

PURSuing THE COSMOPOLITAN

Book review

Said, E (2003) **Freud and the Non-European**. (Introduction by Christopher Bollas and a response by Jacqueline Rose). London & New York: Verso (Published in association with the Freud Museum, London). ISBN 1-85984-500-2 hbk. Pages 84.

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The last of his books to be published in his lifetime, **Freud and the Non-European** provides an intriguing instance of Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading. Freud, for Said, is first and foremost a writer, an erudite scholar of culture whose intellectual value can be reduced neither to the disciplinary bounds of psychoanalysis nor to the time of the historical era in which he wrote. To view a writer contrapuntally is to understand their work as "travel[ing] across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble *along with* later history and ... art" (p24). The works thus analyzed, if they are significantly accomplished, "culturally weighty" enough, are significant beyond the time and location in which they were written. It is the case then that later history may reopen and challenge "what seems to have been the finality of an earlier figure of thought, bringing it into contact with cultural, political and epistemological formations undreamed of" (p25). It is in the vein of this approach that Said turns to Freud, not to ferret out what is most unpalatable about the latter's representations of the "Non-European", but instead to apply Freud's **Moses and monotheism** to the question of Jewish identity in the context of Palestine.

Said's objective, perhaps surprisingly, is to unsettle the orthodoxy of self-defining narratives of identity that we encounter in nationalist movements and identity politics alike. Psychoanalysis is clearly an ally in an agenda of this sort, and Freud is doubly useful, not only anecdotally in terms of his ambivalent relationship to his own Jewishness (which Said types as "hopelessly unresolved") but, more importantly, in view of his treatment of the figure of Moses, an Egyptian who became not just the leader of the Jews, but as the man who seemed to have created them as *his* people. Freud's thesis undercuts the singular originality of Judaism, arguing, via the mythical murder of the heroic father common to all religions (in this case Moses), an act subject to the dormancy and the return of the repressed, that Judaism constituted itself as a permanently established religion. This has trenchant bearing on the Palestinian question for Said, and in a fairly straightforward way. Freud, he suggests "left considerable room to accommodate Judaism's non-Jewish antecedent and contemporaries" (p44). Rather than seeing Jewish identity as simply beginning with

itself, Said, through Freud, sees Jewish identity as coterminous with other Egyptian, Arabian, Non-European identities, from which it borrows certain of its most fundamental constituents. For Freud and Said alike, psychological, like historical identity, is composite, an entity that cannot be “thought or worked through itself alone”, that cannot “imagine itself without the radical originary break or flaw which will not be repressed” (p54).

One of the book’s most intriguing moments is to be found in Christopher Bollas’ Introduction in which he traces a series of links between Said’s work and the writings of classical psychoanalysis. Freud’s **The interpretation of dreams** is an important influence on both **Beginnings** and **Orientalism**. Said’s **Beginnings** makes for a case-study in breaking with old and substantiating new intellectual traditions. It makes for an important conceptual resource for **Orientalism**, where Said borrows Freud’s latent/manifest distinction between types of dream-content as means of identifying different modes of representing otherness in Orientalist discourse. More explicitly psychological concerns are discerned in Said’s **The question of Palestine**, a chief concern of which is the psychology of the refusal to recognize an other’s being. This is a refusal which Bollas equates to the effects of “negative hallucination”, that is, “of not seeing the existence of an object or an other” (p5).

In examining the structure of oppression we need take into account not only the play of projections and derisions – the continual and often creative deployment of discursive, historical, and psychological modes of otherness – but also the refusal to acknowledge the existence of the other. The latter is perhaps the more insidious form of de-subjectification. By stopping short of recognition it falls short of even the basic procedures of objectification that we have come to assume of the dynamics of oppression. This is not to imply that its effects are any less damning. In the case of “negative hallucination” we are left to confront the erasure of a people from history and from political visibility; a removal from the realm of identification powerfully fictionalized by Ralph Ellison in **The invisible man** (in the instance of white America’s “non-seeing” of black subjects) It is for these reasons that Said so frequently asserted the importance of a *politics of representation* with regard to the Palestinian cause. Hence the necessity of a “permission to narrate”, the re-entry into history of those dispossessed of history, the “rights to representation” of those, who in the memorable quote from Marx which opens **Orientalism**, “cannot represent themselves; [and] must be represented”.

We have thus a combination of positive (or projective) and negative hallucination, an “object relation” which is not simply toxic, but *psychotic* also, such that, in Bollas’ words: “The oppressed exists ... to contain unwanted destructiveness in the oppressor who insists at the same time that the oppressed be like a fecal entity that is so odious that it cannot be recognized, except if and when it is out of sight, and finally eliminated” (p6). The attempt to consolidate a historical identity of imaginary wholeness and originality - as Said foregrounds in **Freud and the Non-European** - is of course the counterpart of these procedures of negation and objectification. Somewhere in the crossfire between lines of identification and of oppression one becomes aware that the conditions of possibility for a given historical identity are interwoven with its conditions of *impossibility*. One cannot but notice here – this, if anything, is the implication of Said’s book - that the substantiation of a robust, singular and “originary” sense of self or nation maintains a relation of dependence on that *which it would wish away*. Perhaps this is part of what

we mean by cosmopolitanism: an awareness that society should not be grounded in a set of “total identities” which are protected at the cost of the subservience of various “other” identities left to flicker between nothingness and abjection. The lesson of cosmopolitanism, by contrast, is one of the mutual-dependence and mutual-involvement of national, racial, cultural identities. This is less a utopian vision of mutli-culturalism, and more a lesson in the ultimate incoherence of any one (national, racial, cultural) “grounds of identity” as somehow autonomous, self-inaugurating, or “monadic”.

Freud and the Non-European makes for a pertinent example of the potential intercourse between heterogeneous scholarly concerns and intellectual approaches. Its conclusion, furthermore, points to a concern that sums up one of the fundamental preoccupations of the late Edward Said’s career, namely the insistence that threatened national, historical, and cultural identities are best addressed not through the palliatives of tolerance and compassion, but through the perspective of a troubling, disabling, destabilizing cosmopolitanism “from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself” (p54).