resistance to colonial enterprise. Culture and Imperialism acknowledges to a greater degree than before the tradition of the metropolitan resistance to imperialism. According to Said, this resistance from the metropolitan centre was not very effective until the colonised themselves began the struggle for liberation. Nevertheless, there is recurrent praise for figures like Jean Genet who have in effect crossed to the otherside. As further recent evidence of metropolitan opposition to western domination, Said cites the self-reformation of scholarly bodies such as the American Middle East Studies Association which was formerly aligned to US State Department Programmes for Middle East domination. Culture and Imperialism recognises resistance to imperialism from outside to a far greater extent than Orientalism. It addresses the histories of decolonisation in the contemporary era giving accounts of a number of struggles and analyses nationalist discourses. While acknowledging the crucial role of cultural nationalism in ending the era of empires, he nonetheless expresses his unease that it may prevent the
reconciliation between the West and non-West on which future of humanity depends.

He expresses the suspicion that nationalism can all too easily replicate the essentialising and dichotomising vision of the culture of the former imperial powers. He tries to distinguish different kinds of anti-colonial and postcolonial critics and their role in the struggle against imperialism. Said praises the work of cultural nationalists like Ngugi and Chin Weizn and acknowledges that their rejectionism was an important stage in the struggle against colonialism. It is very clear to Said that the best way forward is a mode of cultural criticism which reflects the hybridity engendered by the ever more intertwined histories of the modern world. This view eschews the conceptions of identity which are based in fixed categories of race, ethnicity or national identity.

Said interprets the culture of imperialism as a complex phenomenon in which social existence and individual consciousness, the world and the text, mutually determine each other. He describes the complex and reciprocal relationship between written artifacts such as the European realistic novel
and imperial practices in geographically distant lands. In short, he constructs imperialism as a cultural phenomenon that occurs within multi-levelled relations of power and knowledge that are irreducible to language and that are captured poorly by terms such as “text” and “discourse”. Imperialism, in his view, is:

the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; “colonialism”, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. As Michael Doyle puts it: Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire. (Said, Culture 8)

Culture is a battlefield of competing interests from
which different people draw different conclusions. Said gives two definitions of culture:

first of all it means those practices like the arts of description, communication and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aim is pleasure. [. . .] Second and almost imperceptibly culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has known and thought as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s. (Culture XII-III).

Said rejects the base and superstructure distinction of culture. He argues to the contrary that culture is an ideological site that mystifies social relations such as slavery and colonialism by constructing aesthetic artifacts. Said is fully aware of imperialism as a cultural formation. Said is largely responsible for our sensitivity to this issue. Knowledge of imperialism as culture is the backbone of his critique of
imperialism. It is an experience so vast and yet so detailed whose cultural dimensions are so crucial, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of whole secular human history. (Said, Culture 61).

Said’s work, as exemplified by Culture and Imperialism is affiliated with an English language tradition of cultural thought that extends backwards through Raymond Williams’ Culture and Society to Matthew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy. Matthew Arnold was a man caught between two worlds: the world of traditional Christian belief and the world of modern Scientific reason at a time when one dead, the other powerless to be born. In a world where national identity had displaced religion as the centre of value and the highest object of loyalty, Arnold was a proponent of cultural criticism as the transformation of religious thought. Through
mediations of T.S Eliot and the New Critics in whom religious themes are prominent, Said appropriates and transfigures aspects of the Arnoldian cultural idea, while rejecting others. He joins the Arnoldian praise of high culture as "the best that has been thought and said". But he cannot celebrate culture in so far as it is transfigured religion. If Arnold construes culture as the transfiguration of religious thoughts, then Said construes the critique of culture—that is the critique of transfigured religion—as the premise of all criticism. Arnold's cultural critique simultaneously negates theological dogma both popular and philosophical, and preserves Christianity's core, its moral truth and existential efficacy. He transforms Christianity from an offence to modernity's scientific spirit to a differential and sceptical accomplice. Arnold wants to restore unified sensibility. One that is mediated however by scientific reason. With Arnold, religious appeals to miracles and supernatural verification had lost all legitimacy with the triumph of scientific world view. The watchword of science was verification but the religious faith could only be
verified experientially by the evidence of the moral laws effi-
cacy in human history. Arnold believed that religious criti-
cism should be rational, imaginative and edifying. Arnold
suggested to reconcile religion and science. He sought to
specify the proper spheres of religion and science and thus
prevent the illicit encroachment of one on the other. In the
modern world, religion could no longer be dogmatic and doc-
trinaire. It could only survive as a moral sensibility linked to
action.

Like Arnold, Said thinks that religion is fine when rel-
egated to its proper place as a properly private affair. Said’s
and Arnold’s disagreement turns on the proper relationship
between religion and cultural critique. In Arnold’s view of
culture, the cosmological claims of religion are negated, the
moral claims preserved and transformed. But the existential
claims exhibit a bit of ambiguity. He does suggest that in
some indefinite future, the arts and sciences might dis-
place religion as an adequate motivation for moral conduct.
But on the question of whether science can provide the
existential assurance and consolidation that religion does, he is often silent. Arnoldian culture is neither vulgar curiosity nor "an engine of social and class destination, separating its holder, like a badge or title from other people who have not got it" (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 6 ). On the contrary, culture is a quest for total perfection through knowledge of those things that concern us most: "the best which has been thought and said in the world". This knowledge is a stream of fresh and free thought that flows across our ideas and habits (Arnold 43). As Raymond Williams observes, this concept of culture belongs to a tradition that is distinctly English which extends from Burke through Coleridge and Carlyle to Arnold (Raymond Williams *Culture and Society* 111-112). In part, a moral concept, Culture is a humanitarian impulse, a desire to diminish and overcome human error, confusion and misery, "the noble aspiration to leave the world, better and happier than we found it" (Arnold 44). Said shares this aspiration. But he is suspicious of Arnold's view of modern society and the unrest prevailing in it. He describes *Culture and Anarchy* as a very rigorous apology for a deeply authoritarian and
uncompromising notion of the state. Said is both fascinated and repelled by Arnold’s notion of culture. He offers qualified approval of Arnoldian high culture, but rejects Arnoldian worship of the state as the supreme authority. Said's appropriation of Arnold's idea of culture is qualified by his unwillingness to wholly embrace Arnoldian view because it takes the form of nationalism and purist notions of cultural identity. It creates an excessive veneration of the state wedded to strong forms of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. On the wrong side of this strong delineation between 'us' and 'them', anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste and immortality are identified deposited outside the culture and kept there by the power of the state and its institutions. Said has specific historical examples in mind including Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835 and the utilitarian philosophy of British colonialists. Said quotes Macaulay as follows: "All the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgement used at the preparatory schools in England". (Said, The World 11)
The second example is the relationship between utilitarian philosophy and British colonial policy in India. According to Said, there is a strong “us” and “them” element in the philosophy John Stuart Mill.

Arnold’s idea of culture did not embrace Europe’s Asian, African or West Indian colonies nor is it clear that it included the English working class, given his life long ambivalence towards the “masses”. The “ours” and “theirs” distinctions that Arnold and his peers drew were bolstered, according to Said, by the human sciences, Social Darwinism, and high cultural humanism. Said says:

Most modern readers of Matthew Arnold’s anguished poetry, or of his celebrated theory in praise of culture, do not also know that Arnold connected the ‘administrative massacre’ ordered by Eyre with tough British policies toward Colonial Eire and strongly approved both; Culture and Anarchy is set plumb in the middle of the Hyde Park Riots of 1867, and what Arnold had to say about culture was specifically believed to
be a deterrent to rampant disorder—colonial, Irish, domestic. Jamaicans, Irishmen and Women and some historians bring up these massacres at ‘inappropriate moments’, but most Anglo-American readers of Arnold remain Oblivions, see them—if they look at them at all—as irrelevant to the more important cultural theory that Arnold appears to be promoting for all the ages. (Said, *Culture* 157-58)

Said brings this train of thought to a head with the following:

The idea of culture itself, as Arnold refined it, is designed to elevate practice to the level of theory, to liberate ideological coercion against rebellious elements – at home and abroad – from the mundane and historical to the abstract and general. “The best that is thought and done” is considered an unassailable position at home and abroad. (Said, *Culture* 159)

Said fears the exclusionary power of culture,
especially when wedded to the repressive power of the state. Under this description culture constitutes a church-state in which the others of culture—colonial people, the poor and delinquent—are grouped under the rubric of anarchy. In imperialistic scenario this means "blacks" and underclass, or Palestinian terrorist or Islamic fundamentalist. They replace English working class, democrats, middle class philistines and aristocratic barbarians as the enemies of culture. But Said's relation to Arnoldian cultural thought is not as simple or unambiguous as this. But for all his suspicion of high cultural humanism, Said remains a high cultural humanist. Where Arnold has an aestheticised fear of multi-levelled anarchy, Said fears conformity, he fears the loss of ideology and critical function of the high culture. Said regards a thoroughly commodified popular culture as depoliticised, if not in complicity with capital.

The novel is of crucial importance to Said's analysis of imperial culture because in his view without empire there is no European novel as we know it. If we study the impulse giving rise to it we shall see 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 (Culture82). It is not that the novel or culture in the broad sense “caused” imperialism, but that the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other. Furthermore, this link was peculiarly Anglo-centric, for while France had more highly developed intellectual institutions, the rise and dominance of the English novel during the nineteenth century was virtually undisputed. Thus the durable and continually reinforced power of British imperialism was elaborated and articulated in the novel in a way not found elsewhere (Culture 87). The continuity of British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century is accompanied actively by the novel’s depiction of Britain as an imperial centre.

Borrowing from William’s notion of a culture’s “structure of feeling” Said calls this a “structure of attitude and reference” that builds up gradually in concert with the novel. There are at least four interpretative consequences of this.
First, there is an unusual organic continuity between earlier narratives not overtly concerned with empire and those later ones which write explicitly about it. Second, novels participate in, contribute to, and help to reinforce perception and attitudes about England and the world. Along with an assumption of the centrality and sometimes universality of English values and attitudes goes an unwavering view of overseas territories. Third, all English novelists of mid-nineteenth century accepted a globalised view of the vast overseas reach of British power. Novelists aligned the holding of power and privilege abroad with the holding of comparable power at home. Fourth, this structure connecting novels to one another has no existence outside the novels themselves. It is not a policy or a meta-discourse elaborated in any formal way, but a structure of attitude and reference that finds concrete reference in particular novels themselves. (Culture 89-90)

Because the underlying “structure of attitude and reference” examined by Said has no existence outside the novels themselves, they must be read in a particular way to illuminate this structure. Consequently, Said’s most innovative
contribution to identifying the nature of the dense inter-relation­ship between European culture and the imperial enter­prises is his formulation of a mode of reading that he calls "contrapuntal." This method of reading is particularly relevant to reading novels, since the novel had a unique relationship with the imperial process, but contrapuntal reading is not limited to novels. This is a form of "reading back" from the perspective of the colonised, to show how the submerged but crucial presence of the empire emerges in canonical texts. As we begin to read, not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other subjected and concealed histories against which the dominant discourse acts, we obtain a very different sense of what is going on in the text. We read a text contrapuntally for example, "when we read it with an understand­ing of what is involved when an another shows, for in­stance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England". (Culture78). The idea of contrapuntal reading came from Said's admiration for the Canadian virtuoso pianist
Glenn Gould, a person who exemplified contrapuntal performance in his ability to elaborate intricately, a particular musical theme. Contrapuntal reading is a technique of theme and variation by which a counter point is established between the imperial narrative and the postcolonial perspective, a counter-narrative that keeps penetrating beneath the surface of the individual texts to elaborate the presence of imperialism in canonical culture.

Such a reading aims particularly to reveal the pervasive constitutive power of imperialism to those texts, since the empire functions for much of the nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction (Culture 75). It is the process of making that code visible that becomes the business of a contrapuntal reading which reads the texts of the canon as a corollary accompaniment to the expansion of Europe. Approaching the constitutive nature of imperialism in this way involves taking into account the perspectives of both imperialism and anti-imperialist resistance. This avoids a “rhetoric of blame” by revealing the intertwined and overlapping histories of metropolitan and formerly
colonised societies. Cultural experience and cultural forms are "radically quintessentially hybrid", claims Said (Culture 68) and although it has been the practice in western philosophy to isolate the aesthetic and cultural realms from the worldly domain, "it is now time to join them" (Culture 68).

Thus, worldliness of the text manifests itself in a dense network of affiliations within and between cultures and societies. So contrapuntal reading does not simply exist as a form of refutation or contestation, but as a way of showing the dense interrelationship of imperial and colonial societies.

Said's own sense of the contrapuntal process is a way of reformulating geography and he regards the emphasis on geography in Culture and Imperialism and in Orientalism as extremely important. The concern with geography becomes insistent throughout his work, not only because of his own dislocation and exile, but because the obscuring of those local realities that are crucial to the formation and grounding of any text is a prominent feature of the universalising processes of imperial dominance.

In all the instances of the appearance of the empire
in cultural products such as novels, the facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune enhancing or fantacised activities like emigration, money-making and sexual adventure (Culture 75). The perspective of the inhabitants of those far-flung places, indeed the people themselves only exist as shadowy absences at the edges of the European consciousness. Contrapuntal reading acts to give those absences a presence.

Said’s best known example of a contrapuntal analysis is his reading of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, in which Sir Thomas Bertram’s absence from Mansfield Park, tending to his Antiguan plantations, leads to a process for genteel but worrying dissolution among the young people left in the care of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. A gradual sense of freedom and lawlessness is about to result in the performance of a play called Lovers’ Vows, when Sir. Thomas returns and methodically put things to right, like “Cruso setting in order” or “an early protestant eliminating all traces of frivolous
behaviour" (*Culture* 104). The contrapuntal reading is one that brings the reality of Antigua to the fore in this process. Sir Thomas, we assume, does exactly the same thing on his Antiguan plantations, methodically and purposefully maintaining control over his colonial domain with an unimpeachable sense of his own authority.

Fanny Price, the poor niece, the orphaned child displays an integrity of character favourable to Sir Thomas, and gradually acquires a status superior to more fortunate relatives. But when she is forced to return to her home Portsmouth, we find another, even more subtle connection with empire. Her return is a rediscovery of the limitation, the confinement, the meanness of situation and spirit that poverty entails. The message is an imperial one: “To earn the right to Mansfield Park you must first leave home as a kind of transported commodity [. . .] but then you have the promise of future wealth” (*Culture* 106). Fanny’s movement is a smaller-scale version of the larger colonial movements of Sir Thomas, whose estate she inherits.
However, in reading the novel, there is a corresponding movement to the one that searches out the relevance of references to colonial holdings. Whereas the reference to Antigua uncover hidden aspects of the dependency of British wealth upon overseas holdings, there is also, says Said, a need to try to understand why Austen gave Antigua such importance. Britain and, to a lesser degree, France both wanted to make their empires long-term, profitable, ongoing concerns, and they competed in this enterprise. Thus British colonial possessions in Jane Austen’s time were a crucial setting for Anglo-French competition as both empires struggled for dominance in the sugar industry (Culture 107).

Austen’s Antigua is not just a way of marking the outer limits of Mansfield Park’s domestic improvements or an allusion to the “mercantile venturesomeness of acquiring overseas dominions as a source for local fortune”. It is a way of signifying “contests of ideas, struggles with Napoleonic France, awareness of seismic economic and social change during a revolutionary period in world history” (Culture 112). Further, Antigua holds a precise place in Austen’s moral
geography, because the Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar and colonial planter class. While a contrapuntal reading allows us to see the operation of imperialism in particular texts, it also opens up the almost total inter-relations between cultural and political practices in global imperialism. One fascinating aspect of the subject is "how culture participated in imperialism and yet was somehow excused from its role" (Culture128).

Imperialism itself only became an actively proclaimed doctrine after the 1880's, yet the exponents and propagandists of empire during this time deploy a language "whose imagery of growth, fertility, and expansion, whose teleological structure of property and identity, whose ideological discrimination between "us" and "them" had already matured elsewhere—in fiction, political science, racial theory, travel writing" (Culture128). So, by the time of the rise of the overt doctrine of imperialism, even the most questionable and hysterical assertions of dominance are announced as virtually universally agreed truths. These assumptions have percolated, by this time, through the culture itself.
When a cultural form or discourse aspired to wholeness or totality, when it assumed its own universality, this was usually because its cultural assumptions were backed by a quite explicit demonstration of political power. Such specific material links between culture and power are outlined by V.G Kiernan in an analysis of Tennyson’s *The Idylls of the King* which lists the staggering range of British overseas companies, all of them resulting in the consolidation or acquisition of territorial gain, to which Tennyson was “sometimes witness, sometimes connected” (*Culture*127). Victorian writers were witness to an unprecedented display of British power during this time, so it was “logical and easy to identify themselves in one way or another with this power” (*Culture*127), since they already identified with Britain domestically.

Said’s attention to the presence of the politics of imperialism within the literature and music of the imperial powers has confused some critics into accusing him of inordinate attention to Western culture, and a corresponding lack of attention to those of the colonised societies.
Culture and Imperialism does redress, however, the absence of those cultures of resistance to imperialism that spread throughout the various European empires. According to Said, a central problem with ideas of resistances is the overly simplistic conflation of resistance with oppositionality. This assumes that in the engagement between imperial discourse and the consciousness of the colonised, the only avenue of resistance is rejection. The forms of resistance that have been most successful have been those that have identified a wide audience, that have taken hold of the dominant discourse and transformed it in ways that establish cultural difference within the discursive territory of the imperialist. An example of this occurs, for instance, when writers appropriate the colonialist language and literary forms, enter the domain of literature and construct a different cultural reality within it. This is the form of resistance that interests Edward Said, because this is the form that has been arguably the most effective in cultural terms.

It is this form of resistance that is deeply inflected with Said’s notion of secularism. As he uses it, secularism is not
only opposed to the tendency of professional critics towards "theological" specialisation, but to the almost theological doctrines of nationalism itself. In an interview with Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinker, Said sets "the ideal of secular interpretation and secular work" against "submerged feelings of identity, of tribal solidarity of community that is 'geographically and homogeneously defined'. "The dense fabric of secular life" says Said, is what "can't be herded under the rubric of national identity or can't be made entirely to respond to this phoney idea of a paranoid frontier separating "us" from "them"-- which is a repetition of the old sort of Orientalist model". (Sprinker 233).

Resistance becomes a central theme in *Culture and Imperialism*. Said argues that a dialectical relationship very quickly characterised the engagement of colonial subjects with the empire. Indeed, resistance against empire was ever pervasive within the domain of imperialism, since the coming of the whiteman brought forth some sort of resistance everywhere in the non-European world (*Culture XII*). The fact that he did not discuss this response to Western dominance in
Orientalism did mean that he ran the risk of negating the active resistance of the colonised. Imperial power was never pitted “against a supine or inert non-western native: there was always some form of active resistance against and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out” (Culture XII).

Said’s strategy for resistance encapsulates a two-fold process, which can be likened to the two phases of decolonisation he discusses in Culture and Imperialism. The first is the recovery of “geographical territory” while the second is the “changing of cultural territory” (Culture 252). Hence, primarily resistance that involves “fighting against outside intrusion” is succeeded by secondary resistance that entails ideological or cultural reconstitution. Resistance then becomes a process in the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the natives’ past by the process of imperialism. (Culture 253)

This culture of resistance is explored by Said in terms of the capacity of the colonised to “write back” to empire, a process that reconstructs the relationship between the self and
the other, and which he sees operating through a rewriting or writing back to canonical texts such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. He juxtaposes *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad’s story of a journey up-river to the dark heart of the African jungle, with Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between* and Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, novels which rewrite the Conrad classic from the point of view of the colonised.

Such canonical rewritings locate the interrelated strategies of rereading and rewriting in the process of cultural resistance, and they are effective interventions because they cannot be dismissed or silenced. Crucially they are “not only an integral part of a political movement, but, in many ways the movement’s successfully guiding imagination, because they demonstrate an intellectual and figurative energy, reseeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and nonwhites” (*Culture* 256).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said codifies the “voyage in” as the movement and integration of the Third World thinkers into metropolitan First World. It is an inversion of the
narratives, such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* that emphasises a voyage in to the Third World’s interior in the name of colonisation. Said’s appropriation of the journey motif and his reversal of its direction suggest the ways in which the exiled intellectuals write back to the centre by migrating across a space separating the First World and Third World:

The ‘voyage in’ then constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work and that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalisation in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logo dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed from east to west or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire in which the separations and exclusions of ‘divide and rule’ are erased
and surprising new configurations spring up.

(Culture 295)

Said's "voyage in" motif could be used to show how secularism withstands the criticism that deviously serve the interest of neo-imperialism by co-opting elitist authoritative structures that are every bit as oppressive as colonial rule. But Said argues in the passage that Third World intellectuals voyage in to the metropolis is an insurgent practice. It is an "adversarial" internationalization that disrupts Third World's history of passivity and exploitation. It encourages instead an active displacement of Euro-centric 'logos' from its position of sanctity in London and Paris. The exiled intellectual's mobility across the bounds of national identity enables an engagement of cultural work to achieve progress in the struggle for de-colonisation.

Just as identity must be constructed so Edward Said must construct himself as a victim in order to make the journey. The Palestinian victim who resides in the metropolis as a prominent and celebrated intellectual embodies in his own worldliness the very paradox of hybridity, development and
will, that complicates postcolonial cultural identity. The sense of loss is both deep and unremitting but it is a sense of loss from which empowerment emerges. At several points in *Culture and Imperialism* Said calls for a contrapuntal reading, an approach that by juxtaposition of texts and histories would catch the complex relations of art and society without ever reducing one to the other. Culture itself becomes only one element in a contrapuntal criticism that reads texts alongside contexts but never collapses the former into the role of a pure reflection of the latter.

In Said’s reading of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, he finds the novel as a double-edged work. On the one hand, Said argues that the very absence of systematic and regular representation of natives is as much part of Conrad’s imperial attitude as would have been a more explicit, systematic stereotyping. Said contends that *Heart of Darkness* takes part in a tradition that in concentrating on things Occidental consigns everything else to shadow and non-existence. In Said’s words the form of Conrad’s narrative has made it possible to derive two possible arguments, two visions:
One argument allows the old imperial enterprise full scope to play itself out conventionally. The second argument [. . .] sees itself as Conrad saw his own narratives, local to a time and place neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain [. . .] since Conrad dates imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste (as in Nostromo) he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens European colonies, even if for his own part, he had little notion of what Africa might be. (Culture 25-26)

Perhaps no example of this contrapuntal secular mode of interpretation has generated more controversy than Said's reading of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park. Said's basic claim is straightforward. The peace, harmony and domestic tranquility of the factual and fictional Mansfield Park depend on the cruelties of slave-based sugar production in Antigua--they depend on each other. Jane Austen sees that what Fanny does, as a domestic or small-scale movement in space, corresponds
to the larger more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas, her mentor, the man whose estate she inherits. According to Said, Austen is fully aware of the material relationship between the calm splendour of English space such as Mansfield Park, and Caribbean sugar plantations where slavery was not abolished until the 1830s. Fanny Price’s bourgeois life-style and the life of anonymous Antiguan slaves under the cruel whip of slave driver, are part of the single reality. Said’s contrapuntal reading is designed to make explicit what is often implicit in the English realistic novel, that is a structure of attitude and reference that presupposes as ordinary and everyday English overseas colonial possessions. Michael Steffes disputes this claim that “Mansfield Park rests upon a symbolic equivalence established between the forced labour of African slaves and that invisible figure who stands in the margin of every page Jane Austen wrote, the unmarried gentlewoman who has no money of her own” (in William D Hart Edward Said 103). Michael Steffes argues that Austen then cannot be read as supporting slavery or of being indifferent. In his heavily documented essay Steffes
shows how widespread anti-slavery sentiment was in Austen’s England, the preponderance of the evidence for personal opposition to slavery and the obvious irony in her invocation of slavery. But this argument however misses the point which is not that Austen supported slavery but that she represents through her novel a set of dispossessions and attitudes that were constitutive of the later age of empire.

Said follows the same interpretive vein when assessing the novels of Rudyard Kipling and Albert Camus. As with Jane Austen no matter how muted the reference, Camus’ novels are already constituted by French structure of attitude and reference. They are not merely anguished reflections on human condition but cultural interventions in the contest between Algerian nationalism and French colonialism. Camus displaces the reality of Arab deaths at the hands of French imperialist on to an anonymous biblical pestilence like plague. Camus has his characters ask existential questions at the point where they should be asking socio-historical questions. With Camus, Said concludes, a massive French “structure of feeling” receives its most exquisite and final
articulation.

Said says that *Kim* is a great imperial document of its historical moment. If Kipling’s India has essential and unchanging qualities, this was because he deliberately saw India that way. Said says that two factors might be kept in mind when we interpret *Kim*. One is that whether we like it or not, its author is writing not just from the dominating viewpoint of a white man in a colonial possession but from the perspective of a massive colonial system. Kipling assumes a basically uncontested empire. The second factor is that no less than India itself, Kipling was a historical being as well as a major artist. *Kim* was written at a specific moment in his career, at a time when the relationship between the British and Indian people was changing. *Kim* is central to the semi-official age of empire and in a way represents it. Though Kipling resisted this reality, India was already well on its way toward a dynamic outright opposition to British rule. A remarkably complex novel like *Kim* is a very illuminating part of that history.

*Culture and Imperialism* explores contrapuntally as
intertwined histories and overlapping events, Western discourses of cultural imperialism and "non-Western" resistance and the opposition that it inspired. Besides Irish Yeats, Said cites Pablo Neruda, Aime Cesaire and Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine) as poets of decolonisation. These poets, Said emphasises, are nationalists. But he wants to distinguish their nationalisms from the imperial nationalism of the Western powers. If imperialism is the aggressive territorial expansion of nationalism then decolonisation is the recovery of lost territory.

In practice, Said values most, those Third World intellectuals who have migrated to or been exiled in the metropolis. The value attached to these critics rest on two propositions: firstly, there is an oppositional quality to the consciousness of such figures, characteristically expressed in the way they appropriate the dominant metropolitan discourses and their ability to deconstruct these discourses against the West from the point of view of the regions from which such critics came. At the same time by virtue of this border-crossing postcolonial critic escape the impasse in which many nationalists of third
world are assumed to be trapped.

Said's own suspicion of cultural nationalism leads him into some unexpected arguments. One involves the partial rehabilitation of V.S. Naipaul, often regarded in postcolonial critism as the quintessential "brown-skinned English man" who has internalised the West's traditionally negative or derogatory vision of the Third World. Moreover, Said's general suspicion of literature which acts as a direct expression of political interests perhaps sheds light on *Culture and Imperialism*'s comparative neglect of the creative work of the 'Third World', certainly when measured against his attention to the metropolitan or "migrant" canon. Ahmad is possibly right to suggest that Said's apparent preference for Western high culture derives precisely from a relative ideological independence and aesthetic distance in the former, compared with the more immediate affiliation of the latter to the politics of the liberation struggle (*In Theory*).

As Bart Moore-Gilbert observes, in seeking to defend a Western canonical figure like Joseph Conrad from the charge of racism brought against him by some African critics,
notably Achebe, the later Said advances arguments which seem almost inconcievable from the author of *Orientalism* (66-67). While he recognises that Conrad is not altogether innocent of complcity in Orientalist style representations of the other, failing to recognise signs of subaltern resistance, for instance, *Culture and Imperialism* argues that it is because of the “complex affiliations” of work like *Heart of Darkness*, with their real setting, that they are interesting and valuable as works of art. Said clearly wants to keep straightforward propaganda out of the canon by virtue of his stress on complexity. This is what redeems Kipling, too. Thus, while there are “few more imperialist reactionary than he”, according to Said, Kipling nonetheless bears comparison as an artist with such major figures as Marcel Proust, Henry James and George Eliot (*Culture* XXIII). At such moments, *Culture and Imperialism* appears to see the canonical Western work as a space of resistance inside the dominant order. Its characteristic “complexity” suggests that it escapes being mechanically determined by the “latent” power of the base, whether this is considered as residing in the discursive archive, or in the
material relations of colonialism.

This seems difficult to square, however, with other arguments in *Culture and imperialism* which are strongly reminiscent of those of *Orientalism*. Thus while Said now focuses on more “literary” kinds of text, the latter volume is thematically and ideologically consistent with the former in its paradoxical insistence, at certain moments, that no distinction can be made between the spheres of politics and culture, arguing that the two are not only connected but ultimately the same. Said's exploration of Western high culture is organised largely by what he calls an analysis of “the structures of attitude and reference” in the field of high culture which prepares for and endorses consciously or not the imperial project.

The continuities between *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are nowhere so apparent, perhaps, as in the recurrence in the latter volume of problems which had troubled the former. For example in *Culture and Imperialism* Said is at pains to retract the assertion in *Orientalism* that westerners are ontologically incapable of “true” or sympathetic
knowledge of the non-West. On the other hand, *Culture and Imperialism* at moments repeats the same kind of "Occidentalism" apparent in the earlier text. Citing a particularly unpleasent example of Ruskin's views on race from his Slade Lectures, Said asserts that such attitudes are readily at hand in almost any text one looks at in the nineteenth century. To this extent, *Culture and Imperialism* remains strongly attached to the idea that the individual Western writer or work of art cannot escape the determinations of the dominant ideology and is always marked by its production within the context of a system of colonial relations. This is the rationale behind the approach which Said takes towards individual works within the Western canon, such as *Mansfield Park*. Yet the representative weight which Said gives to such texts raises serious questions. It is contentious to suggest, as Said does, that *Mansfield Park* epitomises Austen's work when it is more accurately regarded as distinctive, even exceptional in her oeuvre. This becomes even more problematic when Said then uses this one work by a single author to generalise about the existence of a whole developed system of ideas about empire
across the entire range of nineteenth century literature. In this respect at least, Said seems to reaffirm his earlier Foucauldian position in *Orientalism* that it is discourse, whose material presence or weight is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.

Perhaps the most contentious of Said's ambitious attempt is to extend his analyses of the complicity of Western culture with imperialism in questions of form and genre, particularly in respect of the debate over the "rise of the novel", that the relationship of its emergence to the development of Western imperialism is an intimate one. At times, Said seems to claim that the genre was a byproduct of empire, at others, as when he cites Blake's dictum that "Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose", the reverse (*Culture* 65). Consequently the prevarication familiar from *Orientalism* between the relative influences of discourse and material imperatives in the acquisition and maintenance of empire is repeated in the latter text.

*Culture and Imperialism* remains in many respects a more enigmatic text than its predecessor *Orientalism*. On the
one hand, the text at times strongly confirms the disillusion with Foucault evident in *The World, the Text and the Critic*. *Culture and Imperialism* is also harsh about other aspects of the poststructuralist theory, accusing it both of persistent neglect of the issue of neocolonialism and of a disengagement from the world. At the same time, on several occasions, Said explicitly reaffirms the epistemology of Foucauldian discourse theory.

For all his suspicion of high cultural humanism Said remains a high cultural humanist. It is true that he fears the vulgarity of popular culture, he fears the loss of the ideological-critical function of high culture. Moreover, he regards a thoroughly commodified popular culture as depoliticised and in complicity with Capital. Said’s cultural biases are on the whole tinged with conservatism as the sheer weight in his texts given over to the masterpieces of high modernism amply testifies. He believes that there are “Arnoldian best that is thought or said touchstones” and he thinks that we should give an account of how they are constructed, where
they came from, and why they are authoritative. (Said, *Musical Elaborations* 60). It would be wrong to suggest that Said is uninterested in cultural politics and difference. His interest is, however, is of a decidedly high-brow variety. Said wants to displace the Eurocentric canon by introducing non-European classics into the humanistic discourse. He otherwise appears committed to rigid distinction between high and low culture. This distinction is associated with modernism. As *Musical Elaborations* shows Said cannot think critically about popular culture, naturally. The rebelliousness subversiveness of pre-capitalist form of music under the regime of capital have been domesticated and placed in the service of commercial success. Music is no longer a revolutionary and unruly attack on the cultural privileges of the ruling class, but has degenerated into a depoliticised handmaid of consumerism. Depoliticisation results from the vulgarisation of art, from mindless repetition and irrelevant consumption. Said says, "that music remains situated within the social context as a special variety of aesthetic cultural experience that contributes to what following Gramsci. We might call the
elaboration or production of civil society”. *(Musical 12-13). Curiously, on Said’s interpretation, elaboration equals maintenance. Elaboration is a cultural contest through which society is maintained and transformed by competing social classes. “Music therefore quite literally fills a social space and social hierarchy directly connected to a dominant establishment imagined as actually presiding over the work. The awe we feel in the Credo, for example, reinforces the separation between the ruler and the ruled and this in turn is made to feel “right” in great outbursts of joy” *(Musical 64).

Here Said refers to the music of Bach and says that not enough of this has been studied as giving a particular social presence to Bach’s music, since what is generally current in writing about music today is tied to the idea that music has an apolitical and social autonomy.

Said’s subtle reading of classical music is especially evident in chapter two of *Musical Elaborations* entitled “On the Transgressive Elements in Music”. He begins this chapter with a discussion of the relations between politics and ethics, on the one hand, and aesthetic and intellectual merit on
the other. Paul de Man’s war time activities which became the subject of controversy in the 1980s are his point of departure. Said asks should de Man’s collaboration with the Nazi occupation during world War II affect the interpretation of his later work. His instincts are to argue for the connection between art, theory and life but not for their identity. Said’s answer is that we should be suspicious of his later work. From European classical music, and de Man’s war time activities, Said goes to a discussion of Wagner’s music. Said notes how Wagner’s indisputable anti-semitism is constitutive of his music and yet he argues that its aesthetic merit is unimpeachable. Wagner becomes the touchstone for his readings of classical music as transgressive of culture and is in complicity with culture, even to the point of such abominations as Nazism. Wagner’s music is a Pharmakon, both poison and cure. Wagner’s music refuses to carry the ideological message that its author intended. Wagner may be a vicious
anti-semite but his music is more than that and cannot be reduced to his anti-semitism. Music, as his nuanced interpretation of Wagner attests, cannot be reduced to coarse reality because it not only mirrors but transcends social relations. Music's transgressive limit is its nomadic quality, its ability to detach from and reattach to various social formations, alter its rhetoric as the occasion demands. Furthermore, music has flexibility in relation to the gendered power relations of which it is a part. In this respect:

Western Classical music, in particular, can usefully be regarded as one of the products of intellectual labour that Gramsci analysed as constituting what he called the "elaboration" of Western society. Seen in this slightly alienating way music shares a common history of intellectual labour with the society of which it forms so interesting and engaging an organic part. Thus we can see musicians as belonging to the intellectual class even though they are a distinct subgroup with their procedures, associations,
powers and standards. Their contribution today is the maintenance of society, giving it rhetorical, social and inflectional identity through composition, performance, interpretation, scholarship and yes, a kind of professionalism that removes and to a degree isolates music in an idealised domain of its own (*Musical* 70-71)

In contrast he loses his Gramscian perspective when viewing popular culture. Said views popular culture as simply another manifestation of commodity fetishism. It is a mystery that Said who can rightfully see Western classical music as a form of elaboration and that how he is incapable of seeing popular cultural forms and music in the same light.