

## “Call in the Troops and Clear the Bazaars”: Repetition as Echo and Dis-Orientation in *A Passage to India*

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『インドへの道』における反復を読む

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### Introduction

In his groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said describes how the Orient has long been seen as a “stage” upon which the territorial ambitions and cultural fantasies of the West are to be enacted—particularly in the wake of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798. The Orient, according to Said, became “a stage” upon which the drama of knowledge and power, “actions of a world–historical importance,” would then take place (84–5). Throughout the long encounter between the Occident and its “Other,” the Orient, when talking or writing—even thinking—about the latter, this theatrical or “dramatic” perspective, with its enabling discourse (a term that Said adapts from the work of Michel Foucault, meaning here “a set of representative figures, or tropes,” such as the “lazy native”), “is never abandoned,” according to Said (71, 85). These two terms, “Occident” and “Orient,” are, in fact, less concrete geographic spaces than phantasmagorical concepts produced by and inextricably enmeshed within regimes of power and knowledge–production. The discourse of Orientalism, then, according to Said, “theatricalizes” the Orient in the sense that it reduces and defines it, rendering it observable (and hence controllable) as though the Orient were a stage upon which its stock characters perform the drama of colonialism.

This sense of theatricality or performativity in the colonial context is vividly illustrated in E.M. Forster’s novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), which will be the focus of the following essay. Specifically, I will examine how the phenomenon of repetition affects the aforementioned “stock characters” and the performance of their assigned roles in the larger drama of the British Raj, as demonstrated by the way in which the “Mutiny” of 1857 haunts both the trial of Dr. Aziz and its aftermath, as well as the larger narrative of the novel itself, threatening to disrupt the uneasy “calm” and order of British rule in Chandrapore. The Mutiny, then, acts as a specter haunting the trial’s proceedings, supplying the attentive reader with a vivid illustration of Said’s understanding of repetition, which, closely resembling that of Louis Bonaparte as depicted in Karl Marx’s *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), involves a highly ironic “*coup de théâtre*” that, itself, is—at least potentially—transformative and revolutionary.

In what follows, the manner in which the Mutiny haunts both Aziz’s trial in particular and

Forster's narrative in general will be explored, focusing attention upon the use of the word "echo" in both its literal and figurative meanings, ultimately suggesting that the echoes of the Marabar Caves and of the 1857 Mutiny alienate, defamiliarize and disorient (or, vis-à-vis the larger discourse of Orientalism, "dis-Orient") Mrs. Moore and Adele Quested—a dis-Orientation that proves disastrous (in fact, fatal) for the former, while, for the latter, opening up a space of resistance and disruption. Adele's act of calling into question British sovereignty (albeit temporary) in Chandrapore further enlarges that space, not only for the fictional characters (such as the native Indian population, for whom the trial has become a unifying cause) but also for the reader, despite Forster's rather pessimistic narrative trajectory and politically ambivalent conclusion.

### On Said's Sense of "Repetition"

To begin with, we need to understand what Said means by the term, "repetition," in order to see how it might be deployed in our analysis of *A Passage to India*. According to Said, closely following Giambattista Vico, repetition is "something that takes place in actuality, as much inside human action in the realm of facts as inside the mind" ("On Repetition" 113). For Vico, as Said explains, repetition "connects reason with raw experience" by, first, "accumulating meaning" as "the weight of past and similar experiences" (Ibid.)—in other words, repetition constitutes human society (and a *sensus communus* or "common sense") as such. Second, repetition "contains experience in a way; [it] is the frame within which man represents himself to himself and for others" (Ibid.); or, put yet another way, repetition constitutes re-presentation. Third, "repetition restores the past to the scholar, illuminating his research by an inexhaustible constancy"—or, as Said alternatively writes, it functions as a species of "archeological reconstruction" (Ibid.).

In sum, according to Said, Vico's notion of repetition is "a principle of economy," which bears a certain resemblance to "musical techniques of repetition," which we might call, along with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (in *A Thousand Plateaus*), a "refrain," best illustrated, in Said's reckoning, by Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, a musical piece in which "a ground motif anchors the ornamental variations taking place above it" (114). The "ground motif," for Vico, is what he called "gentile human history." In Said's terminology, this is "filiative" and "genealogical" (following Michel Foucault), hence tied to the logic of (re)production and (re)generation, and therefore constituting at one and the same time a repetition that is one of both recurrence (or Identity) and Difference: infinitely repeatable and, yet, (at least potentially) "revolutionary," in the sense of being "new" for each subsequent instance.

Said goes on further to argue that "the novelistic character," in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries in Europe, is largely "conceived as a challenge to repetition, a rupture of the duty imposed on all men to breed and multiply, to create and recreate oneself unremittingly and repeatedly" (117). However, both Vico's notion of History and Gustave Flaubert's form of the novel (to use Said's example) house an essential contradiction: they both call for and proliferate "filiative" repetition, in addition to the institution of "affiliation"—that is, "a joining together of people in nongenealogical, nonprocreative but social unity" (118)—and this constitutes a logical contradiction, an "antithesis

between genealogical filiation and social affiliation” (Ibid.). As a consequence, Said attempts to locate a “form,” “image” or “method,” other than this “generative, procreative” one doomed to contradiction, “within the framework of repeating human gentile history” (Ibid.)—and he turns to Søren Kierkegaard and Marx as a result.

It must be pointed out, however, that Vico was not blind to this internal paradox, and that he, according to Said, sketched accordingly two alternatives to “filiative” History (and by logical extension, to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century European novel). The first, culminating for Said in Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition, is cyclical and regenerative, a species of “Eternal Return” as it were, based upon “supernatural will.” History, in this case, crumbles or is consumed by flame, only to rise again, phoenix-like, from its own ashes. In other words, “history repeats itself” and human actors seem powerless to have any meaningful effect upon this process, much less the ability to stop it from repeating itself.

The other, more interesting and (politically) useful alternative for Said, is Vico’s sketch of History as “the rise of civilization, its flourishing, debasement, and final dissolution,” guided from within by “inner laws of development and regression, laws social and historical that contravene the power of direct generative continuity” (120), and this is epitomized by Marx’s treatment of repetition in *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*. Following Said, this is the notion I would like to explore, particularly in relation to the specter of the 1857 Mutiny as it haunts both Aziz’s trial and the larger narrative framework of *A Passage to India*.

### On Marxian Repetition

For Marx, repetition is debasement, to be understood not (contra Flaubert or Jonathan Swift, according to Said) as “a function of seeing human society as a closed system of stupidly uttered clichés, but [rather] as a consequence of a methodological theory of relationship between one event and another” (122). First and foremost, “what installs these forcibly instituted precedents [for example, the Revolution of 1789, or the rise of Napoleon I] is an occurrence within French literature” and it is Marx’s task (in *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*) as a historian to “see the facts as they are, that the son is really the nephew,” thereby “correct[ing] the egregious error fathered by the Napoleonic legend, that a great man bears a son who in turn inherits his position” (122). How Marx brings this about is through writing, through (re)presentation: “[w]hat Marx does in his own writing is to show that rewritten history can be re-written, that one sort of repetition usurped by the nephew is but a parodied repetition of the filial relationship” (Ibid.).

Here, what results from Marx’s literary efforts, I would argue, is exactly what Bertolt Brecht would later call the “A-Effect”: a process of making-strange, alienation or defamiliarization, through the assumption of a “critical attitude” (thoroughly described in “A Short Organon for the Theatre,” 150). To put it most simply and concisely, as Brecht himself describes it in “A Dialogue about Acting,” “[w]hat I mean is: if I choose to see Richard III I don’t want to feel myself to be Richard III, but to glimpse this phenomenon in all its strangeness and incomprehensibility” (27). It is precisely this “strangeness and incomprehensibility” that is crucial—this causes the viewer (for Brecht) or

the reader (for Marx) to adopt a critical attitude toward the events unfolding on the stage or page. This, in turn, has several consequences, as we shall see in the case of Forster's novel.

What Marx brings about through his repetition (or parodic "echo") of the usurpation by Louis Bonaparte, then, is precisely what Brecht called "the terror necessary to all recognition" (26), the presentation of monstrosity (the root meaning of which, we must recall, is *monstrare*, to show), the "clownish monster" (Said 127) of Louis Bonaparte (qua "Napoleon III") in all his strangeness or artificiality, who was, in fact, brought into being by the *Lumpenproletariat* (paradoxically, the "unproductive segments of society," according to Marx). This, I would argue, is nothing less than what Deleuze calls "the triumph of the False" (or, alternately, "the Pseudos" or "the Simulacrum"), the copy without original, that he sees taking shape, in germinal form, in Plato's *Sophist*, wherein the Sophist does not distinguish himself from Socrates, allowing us to consider the possibility of the "victory" of the Sophist over Socrates—in other words, the victory of the Simulacrum, the "copy without original." This explains why, as Said points out, "Louis Bonaparte's exploitation of his uncle's legacy centers precisely on that article of the Napoleonic Code stipulating that *la recherche de la paternité est interdite*" ("Enquiry into paternity is forbidden," Said 123). In other words, he does not want anyone to investigate his true origins. But, of course, this "enquiry" is exactly what Marx will undertake in *the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, to such powerful effect.

Louis Bonaparte, as Said explains, attempts to "legitimize his usurpation by appeals to repetition in natural sequences"; whereas Marx, "on the other hand, repeats the nephew's repetition and so deliberately goes against nature" (123–124) in order to show the nephew to be a "monster" (a clownish one, to be sure, but a monster nonetheless). Marx's "method," then, is to "repeat in order to produce *difference*" (124, emphasis added). The end result of this monstrous repetition is to reveal what we might call the "spectrality" of Louis Bonaparte's gesture—after all, as Said phrases it, "to repeat a life is not to produce another life; it is to place death where life had been" (Ibid.). In other words, it is to summon a ghost and make it walk again—then, to exorcise it, once its usefulness is at an end. As Jacques Derrida describes him in *Specters of Marx*, Louis Bonaparte is "[a] fake magician [...] himself haunted by the quasi-paternal figure of a great specter," who then, after seizing power, "makes the revolution disappear, like a phantasmagoria, by means of a perverse, diabolical, and non-apparent exorcism" (119).

For Said, as a result of all this, Marx's accomplishment (uncovering Louis Bonaparte's *coup de théâtre* and thereby disclosing the fact that this has involved "death masquerading as life") is an example of "affiliative repetition made possible by critical consciousness" (124); or, in other words, a repetition made possible by adopting something very much like Brecht's "critical attitude" (what he intended the audience of his "Epic Theatre" to adopt when viewing one of his plays). This is nothing less than a "methodological revolution, whereby [...] the facts of nature are dissolved and then reassembled polemically [...] perhaps to illustrate human power more to transform nature than to confirm it" (124–125). What Said is stressing here, as I understand him, is the possibility of not only "transforming nature" to conservative or reactionary ends, as in the case of the "clownish monster" Louis Bonaparte, but also toward progressive, liberatory or revolutionary goals—for example, as we can see powerfully illustrated by the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century Indian independence movement.

### **Repetition in *A Passage to India***

Based upon this Saidian notion of “repetition,” then, drawn from Vico, Marx and Brecht, I would like to argue in what remains that the specter of the 1857 “Mutiny,” which haunts both Aziz’s trial as well as the overall narrative of *A Passage to India*, is extremely disruptive (regardless of whether or not Forster consciously intended for it to be so) for the British Imperial “project” in Chandrapore, hence India. The “Mutiny,” with its “echo”—and here we must note the importance of this term, since the cause of the trial, an Englishwoman’s “dishonor” in the Marabar Caves, where she was beset by echoes that quite literally “disoriented” her—that attends and, as it were, haunts Aziz’s trial, is a moment of danger, of potential insurrection or outright revolution. According to Foucault, whose focus is, admittedly, “[t]he ceremony of public execution” as a “political ritual” (as distinct from its judicial function), the body of the condemned (and in Forster’s narrative, Aziz is condemned in the eyes of the Anglo population) is the focal point of an “uncertain festival in which violence was instantaneously visible,” the “spectacle” of which “ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed” (*Discipline and Punish* 63).

Power relations, in other words, when made manifestly visible in such situations (public trial, public execution, and so on), run the risk of being inverted or reversed—much as Forster phrases it at one point during the trial: “A new spirit seemed abroad, a rearrangement, which no one in the stern little band of whites could explain” (238). Hence the anxiety that the overwhelming majority of the Anglo population express, more often than not conjuring images of the 1857 “Mutiny”—the possibility, that is, of it being repeated—as well as the numerous calls for a swift trial behind closed doors, in lieu of a more visible, public display. This last point is epitomized by the Collector, who “longed for the good old days when an Englishman could satisfy his honor [with] no questions asked afterwards” (203).

To illustrate Foucault’s crucial point concerning the precariousness of public displays of power, let us look at a few examples drawn from the novel. In the first, we encounter Superintendent of Police McBryde speaking to Fielding and directly referencing the event in question: “Read any of the Mutiny records; which, rather than the Bhagavad Gita, should be your Bible in this country. Though I’m not sure the one and the other are not closely connected” (187). Later, once again addressing himself to Fielding, McBryde warns that “[w]e shall all have to hang together, old man, I’m afraid[...] you don’t happen to know this poisonous country as well as I do, and you must take it from me that the general situation is going to be nasty at Chandrapore during the next few weeks, very nasty indeed” (189; ellipsis added). Here, we can clearly see that he is implying that history is repeating itself and the “nature” of Indian people (and religion or culture, taken in a broad sense of the word) is manifesting itself in rebellion.

Forster goes on to describe how English “[p]eople drove into the club with studious calm[...] for the natives must not suspect that they were agitated[...] they realized that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood[...] One young mother[...] dared not return to her bungalow in case the ‘niggers attacked’” (200). The climate of fear that this apparent repetition of the Mutiny has inspired culminates in calls to evacuate English civilians from Chandrapore while

declaring marshal law and thereby “calling in the troops.” We see this revealed by the attitude of the Collector, who, we are told, “wanted to flog every native that he saw, but[...] do nothing that would lead to a riot or to the necessity for military intervention. The dread of having to call in the troops was vivid to him” (202; ellipsis added). In other words, the Collector recognizes the potential for, and rightly fears, a reversal in power relations during this unstable period ushered in by Aziz’s trial.

His command ultimately ends up being a call to “[g]et the womenfolk off to the Hills, but do it quietly” (204), since he fears another full-blown Mutiny. His words are echoed by other military figures, such as a soldier who cries out “[t]he army’s got to come in sooner or later” (203), only to be drowned out by the Major, who exclaims “[i]t’s not the time for sitting down. It’s the time for action. Call in the troops and clear the bazaars,” making everyone around him uneasy while conjuring up images “untouched since 1857” (207). One of these long-forgotten images is of treacherous natives plotting from within British households, as we can see revealed by Ronny’s paranoid declaration that “every servant I’ve got is a spy[...] They all hate us” (226–227; ellipsis added). An even more frightening outburst emanates from Mrs. Turton, who adds a sexual (and sadistic) undertone to the racist discourse that circulates among the British population. British men are “weak, weak, weak,” she cries; “Why, they [the natives] ought to crawl from here to the caves on their hands and knees whenever an Englishwoman’s in sight,” she further demands, “they oughtn’t to be spoken to, they ought to be spat at, they ought to be ground into the dust, we’ve been far too kind” (240). All of these comments reveal the underlying anxiety on the part of the British concerning the possibility of a reversal of roles, a shift in power, and an upending of the “natural” (racial or “filiative”) order of things.

One of the best-known examples of the carnivalesque atmosphere of such public displays of power—where power is rendered vulnerable in the very act of exposing itself, and where the social order may be upended—is George Orwell’s well-known 1936 short story, “Shooting an Elephant,” set in colonial Burma:

I glanced round at the crowd[...] a sea of yellow faces[...] and suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first glimpsed the hollowness, the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the lead actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind[...] a sahib has got to act like a sahib[...] [if I did nothing, the crowd] would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at. (152–153; ellipsis added)

Forster—perhaps unconsciously, I admit—offers us an example of this same Saidian–Marxian repetition through the figure of Adela, who, unlike Orwell’s narrator (cited above), does not succumb to the pressures of *performing* her sahib–status (and with it, the larger narrative of the British Raj); rather, Adela allows the literal “echo” of the Marabar caves, as well as the figurative

"echo" of the 1857 Mutiny reverberating all around her, to disorient her (or, vis-à-vis the larger discourse of Orientalism, as mentioned above, to "dis-Orient" her), allowing her to occupy a space of resistance (at least temporarily) in a literal, material fashion (in Chandrapore, during the Raj) as well as in a more figurative, formalist or abstract sense (despite Forster's rather pessimistic ending), as a fictional character in the novel and in terms of her effect upon the reader.

In the text itself, we can point to several scenes that build to Adela's assumption of Brecht's "critical attitude," such as during the opening argument of the prosecution, when the charges are being read, with Superintendent McBryde indulging in his favorite pastime, "Oriental Pathology." He "remarked that the darker races are physically attracted to the fairer, but not vice versa—not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact that any scientific observer will confirm." Someone then shouts, "Even when the lady is so uglier than the gentleman?" and the narrator reports that the "comment fell from nowhere, from the ceiling perhaps. It was the first interruption [which] led to the first of a series of scenes" (243). This disruption sends the proceedings to the brink of chaos, but is only the first of several such incidents.

To take perhaps the most striking, the name of Mrs. Moore is quite unexpectedly, and to her son Ronny's chagrin, "travestied into *Esmis Esmoor*, a Hindu goddess" by the native people both inside- and outside the courtroom, who chant her "Indianized" name, hoping to conjure her, in a way, since she has obviously been spirited out of the country: "she would have proved his innocence, she was on our side, she was poor Indians' friend" they say (249). In this case, the figure of Mrs. Moore is, itself, a repetition of that of Queen Victoria, who Aziz and others at the beginning of the narrative feel was an "exception" to the general viciousness of English ladies in India. This leads to another "queer" scene of disorder, of "magic" that must "exhaust itself" before the trial can continue, at which time Adela takes the witness stand and the trial reaches its climax: "The prisoner followed you [into the cave], didn't he?" [the barrister] repeated in [...] monotonous tones [...] they were employing agreed words throughout, so this part of the proceedings held no surprise [and yet Adela's] vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it [...] she failed to locate [Aziz] 'I'm afraid I've made a mistake[...] Dr. Aziz never followed me into the cave'" Adela states, to the shock of the onlookers (255). Mrs. Turton then shouts,

against the gathering tumult [...] "Call the other witnesses; we're none of us safe—" Ronny tried to check her, and she gave him an irritable blow, then screamed insults at Adela [a]nd then the flimsy framework of the court broke up, the shouts of derision and rage culminated, people screamed and cursed, kissed one another, wept passionately. Here were the English, whom their servants protected [...] Victory on this side, defeat on that—complete for one moment was the antithesis. Then life returned to its complexities. (256-257; ellipsis added)

"[L]ife [in the Raj] returned to its complexities," to be sure, but the writing, as they say, is on the wall. For, as Forster memorably phrases it, "the flimsy framework of the court"—and, by extension, the entire colonial enterprise in India—is finally exposed. After the trial, Mahmoud Ali, to take but one native voice in the crowd, screams, "Down with the Collector, down with the

Superintendent of Police [...] Down with the Civil Surgeon,” thereby “lash[ing] the crowd to fury” all the while (261). As a result, the reader can see quite clearly that events have reached a dangerous stage for the British Raj, wherein insurrection has only narrowly been avoided. The next time—if history “repeats itself,” as it were, but now with a Marxian–Saidian difference—the British colonial authorities may not be so lucky. As we know from history, of course, they were not.

### Conclusion

Forster, as is well known, ends his novel on a pessimistic note, stressing how “life returned to its complexities” in mysterious, utterly “unfathomable” India. Yet, perhaps we should look again at the character of Dr. Aziz, rather than focusing solely upon the British colonizers. Aziz, in his newly adopted role of poet of the revolution-to-come, best embodies the liberatory, dis-Orienting potential of the “echo,” despite Forster’s authorial intentions or political vacillation, when he states, “[l]et us discuss why poetry has lost the power of making men brave. My mother’s father was also a poet, and fought against [the English] in the Mutiny. I might equal him if there was another mutiny” (308)—and it is to him that we should leave the final word. For the work of art—poetry, for example, as in the case of Aziz’s grandfather—is nothing less than an attempt to imagine the political, by which I mean the possibility of resistance, disruption, and transformation. This is precisely what Aziz has tried to do throughout *A Passage to India*, a remarkably complex novel, which manages to dis-Orient the reader through its poetics of repetition, becoming in the process a prescient “political” work of art, to be sure.

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