

Reviews

JOHN M. MACKENZIE, *Orientalism. History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press 1995. XXII + 232 Pages, £ 45.00. ISBN 0-7190-1861-7 (hardcover). £ 15.99. ISBN 0-7190-4578-9 (paperback)

Historians have been slow in taking up the challenge of *Orientalism* (1978), the controversial polemic by the literary critic Edward W. Said against the dominant Western modes of perceiving, or rather constructing, the Orient. Much of the debate so far was about Said's version of the development of Oriental Studies and the hidden or explicit collusion of their practitioners with imperialism. In addition, a recent exchange between Said and the late Ernest Gellner, a philosopher and social anthropologist, has addressed the fundamental question of moral and cognitive relativism in the modern world.

It is interesting to note that John MacKenzie, who holds the Chair of Imperial History at Lancaster University, has chosen to engage Said and his school not on issues of the history of imperialism proper, but in the domain of the arts. MacKenzie mounts his challenge equipped with the tools of an experienced cultural historian and with a very deep and extensive amateur's knowledge. Even more than *Orientalism*, Said's latest book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), seems to have prompted MacKenzie's detailed examination of what might by now be called "Saidism". He professes to be in sympathy with Said the man and his relentless castigation of the New Right in academia and politics, but raises serious objections against an interpretation that has turned dogmatic in the hands of many of Said's followers, with the result of "moral condemnation befogging intellectual clarity" (p. XVII).

The first two chapters are particularly useful. The author surveys the various responses to Said and provides his own insightful critique, pinpointing, for example, Said's ambivalent attitudes to "metanarratives". He deplores Said's recent radicalization of his own position: the idea that cultures seem to be condemned to irredeemable misunderstanding. He also disagrees with the notion, crucial to Said, that the arts tend to conform with the dominant political ideologies of their time. In contrast to most commentators, MacKenzie is not exclusively concerned with "orientalism"

in the narrow sense of Western attitudes towards Islamic civilization. He therefore pays special attention to studies that take up Saidian motifs and apply them to other parts of Asia, especially to India. A general and very sensible conclusion seems to be the limited usefulness of contributions by literary historians with little knowledge of the real historical world and not much sensitivity towards the social conditions of artistic production.

With the impoverishment of theory and the concentration of the Said school on a small number of elite texts, MacKenzie contrasts the wealth of orientalizing art that was created in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Orientalist art, in his reading, implies less the fanciful denigration of Eastern civilizations than culturally conservative attempts to escape from the consequences of modernity. This is not a particularly surprising conclusion. Much more original is the following chapter on architecture, with its intriguing remarks on the attractions of an oriental style to the 19th-century public. Perhaps the best chapter in the volume is the discussion of oriental influences on European design. In no other field of the arts did the Orient, genuine or imagined, play a more prominent role in purifying Western tastes and bringing about the syncretism that was a hallmark of fin-de-siècle culture. The chapter on music is full of remarkable discoveries, especially in opera. Yet, the encyclopedic accumulation of material sometimes prevents a more penetrating analysis of individual works. The ways in which oriental influences invaded the very material and texture of music might have been demonstrated more clearly.

The final chapter on the theatre summarizes the main aspects of MacKenzie's approach. He insists on the openness of the artistic process and on its ambiguous and unpredictable relationship to the real world. He also levels the boundaries between elite and popular arts and has fascinating things to say about "demotic Orientalism" in architecture and design. Said's artists are unconscious participants in a homogeneous "discourse" of power and condescension that pervades even the most rarefied masterpieces. MacKenzie's artists are conscious creators adding the Orient to their repertoires of motifs, forms and techniques. Said's vision seems to have been turned upside down. Far from imposing Western meanings on to a passive Orient, the West, in MacKenzie's view, borrowed from alien sources of artistic creativity and used them for rejuvenating its stagnant own traditions. However, the ultimate consequences are not all that far apart. Both Said and MacKenzie celebrate in an almost "essentializing" manner the unique accomplishment of the West. No other civilization was capable of rising to global interpretive hegemony (Said), no other surpassed Europe in its ability to draw, almost parasitically, on the achievements of others (MacKenzie).

MacKenzie's book, sparingly but instructively illustrated, can be read to advantage as an introduction to the oriental impact on Western art and music during the 19th-century. At the same time, it is, next to Ernest Gellner's onslaught, the most ambitious attempt to date to respond to the Saidian challenge. While it sometimes underrates the complexity of Edward Said's initial ideas, it disturbs the complacency of a new "post-orientalist" or "post-colonial" orthodoxy that tends to miss the ironies of real and artistic life.

Jürgen Osterhammel

JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (Hrsg.), *Asien in der Neuzeit 1500-1950. Sieben historische Stationen*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1994. 188 Seiten, DM 24,90. ISBN 3-596-11853-0

Der Untertitel dieses Sammelbandes dämpft allzu hohe Erwartungen: Nicht ein Überblick über die neuzeitliche Geschichte Asiens wird hier geboten, sondern sieben nicht zusammenhängende Einzelstudien, die zu einer ersten Übersicht über die vielfältigen historischen Entwicklungen des größten Kontinents beitragen. Der zeitliche Rahmen erstreckt sich vom 15. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert, der geographische von Syrien und dem Iran bis nach China und Japan.

In der Einleitung betont der Herausgeber zu recht die Vielfalt der asiatischen Kulturen und die Schwierigkeiten, Asien als ein Ganzes zu begreifen. Auch setzt er sich kritisch mit der Entwicklung des europäischen Asienbildes auseinander. Um so weniger kann aber der anschließende Versuch überzeugen, doch gemeinsame Grundzüge der neueren asiatischen Geschichte darzulegen. Osterhammel entwirft ein Modell, nach dem zwischen 1500 und 1700 sog. *gunpowder empires* entstanden, die im 18. Jahrhundert wieder zerfielen. Im 19. Jahrhundert brach der europäische Imperialismus in Asien ein und zerstörte die autochthonen Strukturen. Gegen ihn richteten sich zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts kulturell-nationale Befreiungsbewegungen; der Prozeß der Dekolonisierung war um 1950 abgeschlossen. Dieses Modell ist jedoch allzu schematisch und muß eine ganze Reihe von Ausnahmen explizit eingestehen. Auch die Variationsbreite der nachfolgenden Studien trägt nicht dazu bei, das in der Einleitung skizzierte Modell zu erhärten.

Wenig Raum gibt der Sammelband den traditionellen Gesellschaften. Nur Paul Lufts Studie über den safavidischen Iran ist ausschließlich diesem Thema gewidmet, während Sabine Dabringhaus die Entwicklung