

IMAGINATI⊕N AFTER postcoloniality

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Postcoloniality, in its most banal framing, emerges as the study of objects in a formerly colonized place, an empiricist, historicist enterprise to which, symptomatically enough, the question of colonialism is more or less incidental – the objects are staged as studied after the fact, thus moving the question off the table. As Gayatri Spivak might suggest, such use of the term is catachrestic, an abuse of a metaphor. For postcoloniality's charged, inciting interventions demonstrate that even objects that predate colonialism – or, better, eurocentrism - have been profoundly molded by it: Nicholas Dirks's study of the transformation of caste in British India as a consequence of anthropology, census, and other institutions; or Lata Mani's, of sati by British colonial patriarchy and evangelism. Door-opening in this regard, apart of course from Edward Said's Orientalism, is Partha Chatterjee's account, in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, of anti-colonial Indian nationalism. Chatterjee does not find it an autonomous, discrete, purely oppositional discourse, as it stages itself, but one articulated within the terms of, and so overdetermined by, another: such nationalism challenges European domination politically and otherwise; however, it does so, indeed can only do so, within a eurocentric epistemological frame. Ultimately, therefore, despite its oppositional stance, anticolonial nationalism reinforces eurocentrism. It begins a critique, but cannot finish or abide by it - the latter being the charge, responsibility, burden of postcoloniality.

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Though he doesn't do so himself, Chatterjee's argument enables distinguishing between two strands of the critique of eurocentrism, the anti- and post-colonial. Anti-colonial critique responds to eurocentrism's charge of difference and inferiority on the part of the colonized by affirming difference – a category of eurocentrism – but asserting equality against inadequacy, modernity against backwardness, reason against superstition. Jawaharlal Nehru being the exemplary Indian instantiation. His position, phrased crudely: I too am capable of reason, so am like you; however, I'm also different – my culture is not yours, but it is as good, alternatively modern. To the Macaulayan desire to interpellate subjects "Indian in blood and color, but English in taste...opinions...morals and... intellect," he counters: I will be true to my own, Indian culture, not imitate yours. An Africanist iteration of this might be: yes I am black, but I am beautiful. Recognizing, however, that such identity – or, better, subjectivity – is constitutively contoured by eurocentrism, postcolonial critique, if it desires to be different from the anticolonial, cannot replicate the Nehruvian or Africanist move.

The interventions of Said, Chatterjee, Spivak and others do not understand colonialism as a merely historical event, but one with lasting politico-epistemological effect/s. They not only reformulate the study of what used to be called the third world, they promise to shake the very foundations of disciplinary reason. Or should it be promised? For it appears today that the pledge has not been kept, that postcoloniality has lost its charge; although, as Mao Zedong observed of the French Revolution, it's way too soon to tell. Nevertheless, one can find promising signs in unexpected places: for instance, Catherine Hall's investigation of the impress of colonialism, no longer taken as a politico-geographically discrete happening out there, on nineteenth century Britain. Despite being straightforward disciplinary history at one level, Hall's work doesn't understand the U.K. empirically, as a place bordered by the Irish sea, Atlantic Ocean, etc; it effectively deconstructs the concept place. On the other hand, and less promisingly - compromisingly, perhaps - Chatterjee's own recent production, in a text like *The Politics* of the Governed, has succumbed to a sophisticated identity politics: Nationalist Thought persuasively critiques - one might even say eviscerates - the concept alternative modernity as epistemologically incoherent (since one cannot demarcate the boundary of a culture, or inside, from its outside); it effectively, incitingly understands modern India as constitutively contoured by eurocentrism. His newer work represses his own insight, stages the country as alternatively modern.

But postcoloniality has always had to reckon with identity politics. Its arguably most currently popular strand, in the wake of Dipesh Chakrabarty, sees its task as "provincializing" Europe: this frame holds European – Chakrabarty doesn't say eurocentric – categories inadequate to the accounting of Indian practices. Thus Europe must be provincialized, downgraded, put in its place: no longer treated as the exclusive frame of reference, the only supplier of categories, just one amongst many. Chakrabarty

holds that at least some Indian objects – with the masculine, bourgeois, Bengali adda being exemplary – escape the impress of Europe, are outside, discrete, help constitute the Indian subject as alternatively modern. In so far as Mahmood Mamdani's compelling reinterpretation of Dafur is complicitous with African nationalism, it resonates with Chakrabarty's position. Mamdani's engagement with the detail of the Darfur debate, its dependence on colonial categories, is exceptional (if empiricist); his critique of its liberal-imperialist U.S. framing, as genocide, required reading; but his call for an exclusively African response, intellectual and political, to the conflict signifies its nationalism – an awkward term, undoubtedly, to capture interpellation by a continent. If Chatterjee once taught us that postcoloniality must finish the critique of eurocentrism, Chakrabarty, Mamdani and now even Chatterjee himself, suggest otherwise. They do so from a position grounded upon a claim to difference, a subjectivity outside Europe, but not eurocentrism.

While they differ, these strands of postcoloniality proceed methodologically, in classic empiricist terms, by effectively distinguishing between inside and outside: the discrete knowing subject from the similarly discrete studied object. They do not address the possibility that their subject-position, indeed that the modern concept subject, which more commonly takes the name human, might itself be eurocentric. And, in the case of Chakrabarty and Mamdani, that the same claim could be made of the places of and from which they speak, India and Africa. Consciously or otherwise, such work deploys eurocentric concepts – not to be confused, or conflated, with European ones – to critique eurocentrism. This paper addresses the limits of such approaches to postcoloniality – not just of nationalism and identity politics, but of empiricism and historicism – by reading two intersections in the itinerary, in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme, of a concept of cortical significance to disciplinary reason, to the human/ities in its first and second modern iterations: imagination. As we will see, imagination isn't an innocent object, a non-axiological (value-free) possession of the subject that could be unproblematically mobilized, cathected towards the critique of reason. Crudely put, it is not something we are all born with, the seat of our creativity, reason's nemesis. Rather, accompliced with other authoritative modern concepts, an ideological one in the Althusserian sense – it interpellates, transforms subjects; and, like all acts of interpellation, although Althusser doesn't address this himself, it others. To invoke a deconstructive term, as ideology interpellates, it produces its difference - that which its subject is different from and defers, pushes aside, subordinates.

The first intersection read here is Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821); the second, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651, hereafter *LN*). Shelley's text, a canonical document of romanticism, a foundational one of the discipline of English literature, of the humanities in its second iteration, advances the case for understanding imagination as a sovereign "class of mental action" different from, superior to reason. Hobbes's, a

foundational document not only of "social contract theory," but of "early" or emergent modernity, of eurocentric subjectivity, of the humanities in its first iteration, stages imagination as a passive attribute of the subject that facilitates reason. Responding most immediately to Thomas Love Peacock's 1820 "attack," against which he defends poetry, Shelley transforms, recharges imagination as active, even progressive. In so doing, he solicits a reading of the concept as having an itinerary consisting of at least two intersections: an emergent modern one which stages it as accessory to reason; and another, as creative, inspiring, nobler. To postcoloniality, however, at stake in reading Shelley isn't the critique of reason, as the essay – and the concept more generally – is conventionally received; but that, even while breaking with Hobbes, as it were, the former repeats the latter with a difference. A Defence of Poetry maybe compelled by the desire to vindicate poetry; Leviathan, to advance the case for ordered civil society. The dominant concerns of both texts undoubtedly differ: the one addresses literature; the other, politics. To read them together maybe, to abuse a metaphor, to mix pineapples and oranges – but, then, to another frame, they are both fruit! Despite theorizing poetry, imagination, Shelley is compelled to engage with the interwoven questions of civil society, social progress; they are inextricable from his case for imagination.

The two are not, of course, the only ones to theorize imagination. Shelley himself does so in many other places. In reading just these two texts, this presentation does not suggest that they have made the most significant contributions to the question. Rather, DP gets implicated in a larger study, a reading of the itinerary of concatenated terms - culture, nature and society - in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme prompted, on the one hand, by poststructuralism and postcoloniality; and, on the other, by the novelty of culture as a signifier of subjectivity: it is quite literally foreign to that episteme till the late nineteenth century. Crudely phrased, till Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy (1869) and Edward Burnett Tylor's Primitive Culture (1871), nobody in the English-speaking world could have known they "had" (a) culture. We may take it for granted today that we do, like we also do an imagination; but such interpellation is recent. An ideological term, culture, extimately accompliced by race, both interpellated and othered, produced superior and inferior: the modern, civilized, rational, free white European subject and its differance – the brown Asian barbarian and the black African savage. (Indigenous South Americans are also understood as savage.) Civilization, barbarian and savage being understood, at the intersection of Arnold/Tylor, as three distinct stages of culture. Imagination accomplices such subjectivity; it reinforces the distinction, the difference, between the civilized and its other/s, in canonical texts of English literature (Shelley, Macaulay) just as it does in

²A term from Roland Barthes, intersection suggests a meeting (of many texts), rather than a discrete, closed object. *DP*, for instance, responding as it does to Peacock, cannot be responsibly read exclusively within a romantic frame. Indeed, "romanticism" itself is a frame imposed upon many texts. Opposed to both linear history and Foucauldian genealogy, one could characterize itinerary as a (staging of a) reading of a network, the distribution, ordering – not the linear movement through time – across an episteme of an extimately accompliced web of concepts.

English anthropology (Tylor, Malinowski). Put differently, the distinction is constitutive of modern Anglo-U.S. subjectivity, of the human, the category that centers, orders the humanities: one finds it in its earliest or emergent articulations, in the theorists of civil society as constituted by contract, Hobbes and John Locke. Simply put, imagination emerges in this reading as a eurocentric concept. Eurocentrism, we should not forget, isn't only a politico-epistemological formation that underwrites disciplinary reason, the production and organization of knowledge through a frame centered in the civilized, rational, modern subject. It is a euphemism for racism.

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The discipline of English literature holds its ethically interpellative function axiomatic; crudely put, reading literature makes you a better, more moral person. (Such logic, of course, makes professors of literature, who read all the time, the best people on earth.) *DP* is an early, authoritative advocate of this position; although, as the title signifies, it more consistently defends poetry, not literature. The latter term was only beginning to be deployed at this moment; Shelley's text, an instantiation of its emergence. By Macaulay's (in) famous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), it had taken: Macaulay mobilizes English literature, avowedly understood as the work of imagination, towards the task of interpellating Indians into the superiority of English subjectivity; into, in Homi Bhabha's sly formulation, being almost white, but not quite. Since the teaching of English literature, as English literature, begins – as Gauri Viswanathan reminds us, in India, not England – only after Macaulay convinced the East India Company to adopt his program or, in non-agential terms, after English colonialism took interpellation – civilizing the natives – as one of its tasks, one could read the discipline itself as constitutively contoured by eurocentrism.

Rebutting Peacock's critique of poetry a sirrelevant to modernity given the achievements of the rational, scientific disciplines, Shelley claims a progressive, instrumental role for poetry, which he defines as "the expression of the Imagination": it "acts to produce the moral improvement of man." In so holding, he doesn't dismiss the contribution of reason to improvement, interpellation. It abets progress too, for instance through the "schemes and...examples of civil and domestic life" produced by "ethical science." But reason can only aid development as a supplement to poetry; the schemes and examples depend upon "elements which poetry has created." And which imagination, in turn, enables: "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pleasures and pains of his species must become his own" (DP: 517). This being Shelley's cardinal claim: that imagination enables not just poetry, or art in the broad sense; these are effects, the consequence of a prior autodisplacement -transportation of the subject - not, of course, a physical move, but an ethical one, an identification with the other. To produce extensive social improvement, such identification with the desires and distresses of others must be unlimited, universal, encompass the entire species – at first glance an exemplary ethical position. Though it begs

the questions: what happens to the other when the poet assumes her place, incorporates her? Does she speak through or with him, or is she spoken for? Given such expansive possibility for imagination, Shelley advances a robust definition of his subject: "Poets, or those who imagine...are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance... and painting; they are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society..." (DP: 512).

If the last claim sounds hyperbolic, it is, nevertheless, coherent. Our historicist moment may understand civil society as the consequence of social evolution, of long, slow progress; to Shelley, it gets authored, found, instituted abruptly. Such framing suggests agency – authors, founders – and a discrete outside, a prior, asocial, noncivil condition before civil society, one that the latter breaks from. Shelley's essay doesn't discuss either condition in any detail. But the text enables divulging his theory of the institution of civil society. By deploying the term and, as we will see, its differance, he directs the reader to those who have addressed them – most authoritatively within the Anglo-U.S. episteme, Hobbes and Locke, both of whom term that prior condition the state of nature, which Hobbes, memorably, compares to war. In both accounts, some subjects in its vanguard conceive civil society as an alternative, a superior condition to miserable, intolerable nature. Shelley calls these subjects poets: without imagination they cannot produce an alternative to their present, transport themselves to a place – even if one without a referent – that improves nature.

LN has a different account of the establishment of civil society. It, too, understands this condition as found, instituted – as a consequence of the exercise of reason. The subjects of its differance, nature, are absolutely free and equal; but this very freedom and equality produces narcissism, competition, a condition effectively of war. It gets superseded when a few subjects – an educated, male vanguard with access to reason – persuade the rest of the value and necessity of a transaction: that the loss of freedom in civil society is actually a gain – of peace and order – compared to, in exchange for the instability, insecurity of nature/war. To Hobbes, a rational act enables the recognition of such necessity: "The finall Cause...of men...in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves...is the foresight of their own preservation" (LN: 93). Not transportation to another place, or identification with the other, but foresight, a disciplinary method authorized by reason, suggests social and political order, organization, harmony as institutional restraint of narcissism, freedom and competition, a stable end to war, rupture with nature and the founding of civil society.

However, every natural subject, though equal, doesn't possess foresight in its most rigorous form, science, which Hobbes taxonomizes into "Naturall" and "Civill Philosophy" – signifying the humanities in its first iteration. Indeed, the trait, "applying the sequels of actions Past, to the actions that are Present," could in the strict sense "belong onely to" the transcendental subject, god. For, unlike the past, which "has a being in the Memory," being produced by an object, a referent, "things to come have no being at all," having no referent. Hobbes finds "the Future…a fiction of the mind." In the last analysis, the "best Prophet" or predictor is nothing more than the "best guesser" (LN:18). This attenuates the case for

commonwealth, which requires a guarantee that the transaction will succeed. Being reasoned guesswork, foresight can only produce fictions, not certainties. Is civil society nothing more than a science fiction? Hobbes resolves this problem strategically, not theoretically, by finding not only science but reason effectively elitist. The majority of men (and women) are within reason but, finding it of little quotidian utility, don't practice it. They cannot foresee the consequence of nature, reach the judgment that science alone enables: that civil society could remedy nature. In which case, the questions arise: if reason is effectively exclusive, how and which free subjects, exactly, establish commonwealth? Could it be instituted by the equal participation of all, as Hobbes asserts? Or the interpellation of the majority by a vanguard, an elite, a (dis)placement of the majority where the elite desires? LN suggests that an educated minority – of "gentlemen," a classed and gendered category, as Stuart Shapin might insist – interpellates the rest, persuades them of the benefit of order. The vast majority of subjects cannot foresee the necessity of civil society or grasp the rules, the science of its institution. Civil society is effectively imposed upon them – an instance of hegemony, at best.

But what role in this process does imagination assume? Its significance to LN emerges from the fact that Hobbes treats it in the second chapter of the book; it determines the argument that follows. Hobbes finds imagination "nothing but decaying sense," the capacity to "retain an image of the thing seen...[after] the object is removed." In other words, as he phrases it, "Imagination and Memory are but one thing." At the most basic level, imagination is homonymous with memory, a passive element of the mind, a mechanical capacity to retain images that fade over time. Despite being mechanical, it is foundational to reason, since it enables "Consequence, or TRAYNE of thoughts...Mentall Discourse" (LN: 16). An empiricist of a peculiar sort, Hobbes holds that "wee have no Imagination, whereof we have not formerly had Sense" (LN: 16). Sense, defined in the very first chapter of LN, is the "Representation...of some quality...of a body without us, an Object. Which...worketh on the Eyes, Eares, and other parts of mans body..." (LN: 11). The movement of cognition proceeds step by discrete step: the object, a thing that works, acts, leaves something of itself upon one of the senses of the subject; this produces an image; the image, in turn, enables thought.

Hobbes classifies thought itself into two forms, "Unguided [and]...regulated by some desire" or end (LN: 17). The latter, ordered thought, gets taxonomized, divided discretely once again, into two further kinds: that which investigates cause, and that which, "when imagining any thing whatsoever, wee seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced...we imagine what we can do with it" (LN: 17). Imagination, in this second case, enables science, civil philosophy – rigorous speculation, rational guesswork directed towards a specific, instrumental end. Peculiar to the human, ordered thought, in this case upon contemplating what the subject can do with nature, how it could be improved, conceptualizes, or imagines, civil society – the original imagined community, no doubt. Enabled not by the identification of subject with other, as in Shelley, but by the hegemony of an elite, scientific, masculine subject; by the conscious, rational deployment

of memory, the past, a tangible object, to produce the future, a fiction, an image without referent. In the case of civil society, an image that, upending empiricism, authorizes the production, institution of its referent. This unique concept does not originate from an object, but originates one, produces – mimicking the divine – something from no thing.

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In sum, imagination enables the institution of civil society in both Hobbes and Shelley: as accessory to reason in the former, sovereign, supreme agency in the latter. *DP* insistently opposes the work of reason to that of imagination; if only, and unavoidably, within terms framed by the dominant strand of the episteme, reason. It was stated above that, responding directly to Peacock's charge that the rational sciences are useful because they enable progress, unlike poetry, Shelley counters by defending, affirming its superior utility, instrumentality:

The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer...Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty...

We have more scientific and economic knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies...We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine...(*DP*: 529, 530).

The rational sciences do not, cannot move the subject to act. Disciplinary reason helps improve the English social condition when viewed from one frame, the whole, the national; however, if viewed from another, the part, bottom, subaltern, it exacerbates inequality. Disciplinary reason enables the multiplication of produce, the expansion of wealth – only to divide, concentrate it. Without putting herself in the place of the other, in this case feeling her pain, given the unequal distribution of income in contemporary, industrializing England, the subject cannot affect social change. Where reason produces knowledge, poetry in this robust sense inspires action, transformation.

As such semantemes signify, Shelley's poet, while an elite, is not elitist but committed to social improvement, to ameliorating the predicament of the subaltern – as a matter not of the management of class conflict, or charity, but justice. His essay, in so far as his position responds to Peacock, demonstrates that the dismissal of literature, imagination, the humanities by instrumental reason isn't recent, a corollary of neoliberalism. The defense of the humanities has a long itinerary. Arnold, too, effectively frames his opus as a defense of culture, "the study and pursuit of perfection," against the unmitigated materialism of the rising, Philistinic middle class. But the claim being advanced here is that postcoloniality cannot cathect imagination, or culture for that matter, in response to such attack (even if Spivak finds Shelley an enabling accomplice). For, despite staking its claim upon an ethical relation to the other, Shelley's imagination flattens detail, difference:

A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. The grammatical forms which express the moods of time, and the difference of persons and the distinction of place are convertible...(*DP*: 513).

One finds here an unambiguous statement of the universality of poetry, of literature – that Macaulay iterates. Literature escapes the mark of time, place and gender. In other words, universalism, in this articulation – as always – represses difference, historical and geographical detail: every subject, regardless of age and address, is convertible, reducible, to every other, as is the past to the present, female to male. And, in Macaulay's conceptualization, barbarian Indian to civilized English; though he does not, of course, allow the converse. Imagination reduces the other to the self, turns the many into one – the signature move not only of universalism, but its extimate accomplice, nationalism. Indeed, imagination enables passing nationalism as universalism.

In Shelley, imagination represses difference within a national frame -DPs social concern, expressed above, stretches not to the entire species, just England - while instituting difference within a global. DPs second paragraph contains this passage on the historical development of imagination, imagination as a historical development:

A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it . . .

The child lacks imagination; it can only imitate, not create; only reproduce, not produce. It cannot make poetry. Likewise:

The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects and of his apprehension of them.

As Spivak points out, though not in relation to Shelley – she doesn't, symptomatically enough, address this semanteme when invoking DP – such analogy, common to the episteme at this intersection, signifies that savages don't have children. It also underlines the essay's interpellative force, for the paragraph continues, opposing the savage to:

Man in society...[who] next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; and additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expressions... (*DP*: 511).

Shelley, like Hobbes, stages human history in two discrete states: civil society and its differance, savagery in one case, nature in the other. Both oppose the savage to the civil/ized social subject; more precisely, Hobbes instantiates the state of nature with the free, narcissistic savage American, opposed to the ordered, social, civilized English. That is to say, the modern subject, at the intersection of its emergence, the humanities in its first iteration, Hobbes, constitutes itself as civil, social, rational, in opposition to the savage; and, at the intersection of Shelley, the humanities in its second iteration, reconstitutes itself as civil, social, rational and imaginative – again in opposition to the savage.

Thus the reading: that the subject itself, the human, is constitutively contoured by eurocentrism; that imagination is an ideological concept, that others, distinguishes between a superior English self and savage other. And the conclusion: postcoloniality cannot continue to cathect such a concept but, rather, finish the critique of eurocentrism.

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